

Charity regulator to look into sale of coronavirus 'protection kits'

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The charity regulator is to scrutinise a church over its bishop's sale of "plague protection kits" made of oil and string during the coronavirus outbreak.

The Charity Commission, which regulates charities in England and Wales, has opened a regulatory compliance case into The Kingdom Church after the National Secular Society raised concerns.

The south London-based church is a [registered charity](#) whose bishop Irugu Wiseman, also known as Bishop Climate, runs a group called Bishop Climate Ministries. The bishop is a trustee of the church.

A [post](#) on the Bishop Climate Ministries website, published on 20 March, promotes the protective power of "the Divine Plague Protection Oil" and "Scarlet Yarn".

The post originally read: "By faith you can be saved from the Coronavirus pandemic by covering yourself with the Divine Plague Protection Oil and wearing the Scarlet Yarn on your body."

"As you use this oil, along with a special scarlet yarn, every coronavirus and any other deadly thing will pass over you."

It has since been edited to remove direct claims that it cures the coronavirus specifically. It now says "you can be saved from every pandemic" by using the oil and string and "every plague and any other deadly thing will pass over you".

The post still contains a specific reference to "the reality of the coronavirus pandemic" earlier on.

It says the oil has been "mixed with cedar wood, hyssop and prayer" and claims cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet yarn, when used together, "act like an invisible barrier to the powers of darkness".

The church's website links to an online shop, which carries the [same post](#). Wiseman has reportedly [told](#) the PA news agency that the church had sold more than 1,000 of the kits.

According to local newspaper [Southwark News](#) the kit was originally on sale for £91, although the link to buy it has since reportedly been [deactivated](#).

A disclaimer has since been added to the posts to say they are "solely under Bishop Climate Ministries and Not the Kingdom Church".

Charity Commission response

After the NSS raised the issue, a Charity Commission spokesperson said: "We are looking into the serious concern about Kingdom Church GB's alleged sale of false COVID-19 protection devices, as a matter of urgency."

"We have opened a regulatory compliance case to assess the matter, and will be liaising as appropriate with other agencies. Charity can and should lead the way in taking public expectations seriously and charity leaders should demonstrate high standards of conduct and behaviour."

The commission said its step was designed to establish facts and to ensure trustees "understand and comply with their legal duties".

It added: "Any charity found to be exploiting people's anxiety during this time of national emergency can expect to face serious sanction by the commission."

NSS reaction

An NSS spokesperson welcomed the commission's response and said the episode highlighted the need for reform of charity law, which recognises 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose.

"Selling bogus protection kits during the current crisis is worse than useless; it's exploitative and potentially harmful. The Kingdom Church, and particularly its trustee, appear to have significant questions to answer over their role in this episode.

"We must also question the current legal assumption that advancing religion is inherently beneficial. In this case, the very opposite appears to be true."

The NSS's campaign for charity law reform

- The Charities Act of 2011 outlines 13 purposes which charities can pursue to ensure they provide a public benefit. One of those is 'the advancement of religion'.
- Last year the NSS published a major [report](#) making the case for 'the advancement of religion' to be removed from the list. Under the NSS's proposals religious charities which benefit the public would retain their status, but all charities would be required to pass a secular public benefit test.

The Kingdom Church's charitable purpose

- The Kingdom Church is registered as a charity with the purpose of advancing the Christian faith and "other such charitable purposes as are beneficial to the community".

Local response

- Victoria Mills, a councillor on Southwark Council, said the issue was "already under investigation by our teams" and encouraged people to report similar issues to [London Trading Standards](#).

Image via Bishop Climate Ministries.

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