

May 13, 2020

To the Honorable Philip Murphy, Governor of New Jersey,

The Bible says, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Man’s essential activity is to live by what God says in His revealed Word, which is, in sum, to worship and enjoy God forever. Before any other consideration—economic, material, or otherwise— the worship of God takes priority. As important as eating, working, and taking walks in parks are for the maintenance of bodily life, they are not man’s true sustenance. Man’s real food is God, God’s will revealed in His Word, and the worship of God. A man may lack everything in life yet if he has the Lord, he lacks nothing else.

It is for this reason that the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment of the US constitution says, “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 . . .” It is also why the New Jersey state constitution specifically begins, “We, the people of the State of New Jersey, grateful to Almighty God for the civil and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy, and looking to Him for a blessing upon our endeavors to secure and transmit the same unimpaired to succeeding generations, do ordain and establish this Constitution.” Moreover, article I, paragraph 3 says, “No person shall be deprived of the inestimable privilege of worshipping Almighty God in a manner agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience . . .”

Based on our God given rights that have been recognized and codified by the US and State Constitutions, we petition you, Governor Murphy, to recognize the lawful assembling of the Christian church in this state. We do not ask you to give this right since it is given and enjoined upon us by God alone, and this right is recognized by both our federal and state constitutions. We do respectfully request that you recognize and make it clear that the assembling of Christians in their respective Christian churches for their weekly and ordinary worship of God is a lawful activity in this state.

Our request is not borne out of selfishness but out of a true love for our neighbors who need the Christian Church to be open and active in the communities of New Jersey. We are driven by a love for our neighbors who need to worship God and fellowship with Him in our weekly Lord’s Day worship, singing God’s praises assembled together, hearing God’s Word read and preached, publicly confessing together our sins to God as one body and hearing His absolution, partaking together of the life in the body of Christ— in a word, being the Church of Jesus Christ. It is because men, women, and children are more than mere economic or material beings that we petition you to recognize the lawful assembling of Christians in public worship. This is what is most needed now, and always, for the good of our state as recognized in the Holy Scriptures and our own state constitution.

We recognize that Article V of the State Constitution does grant you executive power that legislative statutes, such as the Disaster Control Act, N.J.S.A. App. A:9-33, et seq. (DCA) and the Emergency Health Powers Act, N.J.S.A. 26:13-1 et seq. But enactment of these powers do not allow the suspending of God given and constitutionally protected rights absent a compelling state interest and then, only via the least restrictive means necessary. This means that now is the time to recognize, that as our state looks to “re-open,” the Church’s worship of Christ may not be sidelined as a “peripheral concern” or a public assembly that may “endanger the public health” of New Jersey.

The truth is quite the opposite. Assembling together in Christian worship is a salutary benefit without equal, an essential activity, and mankind's very *raison d'être*. When many establishments and organizations have remained opened as "essential," certainly the legitimacy and legality of Christians assembling for worship must be recognized.

You will find that affirming our requests will be welcomed not only by Christians but broadly by all persons of religious convictions who seek to once more gather in their respective religious assemblies. You will also find that by allowing our one, living, true, God to be freely worshipped, our society as a whole will be greatly benefitted.

We pray for you privately and publicly as a Church. We pray for God to give you wisdom and strength during this pandemic. We pray to God that your actions would be guided by a true, civil righteousness, and that you would know that all your judgments will finally stand under God's judgment.

Respectfully,

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Jersey City, NJ

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Hope Church  
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