

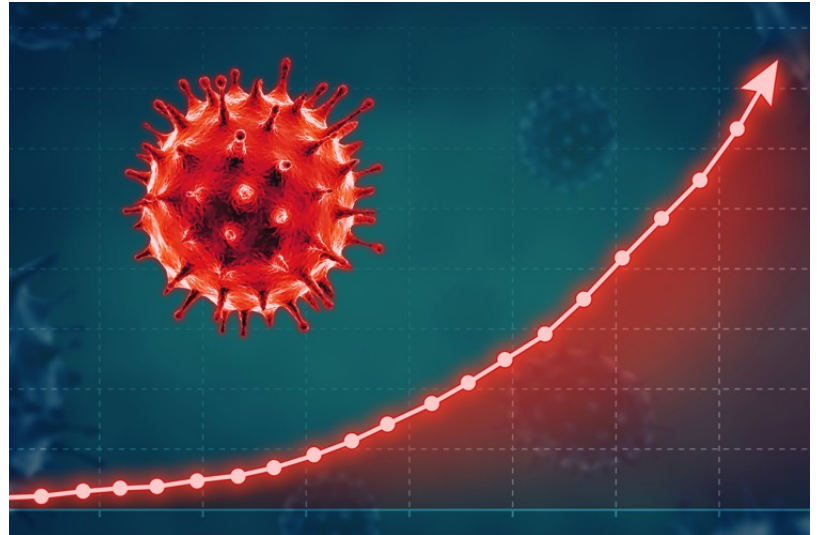


Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 26, 2020

LA Times: Three Cases of COVID at Grace Community Church an “Outbreak”

When the *Los Angeles Times* learned on Thursday that Pastor John MacArthur’s Grace Community Church had dutifully informed county health officials that three members of his 7,000-member church had tested positive for the coronavirus, the paper published an [article with this sensational headline](#): “Coronavirus Outbreak Strikes L.A. Megachurch that Defied Public Health Orders.”

The article opened with, “An evangelical megachurch in Los Angeles that has defied L.A. County public health orders and held indoor worship services for the last several weeks has been struck with an outbreak of the coronavirus”



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The *Times* article failed adequately or accurately to cover the legal aspects of the case that has been brewing since June, but grossly simplified it with this:

In early September, an L.A. County Superior Court judge ruled that the church must stop holding indoor worship services and also must require congregants to wear face coverings and adhere to social distancing practices when worshipping outdoors.

The church has refused to follow that ruling, and county attorneys have asked a judge to hold the church in contempt. A hearing on the matter is scheduled for Nov. 13.

The *Times* puts all the blame on the church by only quoting L.A. County health officials: “The county went to court only after significant efforts to work with the leaders of Grace Community Church to protect the health of congregants and the surrounding community proved unsuccessful.”

While the *Times* article does not come right out and say it, the implication seems to be: So there! The church failed to follow the rules and some of its members got sick! The church demonstrated that it had little interest in protecting the lives and health of its members by refusing to cooperate with the county’s edicts. The church, therefore, got what it deserved!

Jenna Ellis, the attorney from the Thomas More Society who represents MacArthur and his congregation against L.A. County officials, responded to the *Times*’ sensational piece:

Three very mild positive tests among more than 7000 people is hardly news. 0.0004 or 0.043% is not an “outbreak.” The LA Times and others’ grossly misleading and fear-mongering headlines aim to mischaracterize Grace Community Church as irresponsible and a superspreader. It has never been the Church’s position that it is only safe to hold services



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if no one ever tests positive, or for example, if no one ever gets the flu during flu season. Our position has been that LA County shutting down churches indefinitely amid a virus with a 99.98% survival rate, especially when state-preferred businesses are open and protests are held without restriction, is unconstitutional and harmful to the free exercise of religion.

There's much more here than the *Times* cares to admit. Many see this as a First Amendment issue, not a health issue. As *The New American* has reported, the church's attorneys

successfully persuaded the judge that he got the cart before the horse. Before those fines and imprisonment could be implemented, the constitutionality of the rule the church and its pastor allegedly violated had to be determined first. And that would require a full trial.

And the *Times* did not include this from the press release by Thomas More:

[Our] attorneys argu[ed] that MacArthur and the Church are entitled to a full trial on the merits of their challenge to the constitutionality of the government shut-down orders and [Judge Beckloff's] preliminary injunction.

Los Angeles County has sought to shut down the church and hold MacArthur in contempt, but [our] attorneys argued that a final determination on the constitutionality of [Los Angeles County's] orders must occur before the county could seek contempt against MacArthur for merely holding church....

Beckloff agreed that MacArthur and Grace Community Church are entitled to constitutional protections at [the] trial.

"This is significant," said Ellis, "because no person can or should be held in contempt of a constitutionally invalid order.... This case goes to the heart of what our founders designed for the purpose of legitimate government: no[body is] to be above the law."

Finally, as to the church's unwillingness to work with the county, as the *Times* implied, the church repeatedly tried and failed to come to terms with the L.A. County officials and only filed suit as a last resort.

Related article:

[Judge Rules Pastor MacArthur and Grace Community Church Are Entitled to Full Trial, Thus Delaying Fines, Imprisonment](#)



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