

Police Serve Summons to Virginia Church for Holding Service

Police served a summons to the pastor of Lighthouse Fellowship for holding a church service for 16 people spaced far apart in a sanctuary that seats 293.

The charge is violating Virginia Governor Northam's COVID Order 55 with a penalty up to a year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine. Liberty Counsel is representing Pastor Kevin Wilson and Lighthouse Fellowship Church.

Last Sunday before the service, a local police officer entered the church. He gave no introduction and did not ask for the pastor. He abruptly said they could not have more than 10 people spaced 6 feet apart. Then after the service, two police officers entered the church in full mask and gloves and asked to speak with the pastor. They issued him a summons and informed him that if he had service on Easter, all attending would get the same summons.

Lighthouse Fellowship helps keep people free of drug addiction, brokenness, mental illness, poverty and prostitution, and has a 12-step recovery program. Many of the members do not have driver's licenses and are dependent on the church family for rides to get food and supplies, and go to medical appointments and personal care services like haircuts.

Many attendees are on limited income obtained from government assistance—whether disability or social security, Medicare or Medicaid. The church has helped various members with electric or gas bills, rent, groceries, physical labor and transportation for moving, donating time, expertise and resources for repairing and renovating houses and travel trailers, cooking meals, applying for disability benefits,

rides to medical appointments, clothes, wood for stoves, fuel for cars and cutting grass. The church also offers a blanket ministry, prayer ministry, discipleship programs and counseling services.

Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel Mat Staver said, "Lighthouse Fellowship Church protected the health and safety of the 16 people by requiring them to be spread far apart in the 293-seat sanctuary. These people do not have internet or cars, and they depend on the ministry of the church for their physical and spiritual needs. But because the church had six more people than the 10 allowed by Gov. Ralph Northam, the pastor is being criminally charged. There is not a 'one-size-fits-all' template that works for every church. We need to balance the First Amendment with protecting the health and welfare of people. Using an arbitrary number of 10 people for every church is not the answer." {eo}

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