



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

# Romanian Churches in Chicago Could Face “Summary Abatement” if They Continue to Meet

[The letter](#) sent to three Romanian Churches near Chicago from the city’s health commissioner was chilling: “If you continue to operate in defiance of the Executive Order [the “Stay at Home” order issued by Governor J.B. Pritzker], the City will pursue all available legal remedies, including ... Summary Abatement.”

The three churches — Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church, Metro Praise International, and Philadelphia Romanian Church — received orders on Friday, May 15, not to hold in-person worship services until public-health officials deemed that it was safe to do so. On Sunday the 17th, they held in-person services anyway.



This generated a letter on May 22 from Allison Arwady, MD, Commissioner of Chicago’s Department of Public Health (CDPH) that was hand-delivered to each pastor. In it, she reviewed some history and refreshed her threats:

On May 15, 2020, I directed that you not hold gatherings.... You were reported to have gatherings in excess of ten individuals allowed by the Executive Order....

As I previously provided, the Governor’s Executive Order has the force of law and is enforceable by law enforcement agencies in Chicago and throughout the state.

CDPH has the authority ... to order that a location be closed and made off limits to the public “to prevent the probable spread of a dangerously contagious or infectious disease ... until such time as the condition can be corrected or the danger to the public health eliminated or reduced in such a manner that no substantial danger to the public’s health any longer exists.”

In addition, as the Health Commissioner, I have the power and duty “to cause all nuisances affecting the health of the public to be abated with all reasonable promptness,” and general police powers “to correct, by whatever means are necessary, any health hazard that presents an immediate risk to the life or health of one or more citizens of the City of Chicago.”

She has the power, she says, and she plans to use every bit of it to rein in the recalcitrant churches: “I am authorized to seek to enjoin such nuisance or to cause the same to be summarily abated in such manner as I direct.”

What is Summary Abatement? Liberty Counsel, the pro-bono publicly supported law firm that has been advising the churches, says it includes the power to bulldoze the offending buildings, according to *City of Kankakee v. New York Cent. R. Co.*, rendered by the Illinois Supreme Court in 1944:

According to the Illinois Supreme Court, “Summary abatement would mean to put down or destroy



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without process. This means the inspector can, upon his own judgment, cause the alleged nuisance to stop on his own authority and effect a destruction of property at his discretion.”

It is doubtful — though not outside the realm of possibility — that the church buildings will actually be bulldozed. Most likely, the churches will simply be forced to close and be locked down so none of the congregants can enter.

And these aren’t exactly small buildings: Elim’s campus covers 40,000 square feet and the sanctuary seats up to 1,300 people.

Such persecution is nothing new for Romanian Christians. Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver noted that Romanians are “all too familiar with the heavy hand of government against churches and Christians. Pastors living in the former Communist Romania were arrested and jailed for preaching off the approved script of the communist regime or for meeting in places forbidden by the government.”

Staver has filed suit against Governor Pritzker over his unconstitutional executive orders that have totally banned any in-person worship services until “Phase 5” of the reopening program kicks in, over a year from now, and only if there is a viable vaccine.

Staver wrote, “The state cannot ban church gatherings while allowing secular gatherings. Churches are not constitutional orphans begging for crumbs, but rather full heirs to the constitutional promise of the First Amendment and equal treatment under the law.”

According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Metro Praise and Elim Pentecostal continued to hold in-person services despite the threats from Arwady. Said Elim’s pastor, Chris Ionescu, there won’t be “a stand down on our part. It’s only the city that escalates.”

He added, “I wonder: if they threaten us with such extreme measures, what else is left?”

*Image: screenshot from [YouTube video](#) of Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church service*

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