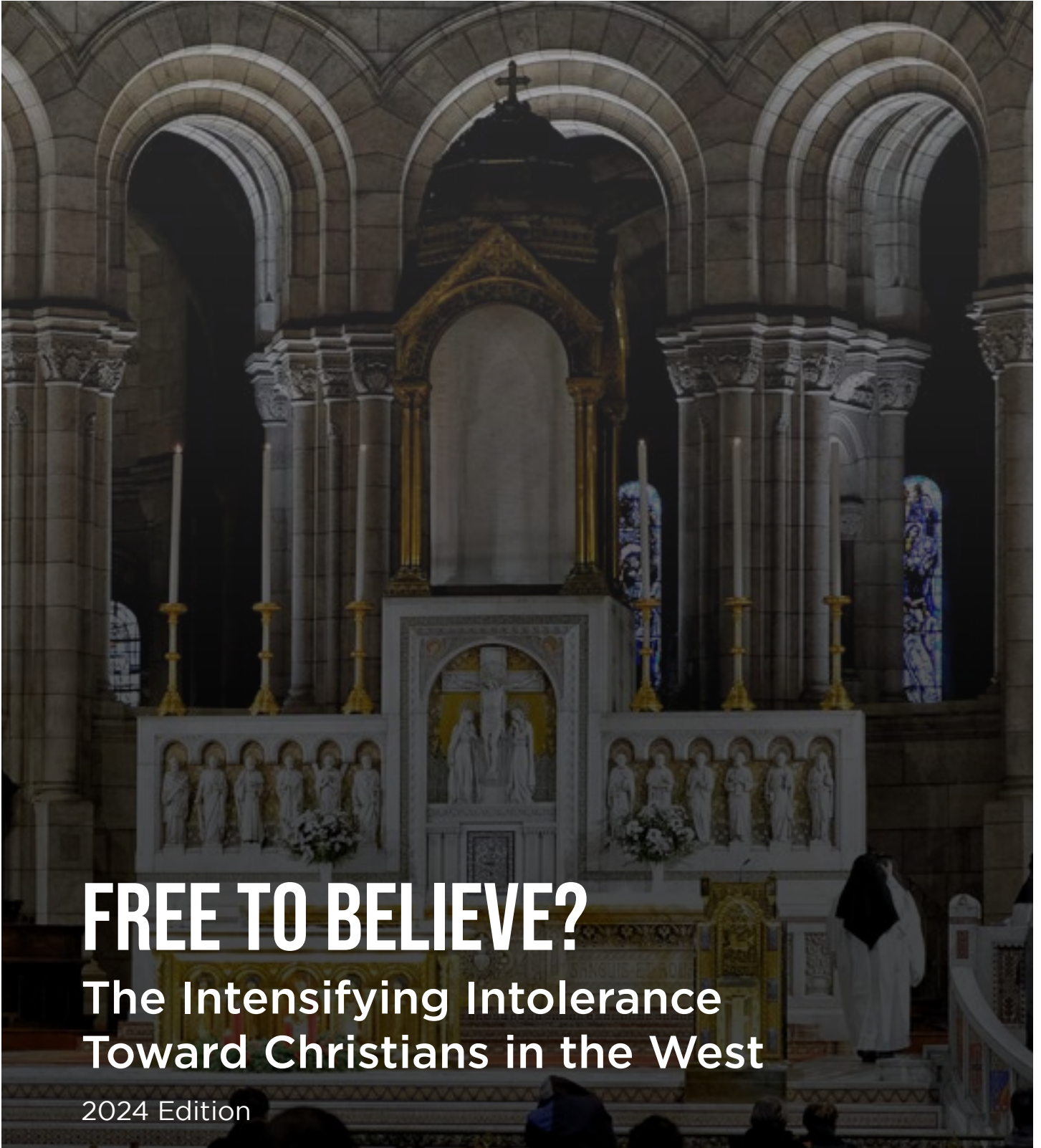




Center for
Religious Liberty



FREE TO BELIEVE?

The Intensifying Intolerance
Toward Christians in the West

2024 Edition



FREE TO BELIEVE?
THE INTENSIFYING INTOLERANCE
TOWARD CHRISTIANS IN THE WEST
2024 EDITION
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Dear readers,

This report is a warning call.

During my time as chair and commissioner of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), I saw a marked rise in violations of religious freedom against Christians. This occurred not only in longstanding persecution hotspots such as China, Pakistan, and India but also across the West.

It is shocking to see Western countries—the same ones we think of as free and open societies—take authoritarian measures against Christians simply trying to live out their faith. Hostility toward Bible-believing Christians is clearly and steadily rising in the West. The report details numerous infringements, including those related to restrictions on speech and public prayer. These abuses are alarming for anyone who understands that the historic understanding of religious freedom is the ability to live your life according to your faith in every aspect of your life.

In the United Kingdom, Christians are being arrested for silently praying in their own heads outside of abortion facilities. In Germany, we see crackdowns on alternative faith-based forms of education. In the United States, Christian teachers and coaches are being fired for their beliefs about human sexuality, and Christians can no longer assume that their place of worship will not be targeted with violent action. These are serious challenges to the ability of Christians in the West to live according to their biblical beliefs.

Religious freedom is the foundation for the human rights that Western democracies seek to promote abroad. Yet, the ability to promote this fundamental human right will be lost if we do not protect it within our borders.

This report is merely a sampling of the rise of actions by Western governmental officials that target Christians' ability to practice and express their faith, especially in the public square. It is intended to sound the alarm and to prompt lawmakers at all levels to set limits and safeguards to protect against future abuses. Finally, it is a call to individuals to vigorously exercise their religious freedom while at the same time calling upon government officials to recognize and prioritize the protection of this fundamental human right so that religious freedom can continue to be promoted around the world.

Sincerely,



Tony Perkins

President, Family Research Council

Former Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

FREE TO BELIEVE?

The Intensifying Intolerance Toward Christians in the West

2024 Edition

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intolerance toward Christians appears to be on the rise in the West.¹ One very dangerous symptom of this upward trend is government officials and entities targeting Christian churches, organizations, and individuals for prosecution or punishment based on their religious beliefs.

It is difficult to monitor and quantify the extent of religious freedom violations occurring across the Western world. However, Family Research Council has set out to provide a better understanding of the current state of affairs by collecting stories of governments targeting Christians. We analyzed open-source documents, reports, and media outlets from 34 countries.

Our initial report, published in June 2022 and covering January 2020 through June 2022, identified 99 incidents across 14 countries. Since that time, we have continued to identify incidents of government intolerance toward Christians. As of the close of 2023, we have identified 168 incidents across 16 countries, all occurring over the past four years.

These stories are alarming and show the diverse ways Western governments—which ought to be the standard bearers for upholding freedom of religion and expression—are undermining the fundamental human right to religious freedom.

Some Christians in Western countries were arrested or fined for preaching or praying in public spaces. Others faced punishment for expressing their biblically informed beliefs in the public square. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some local governments imposed restrictions on houses of worship that were more stringent than those placed on secular institutions and businesses.

This report is far from exhaustive. Yet, it offers insights into the factors contributing to Western governments' violations of Christians' religious freedom and the common pressure points that often provoke such violations.

INTRODUCTION

As the mainstream culture moves further and further away from a Christian worldview, Christian beliefs that contradict progressive secular values are increasingly denounced by the culture and wrongly portrayed as being hateful or bigoted.

Finnish member of parliament Päivi Räsänen's story is emblematic of this phenomenon. Räsänen was prosecuted by Finland's prosecutor general for respectfully articulating a biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality.² She was charged with three counts of "ethnic agitation" for a tweet containing a Bible verse in which she indicated disapproval of her church's sponsorship of a Pride event, for discussing her beliefs on a radio show, and for publishing a pamphlet promoting a biblical understanding of marriage through her church.³ Although Räsänen was acquitted by the Helsinki district court in 2022, the prosecutor general appealed the decision, prompting a "retrial" and extending the case into its fourth year. However, Räsänen was unanimously acquitted by the high court in November 2023.⁴

Christians in schools and universities have experienced hostility for their beliefs on marriage and human sexuality. Several public schoolteachers were fired for expressing concern over the ways that schools have been promoting secular views on sexuality. One California teacher, Jessica Tapia, was fired after questioning the district's policy forcing teachers to hide and even lie to parents about students' gender transitions.⁵ Other Christians were fired and even arrested after their employers found evidence of the individual's biblical beliefs on their private social media pages. Kristie Higgs, a teacher in the United Kingdom, was fired for "gross misconduct" after she posted her disagreement with the inclusion of homosexuality in sex education on Facebook.⁶

There were also alarming incidents wherein prayer and public preaching were considered reasonable grounds for arrest. This has been especially prevalent in the United Kingdom, where the state has instituted buffer zones that censor speech and action around abortion facilities. Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was arrested for silently praying within these buffer zones.⁷ As a condition of her bail, Vaughan-Spruce was told she could not pray publicly anywhere.⁸ It points to a very dangerous trend when people silently praying are being arrested based on presumed thought crimes.

Other research on religious intolerance affirms that it continues to be a serious issue in the West. A Pew Research Center report analyzing the extent of government and societal actions that impinge on religious beliefs and practices noted a gradual rise in social hostilities toward religion.⁹ Pew defines social hostilities as "concrete, hostile actions that effectively hinder the religious activities of the targeted individuals or groups." It found a "high" level of social hostilities toward religion in much of Europe in 2019 and identified North America as having a "moderate" level. These are alarming trends.

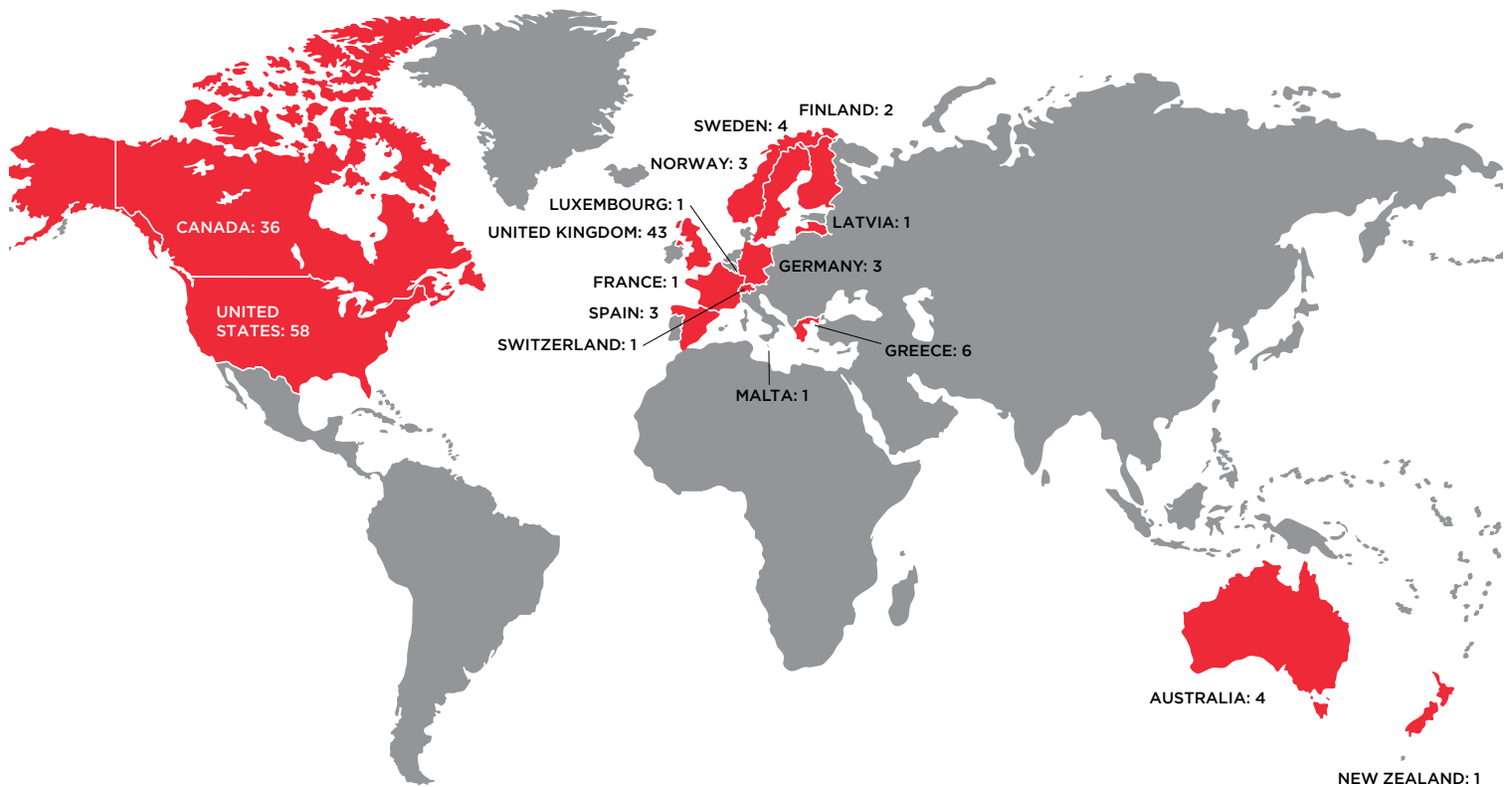


OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

FRC analyzed open-source documents, reports, and media outlets to identify religious freedom violations perpetrated by governments against Christian individuals, organizations, and churches in 34 countries. Between January 2020 and December 2023, we identified 168 incidents across 16 countries.¹⁰

Of the years that FRC examined, 2020 had the most incidents, with 61. The vast majority of these incidents involved churches or their pastors being fined or pastors being jailed for holding a church service that violated the country or locality's COVID-19 restrictions. In 2021, we identified 49 incidents. Many of these incidents were still related to COVID-19 restrictions, but a good amount were related to Christians expressing their biblically informed views on marriage and sexuality, as well as praying or preaching in public. Of the past four years, 2022 had the fewest incidents, with 25. Most recently, 2023 had 33 incidents that we identified. Many of these incidents were related to free speech issues.¹¹

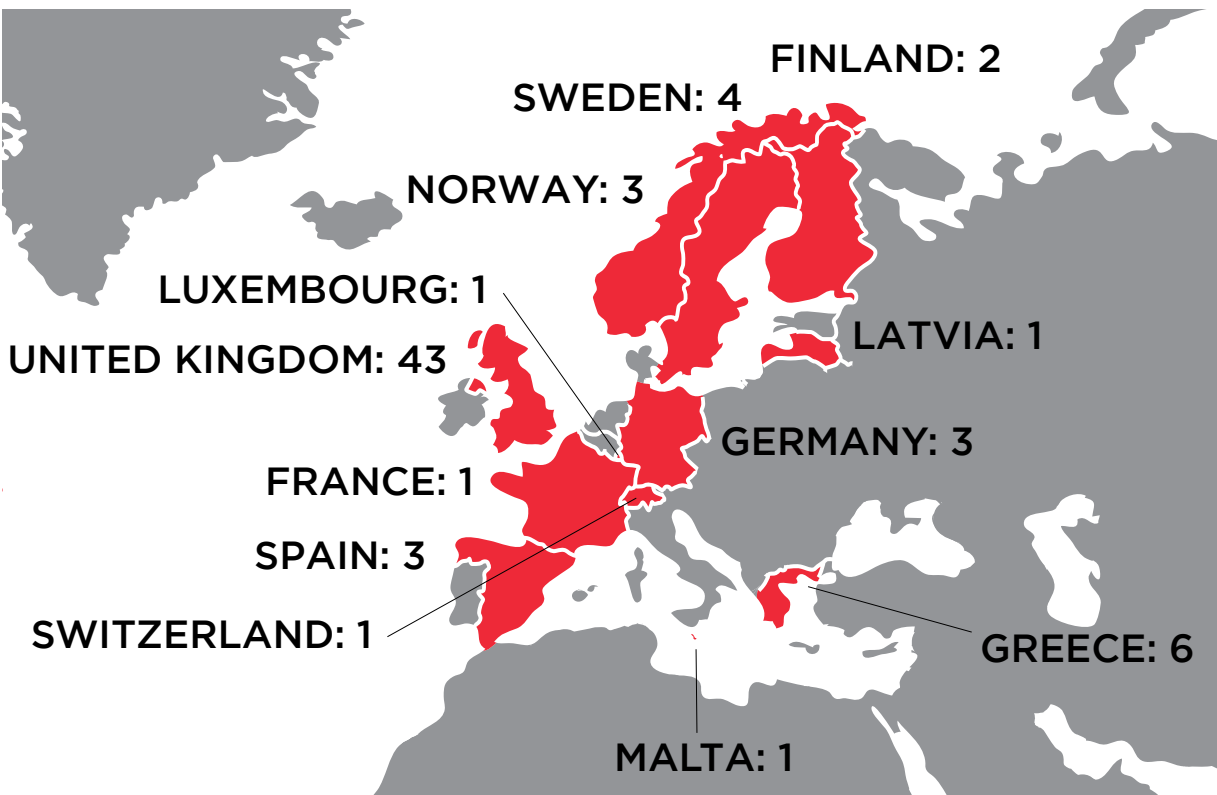
INCIDENTS IN THE WESTERN WORLD



The past three years each having fewer incidents than 2020 does not necessarily indicate an overall decline in intolerance toward Christians. COVID-19 provided an unusual circumstance wherein churches were forced to decide between gathering for church services in person or following their country's COVID-19 restrictions. Although FRC identified fewer incidents related to COVID-19 after 2020, incidents that we identified of Christians facing discrimination for their biblically informed beliefs increased.

This report focuses on instances in which governments in Western countries threatened, fined, jailed, or otherwise punished Christian individuals, organizations, or churches for actions related to their faith. Government laws or policies were outside the scope of the report. This report makes no pretense of being comprehensive. Rather, it is intended to draw attention to a growing problem that is often brushed aside and ignored. We hope that this report offers insights into the factors contributing to Western governments' violations of religious freedom against Christians.

EUROPEAN MAP (ENLARGED)



INCIDENTS BY COUNTRY



AUSTRALIA

Pastor investigated for officiating wedding – August 2021

Pastor Martin Beckett was put under police investigation after admitting on a social media livestream that he had conducted a wedding in violation of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.¹²

Congregation fined for holding in-person church service – August 2021

Thirty-one fines of 1,000 AUD each were issued to members of Christ Embassy Church in Sydney for holding a church service in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. The church itself was fined 5,000 AUD.¹³

Pastor arrested, fined, and banned from social media for holding in-person church services – February and May 2021

Pastor Paul Furlong of Christian Revival Church in Narre Warren, Victoria, was arrested and fined over 1,500 AUD for holding a worship service in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. Later, in May 2021, Furlong was arrested for violating his bail by announcing he would hold a church gathering despite continued COVID-19 restrictions. During his month-long imprisonment, Furlong was denied bail, and his Bible was confiscated for a week. Although he has since been released, Furlong is banned from social media.¹⁴



CANADA

Pastor arrested twice for protesting and silently praying outside library drag queen storytime events – March 2023

Canadian pastor Derek Reimer was arrested for breaking orders following his previous arrest, which forbade him from being within 200 meters of any LGBTQ event. At the time of both arrests, Reimer was protesting drag queen storytime events at public libraries. He was charged with counts of disturbance, mischief, and six counts of harassment, each incurring fines of up to 10,000 CAD or six months in prison.¹⁵

Church fined for holding in-person church services – January 2023

The Church of God (Restoration) was fined \$30,000 for breaking COVID-19 regulations six times in 2020 with meetings of 30 to 145 people. The church was given seven years to pay the fine. Judge Michael Clark sought to teach the church a lesson, saying, “This church will think twice if public orders are put in place considering these fines are significant to them.”¹⁶

Teen arrested for organizing protest against biological males using women’s bathrooms – January 2023

Josh Alexander was arrested at St. Joseph Catholic High School, a publicly funded school, after resisting expulsion from the school. The teen had spoken against biological males using women’s bathrooms—a belief informed by his biblical views on sexuality—to teachers and the principal and then organized a protest against the policy on school grounds. Alexander was suspended, then expelled, and when he returned to school, he was arrested for trespassing.¹⁷

Pastor fined for hosting in-person church service – November 2022

A British Columbia judge declared John Koopman, pastor of Free Reformed Church, guilty of breaking the province’s COVID-19 regulations by having an in-person worship service. A Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer tried to get into the service on December 6, 2020, after seeing information about it on the church’s website and watching congregants enter, but he himself was unable to get inside. Koopman faced a 2,300 CAD fine.¹⁸



The University of Guelph granted Curtis Riddolls a religious exemption to the university's mandatory vaccine policy and then revoked it within a week, excluding him from the lab course he needed to complete his degree.

Panel urged avoiding hiring military chaplains from churches that exclude women in their priesthoods - May 2022

An advisory panel to the Canadian Department of National Defence recommended that the military avoid hiring “chaplaincy applicants affiliated with religious groups whose values are not aligned with those of the Defence Team.” According to a report from the panel, chaplains from churches that exclude women in their priesthood should not be hired.¹⁹

College student denied religious exemption for COVID-19 vaccine - February 2022

Curtis Riddolls, a third-year student at the University of Guelph, applied for a religious exemption to the university's mandatory vaccine policy. The university granted him an accommodation and then revoked it within a week, excluding him from the lab course he needed to complete his degree.²⁰

Pastor fined for hosting in-person religious gathering - November 2021

Robert Smith, the pastor of the Gospel Light Baptist Church in Amherst, Nova Scotia, was fined 2,422 CAD a few weeks after hosting a religious gathering that took place from October 25 to 29. The gathering was found to be in violation of the COVID-19 order under the Health Protection Act.²¹

Occupational therapist fired for refusing COVID-19 vaccine - November 2021

North York General Hospital fired Wanh Porter for not obtaining a COVID-19 vaccine. Porter had a conscientious objection to receiving the vaccine. Porter's request for an accommodation was denied, and she was told she would be placed on unpaid leave in a week and fired in a month.²²

Group of citizens accused Ontario of violating religious rights - October 2021

In a case brought against the Ontario government, Hibah Aoun, a personal trainer and manager of LaSalle Gym in Windsor, claimed that a vaccine passport wrongfully pressures and coerces her into submitting to medical intervention, which violates her religious, spiritual, and conscientious beliefs protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She is joined by seven other citizens in the lawsuit.²³

Church locked after holding in-person Thanksgiving service - October 2021

New Brunswick authorities forcibly locked His Tabernacle Family Church and arrested Associate Pastor Cody Butler for holding a Thanksgiving service despite COVID-19 restrictions.²⁴

Mennonites charged for holding in-person gatherings - June 2021

Two Mennonite individuals were charged with violating COVID-19 restrictions for holding in-person gatherings at Old Colony Mennonite churches in Ontario.²⁵

Pastor jailed for holding in-person church service - May and June 2021

Tim Stephens, the pastor of Fairview Baptist Church in Calgary, Alberta, was arrested and spent three days in jail for holding a worship service outdoors that was in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. He was arrested a second time at his home for holding an in-person church service and spent 17 nights in jail.²⁶

Street preacher charged for serving homeless despite COVID-19 restrictions - May 2021 and April 2022

Police issued two tickets against Derek Reimer, a Calgary pastor who ministers with MISSION7 Ministries, for serving food to the homeless at the beginning of the pandemic. The tickets were later dismissed. Reimer's legal challenges continued when he was arrested in April 2022 for street preaching with a microphone.²⁷

Pastor jailed and put on house arrest for violating COVID-19 restrictions - May 2021 and February 2022

In May 2021, Pastor Artur Pawlowski spent three days in prison and incurred a fine of 23,000 CAD for holding in-person church services in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. In February 2022, Pawlowski was arrested and jailed for 51 days after he gave a speech to truckers who were defying COVID-19 restrictions.²⁸ Additional charges are still pending against Pawlowski.

Church locked after hosting in-person services - May 2021

Local authorities locked the doors of the Church of God in Aylmer, Ontario, after Pastor Henry Hildebrandt held multiple in-person church services. The locks remained until September 2021, when a superior court justice finally allowed the church to reopen as long as they abided by a COVID-19 "safety plan." Fines levied against Hildebrandt, another church leader, and the church itself totaled approximately 200,000 CAD.²⁹

Church fined for allegedly exceeding worship services gathering limit - March 2021

Fellowship Baptist Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, was fined 14,000 CAD for allegedly exceeding the number of people allowed to attend a worship service. Marty Moore of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms said the church had done its best to comply with public health orders without violating its religious beliefs.³⁰



Judge ruled against group of churches challenging COVID-19 rules - March 2021

A justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia dismissed a challenge to COVID-19 rules by a group of Fraser Valley churches that claimed the restrictions unjustifiably infringed on their religious freedoms. The justice stated, “Although the impacts of the ... orders on the religious petitioners’ rights are significant, the benefits to the objectives of the orders are even more so. In my view, the orders represent a reasonable and proportionate balance.”³¹

Student allegedly fired from campus newspaper due to Catholic views - February 2021

Jonathan Bradley said that he was fired from Ryerson University’s student newspaper due to his Roman Catholic beliefs, which include adhering to Church and biblical teachings on sexuality. He claimed that the firing constituted discrimination on the basis of creed under Ontario human rights law. Editors of the magazine told him that his writing in a conservative online publication made the staff feel uncomfortable.³²

Street preacher arrested and charged with “mischief” - February 2021

Michael Ojinma was arrested for street preaching in Vancouver and charged with “mischief.” Authorities accused him of violating an order against electronically enhanced sound.³³

Church fined for holding in-person services - January 2021

Trinity Bible Chapel in Waterloo, Ontario, was fined 83,000 CAD when Pastor Jacob Reaume held an in-person church service that did not abide by COVID-19 restrictions that would have limited the service to just 10 people. By April 30, 2021, Reaume said government authorities had confiscated the church building and his church was facing more than 40 million CAD in fines and dozens of charges.³⁴

Pastor fined for holding in-person church services - January 2021

Pastor Stephen Richardson of Faith Presbyterian Church in Tillsonburg, Ontario, held in-person services and was fined by authorities when neighbors alerted the police. The church started moving locations and meeting in secret before becoming public with its decision to hold in-person services in February 2021.³⁵

Church investigated and pastor charged for holding in-person services - December 2020 and May 2021

In December 2020, Pastor Aaron Rock of Harvest Bible Church in Windsor, Ontario, was charged with violating COVID-19 restrictions for holding in-person services. In May 2021, police investigated an in-person service at the church.³⁶

Pastor repeatedly fined and arrested for holding in-person church services - December 2020

Pastor James Coates of GraceLife Church Edmonton was issued a 1,200 CAD ticket in December 2020 for violating the COVID-19 capacity limits and masking restrictions in the Public Health Act. However, Coates continued holding worship services and kept the doors of GraceLife Church



Trinity Bible Chapel in Waterloo, Ontario, was fined 83,000 CAD when Pastor Jacob Reaume held an in-person church service that did not abide by COVID-19 restrictions that would have limited the service to just 10 people.



The Saskatchewan Health Authority told Nipawin Apostolic Church to cancel its planned Easter service or risk parishioners receiving steep fines, despite the church planning a drive-in service and having the approval of municipal officials.

open to all, regardless of capacity limits. In response, Alberta's public health inspector ordered GraceLife to be closed; however, Coates kept GraceLife open. In February 2021, Coates was arrested after a Sunday morning service for breaching the Public Health Act. He was given a court date, ordered to close the church, and released. The following Sunday, Coates held another church service that exceeded occupancy limits and turned himself in to the police. Coates remained in jail until the end of March and was given a 1,500 CAD fine. Coates continued to hold services that exceeded occupancy limits, and in April, local law enforcement seized the church's property.³⁷

Church fined for violating COVID-19 regulations - December 2020

Southside Victory Church Fellowship in Calgary was given two tickets after violating a number of rules Alberta's Public Health Act had put in place to protect the public from COVID-19. The church was also given a third fine for lacking proper signage to inform visitors of mandatory mask rules.³⁸

Pastor fined for violating public health order - November 2020 and October 2021

In November 2020, Tobias Tissen, a pastor at the Church of God in rural Manitoba, was hit with two fines totaling nearly 2,600 CAD after attending a protest against COVID-19 restrictions and participating in a Sunday religious service.³⁹ In October 2021, Tissen was arrested and jailed for two days for holding in-person church services in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. Authorities issued tens of thousands of dollars' worth of fines against Tissen and his church, Church of God Restoration, for gathering as a congregation in person.⁴⁰

Church fined for holding in-person services - November 2020 and January 2021

Authorities fined Riverside Calvary Chapel in Langley, British Columbia, for meeting in person despite COVID-19 restrictions; once in November 2020 for 2,300 CAD and again in January 2021.⁴¹

Mennonites felt persecuted by orders to close schools and churches - November 2020

Members of the Old Order Mennonite community in northern Wellington County, Ontario, claimed that they were persecuted by Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health's orders to close schools and churches despite the community's attempt to follow public health orders.⁴²

Three churches fined for violating public health orders - November 2020

Three churches in Chilliwack, British Columbia, were fined for violating provincial public health orders. Seven were against Pastor John Koopman of Chilliwack Free Reformed Church, 11 against Pastor James Butler of Free Grace Baptist Church, and six against Pastor Timothy Champ of Valley Heights Community Church. The fines, totaling 55,200 CAD, were dropped in 2022.⁴³

Church told to cancel drive-in Easter service or face fines - April 2020

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) told Nipawin Apostolic Church to cancel its planned Easter service or risk parishioners receiving steep fines, despite the church planning a drive-in service and having the approval of municipal officials. The SHA deemed the church's drive-in Easter service a "mass gathering" in violation of Saskatchewan's Public Health Order.⁴⁴



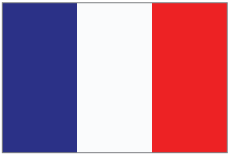
FINLAND

Member of parliament and bishop criminally charged with hate speech - April 2021

Finnish member of parliament Päivi Räsänen was charged by Finland’s prosecutor general with three counts of “ethnic agitation” under a hate speech law in the criminal code for respectfully articulating a Christian understanding of marriage and sexuality in a tweet, a radio show interview, and a 20-year-old pamphlet. Bishop Juhana Pohjola of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland was charged for publishing Räsänen’s pamphlet. Although the Helsinki District Court acquitted all the charges, Finland’s prosecutor general appealed the decision, extending the case into its fourth year before Päivi Räsänen was unanimous acquitted by the high court in November 2023.⁴⁵

Two pastors arrested and detained after outdoor worship service - April 2021

Two pastors were arrested and detained in Espoo for holding an outdoor worship service as part of a Baptist-affiliated “home church.” The police alleged that the congregation of approximately 35 people was not social distancing correctly in accordance with COVID-19 regulations.⁴⁶



FRANCE

French government condemned broadcast network for airing film promoting Christian values - August 2021

After the television channel C8 aired *Unplanned*, an American film that promotes a pro-life message, the French government released a statement that it “firmly condemned” the “despicable anti-abortion propaganda tool” that “goes against the government’s values.” It further condemned the broadcast network, which is owned by a Catholic, for “obstruction to abortion.”⁴⁷





GERMANY

Christian hybrid school shut down – September 2023

The Dietrich Bonhoeffer International School, a Christian hybrid school, was shut down by authorities for violating Germany’s “educational mandate.” In Germany, homeschooling and hybrid schools are banned, and private schools are tightly restricted. The Association for Decentralized Learning, which operates the Dietrich Bonhoeffer International School and other schools, sued the state when it was initially denied accreditation in 2017. The case produced three court hearings, after which the last appeal was rejected by the Constitutional Court in 2022. ADF International sued the state again in 2023, but in October, German authorities sent the lawyer an order of “immediate enforcement of the prohibitions” and fees.⁴⁸

Iranian refugee denied religious asylum – August 2022

An Iranian refugee, referred to as H.H. for his safety, was denied asylum in Germany in 2018, then submitted an appeal to the decision based on his right to religious freedom. In his testimony, H.H. explained that his brother-in-law was killed for practicing Christianity, and later, he and his family became Christians. The Greifswald Administrative Court denied his appeal, saying it was unlikely that H.H. would convert to Christianity after his brother-in-law was killed. The European Court of Human Rights declined to hear arguments for H.H., and he is expected to be deported back to Iran, a country that is extremely dangerous for Christian converts.⁴⁹

Pastor and wife charged for granting church asylum – July 2021

Pastor Andreas Schlechtweg and his wife Susanne Wittmann-Schlechtweg were charged with “aiding and abetting unauthorized residence without the necessary residence permit” after granting church asylum to a young Iranian woman who faced deportation and separation from her husband after her application to the German office for asylum was rejected and his was accepted. In Germany, churches can provide temporary shelter for asylum seekers in special cases.⁵⁰



GREECE

Football star faced imprisonment for Facebook post affirming biological sex – November 2022

Vasilis Tsiartas, a retired football player who played on the Greek national team, was sentenced to 10 months in prison and a €5,000 fine for posting twice on Facebook against a new gender identity bill in 2017. His posts declared sex changes of children as an “abomination” and his belief that “God created Adam and Eve.” Tsiartas planned to appeal the prison sentence and fine.⁵¹

Priest and two others fined for violating COVID-19 measures – January 2022

A priest and two parishioners in Imathia were fined for entering a church for Liturgy despite a government-imposed lockdown due to COVID-19. The priest was fined €1,500, and the parishioners were each fined €300.⁵²

Priest fined after celebrating Liturgy – November 2020

A priest in Chalkidiki celebrated the Liturgy in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. Authorities did not arrest the priest but fined him €1,500 and the two attendees €300 each.⁵³

More than 100 people fined for violating quarantine by attending church – April 2020

Approximately 100 people were fined €150 each for attending Church of the Prophet Elijah in Agia Varvara in violation of a state-mandated quarantine. Two days later, dozens were fined for attending Church of the Holy Trinity in Patras. The church was closed, and the parishioners were sent home.⁵⁴

Church of the Holy Trinity, Patras, Greece – April 2020

Church members thought they were summoned to the church by the priest but were met with policemen. The police issued fines to many of the parishioners, and then closed the church for violating COVID-19 restrictions.⁵⁵

Priest arrested for holding in-person Mass – March 2020

An Orthodox priest, Seraphim of Cypher Island, was arrested for holding Mass in defiance of COVID-19 lockdowns. The Education and Religion Ministry had called for the suspension of “all religious celebrations in all churches, except for funerals and individual prayers.”⁵⁶



LATVIA

Church members divided by vaccination status – December 2021

Archbishop Zbigniew Stankevich, metropolitan of the Roman Catholic Church in Riga, says that the religious community has been divided because members of the congregation are only allowed to participate in services if they are vaccinated. Those who are not vaccinated are only allowed to enter the church for 15 minutes to pray. The bishop said that the rule enforced by the minister of justice was a very serious restriction on religious freedom.⁵⁷



LUXEMBOURG

Court upheld ruling to mandate a government official in charge of monitoring and organizing Protestant Consistory – February 2020

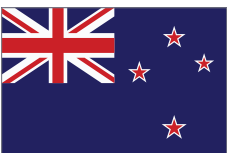
The Court of Cassation upheld a lower court decision that placed an external, government-appointed administrator to organize and monitor the general assemblies and elections of the Protestant Consistory, the Protestant community’s leading intermediary within the government. The Consistory has since applied to the European Court of Human Rights in an attempt to overturn the Court of Cassation’s ruling.⁵⁸



MALTA

Charity worker charged with promoting “conversion practices” after sharing testimony – February 2023

Maltese Christian Matthew Grech described his story of leaving homosexuality on a PM news website program. Following the interview, Grech was accused of promoting so-called “conversion therapy,” which is banned in Malta. If he is convicted of the charges, Grech will be fined €5,000 or face five months in jail.⁵⁹



NEW ZEALAND

Prayer meeting shut down and threatened with prosecution – September 2020

The Mount Roskill Evangelical Fellowship prayer meeting was shut down by local police for exceeding Auckland’s 10-person gathering limit. Police warned church leaders that any further gatherings would result in prosecution.⁶⁰



NORWAY

Christian organizations denied community grant funding due to views on marriage and sexuality - April 2023

The city of Klepp denied funding to five Christian organizations, presumably for their views on gender, marriage, and sexuality. The organizations' complaints were denied in March, but nine city council members questioned the state administrator on the legality of the denials. The denials appear to stem from a change to the grant from December 2021 that requires recipient organization's board members to be able to get elected to boards regardless of sexual orientation.⁶¹

Government directive discourages schools from accepting Bibles from The Gideons - August 2021

A new directive "re-interpreting" the Education Act stated that the circulation of religious texts in school could be considered preaching, which is prohibited by the Education Act. The directive further discouraged schools from accepting Bibles or allowing organizations to distribute Bibles to students as gifts. This official statement directly impacts the ministry of The Gideons, a Christian organization dedicated to handing out Bibles in many public locations, including schools. The organization has since filed a complaint.⁶²

Pastor fined for failing to quarantine before meeting with congregation - November 2020

A pastor was fined 20,000 kroner after meeting with members of his congregation immediately following a trip abroad. Local authorities state that the fine was imposed due to the violation of national quarantine laws.⁶³





SPAIN

Woman arrested for praying the rosary - November 2023

After a month of nightly protests outside of the Spanish Socialist Party headquarters in Madrid—protests that often included rosary recitations—the government prohibited outdoor rosary recitations in that area. The first night the ban was in effect, a woman was arrested for praying the rosary. The ban was appealed, but the appeal was dismissed by the state.⁶⁴

Chinese citizens denied religious asylum - October 2023

Chinese actress Li Yan Li was among several Christian Chinese citizens denied asylum in Spain. Li, who had acted in Christian films, was so desperate not to return to China that she attempted suicide when Spanish authorities tried to put her on a plane to be deported. On November 23, 2023, it was reported that she would be allowed to stay in Spain.⁶⁵

Two people fined for praying outside of abortion facility - June 2022

Two people were fined for praying outside an abortion facility: one woman was fined €600 for organizing an “illegal concentration,” and a young man was fined €600 for praying the rosary. Both individuals are challenging the charges and refuse to pay the fine until proven guilty.⁶⁶



SWEDEN

Bakery investigated after declining to make cake for same-sex wedding - July 2023

A bakery in Stockholm was reported to Sweden’s discrimination agency after it declined to make a cake for a same-sex couple’s wedding. The bakery owners are upfront about their Christian faith on their website and social media. The baker reportedly told the couple, “We respect you as people ... but we do not want to compromise our faith by making such a cake.” The bakery owners insist that they did not discriminate against anyone. They said, “We have many LGBTQ customers who order cakes and bread from us. But when it comes to wedding cakes, it becomes very special, because we believe it is a symbol of a holy sacrament.” The state discrimination agency is investigating the situation.⁶⁷

Kindergarten threatened with fine for lunchtime prayer - February 2022

Local authorities investigated the Ålidenskolan kindergarten after a routine inspection and accused it of having a “religious element” to the children’s education. The authorities found no “religious element” to the teaching but observed that the school facilitated lunchtime prayer. Although the prayer was voluntary and the parents had given consent, the local authorities warned Ålidenskolan that it would be fined 10,000 SEK if they continued lunchtime prayers.⁶⁸

Student discriminated against for wearing cross in public school - October 2020

A 15-year-old student was asked by school leadership to remove his cross necklace for the school photo because it “could be offensive” to other students. Meanwhile, students of other faiths were allowed to wear their religious symbols.⁶⁹

Nurses denied employment for religious beliefs - March 2020

The European Court of Human Rights declined to take up the case of two Swedish nurses who were denied employment as midwives due to their refusal to perform abortions. Even though the nurses had stated their refusal was due to their religious beliefs, a panel found that Swedish officials had acted lawfully in refusing to hire the nurses.⁷⁰



SWITZERLAND

City banned march aligning with Christian values – October 2020

The city of Zürich continued its three-year ban on the local March for Life event advocating for an end to abortion. The city stated that the ban was an effort to protect the attendees from violent counter-protestors. However, when the organizers decided to hold a smaller gathering in the public congress center, which would have had greater protection than a march, they were denied access.⁷¹



UNITED KINGDOM

Two people arrested for praying outside abortion facility – October 2023

A man and woman who were praying and holding pro-life signs outside of a hospital where abortions take place were arrested for violating a state-instituted censorship zone, or “buffer zone.”⁷²

Town councilor arrested for supporting fellow Christian councilor – August 2023

Conservative town councilor Anthony Stevens tweeted a petition in support of King Lawal, another Conservative councilor who had been shunned by his party and businesses for tweeting opposition to the Pride parade. Police came to Stevens’ home without warning. He was searched in front of his family, then detained and questioned at the police station, after which his cell phone was seized. After media attention of Stevens’ arrest, a detective inspector sent a letter to Stevens urging him to remain quiet about his case and not speak to the media.⁷³

Town councilor suspended and canceled for tweet opposing Pride – June 2023

Town councilor King Lawal tweeted in opposition to a Pride parade, saying pride was a sin and not something to celebrate. His tweet included the Bible verse Isaiah 3:9. On the same day he posted the tweet, he was suspended from the North Northamptonshire Unitary Council for 21 days. Lawal was also forced to resign from his own business when a substantial contract threatened to withdraw. He was then dismissed as a trustee from Groundwork Northampton, suspended as an Academy Council member for Weavers Academy, and removed as a Governor of Northampton Healthcare Foundation Trust.⁷⁴

Street preacher arrested for holding sign with a Bible verse outside abortion facility – February 2023

Street preacher Stephen Green was arrested for violating a state-instituted censorship zone, or “buffer zone,” outside of an abortion facility and could be sentenced to up to six months in prison. He said, “There is a huge principle at stake here. If we are not free to hold a sign with a verse from Psalm 139 on it in a London street, then none of us is free.” Green will stand trial in January 2024.⁷⁵

Priest arrested for silently praying outside abortion facility – February 2023

Father Sean Gough was charged with violating a buffer zone because he was standing near a closed abortion facility holding a “praying for free speech” sign. He was then charged with intimidating people going into the facility and for having an “unborn lives matter” sticker on his car.⁷⁶

School chaplain dismissed and blacklisted for telling students they can make up their own minds about sexuality – February 2023

Reverend Bernard Randall delivered a sermon to the students at Trent College in which he said the students did “not have to accept the ideas of LGBT activists.” After receiving complaints, the school dismissed Rev. Randall, and the employment tribunal rejected his appeal for unfair dismissal. The school also referred Rev. Randall’s sermon to the government’s anti-extremism program, although they found no issue with it. Reverend Randall took the school to an employment tribunal, but it rejected his claim.⁷⁷



Man fined for praying silently outside abortion facility – January 2023

Adam Smith-Connor was standing silently for a few minutes with his back to an abortion facility when police officers questioned him. Smith-Connor said he was praying for his deceased son, which led the police to issue him a fine for breaking the buffer zone around an abortion facility.⁷⁸

Woman arrested, threatened with fines for silently praying outside abortion facility – December 2022 and March and October 2023

Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, a pro-life activist, has been arrested and threatened with fines for silently praying outside of an abortion facility, around which the state has established a buffer zone to prevent protestors. Prior to the latest incident in October 2023, Vaughan-Spruce had been arrested twice for the same act and been acquitted.⁷⁹

Police asked woman to move away after praying outside of censorship zone – November 2022

Livia Tossici-Bolt was praying with a friend quietly in a public area when officers asked them to move to a different area. The police said they were too close to the edge of a buffer zone, which prohibits prayer within 150 meters of abortion facilities. Police told Tossici-Bolt that silent prayer could “intimidate and harass” the staff of an abortion facility and cause children from a nearby school to ask questions.⁸⁰

Doctor investigated for praying with patients – September 2022

Dr. Richard Scott, a general practitioner at Bethesda Medical Centre in Margate, Kent, received several complaints about offering prayer to patients after discussing it on BBC Radio in 2019. A tribunal was set up to decide whether Scott would be allowed to continue as a doctor. He was also asked to attend a course about sexual impropriety and to have a psychiatric test. Dr. Scott refused both, but he did agree to complete a one-day training costing £500 on “professional boundaries.”⁸¹

Evangelical preacher arrested for wearing an “offensive” t-shirt – June 2022

Hatun Tash, an evangelical preacher and member of the Free Speech Union, was robbed after attending Speakers’ Corner, an area for free, open-air public speaking. Instead of identifying the perpetrator, police then came and arrested Tash, then strip-searched, interviewed, and jailed her overnight. She was given two charges for her “offensive” shirt, which was a Charlie Hebdo cartoon of Prophet Mohammed. In response to several letters sent to the commissioner’s office questioning the arrest, an inspector said the woman was offensive to Muslims.⁸²

Teacher fired and found guilty of “unacceptable professional conduct” after presenting Christian view of sexuality – May 2022

Glawdys Leger, previously a teacher at Bishop Justus CofE School, wanted her students to be exposed to more than just one narrative about human sexuality. During a discussion on LGBTQI issues in February 2022, she told her students that she does not believe in transgender ideology, that Christians believe sex outside of marriage is sin, and that Christians are supposed to live for God. Leger was fired in May 2022 after a parent complained. The Aquinas Church of England Education Trust reported Leger to the Teaching Regulation Agency. In December 2023, she was tried in court and found guilty of “unacceptable professional conduct” for going against school policy. Although Leger was not banned from teaching, her “unacceptable conduct” was added to her teacher record.⁸³

Street preacher arrested for preaching against homosexuality – August 2021

A street preacher in Leeds, England, was arrested “in relation to public order offenses” for reading Bible verses and preaching against homosexuality.⁸⁴

Street preacher arrested for alleged hate speech – August 2021

Ryan Williamson was arrested for alleged hate speech while he was street preaching in Larne, Northern Ireland. Williamson claims that the “hate speech” referred to by the police is his statements on homosexuality.⁸⁵

Street preacher arrested for reading the Bible aloud – August 2021

A Christian street preacher was arrested for reading the Bible aloud in a London railway station. During his interview with the authorities, police tried to determine whether the reading was “abusive.” The street preacher was released, but one month after he was questioned, he was warned to be careful what he chose to read aloud outside in the future.⁸⁶

Street preacher arrested and given mental health evaluation – July 2021

Street preacher Ryan Schiavo was arrested in London for preaching against homosexuality and churches that fly rainbow flags. Police approached Schiavo and arrested him for causing “intentional harassment, alarm, or distress” under the Public Order Act. They placed him in a cell for over 10 hours. While in custody, Schiavo was given a mental health evaluation, during which the mental health evaluator tried to elicit an affirmation that Schiavo would not discuss homosexuality in public.⁸⁷

Pastor arrested, bruised, and handcuffed for sermon on marriage and family – April 2021

John Sherwood, a 71-year-old pastor, was arrested for supposed “homophobic statements” during a public sermon on marriage and family. Police arrived at the public square in Uxbridge, London, where Sherwood stood preaching on a step stool. After Sherwood refused to get off the stool, the police pulled him down, took away his Bible, and forcibly handcuffed him. Sherwood denied that his statements were hateful and claimed he simply defined marriage as being between a man and a woman. The pastor was left bruised from the treatment and was held overnight in the local police station.⁸⁸

Police shut down church on Good Friday – April 2021

During a time of prayer at Christ the King Polish Church in London, local police took over the pulpit and informed the congregation that the gathering was unlawful, violating attendance limits and social distancing requirements. The congregants were ordered to return home or face a £200 fine.⁸⁹



Seyi Omooba was dismissed from her position in the leading role of West End’s *The Color Purple* after a fellow performer circulated Omooba’s 2014 Facebook post defending a biblical position on homosexuality.

Actress dismissed for biblical Facebook post – February 2021

Seyi Omooba was dismissed from her position in the leading role of West End's *The Color Purple* after a fellow performer circulated Omooba's 2014 Facebook post defending a biblical position on homosexuality. The theater and Omooba's agency terminated their contracts with the actress due to her 2014 comments. Omooba sued the theater, but the court ruled against her.⁹⁰

Christian magistrate fired for views on family – February 2021

The Court of Appeal ruled that Christian magistrate and National Health Service (NHS) Director Richard Page was lawfully dismissed from his position for expressing the view that children “do best” with a mother and a father. In its ruling, the Court stated that the magistrate's views might cause “offense” and that Page's dismissal was justified because it might deter homosexuals from engaging with NHS services.⁹¹

Woman arrested and fined for praying outside – February 2021

Seventy-six-year-old Rosa Lalor of Liverpool was praying while walking outside—masked, socially distanced, and alone—when a police officer approached her. The officer stated Lalor did not have a “reasonable excuse” to be outside since she was not praying in a house of worship and claimed Lalor was there to “protest.” Lalor was arrested, detained in a police car, and fined £200.⁹²

Pastor fined for hosting church service for the homeless – February 2021

Pastor Chizumie Dyer was fined £16,000 for holding an outdoor church service in a local pub car park for the homeless in Bulwell, Nottingham. Although Dyer had spoken to police about the event beforehand and the event had been properly “risk assessed,” local police arrived at the service in riot vans and shut down the event. Authorities defended the fine by stating that the park was not deemed a place of worship and was, therefore, not exempted from COVID-19 restrictions.⁹³

Catholic man's faith disregarded in court ruling – January 2021

In November 2020, a Catholic man fell into a coma after a heart attack left him with permanent brain damage. When the hospital informed the family that the man ought to be taken off life support, the mother and sister of the man argued that as a devout Catholic, he would refuse to be taken off life support. A court ruled against the mother and sister, stating that removing him from life support was in the “best interests” of the man.⁹⁴



Baptism interrupted over COVID-19 restrictions – November 2020

Police interrupted a service during a baptism at The Angel Church in London, where 30 congregants were gathered. After shutting down the service for violation of COVID-19 restrictions, police stood guard outside the church to prevent anyone from entering.⁹⁵

Church’s broadcast shut down and pastor prosecuted – November 2020

After receiving complaints of loud music, police interrupted the Kingdom Faith Ministries International Church in Milton Keynes, England, which was hosting an online service in order to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. The officers told Pastor Daniel Mateola that “too many” staff were running the broadcast and demanded the staff leave. Mateola referred police to the government guidelines allowing the staff to be in the building, but the police responded by calling for backup and shutting down the broadcast. The pastor was then prosecuted for breaking COVID-19 regulations and for his music “blaring out loud.”⁹⁶

Street preacher arrested and strip-searched – November 2020

Street preacher Andrew Sathiyavan was preaching on the streets of Birmingham when he was fined £400 and arrested for violating the government’s COVID-19 guidelines. While in custody, Sathiyavan was strip-searched before his release.⁹⁷

Church closed for holding an in-person gathering – October 2020

New Hope Community Church in Llanrumney, a suburb of the Welsh capital Cardiff, was interrupted by police officers knocking on doors and shining flashlights through windows. The police informed the congregation that they had received complaints from the public about the gathering and that they were in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. The police shut down the service and asked the congregants to leave the building.⁹⁸

Pro-life activists blocked from offering support to women – October 2020

The local government instituted a buffer zone outside the Marie Stopes Abortion Clinic in Manchester. This buffer zone, instituted in response to peaceful pro-life campaigners set up outside the facility, prohibits protesters from gathering around the facility. The city council said the buffer zone is intended to ensure the “safety” and “well-being” of the city’s residents.⁹⁹

Preacher arrested for comments and behavior challenging Islam – September 2020 and May 2021

When speaking at Speakers’ Corner in London’s Hyde Park—a forum for outdoor debates—Christian preacher Hatun Tash received a warning from police due to comments she made against Islam in her sermon. She was told that if she showed up at Speakers’ Corner again, she would be arrested.¹⁰⁰ In May 2021, Tash was arrested when crowds formed at Speakers’ Corner and threatened her over her criticism of Islam. Instead of dispelling the dangerous crowds, police arrested her and held her overnight in jail.¹⁰¹

Police warn pastor and urge him to be silent on LGBT subjects – September 2020

English pastor Josh Williamson was harassed online after he reacted to a canceled Pride event with a Facebook comment saying, “Wonderful news!” When multiple social media users threatened to burn down Williamson’s church, Newquay Baptist, Williamson contacted the police. Local authorities “did not believe” the threat would materialize and instead warned Williamson that if he continued offending the LGBT community, he would be charged with hate speech.¹⁰²

Teacher dismissed for biblical Facebook post – September 2020

Kristie Higgs, a Christian teacher at Farmor’s School in Fairford, Gloucestershire, was dismissed for “gross misconduct” after the school received a complaint regarding Higgs’ 2018 Facebook post presenting a biblical view on sexuality and criticizing sex education in schools. Higgs appealed the dismissal for discrimination against her religious beliefs, but the court ruled that although

her behavior was not homophobic or transphobic, her dismissal was not discriminatory. The court reasoned that Higgs' posts might lead people to believe she was homophobic and transphobic, which "had the potential for a negative impact."¹⁰³

Christian adoption agency determined discriminatory for hiring policy - July 2020

Both the High Court and the Court of Appeals determined that Christian Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Agency's policy only to recruit caretakers who believe that marriage should be between one man and one woman is discriminatory. The agency's chief executive officer, Pam Birtle, has filed an appeal to the UK Supreme Court, claiming that the ruling is a violation of the Equality Act 2010.¹⁰⁴

Pro-life campaigners banned from displaying anti-abortion images - May 2020

Christian pro-life advocate Christian Hacking was given a community protection notice banning him from displaying images of unborn babies. A judge ruled that these images were equivalent to "shouting into a person's face," causing people to feel "emotionally, mentally, or even physically harmed."¹⁰⁵

Street preacher physically removed from vehicle by police - April 2020

Street preacher Dominic Muir was singing hymns and preaching from the back of his truck in Dorset when a police officer approached and told him to "move on." Muir agreed to wrap up his message, but shortly afterward, the officer returned, climbed into Muir's truck, grabbed Muir, and forced him to stop. The police later clarified the officer mistakenly believed Muir was in violation of COVID-19 restrictions.¹⁰⁶

Street preacher arrested and fined - April 2020

Street preacher Mike Overd was confronted by police officers while preaching and offering prayer in Somerset, England. Although Overd demonstrated that he was a preacher and evangelist fulfilling his job, the officers packed up Overd's Bibles, removed him from the area, and imposed a fine of £60.¹⁰⁷



Street preacher arrested and fined on Easter Sunday – April 2020

Street preacher Andrew Sathiyavan was arrested and fined £400 on Easter Sunday. According to local police, Sathiyavan was not allowed to preach the gospel as it caused “anti-social behavior,” and he was in violation of COVID-19 restrictions since he was on the London streets “without a purpose.”¹⁰⁸

Pastor fined for preaching to the homeless on Good Friday – April 2020

Pastor Joshua Sutcliffe was preaching and handing out leaflets to the homeless in London on Good Friday when four police officers approached him and claimed he was in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. Although Sutcliffe provided evidence that he was providing a permissible charitable service, the police imposed a fine of £60.¹⁰⁹

Christian volunteer fined for helping the homeless – April 2020

Jan Niedojadlo, a volunteer for the Christian service organization Lord’s Kitchen, was fined £60 for preaching the gospel and handing out aid to the homeless. Despite providing documents proving that the Christian organization had permission to provide charity to the homeless, local police insisted on imposing the fine for violating COVID-19 regulations and telling Niedojadlo to leave the area immediately.¹¹⁰

Street preacher arrested for alleged controversial comments – February 2020

Street preacher Hazel Lewis was arrested for allegedly making homophobic and racist comments during a public sermon in London. Despite producing audio evidence proving her innocence, the police officers proceeded with the charges. After several hours in custody, Lewis was released. During her trial, a police officer testified that the crowd was trying to goad Lewis into homophobic and racist comments, but she did not comply.¹¹¹

Christian man visited at work by police over tweets – January 2020

Harry Miller, an ex-policeman from Humberside, England, was visited at work by an officer responding to a complaint filed against Miller for allegedly transphobic tweets. The officer told Miller he needed to check his thinking and reported Miller’s tweets as a “non-crime hate incident.”¹¹²





UNITED STATES

Pastor criminally charged for allowing homeless to sleep at church - November 2023

Chris Avell, the pastor of Dad's Place in Bryan, Ohio, allows the city's homeless to stay in the church overnight as part of the church's ministry to the local community. In November 2023, the city ordered the church to stop allowing people to stay overnight, and a month later, the police administered 18 criminal charges to Avell for "violating the city's zoning laws." In January 2024, during an arraignment in municipal court, Avell pleaded not guilty.¹¹³

Church charged excessive fees by county utility company - November 2023

Grace Community Church in The Woodlands, Texas, was constructing a new building and needed to connect to the water line. After the church communicated with the district regarding a price, the district imposed a fee 150 percent greater than the cost of installation. When the church stated it was tax-exempt, the district doubled the previously inflated fee. A lawsuit was filed on the church's behalf.¹¹⁴

Virtual school board sued by state attorney general for approving Catholic school's application to be publicly funded charter school - October 2023

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond sued the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board, claiming that board members violated their oath of office by approving "what would be the nation's first religious charter school funded by public tax dollars."¹¹⁵

Couple denied foster care license because of Christian beliefs about sexuality and gender - September 2023

Because Shawn and Teresa Kellim cannot in good conscience affirm homosexuality and transgenderism due to their religious beliefs, Oregon's Department of Human Services denied them a foster care license. A lawsuit was filed on the couple's behalf.¹¹⁶

Speaker shut down by library for voicing Christian beliefs on gender - August 2023

Moms for Liberty, a parental rights advocacy group, reserved a room in the county library to hold various events over the course of six months. A few librarians took steps to undermine the group's events, including contacting an LGBT advocacy group and sending a staff email labeling Moms for Liberty as "anti- LGBTQIA." In August, Moms for Liberty hosted an event called "Forum on Fair and Safe Sport for Girls." A speaker at the event, Sophia Lorey, a Christian and a former women's college soccer player, voiced concern about biological males competing in women's sports. She was then heckled by protesters and forced to leave by a librarian. The librarian then canceled the entire event and forcibly unplugged the projector when the next speaker began presenting. In December 2023, a lawsuit was filed against the library.¹¹⁷

Church threatened with fines for hosting car show as community outreach - June 2023

Flat Creek Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Georgia, was planning a classic car show—which was to be held on church property as an evangelistic outreach—when the county manager contacted the church and ordered it not to go through with the event as it violated zoning regulations. The county threatened a \$1,000 fine and issued multiple warnings leading up to the event.¹¹⁸

Christian school denied religious exemption for state discrimination law - May 2023

In 2022, Colorado created a program that allows children to have one free year of preschool. In order for schools to participate in the program, they must agree to certain nondiscrimination provisions. Darren Patterson Christian Academy was initially approved for the program, but after finding out that compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions would mean violating its

Christian beliefs about sexuality and gender, the school asked for a religious exemption in May 2023. The school's request was denied. In June 2023, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of the school. In October 2023, a federal district court ruled that the school could participate in the program with a religious exemption while the case is ongoing.¹¹⁹

City issued church abatement notice and threatened fines for giving free meals to the homeless – April 2023

The city of Brookings, Oregon, received complaints after people experiencing homelessness started gathering around St. Timothy's Episcopal Church on the four days of the week the church gave out free meals. The city responded by creating an ordinance in 2021 that limits the days churches can feed the homeless to two days per week. The church refused to comply after being contacted by the city. Eventually, the city gave the church an abatement notice, threatening fines of up to \$720 a day. The city also charged other social services the church provides with violating the municipal code.¹²⁰

School counselor fired after speaking out against school district's policy on preferred pronouns – March 2023

Kathy McCord, a counselor for South Madison Community School in Indiana, was fired for disagreeing with the school's "Gender Support Plan" policy, which would have compelled her to speak in ways that violate her sincerely held religious beliefs. South Madison adopted a policy that requires faculty to use students' preferred names and pronouns without discussing it with parents or even hiding it from parents. McCord expressed concern over the policy but was told she must abide by it or lose her job. A journalist heard about the policy and asked McCord to confirm its accuracy, which she did. The school then fired her in March 2023. In May 2023, a lawsuit was filed on McCord's behalf.¹²¹

Christian school excluded from tuition program and state sports association – Spring 2023

As of 2022, Vermont requires schools in the tuition program to comply with the Vermont Public Accommodations Act and Fair Employment Practices Act, which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Because Mid Vermont Christian School holds to a biblical view of gender and sexuality, the school was barred from the tuition program. It was also barred from participating in middle and high school sports. In November 2023, a lawsuit was filed on the school's behalf.¹²²

High school coach fired for saying males and females are biologically different – February 2023

David Bloch, a Christian snowboarding coach at Woodstock Union High School in Vermont, was fired after having a casual conversation with a couple of students about a transgender athlete competing in the female division. Bloch had stated that males and females are biologically different and therefore should be in different leagues. In July 2023, a lawsuit was filed on Bloch's behalf.¹²³

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David Bloch, a Christian snowboarding coach at Woodstock Union High School in Vermont, was fired after having a casual conversation with a couple of students about a transgender athlete competing in the female division.

Elementary school district ended partnership with Christian university over beliefs on marriage and sexuality – February 2023

For 11 years, Washington Elementary School District had partnered with Arizona Christian University by having university students teach classes and shadow district teachers. During a board meeting in February 2023, the school district decided to sever the relationship with the university because of its religious views on gender and sexuality. The board said it was “embarrassed” the relationship with the university had gone on for so long. A lawsuit prompted the school district to enter into a new agreement with the university in May 2023.¹²⁴

School district fired gym teacher for refusing to lie to parents about children’s gender transitions – January 2023

Jessica Tapias, a physical education teacher in the Jurupa Unified School District in California, did not want to abide by the district’s new policy of keeping information about students’ gender transitions and pronoun changes away from parents. Tapias was also told she needed to admit students into the locker rooms, which she was in charge of, based on their gender identity. The district sent Tapias a notice, informing her that it could not accommodate her Christian religious beliefs on the matter and that she was dismissed from her position in January 2023. In May 2023, a lawsuit was filed on Tapias’ behalf.¹²⁵

Cake shop owner sued after refusing to make cake celebrating a gender transition – January 2023

Jack Phillips, owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado, won a court case in 2018 after he was sued for refusing to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. The same day of the court date, an activist attorney requested Phillips make a cake celebrating a gender transition and a cake of Satan smoking marijuana. Phillips refused to make both, and the activist filed a lawsuit. The Colorado Court of Appeals ruled against Phillips in July 2023, saying Phillips’ actions did not constitute free speech but were an illegal form of discrimination. In October 2023, the Colorado Supreme Court agreed to take up the case.¹²⁶

Church’s application to participate in state program denied – October 2022

Dayspring Christian Learning Center, operated by the Church of Compassion in El Cajon, California, had been participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program—which gives care centers funding to provide free meals to those in need—for almost 20 years. In 2022, a USDA regulation redefined “sex” to include sexual orientation and gender identity. The California Department of Social Services, which oversees the program at the state level, would not allow Dayspring to continue participating in the program unless they agreed to the redefinition. In March 2023, a lawsuit was filed on Dayspring’s behalf.¹²⁷

High school girl suspended and father fired for expressing concern over biologically male students changing in girls’ locker room – September and October 2022

Fourteen-year-old high school student Blake Allen and a few other girls became upset and complained about a biologically male student identifying as female using the girls’ locker room. The school punished Blake and mandated she attend a “restorative circle” with the school’s equity coordinator, write a “reflective essay,” and serve out-of-school suspension. Blake’s father, Travis Allen, defended Blake in a comment on Facebook and was subsequently fired from his job as the middle school girls’ soccer coach. A lawsuit was filed on the Allens’ behalf, which was settled in May 2023.¹²⁸



Christian homeless shelter threatened by government for only hiring Christian applicants – September 2022

The Wyoming Rescue Mission, a Christian nonprofit that serves as a homeless shelter and recovery program, decided not to hire a non-Christian applicant to its thrift store associate position, which is a role that teaches those in the recovery program how to spread the gospel. The applicant made a discrimination charge, which led to the government conducting a 16-month-long investigation of the nonprofit. The government decided that the mission did discriminate and threatened to punish the mission if it turned away a non-Christian applicant again. After a lawsuit was filed on the mission's behalf, the case was settled in the mission's favor in November 2022.¹²⁹

Teacher forced to resign for refusing to facilitate social gender transitions – August 2022

Two students asked Vivian Geraghty, an English teacher at Jackson Memorial Middle School in Massillon, Ohio, to use their new names and pronouns as part of their “social transition.” The school counselor also emailed all the teachers, instructing them to use these new names, but Geraghty's Christian convictions prevented her from denying the biological distinction of the two sexes. Geraghty asked the principal if she could be exempt from this policy but was told she was required to “put her beliefs aside as a public servant” and any violation would be insubordination and require her resignation. In December 2022, a lawsuit was filed on Geraghty's behalf.¹³⁰

Substitute teacher fired for speaking out against children's books promoting same-sex relationships – August 2022

Lindsey Barr, a Christian substitute teacher in the Bryan County School District in Georgia, was fired after she questioned the age-appropriateness of drawings in a book depicting same-sex couples used in a library read-aloud program. Barr spoke to McAllister Elementary School in her capacity as a private citizen and parent, but school officials immediately fired her. A lawsuit filed on Barr's behalf was settled in her favor in April 2023.¹³¹

City issued cease-and-desist letter to Christian homeless shelter – August 2022

Living Water Full Gospel Church of Westmoreland, Tennessee, and the church's homeless and addiction center, The Father's House, have had several issues with the city and Tri-County Electric. The city sent cease-and-desist letters to the church and the center based on alleged building code violations. Then, Tri-County Electric shut off the power to the homeless ministry without notice and refused to turn it on until the Circuit Court for Sumner County issued a restraining order and required that the Tri-County Electric Membership Corporation restore power to The Father's House.¹³²

Churches threatened for having outreach programs outside of the “church definition” – June 2022

Christ Episcopal Church and Mission First in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were given violation notices as a result of their outreach programs, including serving free meals, providing a community food pantry, and administering free mental health counseling. The notice said the churches’ programs go beyond the functions of a church; thus, they cannot be classified as one and do not meet the zoning criteria for the district. The notice threatened the churches with fines of up to \$500 per day plus court costs if they continued the services.¹³³

Pregnancy center harassed by state attorney general – May 2022

Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who has openly expressed disdain for pro-life pregnancy centers, issued letters to the Christian nonprofit Obria Group, demanding that it submit private information and documentation. Ferguson’s reasoning was “‘possible’ deceptive marketing and ‘possible’ unfair collection and use of consumer data,” for which he provided no evidence. After Obria provided over 1,500 pages of documents, the attorney general’s office demanded more. In November 2023, a lawsuit was filed on Obria Group’s behalf.¹³⁴

Woman prevented from adopting because of her religious beliefs – April 2022

Jessica Bates, a single mother of five children, tried to become certified to adopt a child within Oregon’s foster care system in April 2022. Her application was denied because the state required that applicants “respect, accept, and support ... the sexual orientation, gender identity, [and] gender expression” of a child. Bates said she would love any child but did not agree with the state’s policy on bringing children to Pride parades, facilitating the administration of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones, or using preferred pronouns due to her Christian beliefs. In April 2023, a lawsuit was filed on Bates’ behalf.¹³⁵

Fire chaplain fired for expressing religious beliefs on personal blog – December 2021

Dr. Andrew Fox, a volunteer chaplain for the Austin Fire Department, was fired after he wrote a blog post articulating his belief that men and women are biologically different and men should not be on women’s sports teams. Fire department officials asked Fox to apologize for his post after receiving complaints from LGBT members and then dismissed him in December 2021. In August 2022, a lawsuit was filed on Fox’s behalf.¹³⁶

Church and pastor fined for holding church services – December 2021

Calvary Chapel in San Jose, California, and its head pastor, Mike McClure, were fined for holding church services in 2020 and 2021 in violation of COVID-19 restrictions. McClure and his church refuse to pay the fine. However, the county stated that it would continue to demand payment “regardless” of U.S. Supreme Court rulings in similar cases that churches cannot face “harsh penalties and restrictions” and that they are “essential businesses.”¹³⁷

City arborist denied religious accommodation – October 2021

In October 2021, Seattle required city employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they received a religious or medical exemption. David Body, a city arborist, applied for a religious exemption and was denied. In October 2023, the parties reached “a financial settlement that included a mandate for the City of Seattle to provide training to its employees on religious liberties and anti-discrimination policies.”¹³⁸

Service member admonished for giving speech with religious content – August 2021

Jace Yarborough was invited in his capacity as a private citizen to give a speech during a retirement ceremony for a non-commissioned officer held at a private venue. In his speech, Yarborough stated his commitment to Christian values and shared his concerns about the current state of military

culture. After another service member in attendance complained about the religious content of his speech, in August 2021, Yarborough was given a Letter of Admonishment, which will negatively impact his military career. In October 2023, a lawsuit against the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force was filed on Yarborough's behalf.¹³⁹

Church fined for removing a closure sign and holding services - June 2021

Local authorities fined Greater Grace World Outreach Church in Baltimore, Maryland, \$100 for removing the health department's closure sign from a church door. The church also received a \$500 citation for alleged COVID-19 mask and social distancing violations.¹⁴⁰

Public school teacher suspended after challenging policy of lying to parents about children's gender transitions - April 2021

Pamela Ricard, a teacher in the Geary County School District in Kansas, said during a school meeting that she was opposed to using different names for students without parental consent but would follow the principal's direction. After the meeting, Ricard was given a three-day suspension while being investigated. She returned to school and received a written reprimand. In August 2022, the district agreed to pay Ricard for damages and legal fees.¹⁴¹

County employee fired for writing article disagreeing with gender ideology - March 2021

After writing an online opinion article disagreeing with gender ideology, John Labriola was suspended for three days and required to attend diversity training. Labriola refused to attend the training as it would force him to apologize for his beliefs and use people's preferred pronouns, so he was fired. In October 2022, a lawsuit was filed on Labriola's behalf.¹⁴²

Church fined for gathering outdoors after church restrictions dropped - February 2021

Although churches in Florida were allowed to operate at full capacity during the pandemic, Cidra Church in Palm Springs was fined \$5,000 for holding an outdoor service in the church's parking lot. Local authorities informed the church that the fine was imposed because no permit was obtained to hold the outdoor service even though the service was held in the church parking lot.¹⁴³

California discriminated against religious singing - February 2021

The state of California restricted singing at indoor church gatherings due to COVID-19 health orders. However, at the same time, the state allowed its entertainment industry to film televised singing competitions.¹⁴⁴

Churches fined for holding Christmas services - December 2020

Legacy Church and Calvary Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, were each fined \$5,000 for violating COVID-19 capacity limits. Although the churches made every effort to encourage social distancing and mask-wearing, both refused to turn away congregants seeking to worship.¹⁴⁵

Nevada discriminated against religious gatherings - December 2020

The state of Nevada restricted its churches from holding gatherings of more than 50 people, regardless of building capacity. At the same time, it allowed secular establishments, such as casinos, to operate at 50 percent capacity.¹⁴⁶

Public school principal forced third grader to remove mask that read "Jesus loves me" - November 2020

Lydia Booth, a third grader in the Simpson County School District in Mississippi, wore a "Jesus Loves Me" face mask to school. The principal told her to replace it. A policy was issued a few days later that forbade political, religious, or offensive messages on masks.¹⁴⁷



Pastor fined for holding indoor church services – August 2020

Pastor Jack Trieber of North Valley Baptist Church in Santa Clara, California, was fined \$10,000 for holding two indoor church services over the same weekend during the COVID-19 pandemic. A portion of the fine was imposed for singing indoors, which was against state regulations. The county informed the church that they would be sending “agents” into church services to “spy” on the congregation and monitor compliance.¹⁴⁸

Church denied building permit on account of it not contributing to a “street of fun” – May 2020

New Harvest Christian Fellowship in Salinas, California, purchased a building across the street after renting on that same street for over 25 years. However, the city tried to prevent the church from using the space for worship services and imposed restrictions on the building’s use, such as holding worship on the second floor only and using the ground floor for retail space. The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California sided with the city, saying the church does not attract tourists or add to the fun atmosphere that the city wanted on the street.¹⁴⁹

Washington state discriminated against religious gatherings – May 2020

The state of Washington restricted church gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic to 25 percent capacity or 50 individuals, whichever was fewer. At the same time, the state allowed secular establishments, including cannabis retailers, to operate at 50 percent capacity, with no numerical cap.¹⁵⁰

County discriminated against religious gatherings – May 2020

The government of Marion County, Indiana, restricted its churches—which were recognized as essential business by the governor of Indiana—from holding gatherings of more than 25 people during the COVID-19 pandemic, while it allowed secular establishments to exceed that number.¹⁵¹

Church fined for holding small in-person services – May 2020

Adams Square Baptist Church in Worcester, Massachusetts, was fined \$800 over the course of two weeks for holding services exceeding 20 persons in violation of COVID-19 restrictions.¹⁵²

Church cited for holding services – May 2020

Local authorities cited Centro International Para La Familia Church in Dover, New Jersey, for holding services with more than 50 congregants, violating the state-imposed COVID-19 capacity limit of 10 or fewer.¹⁵³



Although Pilgrim Lutheran Church limited attendance to comply with all COVID-19 regulations, their Palm Sunday service was shut down, and congregants were asked to leave.

Town leadership targeted church abiding by COVID-19 regulations - May 2020

The government of Dedham, Massachusetts, sent a cease-and-desist order to Victory Baptist Church, telling them to refrain from holding services and operating the church. The local authorities sent the order in response to the church's advertisement for an upcoming service of 10 or fewer people that complied with the governor of Massachusetts' executive order.¹⁵⁴

Pastor received citation for holding an in-person church service - May 2020

Pastor Kevin Wilson of Lighthouse Fellowship Church in Chincoteague Island, Virginia, received a citation for holding a socially distanced, 16-person service in a 255-seat sanctuary, violating the statewide ban on religious gatherings greater than 10 people. These restrictions were enforced for Wilson while secular establishments deemed "essential" were allowed to exceed that number.¹⁵⁵

Jail administrator fired for posting articles and videos on his biblical beliefs - April 2020

After 10 years of working as a jail administrator for the Muscatine County Sheriff's Office, Dean Naylor was fired for articles he had self-published almost 10 years earlier that expressed his views on the second coming of Jesus Christ, same-sex marriage, and the truth of Christianity. In April 2020, a local Iowa newspaper quoted and condemned the plaintiff's religious beliefs, prompting the county to fire him. In June 2022, a lawsuit was filed on Naylor's behalf.¹⁵⁶

Volunteers arrested while offering prayer for women outside abortion facility - April 2020

David Benham, a pro-life advocate and president of Cities4Life, was arrested for allegedly breaking the stay-at-home order in Charlotte, North Carolina. Benham and three others from his organization were outside an abortion facility, offering prayer and counsel to expectant mothers. Another group was also outside the facility, praying individually. Police approached and cited 12 people for violating COVID-19 safety protocols, charged 13, and arrested eight, including Benham. Since then, local police have dropped all charges, "demonstrating" the arrests were "improper."¹⁵⁷

Police recorded license plates of congregants and warned of "further enforcement measures" - April 2020

Congregants leaving Maryville Baptist Church in Hillview, Kentucky, on Easter Sunday found that state troopers had recorded their license plate numbers and placed quarantine notices on all car windshields. The county's quarantine notices called for a 14-day self-quarantine. The alternative was to face "further enforcement measures."¹⁵⁸

Church shut down on Palm Sunday despite following COVID-19 guidelines - April 2020

Local police arrived at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in West Bend, Wisconsin, after a neighbor reported the Palm Sunday gathering. Although the church limited attendance to comply with all COVID-19 regulations, the service was shut down, and congregants were asked to leave.¹⁵⁹

County prohibited communion and tithes in churches - April 2020

The government of Wake County, North Carolina, prohibited churches from taking in-person tithes and distributing communion in a COVID-19-related order. However, at the time this was announced, restaurants were permitted to exchange money and serve food.¹⁶⁰

City banned drive-in church services but allowed drive-thru restaurants – April 2020

The city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, announced a stay-at-home order that did not ban drive-in services. Shortly before Easter, the mayor announced that the order specifically prohibited them and that churches may not hold drive-in Easter Sunday services. Despite this, the city allowed drive-thru restaurants to continue operating.¹⁶¹

City banned drive-in church services – April 2020

The city of Wilmington, North Carolina, banned drive-in church services for all churches in the community. Although officials stated this ban was for the safety of residents in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, health authorities never identified drive-in services as being unsafe.¹⁶²

Churches banned from drive-in services on Easter Sunday – April 2020

Churches attempting to comply with in-person service bans in Louisville, Kentucky, were banned from holding drive-in services on Easter Sunday because the city declared them to be not “practical or safe,” even though drive-thru restaurants remained open. The mayor also announced that officers would attend known church gatherings to collect license plate information of attendees.¹⁶³

Drive-in church service shut down on Easter Sunday – April 2020

In an attempt to comply with the mayoral ban on in-person worship on Easter, Rev. James Hamilton of King James Baptist Church in Greenville, Mississippi, held his Easter Sunday service as a socially distanced, drive-in, windows-closed service. Police arrived and shut down the service for violating the in-person service ban, warning congregants that if they did not leave, they would face a \$500 fine.¹⁶⁴

Church service shut down and congregants locked out of building – April 2020

Pastor Jon Duncan of Cross Culture Christian Center, a small evangelical church in Lodi, California, was greeted by multiple police officers outside his church’s Sunday morning gathering place. The officers turned away congregants in the name of COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, Bethel Open Bible Church, Cross Culture Christian Center’s landlord, had changed the locks in response to an emergency notice from the county ordering them to close the building to Cross Culture or face fines or imprisonment. This notice coerced Bethel into performing an eviction procedure, a direct violation of the governor of California’s moratorium on evictions.¹⁶⁵

Church shut down despite following COVID-19 guidelines – March 2020

Nine police officers arrived at Friendship Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, during a Sunday service and attempted to shut down the service for violations of COVID-19 guidelines. When the pastor explained that his church had fewer than 10 people in attendance, complying with the “10 or less” regulation, the police continued to insist that the service be shut down.¹⁶⁶

Pastor charged for holding in-person church service – March 2020

Tony Spell, the pastor of Life Tabernacle Church in Central, Louisiana, was charged with six counts of disobeying powers of government for holding a Sunday church service despite COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The charges carried a maximum punishment of six months in jail and a fine of \$500.¹⁶⁷

Pastor arrested for holding in-person church services – March 2020

Florida pastor Rodney Howard-Browne was arrested for unlawful assembly and a violation of health emergency rules for continuing to hold services at River at Tampa Bay Church despite COVID-19 restrictions.¹⁶⁸

ENDNOTES

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