

Summary of Emergency Declaration's Impact on Churches

I want to thank Gov. Mills and her staff for the thorough and open communication we have had through this process. I want to remind everybody that our government has a compelling interest in protecting its citizens from this pandemic. While this recent declaration is more restrictive, I am of the opinion it is still within the bounds of government's constitutional authority. I do not believe that Governor Mills or her staff is in any way antagonistic towards faith-based entities; they are simply trying to navigate through this great challenge while balancing our constitutional rights with public safety.

The most recent declaration is more specific; however, the government is still counting upon our church leaders to operate within the latitude of the regulations with common sense and safety as a priority. In areas where there may not be specific answers, the key to decision-making should be in the administration's words "conscientious in purpose and disciplined in adherence. "

Answers to FAQ's

Can we still livestream our services?

In short, the answer is yes. The questions our leaders must ask themselves are, "Who truly is essential or necessary to produce our services; are we executing these services in the safest fashion with minimal personal contact?" Ministry leaders will have to decide how many participants are required and be responsible for adhering to social distance requirements.

Since churches have been categorized as non-essential, are they allowed to provide essential services?

State and municipal governments are still desirous that churches and faith-based entities will continue to provide essential services such as food distribution, providing essential transportation, and other programs being offered to their congregation and community members. Once again, the responsibility is upon the ministry leaders to make sure that once they deem a service essential, everything is being done to minimize personal contact and maximize public safety. Is the food being left in drop-off areas? Are other items that are being delivered or picked up being sanitized?

What are examples of minimal operations for a church or other non-essential entities?

The emergency declaration does not prohibit safe and regulated operations such as maintenance, security, banking, and other activities that must proceed for a ministry to survive.

What about the concept of gathering in person for Easter either through social distancing in our auditoriums or driving services?

No gathering of over ten, regardless of distance requirements, would be lawful at this time. The concept of a drive-in service where people come to a church parking lot in their personal vehicles is not necessarily prohibited. However, the administration definitely has a preference that we do not promote this option. If ministry leaders decide to conduct a drive-in service, they would have to convince local authorities that they could guarantee that no one would leave their car.

The League does not recommend the drive-in option. I think this is an example where our civic leaders are asking church leaders to follow the spirit of the law and not just the letter of the law. The same principle applies to our online services. Our civic leaders are counting on us to operate within a framework that emphasizes safety and not just our rights. We need to be vigilant and be stewards of our God-given rights; at the same time, I think we should continue to offer respect and compliance to a government that is doing its best to protect its citizens in a very trying time.