

March 4, AD 2021

California Department of Public Health
Sandra Shewry, Acting Director
Dr. Erica Pan, Acting State Public Health Officer
PO Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

Dear Acting Director of Public Health and Public Health Officer,

From time immemorial, in the traditions of both the Western and Eastern Christian churches, the song of the congregation has been a part of Christian corporate worship before God the Blessed Trinity. The Apostle Paul exhorted Christians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16). In psalmody, hymnody, and liturgy, through the centuries Christians have raised their voices in sung thanksgiving, petition, instruction, and admonition—in times of peace and in times of peril.

Under present COVID-19 California state restrictions, congregants who would gather indoors are forbidden from singing such psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

- ❖ I/We believe that the song of the congregation belongs to the free exercise of our faith.
- ❖ I/We recognize that those who would attend services do so by their own choosing, and are free to attend or not attend.
- ❖ I/We affirm that our love for our fellow congregants will move us to alter corporate song in our worship as conditions (i.e., infections) in our respective congregations necessitate.
- ❖ I/We acknowledge the God-given authority of civil leaders to promote good and punish evil (which includes the godly protection of citizens) and I/we pray for their success, yet I/we also acknowledge the limits that God has placed on civil authority (Matthew 22:21).
- ❖ I/We believe that well-meaning as the restrictions that limit congregational song to outdoor gatherings may be, the unintended obstacles to those who want to sing are many, including...
 - Inclement weather conditions, and for many congregations inability to provide shelter during rain, snow, wind, hot or cold weather
 - Space limitations, as not all congregations have ample outdoor space to accommodate worship outdoors
 - Conflict with other audible outdoor activities and events (e.g., lawn mowers, leaf blowers, road construction, home construction, auto traffic, air traffic)
- ❖ I/We believe that the restrictions on the free exercise of our faith have gone on for too long (at the writing of this statement, almost 12 months).
- ❖ **I/We call on you to lift the restrictions on congregational singing indoors** (still to be masked and socially-distanced) at religious gatherings.

Cordially,