



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on April 10, 2020

Virginia Pastor Charged with Crime for Holding Service

RICHMOND, Va. — As government (at the local, state, and federal levels) continues to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext for increasing control over citizens and private businesses, another casualty is religion. In the most recent case in point, a Pastor in Chincoteague, Virginia, was issued a summons by police for holding a church service with 16 people spaced far apart in a building that seats nearly 300.



Pastor Kevin Wilson of Lighthouse Fellowship Church was charged Sunday April 5 with violating Virginia Governor Northam’s COVID Order 55. If convicted, he may face up to a year in jail, a \$2,500 fine, or both.

Wilson and his church are being represented by [Liberty Counsel](#). The Liberty Counsel website describes the organization as “a nonprofit, litigation, education, and policy organization dedicated to advancing religious freedom, the sanctity of life, and the family since 1989, by providing pro bono assistance and representation on these and related topics.”

In response to questions about the case, Liberty Counsel referred *The New American* to [a press release on the case](#). According to that release, besides issuing the summons, police threatened the church with further — and escalated — action, unless compliance is forthcoming:

Last Sunday before the service, a local police officer entered the church. He gave no introduction and did not ask for the pastor. He abruptly said they could not have more than 10 people spaced six feet apart. Then after the service, two police officers entered the church in full mask and gloves and asked to speak with the pastor. They issued Pastor Wilson a summons and informed him that if he had service on Easter, and if more than ten people attended, everyone would receive the same summons.

While businesses all over Virginia have continued to operate without any threat of police action, churches and other religious congregations have been deemed “non-essential” and are forbidden to meet. By contrast, this writer ran out to the grocery store recently and had to circle the parking lot to find a parking space. As an aside, I had less luck finding toilet paper.

That store was crowded — with at least 150 people milling around the store. But a pastor, who dares to minister to 16 people, is issued a summons. The incongruity is based in the liberal view of the value of religion. Because of the liberal worldview held by the Democrat leadership in Virginia, grocery stores are (correctly) considered “essential” while churches are not.

But, like many churches, Lighthouse Fellowship Church provides services to the poorest and most marginalized in its community. According to the press release:

Lighthouse Fellowship helps keep people free of drug addiction, brokenness, mental illness, poverty, and prostitution. Many of the members do not have driver’s licenses and are dependent on the church family for rides to get food, supplies, and go to medical appointments and personal care services like haircuts. Many attendees are on limited income obtained from government assistance



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— whether disability or social security, Medicare or Medicaid. The church has helped various members with electric or gas bills, rent, groceries, physical labor and transportation for moving, donating time, expertise and resources for repairing and renovating houses and travel trailers, cooking meals, helping people to apply for disability benefits, providing rides to medical appointments, clothes, and wood for stoves, fuel for cars, and cutting grass. The church also offers a blanket ministry, prayer ministry, discipleship programs, and counseling services.

Besides the innate value of religion to society — understood and promulgated by generations of Americans, including the Founding Fathers — there is the salient fact that the charitable work provided by this and other churches is absolutely “essential” to those who receive it. But, a government run by people who can’t see the value of religion is not likely to see the charity of a church as anything other than competition.

The stay-at-home order issued by Governor Ralph Northam — as liberal a Democrat as ever there was — arbitrarily assigns the number of people who can safely gather as 10.

As the press release explains:

Lighthouse Fellowship Church protected the health and safety of the 16 people by requiring them to be spread far apart in the 293-seat sanctuary. The church does not have internet. Some people do not have cars and they depend on the ministry of the church for their physical and spiritual needs. But because the church had six more people than the 10 allowed by Gov. Ralph Northam, the pastor is being criminally charged. There is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ template that works for every church. We need to balance the First Amendment with protecting the health and welfare of people. Using an arbitrary number of 10 people for every church is not the answer.

Interestingly, the press conference Northam held to announce his order was itself a violation of that arbitrary number. It was heavily populated by journalists and others. Nor were Northam, members of his administration who were present, and media representatives spaced at least six feet apart.

Consistency, alas, is not a strong point of liberalism.

Hatred of religion, however, is.

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