

Minnesota Churches Matter—new executive order

Background

Catholic and Lutheran churches in Minnesota were among the first to voluntarily suspend public gatherings to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19, a painful choice to make. We have been working with the government since the beginning of the pandemic to love our neighbors and protect people from the spread of illness. But on May 13, Governor Tim Walz issued an executive order providing guidelines for getting the state back on track in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that violated our religious freedom and subordinated our sacramental lives to bars and casinos. The order allowed retailers to return to business as usual with 50% capacity in buildings, but banned churches from resuming in-person worship services of more than ten people, no matter their size.

After [announcing](#) our plans to reopen our churches without the Governor's blessing, today we reached an agreement with Governor Tim Walz to allow churches to re-open for larger gatherings by Pentecost Sunday. The Governor returned to the negotiating table after we acted in defense of our religious freedom. The Governor recognized that churches are able to worship safely just as businesses are able to operate safely.

We are grateful that the Governor has entered into dialogue with us. He recognizes that there are safe, cooperative and responsible ways to resume in-person worship and care for the spiritual needs of Minnesotans.

Talking Points

1. After almost two months of virtual worship services, on May 7, we reached out to Governor Walz with proposed protocols for resuming our in-person worship services. These protocols were in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organization and United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Despite our proposal for responsible social distancing and hygiene, and despite ongoing correspondence with the Governor, and several meetings with his staff, Governor Walz's latest "stay safe" executive order explicitly barred churches from reopening. Requests for dialogue towards reopening did not result in a solution.
2. We are grateful that the Governor responded to our announcement, entered into dialogue with us, and decided to no longer prevent churches and other houses of worship from reopening. Although we had planned to go ahead without the Governor's blessing, we are glad that he recognizes that there are safe, cooperative and responsible ways to resume in-person worship.
3. The urgency in our response has been fueled by our desire to address the needs of the one in four at-risk children and families suffering from domestic violence and the needs of those recovering from addiction who are made even more vulnerable by social isolation.
4. The Governor's previous reopening plan would have allowed the Mall of America to open its doors for customers to engage in retail therapy, but disallowed churches from providing spiritual

healing to their congregations. As pet groomers, liquor stores, and casinos reopen their doors, all we asked was to be treated equally with these secular services.

5. We prefer to cooperate with government office-holders; there is no need to pit church against state. So we are grateful that the governor has worked with us so that we can serve our communities in person and reopen in a safe, cooperative, and responsible way.
6. It is wrong to privilege economic well being over spiritual well being, as Governor Walz recognizes. No government should disregard the fundamental right of the freedom to worship as well as the essential services of human connection and spiritual leadership that our churches provide to our communities. The Governor's change of position is a welcome one and we hope to continue our partnership with the State to address the needs of all Minnesotans during this crisis.