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May 22, 2020,

Dear Sir, Governor Steve Sisolak,

God has granted you great responsibility as the governor of the State of Nevada. 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 soon as safely possible.*** Although we advocate for all houses of worship, together, we represent 28 congregations and 18 schools of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod throughout the State of Nevada, with almost 5,000 congregational members and an equal number of students, 5,000. In addition, most of our churches are involved in some type of extended social service ministry, including food banks.

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 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

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod takes freedom seriously. 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 designating houses of worship as essential for the welfare of the people of the State of Nevada and arrange for their reopening as soon as safely 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
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