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*Admitted to practice in  
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**For immediate release**

### **Federal lawsuit against City of Chesapeake Settled**

*City Offers First Pentecostal United Holy Church \$1.1 Million for Property*

The conflict between religious liberty and economic revitalization as opposing interests in Chesapeake, Virginia, has finally come to an end. The settlement, which is to be filed today in the United States District Court, resolves all remaining issues arising out of the City's denials of conditional use permits for the Church.

"This is a great victory for the people of Chesapeake, and for South Norfolk in particular," said Church counsel John G. Stepanovich of the Virginia Beach law firm of Lentz, Stepanovich & Bergethon. "The City's offer to settle will provide the resources to permit the Church to continue to bring hope and good works to the community for decades to come." The Church has existed in Norfolk since 1945 and serves citizens of South Norfolk. It had planned to move its ministry to a vacant lot that it purchased there in 2000. However, the City of Chesapeake repeatedly denied the Church land use permits to do so, citing concerns about economic redevelopment in the area.

Stepanovich continued: "Essentially, the City and the Church envisioned different ways to invest in this community, but the good of the community was always the focus of both parties in the suit. It was unfortunate that those noble purposes resulted in this litigation; however, now, both the Church and the City can move forward to improve the community, each bringing unique contributions as they become partners in the revitalization of South Norfolk."

The Church filed suit in federal court against the City earlier this year, arguing that the permit denials violated the United States and Virginia Constitutions, as well as the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. These denials, contended the Church, burdened its religious exercise by preventing it from expanding and fulfilling the needs of its various fellowship and outreach ministries.

"The importance of this settlement is clear," stated Roman P. Storzer, co-counsel for the Church and church-zoning expert, "cities must consider the religious rights of churches when planning their economic agendas." When the property, which had formerly housed a supermarket, was put on the market several years ago, the Church was the only interested buyer. "With the settlement, the City of Chesapeake is choosing to invest in its revitalization plan through the purchase of the property, rather than denying construction permits to those who saw a different vision for the community in which they live."

For more information, please contact John Stepanovich at (757) 498-7035 or Roman Storzer at (202) 857-9766.