

Los Angeles County Drops Worship Restrictions

Legal headway is opening opportunities for churches to hold services during one of the most important Christian celebrations of the year—Christmas.

Los Angeles County Health Department has finally dropped the county's unconstitutional COVID restrictions on religious gatherings and removed attendance caps on worship, effective since Dec. 19.

LA County Public Health Department issued a revised temporary order that specifies that houses of worship in Los Angeles can now conduct services indoors with no numerical or percentage caps and only social distancing between separate households.

"We are grateful for the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings that are resulting in the unconstitutional worship bans falling like dominoes," said Liberty Counsel founder and Chairman Mat Staver. "The Supreme Court has made it very clear that the courts and the states must begin applying the First Amendment to protect houses of worship. No pastor, church or parishioner in America should have to choose between worship and prison."

Liberty Counsel represents Harvest Rock Church, which has two campuses in Los Angeles County, and Harvest International Ministry, with more than half of the member churches in the same county.

County officials reversed course and took this action because of the recent ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court granting an emergency petition for an injunction pending appeal on behalf of New York City synagogues and Roman Catholic churches in *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo* and *Agudath Israel v. Cuomo*.

The high court also vacated the lower court orders involving the emergency petition in Liberty Counsel's case of Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry. As a result, houses of worship in other states have now received favorable court decisions regarding unconstitutional worship bans.

While the county followed the high court's guidelines established in the New York ruling, the California-based Harvest ministries continue to battle in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, where Judge Jesus G. Bernal denied the ministry's request for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction against Gov. Gavin Newsom's unconstitutional orders.

"The U.S. Supreme Court has already issued its Constitutional roadmap for houses of worship that should lead courts to find Gov. Gavin Newsom's executive edicts violate the First Amendment," Staver said. "The high court has ruled and therefore all lower courts must obey that decision to allow houses of worship their First Amendment freedom." {eoa}