



**Saint Johns**  
Lutheran Church of Corliss

Online @ [www.stjohnsperham.org](http://www.stjohnsperham.org) & [www.facebook.com/stjohnslutherancorliss](https://www.facebook.com/stjohnslutherancorliss)

Sunday Morning Bible Study @ 9:00 am | Sunday Morning Worship @ 10:00am | Fellowship Time after Worship

Holy Communion: 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays

Date: 5/22/20

Dear saint of St. John's,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As you have probably heard by now, on May 20, 2020 a joint letter from the Minnesota North and South Districts of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod was sent to Governor Walz stating, "we are announcing that our churches may reinstate public gatherings as of May 26, 2020, with the first Sunday services occurring on Pentecost Sunday, May 31. We strongly encourage congregations to follow our strict protocols for sanitation and social distancing and the limits on the number in attendance." How did we come to such a place as this?

- a) On May 13, 2020, Governor Walz issued Emergency Executive Order 20-56 ("Order 20-56") allowing "non-critical" businesses—such as malls and pet groomers—to reopen at 50% capacity beginning on May 18, 2020, and contemplating the reopening of bars and restaurants around June 1, 2020. Minnesota casinos were allowed to begin opening as early as May 26. Yet, Order 20-56 as of May 20, 2020 continued the indefinite ban on worship services that involve more than 10 participants, "without regard to the size of the venue, social distancing rules, or any other relevant consideration." (May 20th, 2020 letter from Becket law firm to Gov. Walz and A.G. Ellison). Further, "Minnesota offers no public explanation for allowing the Mall of America to operate at 50% capacity with store employees, custodial staff, security, and guests for upwards of 8 hours a day, while demanding that houses of worship be banned from holding services at 30% capacity for a short time on Saturday or Sunday." (Becket law firm letter)
- b) This amounted to an "unequal and unfair treatment violates the Churches' cherished constitutional freedoms and, more importantly, hobbles unconscionably their pastoral mission." (Becket letter). In the joint letter from the Minnesota North and South Districts, the Districts have indicated they are compelled to resume public worship services, "doing so in a manner that, at a minimum, complies with the capacity and social distancing requirements that apply to "non-critical" retail establishments." (Becket law firm)

Now that the Minnesota North and South Districts have given the "green light" to gather in violation of Order 20-56, the question becomes how will St. John's Lutheran Church respond? An important reality with this question is that, unlike the Catholic Church's structure, The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and District are advisory for the congregation, who operates within a fellowship with Synod and District. This relationship means, in the case of this situation, neither the LCMS nor District determine whether the congregation reinstates worship or not. As St. John's is a congregation in the Minnesota North District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, St. John's, the congregation is has been given the authorization by District to reinstate immediately public gatherings, following strict protocols for sanitation and social distancing and limiting the number in attendance to 1/3 capacity. (MN North and South letter) However, in so reinstating public worship at 1/3 capacity, this action would be in direct defiance to the law of the land set in Order 20-56. This would mean that by having gatherings of more than 10, St. John's Lutheran Church *could* face legal penalties.

### **Important questions that need to be wrestled with before engaging in civil disobedience to Order 20-56.**

#### **Is this situation a "Daniel in the lion's den moment" for us?**

Does the law in question, Order 20-56, force us to break God's law and boundaries He has established? or Is this an inconvenient, unfair, and dumb law that unnecessarily burdens the church? If it is a law that would force us to deny God or not preach the Gospel, the result is to oppose it forcefully with civil disobedience. However, if it is a law that places inconvenience and unfairness upon the Church, the result is to bear it while pursuing lawful means of protest. Reading Order 20-56, it falls in the category of an unfair law.

#### **Are we being asked to violate God's Word and Commandments by suspending services?**

While our suspending of services, done of our own accord, was in line with the Governor's request due to the spread of COVID-19 - it was done for the safety and wellbeing of the members, in particular, those who are at high risk of infection. In our suspension of services, continuing now, God's Word of Christ crucified and risen is still proclaimed. Our suspension of service does not violate God's Word nor His commandments but in fact are in keeping with them in the care and concern of the neighbor.

### **Does the Governor's Order 20-56, even though greatly unfair, give just cause for civil disobedience?**

The answer is no. Romans 13 places the Christian under the authority of Caesar and his, more than likely, unfair laws. It is only in cases where the law mandates the Christian to disobey God's law and commandments or deny Him that the Christian may disobey (Small Catechism, 4th Commandment). Though Emergency Executive Order 20-56 is an unfair and places limitations on the church - these do not give the Christian just cause to act in civil disobedience for the Order does not mandate Christians to disobey God's law or deny Him. While Order 20-56 treats the church very unfairly, the Order does not fall into the category that calls for civil disobedience and the possibly legal charges.

### **Have the reasons for why we, on our own, first suspended services changed?**

No, they have not. The reasons for the care and protection of the members in our initial suspension of services has not changed. Whether the hospitals have capacity or not, still we are to look after the wellbeing of each other. It also needs to be determined if we can truly fulfill the requirements of 1/3rd capacity, sanitizing, and social distancing. The virus still remains a concern for all the members, as the virus has been shown to affect all age groups.

### **What is correct and gives a faithful *witness* for our children and community?**

This is an important question for us to wrestle with. In confirmation the students learn that they are to listen to their parents and authorities in so far as what they tell them does not go against God's law and commandments. What witness is St. John's giving, understanding the situation, by participating in civil unrest with the qualification of God's law and commandments has not been met? Also, how will the civil disobedience be interpreted and understood by the community at large - when it comes to other laws and mandates? These are not easy questions to answer but they must be considered when faced with such a decision as civil disobedience against an Emergency Executive Order.

### **While we "can" does it mean we "should"?**

The Minnesota North District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has given St. John's the "green light" to reinstate onsite worship services at 1/3rd capacity, following strict protocols. However, just because we can does not mean we should. We must still confront the truth that the virus continues to spread in our area and state and the truth some individuals do have severe complications. We must admit the situation at hand needs very careful considerations with cleaning, sanitizing, and control. For myself, I must admit that I do not feel comfortable to engage in civil disobedience against Order 20-56 considering the reality of the situation. Should we engage in opening worship to 1/3rd capacity as allowed by Minnesota North District - I have to give my opinion that we should not, and as painful and unpleasant it is, follow the guidelines of Order 20-56 and let our voices be heard in opposition to it through lawful means.

### **Why would we continue without without civil disobedience but go forward with the small group of 10 or less.**

- a) Executive Order 20-56 allows us to join together in groups of 10 or less to hear God's Word and receive the Good gifts of the Lord Jesus' body and blood.
- b) The care and concern of all those in our congregation. These reasons have not changed.
- c) The sake of the clear witness to the community of the Gospel and God's Word.
- d) Governor Walz will make an announcement on June 7th with a possible altered plan.
- e) The fact that, while unfair and dumb, the Governor's Emergency Executive Order 20-56 is within his authority and does not force us to forsake the Gospel nor give clear reasons to
- f) The possibility to engage in Lawful disagreement to the Order in a kind and Christlike way.

*In response to the updated guidelines and timeline concerning Governor Walz's Executive Order 20-56 of May 20, 2020 and the announcement of Minnesota North and South District's and the Minnesota Catholic Conference to defy Executive Order 20-56 and allow for the reopening congregations at 1/3 capacity the Board of Elders, having oversight of the spiritual wellbeing of the members of St. John's, the pastor, and his family and also oversight concerning onsite worship and gatherings at St. John's Lutheran Church, Corliss TWP along with the shepherding guidance of Rev. Jared Nies, Pastor, whom is the called Servant of the Word and under-shepherd of St. John's Lutheran Church, Corliss TWP., acknowledge the following.*

We acknowledged that Emergency Executive Order 20-56 of May 13, 2020 does infringe on religious freedom, does not treat the church in a fair and partial way, and determines the church differently to restaurants and other places of business.

We acknowledge that Emergency Executive Order 20-56 of May 13, 2020 gives an indefinite timeline for the reestablishing of groups larger than 10 people at churches while other places are opened to larger groups of people.

We further acknowledged that Minnesota North and South Districts have advised civil disobedience against Emergency Executive Order 20-56 through gathering of no more than 1/3rd capacity with proper protocols for cleanliness.

However, in the acknowledgement of these facts, we the Board of Elders of St. John's Lutheran Church, who are given the oversight of the spiritual well-being and well-running of Worship Services at St. John's Lutheran Church, with the advice and guidance of Rev. Jared Nies, the called Pastor and under-shepherd of St. John's Lutheran Church, have prayerfully and thoughtfully decided to decline any civil disobedience against Emergency Executive Order 20-56 by meeting together in groups large than the prescribed 10 persons in the Order for the following reasons:

1. The law of Order 20-56, while placing inconvenience and unfairness upon the Church, **does not** mandate the Church to disobey the Commandments and Laws of God (i.e. deny His name or the care of the neighbor).
2. The reason for the original suspending of services, done of our own accord, was for the safety and wellbeing of the members, in particular, those who are at high risk. This remains the same and even more so as the virus continues to spread.
3. In our suspension of services, God's Word of Christ crucified and risen is still proclaimed.
4. Romans 13 and the 4th Commandment places the Christian under the authority of Caesar and his, even unfair, laws. Though Emergency Executive Order 20-56 is an unfair law and though the Order places unfair burdens on the church, the Order does not mandate Christians to disobey God's law and commandments or deny Him.
5. We are able to meet together in groups of 10 or less to receive God's Word and the Sacrament of the Altar in allowance to Emergency Executive Order 20-56.

The Board of Elders of St. John's Lutheran Church has made the determination that: In acknowledgement of the concerns of the Minnesota North District's concerns, St. John's Lutheran Church declines to participate in the civil disobedience of gathering in groups larger than 10 persons. We will continue with Phase 1 of the Re-engaging in Public Worship plan which calls for Small Group Gatherings during the week for hearing God's Word and receiving the Lord's Supper as allowed in Emergency Executive Order 20-56 beginning on Sunday, May 24, 2020.

These have been made available to you, the Congregation of St. John's Lutheran Church, in the desire that you are kept informed and also made aware of the prayerful and thoughtful decisions and the reason behind such decisions that have been made by the Board of Elders and Pastor during this unprecedented time.

The Peace of Christ dwell in you richly!

The Board of Elders: Larry Huwe, Head Elder; Chad Mitchell, Elder; Mike Ramsay, Elder

Pastor: Rev. Jared Nies, Pastor.

*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever! Ps 107:1.*