

Weekend Worship Services to Continue in New York Schools

Weekend worship services will continue in New York City's public schools.

Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) attorneys won a permanent injunction Friday that allows churches and other faith groups to continue to meet in public school buildings for worship services after hours.

"Churches that have been helping communities for years can continue to offer the hope that empty buildings can't," said ADF senior counsel Jordan Lorence, who argued before the court on June 1.

"The court's order allows churches and other religious groups to meet for worship services in empty school buildings on weekends on the same terms as other groups. ADF will continue to defend this constitutionally protected right if the city chooses to continue using taxpayer money to evict the very groups that are selflessly helping the city's communities, including the public schools themselves."

Churches meeting in New York City public schools for worship services have fed the poor, have assisted in rehabilitating drug addicts and gang members, have helped rebuild marriages and families, and have provided for the disabled.

The churches have also helped the public schools themselves by volunteering to paint the interiors of inner-city schools; donating computers, musical instruments, and air conditioners; and providing effective after-school programs to help all students with their studies.

"There is no reason to exclude worship services from these empty school buildings, especially when the school allows all

other community groups to meet,” Lorence explained. “Why exclude churches that are helping their neighbors in so many significant ways?”

In February, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York issued a preliminary order that allowed Bronx Household of Faith and other religious groups to conduct worship services in schools while the ADF lawsuit against the city proceeded. The new order makes the preliminary order permanent.

The permanent injunction is part of a 17-year legal battle in Bronx Household of Faith v. Board of Education of the City of New York. The city has been trying to eject worship services from their public school meeting places under the claim that their presence violates the U.S. Constitution, but the court Friday disagreed with the city’s policy, Chancellor’s Regulation D-180.

“Having considered the latest evidence and the parties’ respective arguments, the Court determines that its reasons for granting Plaintiffs’ motion for a preliminary injunction were sound and that implementation of Ch. Reg. D-180 violates both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause...,” the court’s order states. “Defendants are permanently enjoined from enforcing Ch. Reg. D180 so as to deny Plaintiffs’ application or the application of any similarly-situated individual or entity to rent space in the Board’s public schools for meetings that include religious worship.”