

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Minneapolis Clergy Send
Letter to Governor Walz
encouraging amendment to
Executive Order 20-62

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[Minneapolis, MN] This letter was sent in response to Governor Walz's executive order reopening houses of worship. The letter was signed by clergy leading major congregations in Minneapolis. Rabbi Marcia Zimmerman and Rev. Tim Hart-Anderson are available for any questions or official interviews.

Dear Governor Walz,

Thank you for your leadership during these difficult and challenging times. We appreciate the work that you, Lt. Governor Flanagan, and your administration have done to keep Minnesotans safe during this unprecedented health and economic emergency.

We are your partners in this endeavor. As spiritual leaders, we are coping with the stress and anxiety of our congregants and community. We have provided pastoral counseling to those in our congregations infected with COVID-19, and comforted families who are grieving their loved ones who have died from this virus. During Stay At Home Minnesota, we all pivoted and temporarily moved our worship and learning to virtual platforms. While our decision to conduct activities remotely was difficult, we know it is in the best interest of the health and safety of our members.

We believe that the May 23 Executive Order 20-62 permitting religious institutions to open to one fourth of a congregation's capacity, but no more than 250 individuals, for worship is problematic. As clergy from congregations in Minneapolis, we are aware that congregating indoors carries with it incalculable risks. For the foreseeable future, we will continue practicing our faith without gathering in person.

It is our understanding that previous executive orders had provisions for local municipalities to implement additional restrictions to meet the needs of their unique constituents. The May 23 order does not seem to provide for this. We respectfully request that you amend executive order 20-62 to include the ability for local governments to provide their own direction to religious congregations.

Our houses of worship are filled with devoted and observant Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Humanists. Our faithful include many who have underlying health conditions that make them more vulnerable to the most severe impacts of the virus. We are eager to gather again in person, but not until it is safe to do so.

Amending the order to give local jurisdictions authority to be more restrictive would help safeguard public health in those areas where COVID-19 is surging.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you concerning this matter. We are available for consultation at any time.

Sincerely,

Reverend Dr. David Breeden
First Unitarian Society

Reverend Dr. Timothy Hart-Andersen
Westminster Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Dan Collison
First Covenant Church

The Very Reverend Paul Lebens-Englund
St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral

Reverend Jen Crow
First Universalist Church of Minneapolis

Reverend Dr. Paula Northwood
Plymouth Congregational Church

Imam Makram Nu'Man El-Amin
Masjid An-Nur (Mosque of the Light)

Pastor Peter Nycklemoe
Central Lutheran Church

Imam Dr. Hamdy El-Sawaf
Islamic Community Center of Minnesota/
Masjid Al-Amin (Mosque of Faith)

Reverend Dr. Laurie Pound-Feille
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Reverend Al Gallmon, Jr.
Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church

Reverend Judy Zabel
Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church

Senior Rabbi Marcia A. Zimmerman
Temple Israel