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Church of Cannabis in Indiana holds first service...with no marijuana?

By [Lorraine Caballero \(\)](#) | Jul 5, 2015 11:43 AM

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A woman smokes marijuana during the 4/20 Rally at the Civic Center in Denver, Colorado, April 20, 2014. (Reuters / Mark Leffingwell / Files)

The members of the First Church of Cannabis in Indianapolis gathered on Wednesday for the pot-smoking church's first service.

The inaugural service of the First Church of Cannabis happened on the same day that Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) took effect. The church's congregation consisted of people wearing colorful shirts with pictures of marijuana leaves.

Police officers stood outside the church in anticipation of a rowdy service. However, the [Indianapolis Star](#) (<http://www.indystar.com/story/news/2015/07/01/humor-police-presence-mixed-cannabis-church-site/29561919/>) reported that the service was rather unremarkable and was comparable to a concert or a trip to the beach. Church members danced around as the song "Mary Jane" was played and some members testified about their "pot experiences".

One thing that was remarkable was the absence of the pot itself. Founder Bill Levin decided to skip marijuana sessions for the Wednesday service after authorities threatened to arrest those who lit up the leaves, the report relayed.

The state recognized the First Church of Cannabis as legitimate after Gov. Mike Pence inked the RFRA on April 2. The Internal Revenue Service officially incorporated the church as a nonprofit organization in late May.

However, there are some outsiders and experts who see the First Church of Cannabis as simply an excuse for marijuana users to gather and conduct pot sessions legally, the [SBS](http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/07/02/first-church-cannabis-opens-service) (<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/07/02/first-church-cannabis-opens-service>) states.

Still, Levin, who is called by his followers as the "grand poobah," insists that the practice of their church is sanctified.

"This is what I live by, and I have more faith in this religion than any other," SBS quotes Levin.

The RFRA was originally drafted with the intention of preventing the government from infringing upon religion across Indianapolis and 10 other cities. However, it became controversial when speculations arose about the law being just a way for business owners to refuse rendering service to gay couples, the report explained.

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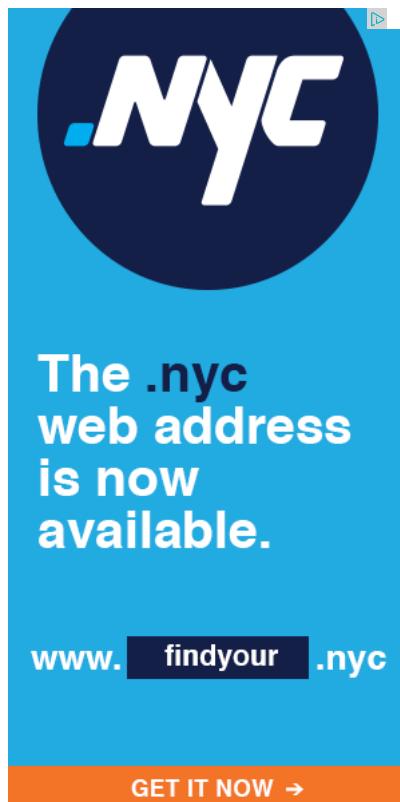
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