



Rev. Dr. Mike Gibson
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May 15, 2020,

Dear Sir, Governor Gavin Newsom,

God has granted you great responsibility as the governor of our state. We pray regularly for you in our churches, that you govern well, and that you experience God's great love for you in Jesus Christ. Today, we write to respectfully request that you **reclassify houses of worship as essential for the welfare of the community and that you plan for their reopening as quickly as possible.** Although we advocate for all houses of worship, we directly represent over 300 churches and 200 schools in the State of California with 65,000 members and a student enrollment in excess of 25,000.

Spiritual Health Supports Physical Health

A health crisis is also a spiritual crisis. The framers of the Constitution, while perhaps not envisioning such a turn of events as COVID-19, understood that religion provides a significant benefit to the state and chose to enshrine it with special privilege. At a time of crisis, more than ever, the citizens of this state need access to their communities of faith. The presence of the Body of Christ, as the Church, cannot be fully realized digitally. Presented with this virus and the resulting economic challenge, people need to know God's power, presence, and love for them. Thus, we maintain that churches are not only essential to the well-being of people of faith but also to the citizens with whom they interact.

Taking Freedom Seriously

You have zealously advocated for freedoms during your political career. We appreciate your watchful attention to the freedom granted in our constitution to assemble as the people of God. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod takes freedom seriously as well. We believe and confess a gracious God who has freed us from our own self-interest to serve and love our community through Jesus Christ, the Savior of the whole world. For some time, we have encouraged our churches to refrain from assembling for the welfare of their own membership and, even more, for the love of their communities. We now entreat you to advocate for the needs and rights of citizens of this state to gather together physically and receive the gifts of Almighty God, to give Him praise, and to pray corporately for their communities. We know this must be done responsibly and pledge ourselves to follow civil authorities in promoting wise and thoughtful reopening guidelines which guard the health of our members and the welfare of the communities in which they live. It is with humility that we request you to act quickly in declaring houses of worship as essential for the welfare of the people of the State of California and arrange for their reopening as soon as possible.

As leading citizens, we stand as servants of God with you,

Rev. Dr. Michael Gibson
President, Pacific Southwest District
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

Rev. Michael Lange
President, California-Nevada-Hawaii District
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

Cc: Senator John Moorlach 37th District
Assembly Member Jim Frazier, 11th District