



LUTHERAN CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



The Honorable William P. Barr
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington D.C. 20530-001

June, 1, 2020

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

Grace and Peace be yours in Christ Jesus.

Religious Liberty, Religious Exercise is Essential for the Solutions Needed for Today

My name is Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, Executive Director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty (LCRL) located in Washington D.C. and the Speaker Emeritus of the “Lutheran Hour,” the longest running Christian radio program in the country. I write today on behalf of the LCRL, our board Chairman, Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, and on behalf of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (L.C.M.S.) to thank you for your support of our 1st Amendment religious liberty, religious exercise protections amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. I also write out of our growing concern for the weaponization of politics which seeks to diminish the “essential” role of the Church and its people in the public square, forcing the crucial legal redress by Minnesota Lutheran Churches (see attached “People of God” letter), the Roman Catholic Church, and the leaders of the Beckett Fund. These legal actions are necessary to maintain 1st amendment conscience protections, to be the Church for others without fear of government coercion or discrimination.

Religious liberty is a precious jewel in our country, one to be rigorously defended for all. Ours is a church body that was drawn to America because of the promise of such liberty. Fleeing religious persecution in Germany, 707 people risked all, voyaging to America in 1838 to establish a community in St. Louis, MO that could worship God faithfully and freely. The promise of religious liberty unleashed a faith-motivated, entrepreneurial spirit that grew from a few hundred people to a church body that today numbers 6000 congregations and nearly 2 million believers. And, these religiously free people not only built churches, they built schools and high schools (now over 2000 strong), Universities (8 across the land), Seminaries, Publishing Houses, Hospitals, Assisted Living Facilities, Nursing homes, Adoption Agencies, Ministries to the deaf, Ministries to the Mentally Disabled, and others. We are a body of believers who have experienced the power of putting our 1st amendment freedoms to work in

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service to our neighbors. Such religious liberty protections and responsibilities were “essential” to overcoming problems then, and they are essential to overcoming problems we face today.

That’s the main purpose of our letter today. We as a church body are concerned about a growing intolerance for the moral voice, even the Gospel voice, of the Church in the public square. The discriminatory intolerance demonstrated during this pandemic against our churches in Minnesota, is a sign of a growing abuse of government and of the weaponization of politics to silence the public voice of the Church through policies and regulations that unfairly discriminate against the Church as an essential, public institution. Please see the attached letter for a more detailed, legal argument to this effect. Note as well, a public demeanor throughout that is honoring to government officials, respectful to the challenges of the present crisis, concerned about the issues of our fellow citizens as well as the issues important to the Church and its people. But please also note our support of appropriate redress to government overreach.

As a Church body we believe that we have a sacred responsibility to be a public voice in culture. That said, we also believe that God has a unique role for good government in our lives as well. When Jesus says to “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s (Matthew 22:21), He teaches that God is at work in the world “two distinct ways.” One, to preserve our broken world through the various vocations of people (public officials too), the other to save the world through His gracious work alone. Lutheran, Two-Kingdom theology, which differentiates the spheres of Church and government, as well as their methodology and purpose is the seedbed for civil liberty in America from its beginning. James Madison wrote about the unique blessing of this way of organizing our culture in a letter to Rev. Schaeffer, Dec. 3, 1821, saying:

It illustrates the excellence of a system which, by a due distinction, to which the genius and courage of Luther led the way, between what is due to Caesar and what is due God, best promotes the discharge of both obligations. The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error...that without a legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity.

In the spirit which respects and honors the governmental role as a necessary, preserving gift of God (Romans 13), we prayerfully ask you to vigorously, boldly continue to protect the Church’s 1st amendment right of religious liberty, an essential voice in the issues of the sanctity of all life, the defense of marriage, and educational freedom.. Please know that our prayers are with you always. God bless you in your leadership and your service.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Gregory P. Seltz, Executive Director
Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty
Speaker Emeritus, The Lutheran Hour

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President
Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty
President, L.C.M.S