

March 12, 2022

Pastor James Coates  
GraceLife Church of Edmonton  
51529A Range Road 262  
Spruce Grove, AB T7Y 1B3

Dear Ohio House of Representatives,

When COVID-19 first appeared and our government implemented lockdown restrictions on our church, we decided to comply in light of our ignorance with respect to the severity of the virus. However, by June of 2020, it was evident that its severity had been overblown and that the lockdown measures were not only unnecessary but were even harmful on society at large. As such, we opened our doors and allowed our congregants to decide whether they would assume the risk of returning to in-person gatherings.

Due to complaints that were being levied against us from the surrounding community, Alberta Health Services (AHS) began attending our gatherings to observe our services in the late fall of 2020. As things progressed, AHS sought the accompaniment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and they too were present in our gatherings during our services. From there, we were taken to court and ordered to comply with the public health restrictions, the media was used to publicly shame us into submission, and I was arrested twice.

In the first arrest, I was served with an undertaking. The undertaking demanded that I comply with the Public Health Act. Given that I could not do that, I rejected its terms and refused to sign. But though I had refused its terms, the document remained binding on me. After holding our regular service the following week, I was asked to turn myself in, at which time my second arrest took place and I was taken into custody. I was brought before a Justice of the Peace and was given a condition of release that put me in an untenable position. It pinned my personal freedom and liberty against both my conscience and calling as a pastor by demanding that I comply with the ever-evolving health restrictions.

Given that I could not agree to the terms of my release, I was transferred to a maximum-security prison. I was there for 35 days, at which time a deal was struck with the crown to alter the terms of my release. They included me pleading guilty of violating the undertaking, even though I had maintained my integrity by refusing its terms. With that, I was released from prison without any condition that would preclude me from fulfilling my ministry as a pastor.

Though AHS and the RCMP did not attempt to access our facility during my imprisonment, they attempted to do so my first Sunday back. We were able to refuse them entry by appealing to Section 176 of the Criminal Code of Canada. However, on Wednesday of the following week, they broke into our facility, changed our locks, and barricaded it with three layers of fencing. This forced our church to effectively go underground as we travelled to different undisclosed locations to worship our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our facility was returned to us on July 1, 2021, and we have been in our facility ever since. Though the battle surrounding COVID-19 has seemingly ended in our province, there are a couple of matters worth highlighting. One, our court system has not given the church a single ruling that would hold the governing authorities accountable to their clear overreach. This is in spite of the fact that numerous other countries have seen their courts rule in favor of religious freedom. Two, our federal government has since passed Bill C-4 which is written so broadly that it could conceivably be used to rule out preaching on biblical sexuality. The bill forbids what it calls conversion therapy and arguably outlaws the saving work of Christ in a person's life.

Without a doubt, the Government of Canada is proving itself hostile to biblical Christianity. Placing it on the Special Watch List for Religious Freedom is warranted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Coates', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Pastor James Coates