



An initiative of WISCONSIN FAMILY COUNCIL

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Religious Liberty During a Pandemic

Dear Pastor,

We believe that government, in principle, is a good thing; and Scripture is clear that governing authorities are ordained by God. Romans 13 and other passages are clear that governing authorities are to punish evildoers and promote the welfare of citizens.

How are we to view and respond to our governing authorities in a time of crisis like the current pandemic?

We should submit to the directions of our governing authorities. We may not agree with some specifics, but as a general rule it is fair to assume their motive is to protect the health and well-being of their fellow citizens, absent evidence to the contrary. Further, love of friend and neighbor are powerful arguments for taking precautions that promote the health and well-being of all.

But is submission an absolute requirement? Scripturally speaking, we can never say that obedience to a governing authority is always required. There are times when with Peter we conclude, “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Daniel praying three times a day contrary to the command of Darius is another obvious example (Daniel 6).

Some recent events gave us all cause for concern. When some authorities in our state were prohibiting a church service where people stayed in their vehicles in a parking lot, that seemed to be an unreasonable restriction, especially since people were allowed to “congregate” in other parking lots (Menards and Walmart come to mind). It seems to be too easy for some in high places to exercise their authority in ways that are inconsistent, inconsistent with the needs of the hour, and certainly inconsistent with our constitutional rights (rights that are recognized as God-given, not government-granted).



Attorney Rick Esenberg, president of Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty said in a ZOOM conference earlier this month that we should view the current circumstances with “tolerant skepticism.” In other words, we temporarily sacrifice a measure of our constitutionally protected rights for the greater good (that is the tolerance part), but we view additional or prolonged governmental restrictions, in the absence of compelling rationale, with at least a measure of skepticism.

We had clear evidence of the need for “skeptical tolerance” when parking lot services were being prohibited.

Governor Evers last week communicated his intent that this shut down will continue through May 24. He gave few details for what happens on or leading up to May 24th. And he apparently is treating the entire state as if the entire state is suffering equally from the virus when, in fact, it is not. By the time you read this, a legal challenge will likely have been filed against his order.

God has seen fit to bless this country with religious freedom.¹ I am not telling you what your church should or should not do during this crisis. I am just reminding all of us that there are lines that government should not cross.

If a church wants to host a “drive-in” service, where all of the physical distancing guidelines are observed, they certainly ought not be restricted from doing so.² If someone wants to peacefully pray outside an abortion facility, as long as they are conforming to physical distancing guidelines, they ought to be able to do so. **We should be extremely cautious about yielding up constitutional rights too quickly and easily.**

I encourage you to read this article by Dr. Albert Mohler, even though it is a little on the lengthy side. You can read the article online [HERE](#).

I also suggest you read US Attorney General William Barr’s speech on religious freedom, given to the Law School at Notre Dame on October 11, 2019. You can access it [HERE](#).

And finally, [HERE](#) is Attorney General William Barr's official statement from the DOJ relative to the need for governing authorities to not single out churches or ministries for restrictions that are not being imposed on others.

In light of the current situation in our state, I suggest the following actions:

- Pray for our Governor to come to faith in Christ and to make wise decisions based on facts and principle, not fear or politics. Lead your people to pray for him in ways that are appropriate.
- If you have concerns about how this shut down of our state is being handled, communicate those concerns respectfully to the Governor, Lt. Governor and to your state representative and state senator. Encourage your people to do the same if they share your concerns.
- Not everyone is going to disagree with what the governor is doing, let alone agree on what he should be doing. Be respectful of those who differ with you. Help your people understand that we don't have to agree with or like everything, but at the same time we should not vilify anyone who takes a different position. (E.g., calling people you disagree with ugly names like "Hitler" or "Nazi" is neither helpful nor Christ-like.)
- Remember that Romans 8:28 is still true. God is good—all the time. And we must remember that He will bring good to pass out of this shut down. Our responsibility is to respond in ways that are biblically informed and faithful to Christ.

When all is said and done, our goal should be to make sure our churches come out of this crisis with a clear testimony of love for God and love for others. If that doesn't happen, we have failed. If it does happen, everything else pales in comparison.

In Christ,



WFC Church Ambassador
Dave Lingle

¹From the US Constitution, First Amendment: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*"

²I am not advocating churches should do this, or that it is a good idea. I'm just making the case that they should be allowed to do so without fear of reprisal from governing authorities.