

New Visa Policy Threatening Evangelical Ministries in Israel

Since its inception in 1980, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem has had the calling to reach every segment of Israel's society with a Christian testimony of comfort and love.

But the ICEJ was recently notified by Israel's Interior ministry that its requests for clergy visas have been rejected on the grounds it no longer qualifies as a religious institution. The mandate threatens to cripple ICEJ's evangelical operations. The new policy would apply to many other Christian organizations that are trying to continue their charity work and let Jews know that Christians indeed stand with Israel.

The unexpected policy change could hurt ICEJ and similar pro-Israel groups that focus mainly on charity work within Israel because they no longer will have sufficient staff to continue their activities.

David Parsons, vice president and senior spokesperson for ICEJ, says with all that has happened in Israel the past three years, including the pandemic, there has been "improper supervision" in the Ministry of the Interior, with turnover in that division of the government. The ICEJ simply wants the Interior ministry to know that it and similar Christian groups will not sit still for this decision and has communicated to the press its frustration with the decision. Parsons says the ICEJ's actions are intended as a "shot over the bow of the Ministry of the Interior."

According to Parsons, the new mandate originates from a "mid-level bureaucrat" within Israel's Interior ministry, and he

hopes it is only a short-term situation, unlike the Christian antisemitism Parsons says has existed in Israel for 2,000 years.

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Messianic ministries are not widely accepted in Israel and have been subject to biases within the culture—ICEJ included.

“We are dealing with a chasm of 1,600 to 2,000 years,” Parsons says in an exclusive interview with Charisma News. “This is a moment where we are not going to stop standing with Israel. These attacks on Christians by Jews and the way we’ve been mistreated by certain officials in the Ministry of the Interior are not warranted. But we’re going to show grace and mercy to them as the Scriptures command us to do. We’re confident that we should be able to get something worked out.”

Many organizations, including Ezra International, Christians United for Israel, the Baptist Convention of Israel, the Christian Friends of Israel and the Friends of Zion, could be impacted if this new mandate remains policy in the Ministry of the Interior. The Baptist Convention of Israel has been active in the region for more than 100 years. Its national director, Kenneth Nelson, told Haaretz News that several families employed by his organization have encountered difficulties in recent months in getting their visas renewed. {eo}

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