

New York Churches Facing Eviction Despite Hurricane Sandy Help

The city of New York continues to seek eviction of churches meeting for worship services in public school buildings on weekends, even after many of the congregations have ministered to the communities in which they meet in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, whose administration has also come under fire for banning food donations to homeless shelters, has not intervened to stop his Board of Education's ongoing efforts to oust the churches.

"Churches that have been helping communities for years should be allowed to continue to offer the hope that empty buildings can't," said Alliance Defending Freedom Senior Counsel Jordan Lorence, who will argue the churches' case on Monday. "The Constitution requires New York City to allow churches and other religious groups to meet for worship services in vacant school buildings on weekends on the same terms as other groups. It is tragic that the city continues its efforts to evict the very groups that are selflessly helping the city's communities, including the public schools themselves."

Churches meeting in New York City public schools for worship services have fed the poor and needy, assisted in rehabilitating drug addicts and gang members, helped rebuild marriages and families, and provided for the disabled. The churches have also helped the public schools themselves by volunteering to paint the interiors of inner-city schools; donating computers, musical instruments, and air conditioners; and providing effective after-school programs to help all students with their studies. The help to communities has only continued in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, especially on hard-hit Staten Island.

In June, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York issued a permanent injunction that allows churches, synagogues, and other religious groups to conduct worship services in school buildings. The city appealed the order to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit.

The injunction is part of a nearly 18-year legal battle in *Bronx Household of Faith v. Board of Education of the City of New York*. The city has been trying to eject worship services from their public school meeting places under the claim that their presence violates the U.S. Constitution.

Alliance Defending Freedom (formerly *Alliance Defense Fund*) is an alliance-building legal ministry that advocates for the right of people to freely live out their faith.