

Hon. Premier Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
M7A 1A1

January 25, 2021

RE: REOPENING ONTARIO CHURCHES

Dear Premier Ford:

Thank you for your leadership during this worldwide pandemic, which has affected so many people in Ontario and abroad. We are grateful for your hard work and efforts to keep Ontarians safe. We pray that God would give you the wisdom needed to continue making decisions that keep people safe, while protecting our economy.

We are writing this letter to express why we strongly feel that churches in Ontario should be considered an essential service. As a church, we are deeply concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic and support many of the government's decisions and safeguards put in place to reduce spread of the virus. We also stand with the local officials who follow provincial guidelines designed to keep the public physically healthy. We have implemented these safeguards at our church and have observed no transmission of COVID-19 to date.

We do, however, want to raise a significant concern: the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the people of Ontario. For centuries, God fearing churches have followed the Lord's biblical leading in our communities by bringing hope into hopeless situations and light into dark places. We stand against the evils that can cause societies to self-destruct and unravel, and stand with those in need by endeavouring to show love and compassion.

First and foremost, this is accomplished by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, news everyone should have the opportunity to hear and consider. Jesus promises hope to the hopeless. We are not ashamed of this fact, and seek to live it out in our daily lives. As a congregation, we show the love of Christ in many tangible ways, including but not limited to:

- An ESL ministry to help those new to Canada learn English;
- A refugee resettlement - working to sponsor and bring to Canada those from persecuted countries, financed entirely by our church;
- Providing food to marginalized people at the Ray of Hope facility, thereby coming alongside people who are hurting and don't know where to turn;
- Summer Vacation Bible School (VBS) where anyone in our community from JK to grade 6 can attend free of charge;
- Summer ministries for young children and teenagers, which are open to the community;

- Two Sunday worship services each week;
- Weekly children's and youth programs;
- Men's and ladies' ministries;
- Korean and Persian ministries;
- Sports teams with church and community participants;
- Community outreach;

All of the ministries and programs we run are funded by our church members and adherents, a cost that the local government cannot and should not have to bear. We feel this is the responsibility of the church of Christ, and will continue to do so without fanfare simply because this is our calling as Christians. Why do we bring this up? Closing churches during lockdowns hinders this critical work in significant ways.

This pandemic has dealt a heavy blow to the wellbeing of Ontarians, not only physically but also spiritually and emotionally. Because the Church has played such a significant role throughout this desperate and overwhelming situation, we very much see ourselves as an essential service. This designation request is not for the current lockdown, which we are abiding by; rather, this is for any future lockdowns, and constitutes a reminder that churches in Ontario need to be opened as soon as possible in order to continue the work God calls us to.

Thank you once again for taking the time to read this letter and we await your response.

Sincerely,

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