

# Now *Praying* Gets 7 Christians Arrested

## **Cops Call Holding Bibles While Lying Prostrate 'Disturbing Peace'**

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Christians have been arrested recently at "gay" festivals for nothing more than having a protest sign that is "wider than their torso," but now police have gone even further, targeting Bible-carrying ministers for praying on public property and for standing on a public sidewalk near a "gay" festival.

One of the new cases comes from Elmira, N.Y., where police arrested seven Christians who went into a public park where a "gay" fest was beginning and started to pray, faces down, while holding their Bibles.

They were cited for "disturbing the peace," and Assistant Police Chief Mike Robertson told WND that the seven are accused of a "combination" of allegations under that statute, which includes the "intent" to cause a public inconvenience, any "disturbance" of a meeting of persons, obstructing vehicular or pedestrian traffic, or taking part in "any act that serves no legitimate purpose."

The second such case arose in Wichita, Kan., where police arrested Spirit One Christian Center Pastor Mark Holick, who had received permission earlier from officers to be on the public sidewalk adjacent to the park where the festival was occurring but then



Pastor Mark Holick being arrested for being on sidewalk at Wichita "gay" fest

was arrested doing exactly that.

Julian Raven, a street preacher, told WND his group of seven assembled to pray for three hours the night before Elmira's recent "pride" festival in promotion of the homosexual lifestyle.

"We have a legal right to be at an event held in a public square. We're not a hate group," he said. "We're Christians and we're going to be there to pray."

He said he contacted police, who told him he had no free speech rights in the public park.

"The female officer, she said, 'You're not going to cross the street. You're not going to enter the park and you're not going to share your religion with anybody in this park,'" he told WND.

"When she said that, for the first time in my life as a Christian, I felt now my freedom of speech is threatened or challenged," he said. "I was being told I could not share my religion with anybody in that park."

Raven said he told the officer "she was violating the Constitution that she had sworn to uphold, and she was very agitated and adamant, and couldn't look me straight in the eye."

Raven asked for the justification for such a threat and was not given a response.

He said his team of Christians then went into the park, holding Bibles over their heads to signify their subservience to God's Word, and lay on their faces to pray.

Within three minutes, police officers had put handcuffs on the seven, to the cheers of the homosexual crowd, he said.

He said a court date is pending for the seven July 23.

"I have the highest respect for the police officers. They have a very difficult job to do. But we were treated unfairly in a public setting. This was a hasty show of force. It was not called for," he said.

He said if the situation is left unchallenged, the city of Elmira will be in the position of being able to control the content of people's

messages in a lawful assembly - or even thoughts if they are nearby.

"We didn't say boo to a goose, still we were arrested," he said.

The local newspaper reported the arrests came just "moments" after Elmira Mayor John Tonello delivered a speech "celebrating diversity."

And the actions prompted some immediate criticism from newspaper readers.

"I was appalled and disgusted by the gay stories strewn through the ... paper. ... What was even more disturbing was the way the city acted. Since when is it illegal to sit on the ground in a public park and recite Bible verses? Are they not protected by the same Constitution that allows gay people to have their gay pride event. These Bible thumpers had their constitutional right to free speech and assembly trampled on by the city. They should not have been arrested," said Kevin Raznoff.

Robertson told WND the Christians "certainly" have a right to assemble, but not on public property when there's an "organized" event there. Asked repeatedly about how the "disturbance" statute relates to First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech, he did not answer.

"Obviously, they caused a disruption to an event that was taking place," he said.

But Raven confirmed to WND the seven Christians did not approach a single person, did not speak to anyone and did not even make any audible statements until after they were arrested.

Pastor Holick's case in Wichita was even more drastic. He had gone, with a team from his church, to pass out flyers and pray at a recent "pride" festival held there.

He had checked with the police department and was told, "The sidewalk is your friend."

"Upon arriving we began to set up," he said. "Immediately, I was approached by WPD and told that we could not go into the park (a public park mind you where everyone else - except the Christians - was allowed in) and that we could not be on the sidewalk on that

side of the street but that we could go to the other side of the street.

"In other words, one side of the street is open to Christians but the public park and the public sidewalk next to the park is not," he said.

But then Holick was arrested within about four minutes of his arrival.

"It is obvious that the WPD did not keep their word and that they wanted to arrest as quickly as possible. The First Amendment ... was cast aside like so much garbage," he said.

"The sin is 'coming out' further and further and the church is now being pushed further and further back inside the four walls of the church building; we are the ones that are seen as 'the trouble makers.' The police arrest the Christians and allow all manner of perversion to flaunt itself in the streets of Wichita. And we the church ... well ... I'm not sure we care," he said.

Police alleged that they asked Holick five times to "leave" the festival, even though he never purchased the required admission fee or went in.

As WND reported , Holick already had been targeted by the Internal Revenue Service for the moral statements he posted on the church's sign.

The notice he got from the IRS warned him about putting his Christian beliefs on the sign, and he responded that he would continue to preach the Word of God.

Just a week earlier, WND reported police in St. Petersburg, Fla., arrested five Christians for carrying signs "wider than their torsos" outside an officially designated protest area at that city's homosexual festival.

Pastor Billy Ball, Assistant Pastor Doug Pitts, Frankie Primavera and Josh Pettigrew, all of Faith Baptist Church in Primrose, Ga., were arrested after leaving a small area set aside by city officials for protest activities. Bill Holt, of Lighthouse Baptist Church in Jefferson, Ga., was also taken into custody.

According to Lighthouse Pastor Kevin Whitman, the five men were told by police their signs were not allowed outside the protest area

because they were wider than their torsos. When the men refused to put them away, they were arrested for violating a controversial city ordinance that governs permitted events.

As WND reported, St. Petersburg officials, following disturbances at a previous homosexual pride festival, implemented rules governing outdoor events that set aside "free speech zones," where protesters are allowed.

The resulting ordinance came under fire by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Alliance Defense Fund for being too broad. It allows the city to create prior restraints of speech on an event-by-event basis, with virtually no predictable limits. It also criminalizes certain free speech behavior around public events and authorizes the police to enforce breaches of permits – the penalty for such breaches being arrest.