

# Government

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## Sect's Cozy Tearoom Fights Health Code.

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By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

A fight over what constitutes government oppression and religious freedom is brewing in a cozy tearoom and cinnamon-scented quilt-and-craft shop operated in violation of local health codes.

Three members of the small Piecemakers religious sect were convicted this week of multiple misdemeanor counts for refusing to let health inspectors into their kitchen.

The group, led by a feisty, 85-year-old, camouflage-clad grandmother, has battled the county for years over a laundry list of code violations, claiming the law of God is greater than the law of man.

“God’s laws help the people, they comfort the people. These laws bind you so that you can’t breathe. They have sucked the substance right out of our country,” said Marie Kolasinski, the Piecemakers matriarch.

Kolasinski and the two other defendants each face up to a year in jail when they are sentenced Jan. 12. They said they will appeal based on how officials handled the case.

“Put me in jail, shoot me, do anything. But I’m going to keep fighting this kind of thing until America wakes up,” said Kolasinski, who compares her actions to the civil disobedience of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Since the early 1990s, the Piecemakers have resisted health inspectors who accuse them of selling unpackaged foods like homemade sandwiches and soup without a permit.

The Piecemakers were ordered to cease all food sales and placed on probation in 2000, but undercover inspectors have observed continuing violations, according to trial testimony.

Last October, inspectors arrived unannounced with a court order, prompting a rowdy confrontation recorded by the Piecemakers. Kolasinski and two others were arrested after wrestling with police officers and unleashing a barrage of profanity, prompting one officer to ask Kolasinski: “Do you kiss your kids with that mouth?”

*Piecemakers Country Store*

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# Government

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Health workers testified it was the first time they had to obtain a court order for a routine inspection of restaurants in Orange County.

Deputy District Attorney Scott Steiner, who prosecuted the case, doesn't believe the Piecemakers were resisting because of their religious beliefs.

"I think the primary reason for their recalcitrance is due to the almighty dollar, much more than the Almighty," Steiner said.

"They put one face to the public as being this innocent, gentle group and then they have a truly ugly side... that is contemptuous of law, is disrespectful and has absolutely no regard for the preservation of public health," he said.

Steiner said he hasn't yet ruled out shutting down the tearoom in light of the convictions.

Kolasinski founded the Piecemakers in 1978, when she says God spoke to her — in English, not Hebrew as she expected. The sect, which she describes as "born-again Christians who have finished their walk to the full Gospel," has 26 members who share four houses.

Together, they run a labyrinthine craft-and-quilt store, tearoom, candy shop, construction company, hair salon and crafts school. They also print a calendar that includes quilting patterns and run a soup kitchen for the homeless.

Wearing a frilly, handmade apron, Kolasinski leads visitors through potpourri-scented rooms overflowing with Christmas ornaments and knickknacks.

Quilting supplies and balls of colorful yarn are stacked to the ceiling, where stuffed-animal moose heads peer from wall mounts. In the main room, an old-fashioned candy counter tempts with red-and-white jelly beans and pieces of chocolate wrapped in gold foil. A homemade apple pie on the counter is on sale for \$10.

Kolasinski said her tearoom and candy shop haven't sickened anyone in 20 years. After trying to comply with the county, she says she realized its food codes were part of an oppressive bureaucracy designed to drive legitimate businesses "to the communist countries."

# Government

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"They say they're out to protect the public," she said. "We try to obey, we try to fit into what's going on, but we can't fit into it."

**K**olasinski, who showed up at trial wearing a camouflage skirt, top and military-style beret, said the court case and fines have cost the Piecemakers nearly \$500,000. But, she said, her resistance will continue.

"You'll see camouflage being really popular right now because we're in a spiritual war," she said. "They can't scare me."

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