



Freedom Forum

A Monthly E-publication of the Western Center for Law & Policy
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- **WCLP Assists Home Bible Study Threatened by San Diego County.**

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Hebrews 10:25*

Does the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution still protect your right to freely exercise your religious beliefs? Does that right include the ability to assemble in the privacy of your home with other believers to study the Bible, pray, and worship without government intrusion? We here at the Western Center for Law & Policy certainly believe so.

Unfortunately, the County of San Diego appears to have a very different interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. On Good Friday a County employee knocked on the front door of the home of a local pastor. After the front door was opened, the Government employee proceeded to interrogate the pastor's wife, asking questions such as: "Do you have a regular weekly meeting in your home?" "Do you sing?" "Do you say amen?" "Do you say praise the Lord?" After hearing positive responses to these questions, the County worker informed her that they must stop holding "religious assemblies" in her home unless they first obtain a Major Use Permit (MUP) from the County. MUP's can cost tens of thousands of dollars. The County employee proceeded to notify her that they would first receive a written warning. If the homeowners continued to fail to comply, they would receive fines of \$100, \$200, \$500 and \$1000, "and the County would litigate."

As promised, the County promptly issued a written warning ordering the pastor and his wife to "Cease/Stop religious assembly on parcel or obtain a major use permit." What was their "crime?" Well, for some time, the pastor and his wife had hosted a Bible study in their home on Tuesday nights attended by approximately 15 people.

The Pastor, who was naturally stunned by the County's actions, promptly retained the Western Center for Law and Policy to defend his right to practice his faith in the privacy of his own home. Attorneys for the Western Center will demand that the County withdraw its burdensome demands, which violate the Pastor's constitutional right to freely exercise his religious beliefs as well as the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (a.k.a. "RLUIPA"; 42 U.S.C. §2000cc et seq.).

The Western Center for Law and Policy is troubled by this draconian move to suppress home bible studies. We believe that home fellowships represent both the past and future of the Church. Historically, when the church has been persecuted, it has met in homes. That is how the Church in China grew. If the current trends in our nation continue, churches may be forced underground. If that happens, believers will once again be forced to meet in homes. If homes are already closed by the government to assembly and worship, where then will Christians meet?

For more information about the WCLP, please visit our website at www.wclplaw.org

Please consider forwarding the *Freedom Forum* to your friends and family.

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