

The *Crosspoint (Englewood) Church* Case

Case Name: *Englewood Church v. Sarasota County*

Case Status: On March 25, ADF attorneys filed a lawsuit in federal court, challenging Sarasota County’s unequal treatment of a religious school.

Significance: Whether the government can refuse to give equal access to a religious school, while allowing that same access to charter schools and other secular groups.



Background: In 2013, Englewood Church (known locally as Crosspoint Church) started a Christian school to serve at-risk students by offering an individualized, faith-based education. More than three years after the school opened, Sarasota County demanded that the church obtain a “special exception” in order to continue operating the school in the church’s own building. After the church submitted its application—a time-consuming and uncertain process costing over \$10,000—the Sarasota County Board of Commissioners refused to grant the exception and threatened the church with daily fines of \$250 per day if it continued to educate children on its property. Meanwhile, charter schools and other secular schools do not need such special permission. The church and school have spent over two years of time and resources to comply with the county’s demand, only to be continually denied the use of their own building. This not only violates federal law, but also denies students of a religiously affiliated school the right to the same educational opportunities as their peers—opportunities not likely to be found elsewhere. Crosspoint Church wants to provide a quality Christian education to children with learning disabilities, but Sarasota County is trying to stop them from doing so.

Key Points

- The County would let Crosspoint Church host a secular charter school, but will not allow it to host a private Christian school in accordance with its convictions.
- If the county has its way, it would block these children and their parents from accessing the quality educational opportunity of their choice.
- The government isn’t treating Crosspoint Church equally when it denies it use of its own building when many secular nonprofits could use the same building at any time.
- People of faith shouldn’t be treated like second-class citizens. Unequal treatment of a religious school and its students is unconstitutional and unjust.

Key Facts

- The church and school have already spent \$10,000 over two years trying to comply with the county’s demands, but the county has still refused to approve the use of their space.
- Federal law (RLUIPA) prohibits the government from treating religious groups worse than others.
- If the government allows a secular assembly or institution access to a zoning jurisdiction, then it must give religious assemblies or institutions equal access.

The Bottom Line: The government can’t treat religious groups worse than secular groups. Yet Sarasota County is trying to block a Christian school from meeting in a church building, even though it would allow charter schools and other secular groups to meet there.