



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 18, 2012

Florida Family Targeted by Community Over Home Bible Study

Another U.S. community is fining a family  for the “crime” of conducting a home Bible study without getting the proper permits. Shane and Marlene Roessiger face a fine of \$250 a day from Venice, Florida, after city officials determined that the couple were conducting an unauthorized “house of worship” at their residence because of the Bible study that brings six to ten individuals there each Friday night.

According to the [Pacific Justice Institute](#) (PJI), the California-based legal advocacy group that is representing the couple in the legal proceedings, the Roessigers have a small Christian outreach called In Him Healing Touch Ministries. When they started the ministry the Roessigers chose to get their mail at home instead of renting a post office box. Now, “Venice Code Enforcement officials are using the listing of the residence as the ministry’s address to build a case against the Roessigers,” explained PJI. “In addition to prayer and Bible study, the ministry has food outreaches in the community and engages in foreign missions work. The latter includes ministering to people living in garbage dumps through providing meals and religious services.”

The import of such civic outreach, however, does not seem to penetrate the hearts or minds of Venice officials, who are fining the couple \$250 daily for violating zoning laws by holding the weekly Bible studies. PJI’s president, Brad Dacus, told [Fox News](#) that such a heavy-handed reaction is completely out of line. “It’s a weekly Bible study,” he emphasized. “It’s the same kind of Bible study that occurs in households across America.” He noted that city officials are “having a specific problem with this family solely because they are having family and friends over to read the Bible and pray. That may be fine in some tyrannical parts of the world. That is not okay in the United States of America.”

Kevin Snider, the PJI attorney handling the case, informed the city’s Code Enforcement Board that the Roessigers have since changed the mailing address for the ministry so that it is no longer listed at their home. Nonetheless, the couple intends to continue using their home for prayer and Bible study. Shane Roessiger said he is having a difficult time understanding “how it is illegal to have a prayer meeting on Friday night with a half dozen people, but it is alright if I invited the same group on Monday evening to watch Monday night Football.”

As the Roessigers’ case has gained media attention across the nation, the city of Venice has made the unusual move of continuing the matter “indefinitely,” keeping the couple in legal limbo. And in the most recent development, following the couple’s last hearing before the Code Enforcement Board, city officials issued the Roessigers another citation — this time for having a small sign in their yard that reads, “Need Prayer.” and lists their ministry phone number. The fine for the “illegal” sign is \$250 a day.

The Roessigers are by no means the only family to be targeted by overzealous city officials on the lookout for “scoff-laws” who overlook rigid — and arbitrarily enforced — zoning laws and choose to conduct informal worship gatherings in their homes. As reported by [The New American](#), a couple in San Capistrano, California — a city that boasts a Catholic chapel from the Spanish mission days in the 1700s



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still used for Mass — was fined \$300 last year for holding Bible studies and Christian get-togethers in their home. And earlier this year a [Phoenix pastor](#) was fined \$12,000 and jailed for 60 days after he refused to shut down a weekly Bible study on his property.

As for the Roessigers' conflict with the city of Venice, Florida, the PJI's Brad Dacus told Focus on the Family's [CitizenLink](#): "This nation was built upon people being able to gather, pray, and have Bible studies in their homes. Many churches are founded upon that as the beginning of their churches. For cities to be allowed to get away with this is totalitarian."

Dacus said that his group would not "stand idly by while local governments run over families for having these types of religious gatherings in the privacy of their own homes. If cities want to fine people and drag them into court or before other tribunals for having prayer meetings, we will be waiting for them."

Photo: The Roessiger home



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