



Focus on Religious Freedom

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FACE Law *Finally* Used to Protect Churches

When Congress and President Clinton enacted the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act in 1994, it ostensibly protected “reproductive health services” and “places of religious worship,” from disruption or destruction of property. But from the start FACE was used almost *exclusively* to **target nonviolent, pro-life civil disobedience**, such as sit-ins at abortion clinics.

Several years ago nine individuals, arrested for a peaceful, prayerful sit-in at a late-term abortion clinic in Washington, D.C., were charged with “obstruction” under the FACE law and “conspiracy,” under a law resurrected from the post-Civil War era, and sentenced to years in prison—which they were all serving until President Trump pardoned them.

FACE has almost *never* been used to protect *pro-life* pregnancy resource centers or houses of worship—even after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned and pro-life centers and Catholic churches were violently attacked, some firebombed, across the country.

Now, following the Jan. 18 invasion and disruption of Sunday services at Cities Church in St. Paul, Minnesota by anti-ICE protesters, several people have been arrested, and reports indicate the Department of Justice intends to charge them under the FACE Act and also the Enforcement Act of 1871 used previously against pro-lifers.

Finally, the FACE law is being enforced as written, to protect not just abortion clinics but churches as well. And that 1871 “Ku Klux Klan” law, instead of being used exclusively against peaceful pro-lifer protesters, is also being applied against raucous church invaders.

Justice demands that laws be applied consistently—and that the religious freedom, and the right to peaceably assemble of those gathered in worship, and of pro-lifers engaged in the time-honored American tradition of **peaceful** civil disobedience, be respected and protected.

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