



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 17, 2020

California Mega-church Defies Appeals Court Override, Opens Unmasked Without Social Distancing

On condition that his congregation wear masks and follow social-distancing guidelines, Pastor John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, [was prepared to hold indoor services on Sunday.](#)



Those were the conditions set by a lower court on Friday, which turned aside Los Angeles County's demand to close the church to inside services altogether. MacArthur said he'd be willing to follow those guidelines as a gesture of good will, in anticipation of a full hearing on the matter on September 4.

But that wasn't good enough for Los Angeles County and its health official. Late Friday night, they appealed the decision to the Second Appellate District's Court of Appeals, asking it to set aside the lower court's agreement with the church.

On Saturday, a three-judge panel of that court tossed that lower court's ruling and agreement and said that the county could continue to ban indoor services at Grace Community Church.

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The panel said they couldn't decide the issue instantly, that the issues were too involved, and consequently the county's demands must remain in place:

The questions presented in the County's ... petition are easy to articulate: May the county enforce the portion of its Health Order prohibiting "indoor religious services" as a means of limiting the spread of COVID-19?

Nested within this question is another: Does the prohibition on "indoor religious services" infringe upon the constitutional right of the Church (and its parishioners) to the free exercise of their religion?

Definitively resolving these questions, however, will entail the resolution of difficult questions of law. We certainly cannot resolve them before tomorrow [Sunday] morning's church services....

Justice requires that [we] issue a stay order to preserve [our] own jurisdiction ... while [we] prepare ... to rule on the merits of those questions....

The County is [therefore] empowered to enforce [its] "indoor religious services" provision of its Health Order.

To which Pastor MacArthur said the equivalent of "nuts to you!" In his opening remarks on Sunday he told his congregation:

We agreed: we'll comply for a few weeks. They [the county] asked for three weeks. We're not



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wanting to be defiant. We will do what is reasonable.

That was not enough for the city.

They went to the appellate court Saturday late and had that order removed....

They don't want us to meet. That's obvious. They're not willing to work with us. They just want to shut us down.

But we're here to bring honor to the Lord. We are holding church ... because our Lord commands it.

The congregation erupted with applause and cheers.

The next move is up to the court. Are they going to enforce their ruling? If so, how? With police, with guns, and badges? Will they seal off the entrance to the church so that no one can enter? Will they arrest Pastor MacArthur?

If so, is this really the message they want to deliver to the millions of believers across the country watching the confrontation between church and state play out?

Image: screenshot from [YouTube video](#)

An Ivy League graduate and former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American, writing primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelmann@thenewamerican.com.

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