

Pastor John MacArthur and Grace Community Church Win Right to Hold Indoor Worship Services

A California superior court vindicated Pastor John MacArthur and Grace Community Church on Aug. 14, 2020. The renowned pastor and his well-known church in Sun Valley took the stance that church is essential. The court affirmed that position, recognizing the constitutionally protected right of churches to remain open and to hold indoor services in their sanctuary. The Los Angeles-area congregation was represented by Jenna Ellis and the Rancho Santa Fe-headquartered law firm of LiMandri & Jonna, working in special counsel capacity with the Thomas More Society. Thomas More Society Special Counsel Erick Kaardal assisted the all-star team in putting forth MacArthur's case.

Hours after Grace Community Church filed suit to invalidate Los Angeles County's unconstitutional restrictions on churches, the county filed for a temporary restraining order to force the church to stop holding indoor services and comply with unreasonable and over-broad demands. Judge James Chalfant denied almost all of the county's requests at the Aug. 14 Los Angeles Superior Court hearing, agreeing with MacArthur and the church that it is the county's burden to show why they should be permitted to infringe on the constitutionally protected rights of churches to freely exercise religion.

Chalfant expressed safety concerns. Attorneys for Grace Community Church explained that Los Angeles County was being unreasonable in its demands and offered to have the congregation comply with face-mask wearing and social distancing indoors until the matter could be fully heard. This

was stipulated as a more reasonable action than that of the county's rush to shut down church services. The judge agreed and set the full hearing for Sept. 4, 2020, ordering the church to have congregants wear masks and social distance between family groups indoors.

MacArthur responded to the court's ruling: "I am very grateful the court has allowed us to meet inside, and we are happy for a few weeks to comply and respect what the judge has asked of us because he is allowing us to meet. This vindicates our desire to stay open and serve our people. This also gives us an opportunity to show that we are not trying to be rebellious or unreasonable, but that we will stand firm to protect our church against unreasonable, unconstitutional restrictions."

Ellis stated: "This is a huge vindication for Pastor John and the board of elders at Grace Community Church, who have simply asked for their right to worship the Lord together in church to be acknowledged and protected. When I spoke with Pastor John after the hearing, he expressed sincere gratitude to the California court and Judge Chalfant. He said his congregation will be happy to comply with the judge's temporary order. This is why John MacArthur is so deeply loved and respected by his congregation and all over the world. He is a gracious and firm leader, and his biblical stand for church being essential has now been rightly validated. We look forward to continuing to advocate on his behalf in asking the court to continue to protect the fundamental rights of churches."

Charles LiMandri added: "This result is indeed a great victory for all citizens' constitutional right to freedom of religion. Pastor MacArthur's love of God and country motivated him and all the Grace Community Church elders to resist the unjust government shut-down orders targeting people of faith. Their devotion and patriotism have brought about a result that respects the legitimate interests of both the church and state. This result makes it possible for the thousands of congregants of Grace to continue to gather together in their

church to worship, while at the same time honoring the court's requirement that reasonable and temporary safety measures be observed. This court ruling should stay in effect at least until there can be a full court hearing in this case on Sept. 4, 2020. Please continue to pray that the courts allow this enlightened judge's decision to stand so that all Californians can soon resume the worship of God in their respective churches." {eoa}