

May 3, 2020

Governor Inslee,

I want to thank you for your careful leadership these last couple of months. As a fellow leader in Washington State, I understand at least a small measure of the heavy weight of responsibility you shoulder each day. I am a local church lead pastor of a congregation in Clark County. Throughout this pandemic, I have followed your leadership closely, encouraged our constituents to do the same, and have prayed for you often.

Like you, I want to see our state and communities remain safe and healthy through and beyond this time of crisis. That is the reason I am writing you this letter. I agree with you that COVID-19 is a serious health threat to our state; to our physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental health. I think we probably agree that holistic health requires keeping in mind all of those aspects that impact human flourishing.

In light of that, I am appealing to you to consider slightly altering one aspect of the 4 Phases approach that you unveiled Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>. Under "Gatherings," I believe a carefully expanded approach would do a tremendous amount to encourage the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of Washingtonians through this trying time. To date, most church congregations have not met in person for nearly 2 months. Under the current 4 Phases approach, that timeline looks to be mid-July or later before congregations of over 50 could meet again. I believe this puts an undue burden on our spiritual communities, further exacerbating the numerous mental and emotional stresses we are all experiencing in these days. I'm on the frontlines of this every single day, and I know you are as well.

Would you consider the following approach? If spiritual gatherings could be given the same consideration as restaurants or movie theaters, I think it would do wonders to relieve some of the fear and frustration so many in our state are wrestling. If spiritual gatherings could be included in phase 2 at 20-25% capacity, and phase 3 at 40-50% capacity, it would dramatically ease the tension and uprooting that so many are experiencing through this time. This caveat would include strict adherence to cleaning and social distancing guidelines. This slight adjustment would present no greater health risk than the current policy.

Here is what I mean. Restaurants are able to open at up to 50% capacity in phase 2. This means that the Red Robin a couple blocks from our church building is able to open, 7 days a week, at 50% capacity each day for lunch and dinner. Our four daughters love Red Robin, and we just did curbside pick-up last night for my 11-year old's birthday, so I know that restaurant quite well. That Red Robin has a dining capacity (with the bar closed) of around 200 people in the dining areas. This means 100 people could be dining at a time. If the tables turn over every hour, from 5-9pm nightly, 400 people—many complete strangers—will be walking in and out of that dining area on a single night, being served by the same wait-staff, using the same restrooms, etc. In phase 3, the movie theater around the corner from that Red Robin will be able to open at 50% capacity. We go to that theater a lot. It has a number of viewing rooms, some that seat more than 200. In one of those theater rooms on any given day, over 100 perfect strangers can watch a 2-hour movie, and the theater itself can turn that room over every few hours for up to 6

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different showings during an operating day. This means 600 different people will walk in and out of that one theater room that day alone. That theater is a Regal 16 and can operate every one of its rooms at 50% capacity in phase 3. That's potentially thousands of people walking in and out of the same doors, using the same arm rests, bathrooms, handrails, etc. every single day and evening. Even with intense cleaning, if you factor in a slight bit of human error, that is a lot of people with a lot of germs in proximity to one another in phase 3. And that theater can be open 7 days a week.

In these phases, hundreds of people will be gathering—in restaurants and movie theaters—day after day and night after night. All I'm asking is that this same consideration could be given to those who would want to choose to gather—safely, responsibly, and in observation of all social distancing guidelines—in a church facility, once a week for 90 minutes. Our church facility is 60,000 square feet. We have 500 parking spaces on 8 acres of land. Our auditorium has a capacity of 1,000 seats. If we could operate at 25% capacity, this means that 250 people could enter the building (we have 3 separate spaced out entry points at different sides of the building), the auditorium (we have over a dozen different points of entry to this room on the main floor and balcony), sit 10+ feet apart from other families, sing, listen to a sermon, and then safely exit to the parking lot and go to their homes. Once a week. No childcare. No kids or youth programs. Additionally, these are not perfect strangers. These are people who know each other well and have a vested familial interest in responsibly guarding each other's health and safety.

I think it will put considerable stress on the social fabric of our communities if hundreds of people can rub shoulders (literally) at Red Robin and Regal 16 day and night, while the church building on the same block is prohibited from unlocking its doors once a week. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be in this line of work. Please consider adjusting this policy to meet the holistic needs of all Washingtonians. We are praying for you and working to support you and all our leaders, Governor Inslee. God bless you.

Sincerely,

Andrew Murch  
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