

Michigan Township Fines Church for Holding Religious Activities in Newly Renovated Building

A Michigan pastor is fighting for the right to operate a church after being fined by town officials for hosting weddings and religious events on its newly renovated property, according to a non-profit legal group.

First Liberty sent a demand letter on behalf of Pastor Don Hamilton and the Sanctum of One God Church to the Charter Township of Windsor after town officials reportedly attempted to prevent the church from engaging in religious activities in its building.

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According to the group, officials have issued multiple citations this month and have refused to work with the church in the last 12 months to help them obtain a “temporary certificate of occupancy” and “special use permit.”

The ordeal began last year when Pastor Don Hamilton and his wife, Kathy, purchased an abandoned church building in the Township of Windsor, Michigan, with the vision of opening a new church. The property itself had a rich history as it was the site, for more than 60 years, of a Methodist Church where hundreds of people gathered to worship and fellowship.

Just six months after being on the market, the Hamiltons closed on the property and began renovations on the old building. After the renovations were completed, the church hosted a wedding for a family friend in September 2024 and

also planned an open house to get the word out to the community about the new building.

The Township's Assistant Fire Chief, William Fabijancic, Jr., discovered the church's plan and informed them they needed to resolve a "few fire code issues" and obtain an occupancy permit.

"The Church informed Mr. Fabijancic of its intention to operate a church and engage in various religious activities onsite and invited him to come into the Church building to perform the inspection," reads the letter. "Mr. Fabijancic declined to perform the inspection at that time but stated he would allow the Church to have the open house and that they would take care of the inspection at a later date."

However, days later, the church reportedly received a cease-and-desist letter claiming the church was operating an "event center" and threatened legal action if they did not stop meeting.

Church leaders attempted to work with officials to comply with the Township's ordinances, but they contend "officials refused to conduct the requested inspection and instead told the church that Mr. Fabijancic was instructed not to cooperate with or respond to the church until all zoning issues were resolved with the Township."

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Pastor Hamilton invited a state of Michigan Fire Inspector to conduct an informal walkthrough of the building to make sure

there were no fire code issues. Hamilton and church leaders complied and then attempted to apply for a special use permit, which officials instructed them to receive.

According to the non-profit legal group's letter, the township delayed processing the permit, while at the same time refusing to issue a temporary certificate of occupancy (TCO) to allow the church to operate while its application was pending.

It took nine months for the township to issue the TCO, and it severely restricted the church's operating hours as well as its maximum occupancy. The building, which could hold 400 people, was now only able to hold 50.

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Additionally, the church was fined \$4,500 for hosting three weddings, two of which were for family and friends, during that nine-month period.

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