

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church v. Collier Township, et al.

Holy Trinity · No. 2:26-CV-00024-CCW · Decided April 8, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania denied Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church’s motion for a preliminary injunction against Collier Township and related defendants. The court held that Holy Trinity had not shown a substantial likelihood of success on its claims under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act or the Free Exercise Clause, and that the remaining preliminary-injunction factors also weighed against relief. The court further concluded that the requested injunction was overly broad and would prematurely resolve issues reserved for trial.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Christy Criswell Wiegand
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	April 8, 2026
DOCKET	2:26-CV-00024-CCW
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved for a preliminary injunction in an action alleging that Collier Township and individual defendants violated the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act and the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses through enforcement of the Township's zoning ordinance. After limited expedited discovery and an evidentiary hearing, the district court denied the motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A preliminary injunction is an extraordinary remedy evaluated under four factors: likelihood of success on the merits, irreparable harm, harm to the opposing party, and the public interest. The moving party generally must establish likelihood of success and irreparable harm as gateway factors. A heightened standard applies to mandatory relief that would alter the status quo: the movant must show a substantial likelihood of success and that its right to relief is indisputably clear.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court opinion with no reported citation identified
PARTIES	Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church v. Collier Township, Gabriel Benvenuti, Dawnlee Vaughn, Mary Ann Cupples-Wisniowski, Tim Downey, Jr., Julie Murphy, Wayne Chiurazzi

TOPICS

injunctions civil rights first amendment municipal law civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure constitutional law civil rights municipal law land use

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Holy Trinity was entitled to a preliminary injunction based on its RLUIPA equal-terms and substantial-burden claims and its Free Exercise Clause claim.
2. Whether Holy Trinity satisfied the heightened standard for mandatory preliminary injunctive relief that would require affirmative governmental action and alter the status quo.
3. Whether the requested injunction was sufficiently specific and feasible under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 65(d).
4. Whether the remaining preliminary-injunction factors—irreparable harm, relative harms, and public interest—weighed in favor of relief.

HOLDINGS

1. Holy Trinity was not entitled to a preliminary injunction because it failed to show a substantial likelihood of success on its RLUIPA or Free Exercise claims and therefore failed to show that its right to relief was indisputably clear.
2. Even assuming Holy Trinity could show a likelihood of success, the remaining preliminary-injunction factors weighed against granting relief.
3. The requested injunction was impermissibly broad and vague, and the court could not feasibly fashion an order specifying the conduct required or prohibited.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A preliminary injunction is an extraordinary remedy never awarded as of right.” (II)

“Holy Trinity cannot establish that its right to relief on its RLUIPA or Free Exercise Clause claims, which are the only claims providing the basis for the preliminary injunction, is indisputably clear.” (III.A)

“The Third Circuit has recently affirmed that preliminary injunctive relief “is proper only in the rare case when a preliminary injunction is necessary to preserve the effectiveness of the ordinary adjudicatory process.”” (III.C)

“For the foregoing reasons, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Holy Trinity’s Motion for Preliminary Injunction, ECF No. 2, is DENIED.” (IV)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Holy Trinity owns approximately 40.6 acres in Collier Township, Pennsylvania, with portions in the Township's R-1 and Planned Economic Development zoning districts. It proposed the Shrine Project, a large religious and cultural complex including a shrine, museum, retreat center, bell tower, parking garage, and related facilities, and sought amendments to the Township's zoning ordinance and map to permit the project. The Township Board denied the Shrine Project proposal in September 2024; Holy Trinity later pursued a scaled-down Chapel Project, received conditional approval, and withdrew its state-court appeal. Holy Trinity then filed this federal action and sought an injunction requiring the Township to cease enforcing its zoning ordinances in a manner that would preclude the Shrine Project.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Holy Trinity filed the federal action and motion for preliminary injunction on January 7, 2026. The court permitted limited expedited discovery and held an evidentiary hearing on March 23, 2026. The court denied the motion, concluding that Holy Trinity had not shown a substantial likelihood of success or an indisputably clear right to mandatory relief, and that the remaining preliminary-injunction factors also weighed against relief.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Winter v. NRDC, Inc., 555 U.S. 7, 24 (2008)
- Greater Phila. Chamber of Commerce v. City of Phila., 949 F.3d 116, 133 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Instant Air Freight Co. v. C.F. Air Freight, Inc., 882 F.2d 797, 800 (3d Cir. 1989)
- Starbucks Corp. v. McKinney, 620 U.S. 339, 346 (2024)
- Sec. & Exch. Comm’n v. Chappell, 107 F.4th 114, 126 (3d Cir. 2024)
- Ace Am. Ins. Co. v. Wachovia Ins. Agency Inc., 306 F. App’x 727, 730–31 (3d Cir. 2009)
- Del. State Sportsman’s Assoc., Inc. v. Del. Dep’t of Safety & Homeland Security, 108 F.4th 194, 201, 203, 205 (3d Cir. 2024)
- Reilly v. City of Harrisburg, 858 F.3d 173, 179 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Arias Gudino v. Lowe, 785 F. Supp. 3d 27, 37 (M.D. Pa. 2025)
- Punnett v. Carter, 621 F.2d 578, 582–83 (3d Cir. 1980)
- Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao de Vegetal, 546 U.S. 418, 429 (2006)
- Boynes v. Limetree Bay Ventures LLC, 110 F.4th 604, 610 (3d Cir. 2024)
- ECRI v. McGraw-Hill, Inc., 809 F.2d 223, 226 (3d Cir. 1987)
- Cont’l Grp., Inc. v. Amoco Chems. Corp., 614 F.2d 351, 359 (3d Cir. 1980)

- *Holiday Inns of Am. v. B & B Corp.*, 409 F.2d 614, 618 (3d Cir. 1969)
- *Hadeed v. Advanced Vascular Res. of Johnstown, LLC*, No. 3:15-cv-22, 2016 WL 7176658, at *8 (W.D. Pa. Dec. 8, 2016)
- *Castillo-Perez v. Lowe*, No. 1:20-CV-02271, 2020 WL 7183579, at *2 (M.D. Pa. Dec. 7, 2020)
- *Hope v. Warden York Cnty. Prison*, 972 F.3d 310, 320, 322 (3d Cir. 2020)
- *Pharmacia Corp. v. Alcon Labs., Inc.*, 201 F. Supp. 2d 335, 383–84 (D.N.J. 2002)
- *Skehan v. Bd. of Tr. of Bloomsburg State Coll.*, 353 F. Supp. 542, 543 (M.D. Pa. 1973)
- *West v. Pennsylvania Dep’t of State*, 753 F. Supp. 3d 424, 429 (W.D. Pa. 2024)
- *Deraffele v. City of Williamsport*, No. 4:14-CV-01849, 2015 WL 5781409, at *15 (M.D. Pa. Aug. 19, 2015)
- *Minnesota v. Clover Leaf Creamery Co.*, 449 U.S. 456, 469 (1981)
- *Schad v. Borough of Mount Ephraim*, 452 U.S. 61, 68 (1981)
- *King v. Twp. of E. Lampeter*, 17 F. Supp. 2d 394, 420 (E.D. Pa. 1998), *aff’d*, 182 F.3d 903 (3d Cir. 1999)
- *Jones v. Twp.*, No. CV 15-5594, 2016 WL 1625552, at *3 (E.D. Pa. Apr. 21, 2016)
- *Congregation Kol Ami v. Abington Twp.*, 309 F.3d 120, 135 (3d Cir. 2002)
- *Castaneira v. Fox*, No. 1:25-CV-00361, 2025 WL 2934037, at *6 (M.D. Pa. Oct. 15, 2025)
- *Mallet & Co. Inc. v. Lacayo*, 16 F.4th 364, 388–90 (3d Cir. 2021)
- *Schmidt v. Lessard*, 414 U.S. 473, 476 (1974)