



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 20, 2020

California Threatens Fines and Incarceration for Preachers AND WORSHIPPERS Who Defy COVID Mandates

Pastor John MacArthur's Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, isn't the only mega-church defying Governor Gavin Newsom's COVID-inspired edicts and mandates against worship services being held indoors.

Following Newsom's edict on July 13 moving most of the state back to Phase 1 — a complete ban on businesses and churches from operating indoors — Greg Fairington, pastor of Destiny Church in Rocklin, videotaped his response. [He said](#), "We will not be shutting down our church.... I believe my mandate as pastor is to obey the word of God, and worship is a part of what we do together as a church corporately, and we need to do this. It's important that we do this."



He added, "We are not going to allow the government to use data that is not supported factually to shut [our] church down. Do not let the fear the media is driving, do not let the fear that is out there, affect us as a church."

Tim Thompson, the founder and current pastor of 412 Church Murrieta in Riverside County, opened his church for in-person services before Newsom's July 13 announcement and has stayed open ever since. Thompson told the Western Journal: "Why is anyone allowing a government leader ... why are we allowing the government to tell the church what to do, ever? That is what men and women fought and died for during the Revolutionary War: that we wouldn't have the church being mandated by the state on how we worship God, where we worship God ... what time, what manner."

Thousands took to the beaches to circumvent Newsom's orders. "Let Us Worship" events from Redding to San Diego drew believers to the beaches and other public places to worship.

Other churches filed suit against Newsom, including Harvest Rock Church and more than 160 other churches. The suit was filed four days after Newsom declared a reversion back to Phase 1, claiming that his order violated nearly every right guaranteed in the First Amendment — free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble — and the 14th Amendment — equal rights for all citizens. It also charged Newsom with discrimination, as he was not enforcing his mandate against protestors but, in fact, was encouraging them.

Meanwhile, Harvest and its affiliated churches continued to hold in-person worship services.

A month after Newsom's updated decree, the City of Pasadena sent a letter to Harvest Church's Pastor,



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Che Ahn:

This letter is to remind you that violations of these Orders are criminal in nature. Each day in violation is a separate violation and carries with it a potential punishment of up to one year in jail and a fine for each violation....

Your compliance with these Orders is not discretionary, it is mandatory. Any violations in the future will subject your Church, owners, administrators, operators, staff, and parishioners to the above-mentioned criminal penalties as well as the potential closure of your Church.

Mat Staver, the founder of Liberty Counsel, which filed the Harvest Rock Church's lawsuit, said:

The City of Pasadena, like Gov. Gavin Newsom, encourages thousands of people to gather for protests, but now considers in-person worship to be a criminal offense.

These actions of the City of Pasadena and Gov. Newsom are akin to repressive foreign regimes, not America where the First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion.

The First Amendment erects a wall which the state may not breach to close churches and incarcerate pastors and parishioners.

In earlier coverage of the confrontation brewing between Pastor John MacArthur of Grace Community Church and Los Angeles County [here](#), we asked: "Are [the authorities] 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?"

Now the question is: Will law enforcement also come into ongoing church services and arrest the worshippers exercising their First Amendment-protected rights?

We're about to find out.

Image: Thinkstock

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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