

California County Caught Spying on Church Members from Next-door Church

A California church has denied coercion with county officials after being accused by a neighboring church of spying on its members who defied lockdown orders during the COVID pandemic.

Media reports say that Substack investigative journalist David Zweig obtained court documents that revealed enforcement officers with Santa Clara County began spying on the congregation at Calvary Chapel San Jose and reported details about the church's worship, prayer and other church meetings.

Pastor Mike McClure defied the mandated social distancing order and reopened the church during the pandemic in 2020 for regular church services and business.

The documents obtained by Zweig allege that the county's compliance unit made a deal with an adjacent church, Central Church of Christ, to use their location as a base camp to surveil Calvary Chapel San Jose—now known as Calvary Christian Fellowship—The Christian Post reported.

But Alexander Tullis, minister at Central Church of Christ, told The Christian Post that “while the court documents ‘seem to suggest’ his church was working with Santa Clara County,” that is not “the whole story.

“While certain members, even in leadership, may have individually allowed this to take place unofficially, I and the rest of leadership came together soon after and officially asked such surveillances be stopped immediately,” Tullis told The Christian Post.

The county apparently complied with Tullis' request in October

2020 and ceased all surveillance activity from the location, The Christian Post reported.

But that wasn't before the damage had been done.

Fox News Digital reported that the account published by Zweig detailed how the county "watched church activities through a neighboring property's chain-link fence, walking in on church gatherings like Bible study and tracking churchgoers' cellular mobility data, monitoring the church for compliance with public health mandates."

Santa Clara County became known for its rigid pandemic directives as early as March 2020, when it, along with other Bay counties, became the first in the country to announce a shelter in place order that directed residents to stay home except for specific activities deemed essential by government officials.

The Christian Post reported that, "on one occasion, officers watched as 'greeters welcomed attendees into the building' and noted 'members of the public entering the church were not wearing face coverings, and none of the greeters were wearing face coverings.'"

In February 2021, Charisma News reported that the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Pastor Che Ahn and Harvest Rock Church by enjoining California's total ban on indoor worship. In a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court halted California from enforcing the total ban on worship in Tier 1 of the state's "blueprint" pending disposition of the case at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and a petition of writ of certiorari to the Supreme Court.

"I want to thank the Supreme Court," Ahn said at the time. "The main thing they did was they lifted the ban on in-person worship. I think that people can worship in perpetuity, so in future pandemics, they'll think twice before locking down the church."

In May 2020, Calvary Christian Fellowship defied Santa Clara County's public health mandates, holding indoor gatherings not in accordance with the mandatory limitations, Fox News Digital reported. The church left itself open to fines in excess of \$2 million levied by the county.

 Calvary counter-sued the county, arguing it had violated the First Amendment of the Constitution and the excessive fines clause of the Eighth Amendment. Both cases are still in litigation.

What should be upsetting to believers is how one church, even if it is an allegation, could cooperate in "spying on another." Such is the way of today's culture in America. {eoa}

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