

May 16, 2020

Governor John Carney
820 N. French Street
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Governor Carney,

Thank you very much for your service to our state. We appreciate the difficulty of the challenge that you are facing under the current circumstances.

We are writing to you as concerned pastors in Delaware.

We have complied in every way during this unprecedented time; praying for you and your team, as the Scriptures command us (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

We have patiently submitted to the orders under the State of Emergency Declaration (and modifications).

We have sought to balance our biblical command to gather together (Hebrews 10:24-25), with the commands to submit to our government (Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13-17) and love our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-40), by not posing a health risk to those around us.

We have patiently waited and observed, as the restrictions have become more and more severe.

We have patiently waited, as we have watched people gather in grocery stores, home improvement centers, liquor stores, and abortion clinics. Some of these have gathered in large numbers. These businesses have been deemed by the State of Emergency declaration as “essential,” while churches, also deemed “essential,” have remained empty.

We have been understanding of the concerns regarding hospital capacity, the risks of death to those with underlying health conditions and to the elderly. We have communicated these risks to those we lead and have reached out to make sure those most vulnerable among us are well provided for.

Churches in Delaware have suspended gathering going on ten Sundays. During this time, we have observed the effects of COVID-19 on our state and the nation. We know of those who have lost loved ones, without the opportunity to properly grieve. We have observed increasing levels of fear, anxiety, and depression. While physical safety has been paramount, the emotional well-being of our population has suffered dramatically.

Now, more than ever, our conscience, based on the Scriptures, sees the gathering of Christ’s Church as “essential.” While we have used online platforms and technology to communicate, it would be a dangerous precedent to suggest internet meetings are equivalent to public meetings in person.

The Delaware Bill of Rights states, "no power shall or ought to be vested in or assumed by any magistrate that shall in any case interfere with, or in any manner control the rights of conscience, in the free exercise of religious worship." Our consciences are bound by the Holy Scriptures, which sees the corporate gathering of God's people as "essential" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Our conscience is troubled and we deeply desire to comply (submit to our government - Romans 13:1-5), but first and foremost submit to our God, who has called us to "not forsake the gathering together" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

As of the writing of this letter, "Non-Essential" businesses have been able to reopen with restrictions. But the church remains unable to open.

As you are probably aware, U.S. Attorney General Barr recently issued a statement emphasizing the importance of properly respecting religious freedom:

Government may not impose special restrictions on religious activity that do not also apply to similar nonreligious activity. For example, if a government allows movie theaters, restaurants, concert halls, and other comparable places of assembly to remain open and unrestricted, it may not order houses of worship to close, limit their congregation size, or otherwise impede religious gatherings. Religious institutions must not be singled out for special burdens.

[U.S. Dept. of Justice, Attorney General William P. Barr Issues Statement on Religious Practice and Social Distancing, April 14, 2020](#)

Because we love God and our neighbors, we share the priority of protecting life. Our churches take seriously our duty to care for our congregations, and we will follow the social distancing guidelines and other sanitation procedures recommended by the CDC guidelines. Church gatherings can be carried out following the same health-conscious safeguards applicable to other businesses and organizations.

We respectfully request that the following interim relief be put in place:

1. That churches and other religious bodies be permitted to gather in accordance with strict social distancing guidelines (most likely requiring multiple services to allow for proper distancing), proper health and sanitary measures, restrictions for those with symptoms, and strong warnings against attendance by members of vulnerable populations, all consistent with current guidelines for gatherings issued by the CDC.

2. That, when strict social distancing is being observed, face masks be optional (though strongly recommended) for those in attendance.

As an interim alternative, effective immediately, we would like to gather outside (not in cars), but following strict social distancing. This would follow the same standard that is used in the State Parks.

You have provided Interim relief for "non-essential" small businesses. We are asking you to provide interim relief for us, the church, which you described as an "essential service."

We are asking for no more than what you are allowing at our State Parks, as an Interim Step.

Sincerely,

Concerned Delaware Pastors

Rick Hensley

Lead Pastor

Grace and Truth Community Church
Felton

Rev. Chris Dito

Lead Pastor

Parkview Assembly
Newark

Timothy Dukes

Senior Pastor

Central Worship Center
Laurel

Anthony Wallace

Lead Pastor

Crossroad Christian Church
Dover

Mark Lashey

Lead Pastor

LifeHouse Church
Middletown

Rick Betts

Lead Pastor

Crossroad Community Church
Georgetown

Ryan Coon

Lead Pastor

Calvary Church
Dover

Christopher Rue

Senior Pastor

Word of Life Christian Center
Newark

TJ Harris

Lead Pastor

Trinity Community Church
Hockessin

Bishop Doreina Miles

Lead Pastor

Union Baptist Church
Dover

Rev. Erick Adams
Lead Pastor
First Alliance Church
Hockessin

Jorge Altieri
Pastor
Iglesia Bautista Faro de Gracia
Milford

Michael Andrews
Senior Pastor
Faith Community Church
Camden

Joel Andrus
Assistant Pastor
Lighthouse Church
Milford

Royce Andrus
Senior Pastor
Lighthouse Church
Milford

Jim Agpar
Associate Pastor
Crossroad Community Church
Georgetown

Jimmy Artis
Senior Pastor
My Father's House Ministries Inc.
Milford

John Baine
Adjutant
Rehoboth Temple of Praise
Laurel

Timothy Banks
Lead Pastor
The Life Center, Inc.
Greenwood

Josh Massaro
Lead Pastor
Middletown Baptist Church
Middletown

Dale Mast
Lead Pastor
Destiny Christian Church
Dover

Bishop Anastacio Matamoros
Pastor General
Iglesia de Dios de la Profecia
Georgetown

Jim McBride
Senior Pastor
New Harvest Baptist
Dover

Kimberly McGill
Pastor
Kingdom Empowerment Christian Church
Seaford and Dover

Mason McGill
Lead Pastor
Kingdom Empowerment Christian Church
Seaford and Dover

Cristobal Mendoza
Pastor
Nuevo Amanecer Church of God of Prophecy
Milford

John Mettee
Lead Pastor
Kings Assembly of God
Wilmington

Tina Miles
Prayer Pastor
Delaware in Prayer
Dover

Woody Bates
Lead Pastor
First Baptist Church
Georgetown

Rev. Todd E. Bean
Lead Pastor
Grace Church
Milton

John Betts
Lead Pastor
Abundant Life
Georgetown

Jon Birch
Discipleship Pastor
Recover Church
Seaford

Tom Birowski
Senior Pastor
Harvest Christian Church
Seaford

Richard Blades
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church
Laurel

Justin Bortz
Assistant Pastor
Beacon Baptist Church
Millville

Jonathan Boulet
Pastor
Sycamore Hill Church
Hockessin

John Bowman
Family Pastor
Calvary Church
Dover

Forrust Miller
Associate Pastor
Love of Christ Church
Bear

J. Allen Miller
Senior Pastor
Community Church of Oak Orchard
Millsboro

Michaela and Jordan Mohammadioun
Pastors
3C USA
Delmar

Dr. David Moore
Pastor
London Village Baptist Chapel
Magnolia

Terri Moore
Pastor
Capitol Baptist Church
Dover

David and Kelly Moorman
Senior Pastor/Co-Pastor
Int'l House of Prayer
Dover

Stephen Morton
Pastor of Outreach and Mission
Bible Fellowship Church of Newark
Newark

Jamie Mullen
Lead Pastor
Word of Truth Church
New Castle

Dr. David Munro
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church
Lewes

Paul Bowman

Pastor
Anchor Church
Milford

Rev. Arthur Bracy

DE Bible College Adjunct
Life Community Church
Bear

Jonathan Brazell

Executive Pastor
LifeHouse Church
Townsend

Ken Brown

Counseling Pastor
Crossroad Community Church
Georgetown

Carlton Cannon

Lead Pastor
Clarence Street Church of God
Seaford

Rev. Vern Caswell

Vicar
Holy Spirit Anglican Church
Lewes

Rev. Jeffrey Collins

Pastor
Christ Memorial Baptist Church
Dover

Scott Conn

Lead Pastor
Laurel Wesleyan Church
Laurel

Eric Cooper

Pastor
Bible Church of God
Dover

Tim Munson

Elder
Life Community Church
Newark

Bill Nack

Pastor
Bethel Charge
Laurel and Bethel

Jesus Negron

Lead Pastor
Idd Casa de Transformacion
Dover

John Nelson

Lead Pastor
Christ Community Church
Wilmington

Kaleb Norris

Senior Pastor
Pleasantville Baptist Church
New Castle

William Oakley

Family Life Pastor
Immanuel Church
Wilmington

Steve Peterman

Pastor
Living Hope Ministries
Milford

Dewayne Pierce

Lead Pastor
Real Life Community Church
Middletown

Gerald Pierce, Sr.

Senior Pastor
Holy Hill Worship Center
Middletown

James Couzens
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Country Chapel
Millsboro

DuAne Davis
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Seaford

Robert Dekker
Lead Preacher
New Covenant Church
Lewes

Humberto Delcid
Lead Pastor
Idd Camino de Vida
Bridgeville

Carlo DeStefano
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Fairwinds Baptist Church
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3C USA
Delmar

Justin Rittenhouse
Pastor
3C USA
Delmar

Paula and Michael Rittenhouse
Pastors
3C USA
Delmar

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Citadel of Praise Church of God in Christ
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Long Neck United Methodist Church
Long Neck

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William Donato

Pastor
House to House Ministries
Wilmington

Jim Dorton

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Three Stones Church
Dover

Winfred Duffie Sr.

Senior Pastor
Greater Glory Kingdom Ministries
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Laurel

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Kingdom Worship Ministries
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Living Waters Christian Church
Kenton

Charlie Ross

Elder
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Smyrna

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Isaac Ross

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Miracle Revival Center
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Phillip Ruiz

Pastor
Hope Community Bible Fellowship Church
Milford

Maleia Rust

Pastor
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William Sammons

Pastor
The Orchard
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The River Church
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Jimmy Ezell
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North Baptist Church
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Wayne Stone
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Roy Harrell

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Bethany Beach

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Milton

Jack Weight
Lead Pastor
Catalyst Community Church
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Floyd Wheeler
Senior Pastor
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C. K. White
Lead Pastor
Bayview Baptist Church
Laurel

John Willis
Pastor
Freedom Biker Church
New Castle

Leon J. Wilson
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Cleveland Lynch
Lead Pastor
Emmanuel Restoration Center
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Ethan Magee
Preacher
Ocean View Church of Christ
Ocean View

Johnny Woods
Senior Pastor
Community Christian Worship
Woodside

Gregory and Mindy Wynne
Pastor
3C USA
Dover and Clayton

Shawn Yoder
Pastor
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Rev. Jim Young
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