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April 30, 2020

Governor John Bel Edwards
Post Office Box 94004
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Dear Governor Edwards,

In the spirit of continued cooperation as our State works to move through this unprecedented pandemic, I would encourage you to consider amending Proclamation Number 33 JBE 2020 to allow Churches and Houses of Worship to immediately begin the process of reopening by following specific best practice guidelines.

My reasoning stems from the public unrest that is unfolding across the Nation and here in Louisiana with regard to peoples' freedom to practice their faith. As we both know, religious liberty is a bedrock principled right from which our freedom flows. It is the foundation for what makes America unique.

Concern is growing that faith-based leaders are growing weary of the continued prohibition to reopen their churches, which may lead to many beginning to ignore the orders. This action will place many in our law enforcement communities in precarious positions, since the enforcement against those of faith are delicate at best. As other states begin reopening and unrest in the Legislature continues, I believe many faith-based congregations will begin to meet with or without guidance.

I would offer that we are be better served by taking a proactive approach by publishing reopening guidelines that take a phased approach to faith services restarting. Without guidance based on best practices in place, this could be disastrous.

Attached is a draft set of guidelines for churches that is based upon what some states, like Texas, have published and best practices developed by members of the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss the matter in more detail.

For Louisiana,

Jeff Landry
Attorney General

Guidelines for Opening Houses of Worship

Houses of Worship should begin putting in place plans to reopen and operate their ministries according to the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). What follows are best practices and tips for churches and places of worship to consider when crafting reopening plans.

ENCOURAGE AT-RISK INDIVIDUALS AND THOSE WITH SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS TO STAY AT HOME

As you begin to consider reconvening gatherings at your Houses of Worship, people in high-risk demographics should be encouraged to not physically attend regular worship services. According to the White House plan, vulnerable individuals (the elderly and people with certain underlying medical conditions) should remain sheltered in place until Phase Three. Houses of Worship should attend to these congregants and, if possible, make special accommodation for them – such as continuing to live-stream worship services, provide drive-in services, or provide a senior service, exclusively for those 65 and above to attend in person.

EXERCISE BEST SANITATION PRACTICES

Houses of Worship should implement best sanitation practices. Consider implementing the following protocols:

- Take the temperature of people who attend services.
- Require everyone to use hand sanitizer upon entering the building.
- Nurseries and childcare facilities are discouraged in the initial phases. However, if they are utilized they should comply with CDC [guidelines](#) for childcare facilities.
- Disinfect high traffic areas, including restroom facilities between uses.
- Remind members to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Encourage members to wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- During the initial phases, the use of pew Bibles and hymnals should be discouraged. When they are used they should be regularly sanitized according to best practices.

MAKE OTHER APPROPRIATE ADJUSTMENTS

In addition to the sanitation practices, Houses of Worship should consider these guidelines:

- Do not pass offering plates, but instead collect tithes and offerings in a central collection box (such as a basket placed near the back of the sanctuary). Encourage online giving.
- Close certain common areas where people are more likely to closely interact.
- Do not pass out literature such as church bulletins. If you do pass out material, ensure that ushers are wearing gloves and that any material handed out to parishioners has been sanitized.
- When administering the sacraments, do not pass around a communal bowl. Provide the elements individually. The goal of these practices is to ensure that multiple people do not come into contact with the same surfaces and objects.
- If your Houses of Worship have greeters at the doors, make sure they do not shake hands with members and visitors. Likewise, if you have a “greeting time” as part of your services, waving or bumping elbows should take the place of hand shaking for the foreseeable future.

- Adjust seating configurations to allow for increased social distancing. For churches that use individual chairs, consider spacing the chairs out. For Houses of Worship with pews, consider roping off every other pew. Families could be encouraged to sit together but maintain the recommended distance of six feet between families.
 - Houses of Worship may take different approaches to this based on their circumstances and set-up, building size, number of facilities, and their configuration. In the early phases, to abide by CDC guidance, some churches may need to have multiple services to enable proper social distancing. Others may be able to spread out over their different facilities.
 - Houses of Worship should consider instituting a graduated process of capping attendance. Start by allowing a certain level of occupancy and subsequently raise it by a percentage as CDC guidelines allow for further opening up. As the occupancy cap increases, the number of different facilities in use will go down.

Leaders set the tone for their flock. Consider going out of your way to model recommended behavior. Your calm and cheerful demeanor can encourage congregants to adopt best practices.