

Government Engages in KGB-Type Harassment in Christian Church

Liberty Counsel sent a letter to the City of Lake Worth demanding it retract its baseless position that all local churches—some in the community for nearly 100 years—now obtain “business licenses” to continue operating, and for its harassment of newly established Common Ground Church. The City has threatened Common Ground’s landlord with daily fines up to \$500 and foreclosure if the “violation” is not corrected by the landlord making the church get a “business license” to meet for worship. Liberty Counsel has demanded that the City drop its plan to have churches obtain business licenses, refund the business license taxes already paid and retract its threat to Common Ground church and its landlord.

The City sent an employee to spy on Common Ground and record its worship activities. The city employee’s statement reads like a report from behind the Iron Curtain describing illicit activity: “I walked back to the Coffee Bar and was able to visualize ... what appeared to be a ministry in progress,” including: “Someone speaking from a podium. ... A (sic) overhead TV or projection with Scripture verse on it. ... Rows of people sitting in chairs on both sides like a gathering setting. ... People holding what appeared to be Bibles or religious books as one had a cross on it.” The report states that a video was captured on the “city phone” to be used “for future court presentation.”

The City’s actions are completely baseless. Lake Worth’s city ordinances specifically exempt churches and charitable organizations from needing a business license; state and federal law require local land use decisions to give equal treatment to secular and sacred assemblies; and the Free

Exercise clause forbids government from prohibiting religious meetings. The coffee shop in which Common Ground Church meets has a business license, just as did the previous secular owner who hosted bands and similar gatherings.

Government employees are public servants and prohibited by the Constitution from inhibiting religious freedom. That is a far cry from sneaking around and into a church and acting like KGB agents,” said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel.

Liberty Counsel is an international nonprofit, litigation, education and policy organization dedicated to advancing religious freedom, the sanctity of life and the family since 1989, by providing pro bono assistance and representation on these and related topics.