



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod | Rev. Jeffrey Proctor

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Dear Members of St. Paul Lutheran Church,

After much prayer and thought, and careful review of Executive Order 2020-18 (Governor Ducey's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy, Stay Connected" policy), and in deliberation with the Board of Elders, I have decided not to suspend in-person services at St. Paul Lutheran Church. The midweek Lenten, Holy Week, and Easter services will proceed as scheduled.

St. Paul wrote to the church at Rome: **"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."** The apostle's point is crystal clear: whoever resists the governing authorities resists God. It is only when the governing authorities set themselves up in opposition to God and the Gospel, enact laws contrary to His will, and seek to prevent preaching and teaching in Jesus' Name that Christians are permitted to disobey. At a time like that, Christians are not only permitted to disobey secular authority, but have a responsibility to do so (cf. Acts 5:29).

We are not currently enduring such persecution. I do not believe that Governor Ducey's Executive Order has as its motive the persecution of the Church or Christians. The increasingly stringent civil restrictions the state has imposed have been quite general. The state is obviously concerned with the temporal affairs of men, not the eternal, and has no concern for the well-being of the souls of its citizens. Unto Caesar is rendered what is Caesar's. Our souls are rendered unto God, not the Governor (cf. Matthew 22:21).

With that in mind, I would like to bring your attention to a couple of pertinent sections from Executive Order 2020-18 that demonstrate how St. Paul Lutheran Church will be within legal bounds and in no way resisting the governing authorities by continuing to meet for worship. Section 2a states

Under this policy, all individuals in the State of Arizona shall limit their time away from their place of residence or property, except [. . .] to conduct or participate in Essential Activities.

The policy is quite clear. People are ordered to limit their time away from home, except for engaging in what the Executive Order calls “Essential Activities.” This raises a couple of questions: 1) What are considered Essential Activities? and 2) Are worship services included under Essential Activities? Section 4f reads

Under this policy, Essential Activities include [. . .] engaging in constitutionally protected activities such as speech and religion [. . .] provided that such is conducted in a manner that provides appropriate physical distancing to the extent feasible.

Our gathering for worship is a constitutionally protected activity. Thus, we are in no way acting contrary to the governing authorities established by God. The provision does state that we must maintain appropriate physical distancing, so new measures for seating in the sanctuary and communion administration will be considered and implemented. Instructions for temporary procedures that comply with this Executive Order will be announced at an appropriate time before or during the service.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Proctor