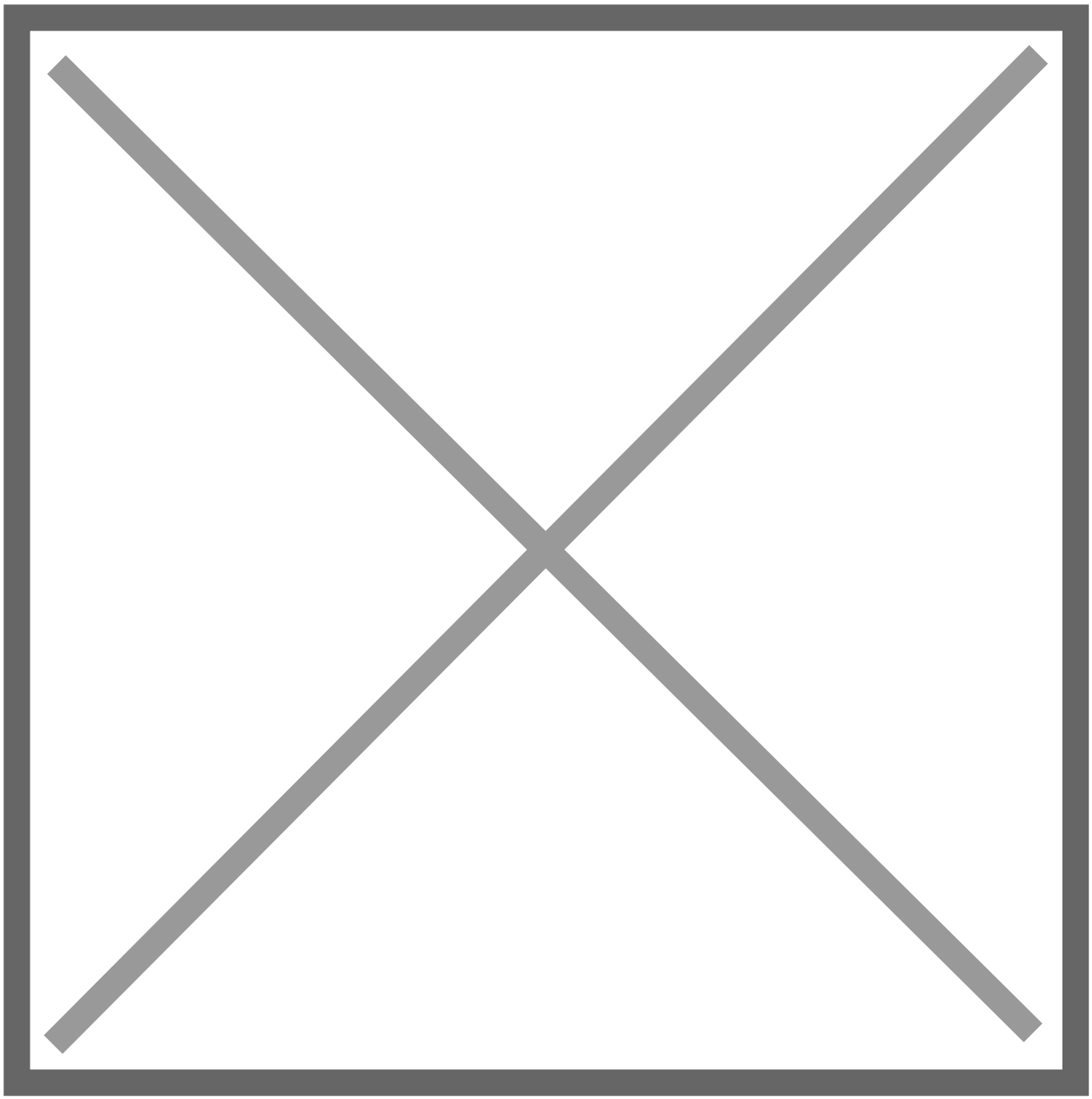
News



California Gov. Gavin Newsom is seen in Sacramento in this 2020 photo. (CNS photo/Reuters/Gabriela Bhaskar)



by Catholic News Service

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Bakersfield, Calif. — December 15, 2020
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A California judge Dec. 10 ruled in favor of a Catholic priest of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X who is fighting Gov. Gavin Newsom's enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions on houses of worship.

Kern County Superior Court Judge Gregory Pulskamp issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting Newsom and others named in Fr. Trevor Burfitt's lawsuit from enforcing COVID-19 related restrictions against the priest, who oversees mission churches in Kern, San Bernardino, San Diego and Los Angeles counties.

The court specifically singled out the provisions of Newsom's "Blueprint for a Safer Economy" and his "Regional Stay at Home Order" as failing to treat houses of worship in a manner "equal to the favored class of entities" permitted to engage in indoor activities.

These favored entities are considered by the state "essential businesses" or "critical infrastructure," the ruling said, and include "big-box retail stores, grocery stores, home improvement stores, hotels, airports, train stations, bus stations, movie production houses, warehouses, factories, schools and a lengthy list of additional businesses."

Pulskamp's ruling noted Newsom and other government officials had "not convincingly established that the health risks associated with houses of worship would be any different than 'essential businesses' or 'critical infrastructure.'"

"Pending a full trial on the merits," the judge said, "defendants, their agents and representatives are hereby enjoined" from enforcing the "Blueprint for a Safer Economy," the "Regional Stay at Home Order" and all other COVID-19 restrictions "that fail to treat houses of worship equal to the favored class of entities."

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Attorneys with the Chicago-based Thomas More Society are representing Burfitt in his suit against Newsom and other state, county and municipal officials.

"The Supreme Court's decision in Brooklyn Diocese v. Cuomo has opened the way to the liberation of churches from the absurd and bigoted superstition that they are veritable death chambers threatening the entire population," said special counsel Christopher Ferrara.

"Not even hair salons, which by the services offered necessitate close personal contact, have been subjected to the onerous and barefaced biases heaped upon houses of worship," he said in a statement.

Late Nov. 25, the Supreme Court stopped New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo from imposing what it called discriminatory 10- and 25-person caps on synagogues and churches.

In separate filings with the court, the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, and two Orthodox Jewish communities objected to Cuomo's rules and the court agreed they violated the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom by treating religious services worse than secular activities.

The traditionalist Society of St. Pius X was founded by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. The Vatican and the society have been in ongoing talks to seek a way to fully reintegrate its members back into the life of the Catholic Church.

The society is no longer considered to be in schism, but doctrinal differences over the teaching of the Second Vatican Council remain.