

Turkish court rejects release appeal of US pastor



Andrew Craig Brunson, an evangelical pastor from Black Mountain, North Carolina, arrives at his house in Izmir, Turkey, on July 25, 2018. (PHOTO: AP Photo/Emre Tazegul via Times of Israel).

Originally published in [Premier Christian News](#)

A Turkish court has rejected the release appeal made by the lawyer of a US pastor who is central to the diplomatic row between the US and Turkey.

The court ruled that Pastor Andrew Brunson – who faces 35 years in prison for terror-related charges, will remain under house-arrest.

The North Carolina evangelist was transferred from jail to home detention for health reasons.

Mr Brunson has received support from the White House who has imposed sanctions on two Turkish officials over his continued detention.

Press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters on Wednesday that Mr Brunson is “a very good person and a strong Christian who’s done nothing wrong”.

She added that Turkey has treated him “very unfairly, very badly”.

Meanwhile, on the same day that Turkey rejected the appeal, it received international support from Qatar after the Arabic country pledged to invest \$15 billion into the country.

Although the amount is a small fraction of what Turkey would need to fix its economy or pay its debts, Turkish media reported the investment as a victory for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkey announced on Wednesday that it was increasing tariffs on imports of some US products, escalating a feud with America which has helped trigger a currency crisis.

The Turkish government said it will impose extra tariffs on imports of products including rice, vehicles, alcohol, coal and cosmetics. Tariffs on American cars were doubled to 120 per cent, while tariffs on alcoholic drinks soared to 140 per cent.

Turkish vice president Fuat Oktay said on Twitter that the tariffs on certain products were increased “within the framework of the principle of reciprocity in retaliation for the deliberate economic attacks by the United States”.

The tariffs come a day after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would boycott US electronic goods, singling out iPhones.

The Turkish lira has dropped to record lows in recent weeks, having fallen some 42 per cent so far this year.

Incredible miracles mark ongoing revival in small Georgia church



Numerous life-changing healing miracles have taken place during Christ Fellowship Church's revival since February. (PHOTO: Christ Fellowship Church)

Originally published in [Charisma News](#)

During Christ Fellowship's 21-day fast in January, Pastor Todd Smith said God gave him a vision of the church's baptistry. The baptism pool was full, and there was a strip of fire on top of the water.

Shortly after, Smith says, God "sat down in our building and rocked our world." And, revival and the manifest presence of God has been evident ever since in the small charismatic church in Dawsonville, Georgia, USA.

Physical healings, deliverance and more than 500 baptisms have

taken place during Sunday-night services at Christ Fellowship for the past six months. Smith says people have come from hundreds of kilometres to “walk into that water and feel the presence of the Lord.”

“And that’s what it is all about, the hunger just to feel God’s presence,” says Smith, who has pastored Christ Fellowship for eight years. “People want to be healed, and they want to be whole. God spoke to me and said: ‘Todd, I am going to baptise people here with both water and fire.’ The encounter has been so strong and so forceful that I can’t articulate it.”

Christ Fellowship, with about 300 to 400 regular attendees, sees its Sunday-night services swell to 600 at times, with individuals and churches traveling in from all parts of Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee to connect with the presence of God. A handful of local pastors and some nationally-known evangelists have taken turns preaching the Sunday night services.

But then, visiting evangelist Pat Schatzline says, the worship and sermons are only a prelude to the manifestation of God’s power when an altar call and an invitation to be baptised are made.

“What’s happening is, when people get into that baptismal tank, they are getting either radically saved or restored,” says Schatzline, co-author with his wife, Karen, of the book *Rebuilding the Altar*. “They are coming out shaking under the power of God. Some even have to be helped out of the tank because they are shaking so much. It’s not like anything I’ve ever seen before.

“We’ve seen people delivered from addictions like drugs and seen many, many radical healings take place. The Holy Spirit’s presence is so thick, and it’s all for His glory. It has absolutely nothing to do with us, and that’s what’s so

beautiful. Nobody takes any ownership in this.”

Schatzline has preached multiple times during the Sunday-night revival at Christ Fellowship and is scheduled to do so again this Sunday evening.

Prior to the beginning of the revival, Smith says Christ Fellowship conducted only a handful of baptisms each month. Since February, he says, it is not uncommon for more than 40 to be baptised in a single service, pushing the service well past midnight in many cases.

The volume of baptisms didn't take hold right away. But they quickly multiplied as the power of God manifested and people became hungry for healing. One Sunday night, Smith said, 69 people were baptised.

“The fame of His name and what He was doing in those waters began to spread,” Smith said. “When we would give the invitation, you would see 30 or 40 people walk to the front to get baptised. The power of God was violent in the water. People would thrash around. Fire confronts what is going on in their lives. It's unlike anything I've ever seen in my life. And, it has nothing to do with us as a church or any personalities involved. It's simply God's presence and His power.”

Many individuals have been physically healed of ailments plaguing them for years. Smith says the church is careful to record them and follow up on them with health care professionals so as not to minimise God's glory.

- A woman in her 60s had a condition from childhood that required medication, the side effects of which depleted the bone in her mouth causing tooth and bone loss. The woman responded to a word of knowledge during a Sunday-morning service, and soon after, her dentist told her she had experienced a 30-percent increase in bone where there had been no bone before. The dentist called it a

miracle.

- A young girl who had been born with an extra bone in an area of her foot that caused the foot to twist to the side and limited her ability to run noticed during a Sunday-night worship service that she could put her foot flat on the floor for the first time. The girl, who was scheduled to have surgery to correct the condition, walked without pain. Her mother took her to the doctor, and he confirmed the condition no longer existed and cancelled all plans for surgery.
- A young adult with a lifelong condition of psoriasis stepped into the baptismal pool to assist another recipient of baptism. A short while later, he looked down and saw that all the psoriasis on his foot and elbows had disappeared, leaving only a faint pink outline. Before this, the condition was so severe that it bled at times. The man's family and congregation members confirmed the condition of his skin prior to the event.
- A lady who had suffered with debilitating cluster migraines for 20-plus years—a condition that kept her confined to bed for days at a time—stepped into the baptistry during a service. She became healed, and she confirms she has been migraine-free for six months.

And those are only a few of the physical healing's that have taken place at Christ Fellowship's Sunday-night services since February. Smith says there have even been people watching the live streaming of a service on Facebook who have fallen under the conviction to drive to the church and get baptized.

"We had one woman come to pick up her sister from the service," Smith says. "She walked into the door, and she fell under the conviction and got baptised. It was amazing."

For skeptics who might doubt what is taking place at Christ Fellowship Church, Smith has only one exhortation.

“I implore people to come and see, come and experience this for themselves,” Smith says. “Come and talk to the people whose lives have been changed. There is nothing logical about it. It’s kinda irrational, as a matter of fact. It doesn’t make sense in the natural.

“Jesus walked on water, and that doesn’t make sense. People defy death, and that doesn’t make sense. That’s what makes it so intriguing and so wonderful.”

Nearly 2 000 soldiers come to Christ at US army base



Troops at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. (PHOTO: Facebook)

Originally published in [Faith Wire](#)

A US army chaplain has described what he believes to be somewhat of a “revival” occurring on a military base in Missouri. The numbers are staggering: over the past six months, nearly 2 000 troops have reportedly come to the Lord.

Chaplain Jose M Rondon, who is stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, has been posting about the astonishing spiritual awakening on Facebook over the past few weeks, detailing personal testimony and uploading video footage of soldiers worshipping God.

“Today, 380 soldiers came to salvation in Christ once and for all,” Rondon wrote in one post. “Thanks CH Tony Cech for the excellent, clear, and powerful messages during the three services. Since March 11 2018, we have seen 1 839 soldiers coming to Christ. God’s doing an unbelievable work through our military at Fort Leonard Wood, MO. May God bring the same powerful conviction of sin and love for Him that we are experiencing at Main Post Chapel all throughout our Nation and His world.”

Rondon told the [Baptist Press](#) that the key to such astonishing results is being direct and intentional in sharing the gospel.

“To be intentional is to be faithful to Christ and obedient to His Great Commission,” Rondon said. “But we will not succeed in making disciples until the lost make the first step to follow Christ as their Saviour. To be intentional not only means to preach Christ’s Word in the chapel, but to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to share His message of reconciliation if, and when, the time fits.”

Rondon also posted a video showing hundreds of soldiers singing a heart-warming rendition of “Amazing Grace.”

“I’m excited about the future of our military for millions of our warriors who will sing God’s Amazing Grace. Glory to Christ, the only God, Saviour, and Lord in this life and the one to come,” he added.

Among the scores of soldiers coming to Christ, there are multiple testimonies of lives transformed and hearts turned to Christ.

"I used to have a lot of anger in me," one soldier, Private Havens, explained in one of Rondon's testimony posts. "I held grudges against people that have done wrongs against me. And I came here, and I realise that the Lord has forgiven me for my sins and I realise that I needed to do the same to others."

He added, "I feel a thousand pounds lighter now that I'm able to let go of the burden of this, not hate, but just feeling wronged. And I have forgiven those that have wronged me. I feel better now."

Rondon said Havens was just one example of the hordes of military personnel who have been coming to Christ in recent months.

"Private Havens is just one of many of the 1 000 and almost 800 soldiers, probably 1 000 by today, we will reach around 2 000 soldiers since March 11 coming to faith in Christ Jesus and growing into their faith as is the case with Private Havens," he noted.

Retired Major General Doug Carver told the Baptist Press that such an unprecedented move of the Holy Spirit is indicative of these troops hungering after a sense of ultimate purpose in their lives, adding that the military men and women were on an insatiable hunt for the truth.

"Our troops, who are increasingly hungry for truth and relevancy in their lives, are finding a faith that works through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ," he explained.

"God is doing great things," Rondon said, imploring Christians to keep praying for a continued move of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these brave men and women.

"I'm asking you to please pray and help us to see not only today and since March 11th with almost 2 000 people coming to

salvation in Christ Jesus, that the Lord is good and He desires not only to reconcile us, to reunite us to Himself, through His death, burial and resurrection but also that He desires for the whole world and mainly our country, United States to know that if He's doing great things in the military, He's going to keep doing great things, in and throughout us for His glory in our society so in need of Christ Jesus our King."

Amen!

Colorado targets Christian baker again despite Supreme Court's cake ruling



Cake artist Jack Phillips, pictured September 21 2017 decorating a custom cake in his Masterpiece Cakeshop in

Lakewood, Colorado. (PHOTO: Rick Wilking)

Originally published in [The Daily Signal](#)

The Colorado Civil Rights Commission is going after Christian baker Jack Phillips again, although the Masterpiece Cakeshop owner won a resounding 7-2 decision in June before the US Supreme Court.

The state commission moved against Phillips after a lawyer asked him to design and bake a custom cake celebrating a gender transition, pink on the inside and blue on the outside.

Phillips, who calls himself a cake artist, said the requested cake's message would violate his religious beliefs.

"The state is doubling down on its hostility against my beliefs, even though that's what the Supreme Court said they couldn't do," Phillips said in a prepared statement released by his lawyers. "It seems I'm the only person in the state of Colorado who can't live out my beliefs."

The religious liberty group Alliance Defending Freedom, which has represented Phillips since he turned down a gay couple's order six years ago for a cake celebrating their marriage, also represents him in a [federal lawsuit](#) filed late Tuesday to challenge the latest state action against him.

Shortly after its Supreme Court loss, the state Civil Rights Commission informed Phillips that it found probable cause to believe that Colorado law requires his bakery in Lakewood to create the requested gender-transition cake.

"I serve all customers," Phillips said once again in his formal statement. "I simply decline to create custom cakes that express messages or celebrate events in violation of my deeply held beliefs."

According to Alliance Defending Freedom, the lawyer asked Masterpiece Cakeshop to bake the cake on June 26 2017, the same day the Supreme Court agreed to hear Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission.

“We told him we’d sell him anything in the shop, but we could not create that cake because of the message it conveyed,” Phillips said of the lawyer’s request.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, in an opinion joined by four conservative justices and two liberal justices, [ruled](#) that the Civil Rights Commission showed “hostility” toward Phillips and his faith in the process of deciding he had violated state anti-discrimination law in declining to create a cake marking the same-sex marriage.

The high court heard arguments December 5 and ruled June 4.

“It’s clear that the state of Colorado did not get the message from the Supreme Court, since it is still singling out Jack for punishment and showing hostility toward his religious beliefs,” Kristen Waggoner, senior vice president for Alliance Defending Freedom, said in a formal statement.

The transgender lawyer who requested the cake is not a defendant in Phillips’ lawsuit. The baker is suing the state commission members in their official capacities, as well as suing its director personally.

“In moving ahead on this new complaint, the government is yet again confirming that it applies its law in an arbitrary and unequal way, which the Supreme Court has already said that it cannot do,” Waggoner, who argued Phillips’ case before the high court, said.

“Jack and other creative professionals should not be targeted by the government for living consistently with their religious beliefs,” she said.

As a policy, Phillips' lawyers note, Masterpiece Cakeshop also does not make custom cakes that celebrate Halloween; that centre on alcohol or drug abuse or sexual themes; or that convey disparaging messages, including those targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals or others in the LGBT movement.

Phillips said, "The Bible tells us God created us male and female, and I believe that. A gender-transition cake is not something I've ever made, and it's not an event I could celebrate. There are plenty of messages I won't convey on a cake. I've turned down requests to make anti-American cakes, cakes disparaging the LGBT community, as well as those glorifying drug and alcohol use, mistreatment of women, divorce, and more."

In the case Phillips won before the Supreme Court, his lawyers stress, the state of Colorado admitted that cake artists are free to decline to create custom cakes with a "specific design," including wedding cakes with "a symbol of gay pride," cakes that contain "pro-gay designs or inscriptions," or cakes with images opposing same-sex marriage.

The state has not found probable cause when other bakers refused to create custom cakes, including those opposing same-sex weddings.

"The arbitrary basis on which the commission is applying the law makes it clear that they are simply targeting Jack because they don't like his religious beliefs," Waggoner said. "Jack shouldn't have to fear government hostility when he opens his shop for business each day. We're asking the court to put a stop to that."

Bethel Church giving R13.4-million to families who lost homes in fire



Bethel Global Response volunteer teams assist Redding, California, residents who lost their homes in the Carr Fire, with Ash Outs, August 6 2018. (PHOTO: Bethel Church)

Originally published in [The Christian Post](#)

An influential charismatic church is giving \$1000 (R13 423) to every household that lost their home in the Carr Fire, a move it says is a “God-sized step of faith.”

Bethel Church, which has several thousand members and is home to Bethel Music, announced on its [website](#) that it would be giving the money to those whose primary residence was destroyed in the fire that began raging near Redding, California, two weeks ago.

“We are incredibly blessed as a church by people all around

the world praying for us, donating and supporting our community here in Redding. The generosity of gifts coming towards us is both humbling and much needed. Christians around the world are coming together and supporting a cause that is bigger than any one individual alone can carry," the church explained.

"When we first made the decision to give a financial gift for the people in our city who had lost their home, the numbers being reported were 150-200 homes. Within just three days, that number had climbed to over 1000 homes, and the amount we had expected to raise and give went from \$200 000 (almost R3-million) to over \$1 000 000 dollars (over R13-million)."

God-sized step of faith

Bethel's original plan to give \$200 000 (almost R3-million) "was a challenge, but doable in our own strength and resources," the church said.

"But \$1 000 000 (over R13-million) is a God-sized step of faith. We are believing Him for it, and are now in the process of reaching out to our friends around the globe to be the hands of Christ to our city in this moment. We are determined to honour this commitment, whether the generosity comes from gifts from the global community or from our own church finances."

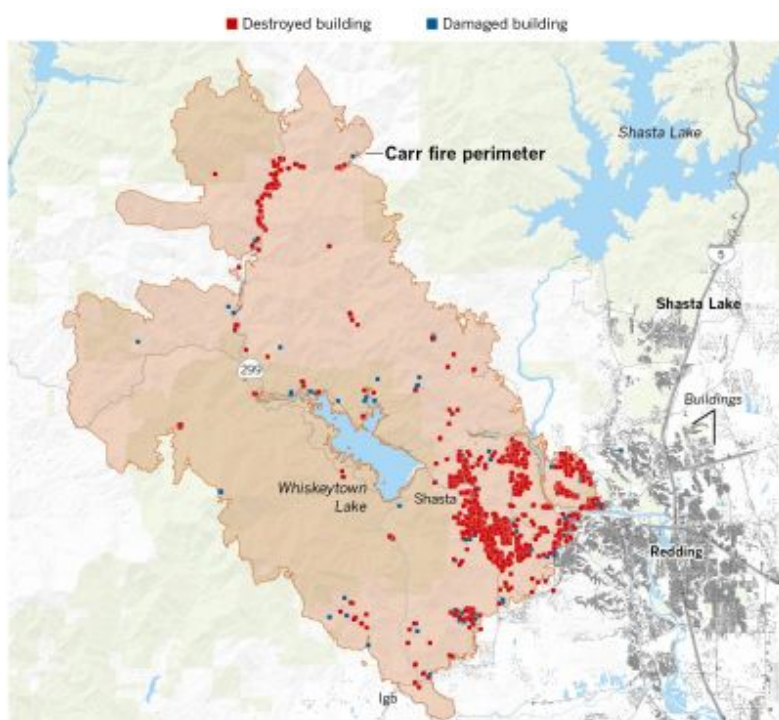
The only Redding and Shasta County residents who will qualify to receive the sum of money are those whose homes were their primary residence. Their houses must also be listed on the Housing Authority report as more than 50% destroyed. The money will not benefit those who lost their vacation homes, second homes, or rental properties. Only one gift of \$1000 (R13 423) will be given per household.

Days after the fire began, the church came under criticism on social media for not opening its doors for evacuees. Bethel [maintained](#) that it offered to be such a site but was told that

it was situated too close to the fire zone and that it would not work to have people stay overnight given that there is only one road in and out of its premises. The Red Cross subsequently confirmed to local reporters this was indeed the case. The church is presently serving as a Salvation Army aid distribution site.

[Bethel Global Response](#) has also deployed “Ash Out” teams, in which hundreds of volunteers help residents sift through the ashes of their homes to recover any valuables.

“We cannot begin to describe the feeling of helping someone who lost their home find something that they thought was gone forever. This is part of what it means to live like Jesus – to link hands together as we move forward,” the church said on its Facebook page.



Map of the Carr fire perimeter as of July 31 2018 and locations of damaged infrastructure. Click [here](#) for an enlarged image. (PHOTO: [LA Times](#))

Community coming together

Sources in Redding told CP Tuesday that the community is coming together wonderfully in the recovery efforts. From the Hearth Cafe, a popular eatery in town, has announced that it would be personal cooks for those families who lost their homes in the fire. Several [announcements](#) on the restaurant's Facebook page read: "If you've lost your home in the Carr fire, we are your kitchen. #weareyourkitchen." They will be serving these individuals free food for the month of [August](#).

Bill Johnson, senior leader of Bethel Church, said Sunday that they have been thrilled to see "incredible cooperation" in the city as Bethel volunteers, other churches as well as various organisations have stepped up to help.

"What is happening really is a sign in the natural of a display of God's power being released across the city," he told the congregation.

"This destruction was not caused by a loving Father. As I mentioned last week, you heard the voice of the Devourer for several days, you're about to hear the voice of the Restorer for months on end. God is going to restore at such a higher level, a greater place than anything we've seen happen."

As of Tuesday afternoon, the Carr Fire is ranked the sixth most destructive fire in California's history, seven people have died because of it, and the blaze is 47% contained, reports say. The fire began on July 23 as a result of a vehicular failure near Whiskeytown National Park and has devoured almost 170 000 acres and 1 599 structures, according to CalFire, the state's fire agency.

China closing churches, seizing Bibles in 'ambitious new effort' to eradicate religion



A demolished house church in Zhengzhou in central China's Henan province, June 3 2018. (PHOTO: [Ng Han Guan](#))

Originally published in [Christian Headlines](#)

China is in the midst of an “ambitious new effort” to lessen or even eradicate the influence of Christianity and religion from the country, according to an investigation by the Associated Press.

An in-depth story by AP described churches being shut down, Bibles being seized and restrictions being placed on other religions, too. Crescents have been removed from mosques and Tibetan children removed from Buddhist temples and placed in public schools.

One Christian named Guo [described](#) an incident in which Chinese

officials interrupted a church meeting and told everyone to leave. They then ordered church leaders to remove a cross, a Bible verse and a painting of the Last Supper off the wall. Guo didn't give his full name out of fear of government repercussions.

"I've always prayed for our country's leaders, for our country to get stronger," he told AP. "They were never this severe before, not since I started going to church in the 80's. Why are they telling us to stop now?"

In recent months, Chinese authorities have:

- Shut down hundreds of Christian house churches.
- Seized Bibles and forced e-commerce retailers to stop selling Bibles.
- Prevented children from attending church in some areas.
- Urged Christians in one location to replace posters of Jesus with pictures of President Xi Jinping.
- Raided church meetings and interrogated hundreds of Christians from one congregation.

The AP story further said that under Xi, Christians "are seeing their freedoms shrink dramatically even as the country undergoes a religious revival." Experts said Xi is "waging the most severe systematic suppression of Christianity in the country since religious freedom was written into the Chinese constitution in 1982," according to AP. The goal is to "Sinicize" the nation's religions with "Chinese characteristics." First among these is loyalty to the Communist Party.

"Xi is a closet Maoist – he is very anxious about thought control," Willy Lam of the Chinese University of Hong Kong told AP. "He definitely does not want people to be faithful members of the church, because then people would profess their allegiance to the church rather than to the party, or more exactly, to Xi himself."

Trump hits Turkish officials with sanctions over Pastor Brunson's detainment



Andrew Craig Brunson, an evangelical pastor from Black Mountain, North Carolina, arrives at his house in Izmir, Turkey, on July 25, 2018. (PHOTO: AP Photo/Emre Tazegul via Times of Israel).

Originally published in [CBN News](#)

President Donald Trump is following through on threats to sanction Turkey for the arrest and detention of American Pastor Andrew Brunson.

“At the president’s direction, the Department of Treasury is sanctioning Turkey’s minister of justice and minister of interior, both of whom played leading roles in the arrest and detention of Pastor Brunson,” White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders announced Wednesday.

The sanctions will freeze the US assets of Turkey's minister of justice, Abdulhamit Gul, and its minister of interior, Suleyman Soylu. The penalties also bar any US transactions with the two men.

"Any property or interest in property of both ministers within US jurisdiction is blocked, and US persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with them," Sanders said.

President Trump called Brunson an "innocent man of faith" who "should be released immediately," noting that the missionary pastor is "suffering greatly."

The 50-year-old was arrested in December 2016 and later charged with links to a failed plot to overthrow the Turkish government – an accusation he denies.

His supporters claim that he's a political prisoner being held as a bargaining chip by Turkey, which is seeking the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric blamed for a failed coup.

Brunson's next hearing is on October 12.

**Pastor Andrew Brunson
transferred to house arrest**



A prison vehicle, believed to be carrying jailed US pastor Andrew Brunson, leaves from the Aliaga Prison and Courthouse complex in Izmir, Turkey, July 18 2018. (PHOTO: Reuters)

Originally published in [Christian Today](#)

An American pastor who has been detained in Turkey for nearly two years on terrorism charges, straining ties between Ankara and Washington, has been transferred from jail to house arrest, broadcaster CNN Turk said on Wednesday July 18 2018.

The report came one week after a Turkish court ruled to keep Andrew Brunson, a Christian pastor from North Carolina, in detention while he is tried for terrorism and espionage.

Brunson's case has deepened a rift between NATO allies Washington and Ankara. The Turkish lira strengthened to 4.8340 against the dollar from 4.8599 before the report.

US embassy and consulate officials in Turkey could not immediately comment on the report and Brunson's lawyer told Reuters he was seeking confirmation.

CNN Turk said Brunson will be fixed with an electronic ankle bracelet or similar monitoring device and is banned from leaving the country.

The pastor, who has lived in Turkey for more than two decades, was indicted on charges of helping the group that Ankara blames for a failed 2016 coup against President Tayyip Erdogan, as well as supporting outlawed PKK Kurdish militants.

Brunson, who denies the charges, faces up to 35 years in jail if found guilty. President Donald Trump said in a tweet last week Brunson was being held hostage and that Erdogan should 'do something to free this wonderful Christian husband and father'.

Victory for pro-life sidewalk counsellors



Marilyn Nevarez, left, member of Church at the Rock in Brooklyn, counsels with a woman outside an abortion clinic in Queens, NY.

(PHOTO: Thomas More Society)

Originally published in [Baptist Press](#)

Pro-life sidewalk counsellors may continue praying, preaching and handing out literature in front of a Queens, NY, abortion centre, a federal judge ruled on July 20.

The case began last June when former New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman filed suit, charging the counsellors with harassment, physical obstruction and threats of violence against women seeking abortions at Choices Medical Clinic and the volunteers escorting them to the door. Schneiderman's office carried on with the lawsuit after his resignation in May over sexual assault allegations.

"To the contrary, the record as a whole suggests that the defendants have endeavoured to toe the line between lawful and unlawful conduct," US District Judge Carol Bagley Amon wrote in a 103-page opinion. She refused to grant a preliminary injunction against the 13 counsellors.

"We thank the Lord that our life-affirming work to counsel women considering abortion was upheld in federal court," Kenneth Griep, senior pastor at the Church at the Rock in Brooklyn, said in a statement. He noted that the group of sidewalk counsellors "will continue to offer compassion to those who see abortion as the only way out of an unexpected pregnancy."

Martin Cannon, attorney with the Thomas More Society, argued in court that the suit violated the sidewalk counsellors' First Amendment rights. He said the state's accusations of force or threats of force were based on incidents initiated by the facility's volunteer escorts. When a counsellor struck up a conversation with a woman on her way to the door, a group of escorts would crowd the woman away from the pro-life advocate. That produced incidental brushing of shoulders and other

interactions, but not harassment.



Thomas More Society special counsel Martin Cannon (left) represented Pastor Kenneth Griep of the Church at the Rock. (PHOTO: Thomas More Society)

“The sidewalk counsellor is still trying to call out to her, maybe trying to hand her a pamphlet. That’s what’s supposed to be this harassment,” Cannon said. The pro-lifers, he said, “are out there just to offer assistance to women. And it’s not just empty words. They have little babies running around in their church and in their homes that have sprung from that sidewalk. They really put their money where their mouth is, and they don’t harass people.” Cannon added, “The case was an abuse of the rights of peaceful New York citizens.”

Amon tossed out much of the state’s evidence and several testimonies, calling them “unreliable.” The lawsuit claimed that counsellors Ranville Thomas and Ronald George, both affiliated with the Church at the Rock, had threatened volunteer escorts with death. The attorney general’s office quoted them saying, “You never know when you’re going to die.”

But “after years of sharing the sidewalk with Thomas and R George,” Amon wrote, the abortion centre escorts understood that the counsellors were urging them to repent, not making threats, and were not genuinely intimidated. The judge attributed the shoulder-bumping and jostling caught on camera to the “escorts often outnumbering the protesters two to one” on the sidewalk.

The state could appeal the decision, but Cannon said it will prove difficult because Amon ruled based on a lack of evidence rather than law.

“Planned Parenthood nationwide, all of the pro-abortion attorney generals nationwide were watching this case,” he said. “If Schniederma had succeeded, you’d see these brazen efforts at distorting law pop up against counsellors on the sidewalk everywhere in the country. So it’s a very significant case.”

Thai soccer team speak of cave rescue for first time after being released from hospital



The rescued Thai soccer team holding a press conference.

Originally published in [Faith Wire](#)

The entire Thai soccer team who were trapped within a flooded cave network for two weeks have spoken for the first time since being rescued from a flooded cave in Northern Thailand. Press questions have been carefully scrutinised and monitored by psychologists before being asked to ensure that the boys do not undergo any further trauma.

“Their mental state is quite good. They should be able to handle any stress when returning home. They are also physically strong. There is nothing to worry about,” said one of the doctor’s present at the press conference Wednesday.

The three Navy SEAL’s who stayed back with the boys in the cave were also introduced, though their identity remains protected.

“I am the prettiest gentleman that was in the cave,” said one of the unidentified SEALs, which was met with laughter from the assembled journalists.

The press conference host then asked one of the boys what it was like when the British diver emerged from the water and discovered the team huddled on a rock deep within the

underwater caves.

The boy talked of his shock when he heard someone speaking in the dark. "We waited and listened because we couldn't believe that there was someone there," he explained, adding that the rescuer appeared from the depths and said "Hello."

The boy continued, saying that he "was quite surprised because it turns out that the rescuer was not Thai."

"We said "Hello" to each other.""

"This was a miracle moment," the boy added.

The reason behind going into the cave

So, why did the boys go in the cave in the first place?

"Everyone agreed we will go to Thaum Luang. I had never been to the cave before, but others had. We experienced some water as we came into the cave. But we discussed whether or not to stay or go further into the cave, and it was said that we had one hour," explained the 25-year-old coach, Ekkapol Ake Chantawong,

"On the way back we realised we couldn't get out," he continued. "We got trapped."

"It was not anyone's birthday," the coach added, responding to speculation that the cave trip was done in celebration of a team member's birthday.

The coach also clarified: "We all can swim," correcting early reports that many of the team members did not possess this skill. He noted that when the group realised that the water levels were rising, they decided to find some high ground and stay the night.

"Before we went to sleep, we prayed. I was not worried or scared at that time. I believed that tomorrow the water would lower."

17.000 #ThaiPBSnews
pic.twitter.com/XYNd8CYuQV

– ThaiPBS News (@ThaiPBSNews) [July 18, 2018](#)

How they survived

So how did they survive, and what did they do as they awaited rescue?

“I went every day with the team to find a way out,” one of the boys explained. “I also looked to find water sources that were flowing down from higher up in the cave,” another added.

“We just drank water,” the boy noted, adding that they did not have any food. He recalled that they were OK for a day or two, but then began to feel weak due to lack of food. The coach advised the boys to stay very still to conserve vital energy.

“I felt very weak and hungry,” said the youngest and smallest member of the team. “I made sure not to think about food – I didn’t think about fried rice!”

Another member of the group said he would spend his free time attempting to dig a tunnel to freedom. “I could dig two or three meters deep,” he said. Another team member confirmed this, saying that as the water was visibly rising, the group felt they were doing something productive by digging into the cave wall with sharp rocks.

Honouring Lieutenant Commander Saman Kunan

The boys also took a moment to honour the ex-Navy SEAL who lost his life during the rescue operation.

“We are sorry about the loss of Lieutenant Commander Saman Kunan,” the coach explained. “He was really sacrificial in his rescue of all of us. We were all shocked. We couldn’t believe what had happened. Everyone was saddened by the news and felt

guilty that we were the cause of his death.”

The boys also talked about being sent an image of the heroic rescue diver and explained how they penned various messages of condolence to his family while confined in the hospital together.

“We decided to write some messages to the Commander. And we will send this to his family.”

One message reads “I would like to express our condolences. May you rest in peace. Thank you very much for your sacrifice.”

“We have to be more careful and check everything more carefully about whether different activities should be done or not,” the coach explained. The coach, along with most of the team, said they would love to be both professional soccer players and Navy SEAL’s in the future.

“I want to be a Navy SEAL because I want to help others,” one of the players added.



The team recovering in hospital.
(PHOTO: Thai Public Health Ministry)

Apologising to their parents

Every member of the team said they wished to apologise to

their parents for not informing them that they were headed to the caves on that fateful day. Most of the players said they told their parents they were going to soccer practice.

“I’m in big trouble with my mother,” one of them noted.

“The reason to hold this evening press conference is so media can ask them questions and after that they can go back to live their normal lives without media bothering them,” chief government spokesman Sunsern Kaewkumnerd said prior to the conference, according to the [BBC](#).

The team have been quarantined in the Chiang Rai Prachanukroh Hospital since they were freed by an international team of rescuers on July 10. Several of the youngsters were treated for lung infections and minor injuries. But aside from some mild illness, the boys remained miraculously unharmed after coming through a perilous rescue operation that involved them diving through narrow underwater tunnels.

“They are likely to return home immediately after the press conference,” he added.

Chiang Rai’s provincial governor Prachon Pratsukan noted that it would be the team’s “only official media interview”, adding that there would “be no more speaking with the press after this.” According to [the Guardian](#), a number of journalists have submitted questions which have been carefully vetted by psychologists – only approved questions will be put to the boys during the media appearance.

Mental health experts have advised the boys to avoid journalists for at least a month after returning home, highlighting the risk of dredging up traumatic memories of their terrifying experience.