

To Whom It May Concern,

Whereas we are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with authority under God to preach and proclaim His rule over all of life, and...

Whereas you are our God-ordained civil authorities delegated with the task to govern justly...

We have seen fit to inform you of our convictions with respect to our callings as church leaders where it may conflict with your governing policies.

We recognize the authority for the governed and the government comes from Romans 1, I Timothy 2, Romans 13, and I Peter 2. We are to respect the legitimacy of governing authorities, and the governing authorities are to rule as delegated servants of God to the people. We also recognize that from our nation's founding, we have a sacred and legal contract:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (U.S. Constitution, Amendment 1).

As Christian churches, the exercise of our religion indeed requires the freedom of assembly. When we gather, we do so with all ages, ethnicities, socio-economic classes, and both genders, under the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has purchased our eternal hope through His life, death, and resurrection. To this end, we as pastors, under God, call a group of believers, under our care, to voluntarily assemble regularly in an orderly fashion, considering the needs of each other. The nature of our Christian religion physically requires our members "peaceably to assemble" (U.S. Constitution, Amendment 1).

In times of crisis, churches, out of love of neighbor and one another, have voluntarily suspended meetings. In the case of COVID-19, for example, though some of us are in rural areas or have small congregations, we have made conscientious decisions to limit our public gatherings. We acknowledge that snow-storms, local crises, wars, pandemics, et cetera, are all providential hardships that may warrant temporarily suspending our ordinary meeting schedules; however, we must emphasize that decisions in this regard are the prerogative of the church, not the state.


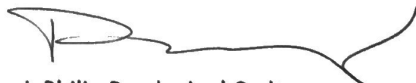
We say this to emphasize that it is our liberty to meet or not to meet. These decisions fall under the institutional jurisdiction of the church, and this constitutional right is not to be infringed. We remind you that it is our freedom of conscience which dictates our decision to suspend meetings. Any magistrate who presumes to overrule this right violates the sacred trust established in the Constitution of the United States.

We are deeply concerned for the precedent set by our government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments may have an interest to quarantine known sick individuals and groups as necessary (Leviticus 13), but they are not to prevent the church from gathering. This must not happen. The church has authority and performs a necessary and essential function in society, which the civil government simply cannot supply. We must be allowed the freedom of conscience to make essential and necessary decisions for our congregations. We are obligated to rule in our respective jurisdictions according to the Bible. Both clergyman and magistrate must recognize their responsibilities and limitations in the fear of God as both will be held accountable to the standard of His Word.

We deem our governor's stay-at-home order a clear violation of both the separation of powers and liberty of conscience for religious worship, by which our very government was set apart from other nations. Accordingly, we must respectfully disobey the stay-at-home order as it is in direct conflict with our 1st Amendment freedoms to conduct the ministry of the church.

When our deepest convictions are in conflict with the demands of the state, we stand with our fore-bearers: "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29).

Under God and Respectfully,



Ken Carlton (Pastor), Evyn Thompson, Matthew DiGiovanni, Philip Ready, Joel Carlton
(Leadership of Providence Community Church, Crosslake, MN)