



Written by [Annalisa Pesek](#) on April 10, 2021

Jailed Canadian Pastor's Church Now Barricaded With Eight-foot Fencing; Neighbors Rejoice

The scene could have been lifted straight from the pages of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*: Government officials obediently carrying out state orders, fencing off a house of worship, having previously imprisoned the shepherd of the church.

Yet this is not happening in Soviet Russia but in a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, specifically Alberta, Canada, where citizens have the freedom "to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal," according to [Section 2\(a\)](#) of the Canadian Charter.



YouTube

As previously [reported](#) by *The New American*, [Canadian Pastor James Coates](#) was [jailed](#) for more than a month in a maximum-security facility for breaching COVID-19 restrictions and continuing to hold services at GraceLife Church (GLC), near Edmonton.

The Church Is Seized

Early morning Wednesday, April 7, Coates learned via a text message that the Alberta Health Services (AHS) had officially "physically closed" the house of worship "until GLC can demonstrate the ability to comply with Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health's restrictions," reported [660News](#).

"The government is embarrassed at this point in time," Coates told [Rebel News](#) reporter Sheila Gunn Reid on April 8. "We are a black eye on our government because we continue to meet. I think the closing of our facility is necessary in order to prevent any further embarrassment to the government."

Reid is the one reporter Coates has allowed on the premises since the church received the AHS closure order back in January. "Mainstream media is effectively state-run media and that is why we don't give them our time because we know we're not going to get a fair hearing, and it's just not worth it to give them our message," he said.

Assisting health officials in fortifying the church were the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), barricading the building and grounds with tall fencing to keep the parishioners off the property.

In one [video](#), the RCMP is seen setting up the barriers, while nearby a visibly emotional Pastor Coates appears to be wiping away tears. Several parishioners and local residents gathered at the scene in support, some carrying signs and Charter Rights, as the authorities guarded the site to block anyone from entering the facility.

Despite this excessive attempt to keep the church closed, Coates maintains that he and his congregation will not be deterred from meeting:



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The government is trying to go toe-to-toe with the Lord of Glory in this moment. The church is not a building. The church is the people of God who come together and worship the Lord Jesus Christ, and so while it's unfortunate that we don't have access to our facility that in no way impedes or obstructs the work of the Gospel, the building up of the body of Christ. I see this as a wonderful opportunity for the Lord to put His glory on display.

After receiving AHS's closure order back in January, Coates continued to preach on Sundays.

"We have met for 37 Sundays in a row without a single COVID case, let alone a breakout, and so we are exposing the reality, not only that these lockdown measures are unjust but that they are harmful and unnecessary," said Coates.

"Our Responsibility as Shepherds Is to Open the Church"

Coates has been a vocal critic of church leaders applying "[Romans 13](#)" to justify their willingness to comply with stringent health and safety regulations, requiring churches across Canada to operate at 15-percent capacity.

He has termed such obedience "pastoral malpractice."

"Do we have that authority, that we can tell people they can't worship? We refuse to tell people of this body they can't come. Our responsibility as shepherds is to open our doors. We are opening our doors to worship," preached Coates before his arrest.

To comply with the state's health orders would be to turn congregants away, which Coates was never willing to do.

Even as the blockades were erected, and the biased media sought reactions from members of the Parkland County community, many of whom seemed glad to see the "darn church" finally close (mainstream reporters interviewed few, if any, parishioners), the pastor said that although the church property is now occupied by police and security, "the time is now, not in any kind of violent manner, but to peacefully return to your life."

"[Alberta] Premiere Jason Kenney," continued Coates, "is an incredible disappointment to this province. I would say this to the Alberta people — the only way to get your province back is to take it back.... People are not afraid. We need to return to our lives. If you are waiting for the government to hand you back your civil liberties, it is just not going to happen." He went on to say:

Democracy at this point in time is dying because Kenney is not governing in accord with the mind of the people. It is abundantly apparent that Albertans want to go back to life as usual and the excuse that it's a health issue that is preventing us from doing that is just that, an excuse.

There clearly is some underlying agenda that is shaping the governance of Jason Kenney, and it's to the detriment of the people of this province. If everyone goes back to life as normal and the masks come off, the pandemic goes away. We are ultimately in control.

Anger Toward the Church

Some people are still very much afraid or they hate the church. One neighborhood snitch, who goes by the name of Wess, admitted to a reporter that "A lot of us have made calls to the premier, to the justice



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minister, asking them why they are not taking any kind of action here. And well, I guess today they actually did.”

Bizarrely, those who reported the church to the authorities appear to be proud of their actions and grateful to see the fortress surrounding the church.

According to the local news, “between last July and April 6 of this year, AHS says it received 105 complaints about GraceLife and inspectors have conducted 10 site inspections. Violations were observed at each visit.... With COVID-19 cases increasing and the more easily transmitted and potentially more severe variants becoming dominant, there is urgent need to minimize spread to protect all Albertans.”

As of April 7, the number of [deaths](#) attributed to the coronavirus in Alberta, population 1.1 million, have reached 2,005. Just take a moment to do the math. On Friday, an entire news article was devoted to [75 new cases](#) of grocery store workers in the Edmonton area.

This raises the question: Why are the stores still open but the church closed? Costco has never closed. Yet the authorities are barricading a church? And the neighbors are rejoicing?

“I was at Costco on Monday and it was packed,” said the pastor. “The premium outlet mall, packed as well.... There is no way what is happening now is in accord with truth. There are so many doctors and experts that have come out and challenged the science and medicine that is being propagated by AHS and our government officials that it is now to the point where you are not responding to the information available to us, We the People. Time to wake up, speak out! It is time to return to the civil liberties that are ours as a nation.”

During the pastor’s month-long incarceration (he was jailed from February 16-March 22), his wife, Erin Coates, gave an exclusive interview with Canadian TV host Faytene Grasseschi, during which she stated, “We know how this disease works now, who the most vulnerable are, and how we can work to protect them. People are really hurting; they need to worship God. They need to be together.” She pleaded with other religious leaders to “open your doors to pre-COVID restrictions, and if you’re not quite there, wrestle with what’s going on, as studies are starting to be released.”

Moreover, one in 10 Canadians have struggled with depression in the last 10 months. More than 800,000 Canadians have lost their jobs and the country is now on the verge of a third lockdown. According to Erin Coates,

People are struggling with suicidal thoughts. Opioid addiction is going up, drug addiction is going up. Our nation is really hurting. We hope not only to take care of God’s people but that we have hope in the Lord Jesus to help you live life to get you through these hard times.

Before the pastor’s release from jail, lawyer John Carpay, president of the [Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms](#), expressed that the tide was turning in terms of public opinion about COVID lockdowns. “Every court ruling from here on out will be setting a precedent for other provinces. Several lessons we take away from this is that if you fight a battle, you can win. If you don’t fight a battle, you are guaranteed to lose. Coates is a hero because he chose to fight a battle that he was called to fight.”

How Can We Support James Coates and Other Pastors?

As a new battle begins for Pastor Coates, he strongly urged his fellow Albertans to place pressure on members of the legislative assembly (MLA) as a way not only to support him but to end the pandemic.



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“People need to let their MLAs know what is happening here. We need to put pressure on the premiere. We need to return to our daily lives. Pastors need to open their churches. At the end of the day, COVID is a reality. You have to assess whether you want to live this life in a lockdown-type society where your civil liberties are removed from you, or whether you are willing to go back to freedom at the risk of contracting the virus. And that is where the Gospel of Christ comes in. If you are in Christ, you are not afraid of death.

As of this reporting, no date has been set for the removal of the fencing or the unlocking of the occupied church.

“I Am Not a Political Revolutionary”

In the spirit of colonial preacher Jonathan Mayhew, whose famous words, “Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God,” are credited with inspiring the brave fighters of the American Revolution, Coates remains obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. Upon his release from jail, Coates exclaimed, “I am not a political revolutionary. I am simply here in obedience with Jesus Christ.”

“[When] I found out that they were locking up the church, I had excitement in my heart. I mean they are going toe-to-toe with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and in general that does not go well, and it certainly does not go well in the end,” he said.

For the full interview, click on the video below.

Related articles: [Canadian Pastor Released From Jail: “I Am Not a Political Revolutionary. I Am Simply Here in Obedience With Jesus Christ”](#)



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