



CALIFORNIA-NEVADA-HAWAII DISTRICT
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
2772 CONSTITUTION DRIVE, SUITE A
LIVERMORE, CA 94551-7566

August 12, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom,

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. We again write to you, as the Bishops of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the State of California, on behalf of over 300 churches (with 65,000 members) and 200 schools (enrollment of over 20,000 students).

As Christians, one of the important tenets the Bible teaches us is to be good citizens. We are very proud of the way our congregations and schools have shown exceptional concern for their neighbors and diligently followed the guidance of local authorities. When stay-at-home orders were issued, they quickly moved online for worship, then reopened with all safety protocols in place, showed restraint in singing and speaking, and now, where possible, gather outdoors. They have also sacrificially served their neighbors with food, care, and kindness – all without the assistance of government dollars. It is Christ's mandate to "love our neighbors as ourselves" and His love that compels them in their service of others.

Governor Newsom, we humbly suggest that it is now time for you to act in support of the efforts of the faith community by identifying it as essential to the function, health, emotional and spiritual wellness of all. We have no hesitancy in making this request, as we are confident in the church's efforts to ensure the safety of all they serve, certainly exceeding those of most businesses and organizations that have been designated as essential.

We also ask that you grant permission, as soon as possible, for our Lutheran schools to provide the in-class instruction and loving care that parents and students desire. Please support the waivers being submitted by our schools to local governments that will allow them to have students on campus sooner than later. The smaller number of students in our schools makes it possible to ensure excellence in social distancing and safety. Here is an example of one of our Lutheran Schools in the Las Vegas area that has safely returned to in-person instruction and was featured on a local news station. <https://www.8newsnow.com/news/local-news/some-private-schools-reopen-welcome-students-back-to-classrooms/>

Much is being said in the media about churches that are returning to in-person worship in pushback against the failure to recognize faith communities as essential to the well-being of all the people of California. In contrast, many businesses and organizations that do far less to benefit the citizens of California have been designated as "essential." We hope you will join us in being greatly concerned about the threats from local municipalities to turn off a church's utilities while the same officials express their support and admiration of those who express their protests in the streets. From our perspective, this approach lumps churches that meet to peacefully worship and serve their communities into the same category as large house parties that at the very least provide no benefit to the community. These inconsistencies are an infringement of the rights given to everyone who legitimately exercises their freedom of speech and their freedom for religious expression.

We thank you for your consideration and pledge to continue to pray for you and the State of California.

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

Rev. Dr. Michael Gibson
President, Pacific Southwest District
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