

Open Letter to Governor Brown

May 21, 2020

Dear Governor Brown,

We are a group of protestant ministers living and doing ministry in Hillsboro and the surrounding areas. We are writing to you to thank you for your leadership. The restrictions and guidelines set up by your task force indicate to us that loving care and compassion for the citizens of Oregon, along with sound science and good data, have guided your decisions in these pandemic times.

We were dismayed by the lawsuit filed against your administration by ten congregations and 21 individuals, ostensibly in the name of freedom and the exercise of religion. We were further appalled to hear of the misguided ruling of Baker County Circuit Judge Matthew Shirtcliff to render these restrictions "null and void," encouraging faith communities to freely assemble in their buildings despite the serious risks.

Furthermore, we take exception to the suggestion that the restrictions implemented to slow the spread of the coronavirus have closed our churches. We have not closed our churches. We have pivoted. We have adapted. We have gotten creative. We are worshiping communities and that is what we are doing... worshiping... on Sunday mornings, in Zoom meetings and conversations, streaming on social media platforms, and in our service to those most in need in our community... all the while maintaining the guidelines set up by health professionals and your task force.

We certainly acknowledge that this time has not been easy for any of us and we are all dealing with unanticipated hardships. Nevertheless, we continue to find creative and innovative ways to serve our congregations and the communities in which they reside. So please know that the few congregations named in this lawsuit do not speak for us nor, we believe, do they speak for thousands of faith communities around the state whose core mission is to love God and neighbor.

Respectfully,
Rev. David Eppelsheimer
Pastor, Community of Christ Church

Rev. Clay Andrew
Pastor, Hillsboro United Methodist Church

Rev. Tracie Bullis
Pastor, Old Scotch Church

Rev. Adam Hange
Pastor, Hillsboro First Congregational Church

Rev. Jorge Rodriguez

Pastor, Las Naciones Iglesia Metodista

Rev. Karen LaJoy Smith
Rector, All Saints Episcopal Church

Rev. Julie Smith
Spiritual Care Manager, OHSU Tuality Healthcare

Rev. Bob Stebe
Pastor, Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

Rev. Karen Tiegs
Assisting Priest, Ss. Peter & Paul / Ss. Pedro y Pablo Episcopal