His Excellency Charlie Baker Massachusetts State House Office of the Governor Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

We, the undersigned Massachusetts faith leaders want you to know that we have been praying for you and all those in authority with increased fervor over the past two months.

We care deeply for the health and welfare of our congregations and our communities. We recognize the risks and uncertainties surrounding COVID-19, and the extraordinary measures we are all having to take, and we have continued to serve, especially in feeding the hungry and comforting the many who are suffering now.

While we have been praying and serving, we have also been watching. We have seen how marijuana dispensaries, liquor stores and abortion clinics have all been deemed "essential," but churches and other places of worship have not. We are grieved by this, but we have been patient, and peaceful.

However, church IS essential for us. Your order of March 23rd would forbid us from gathering together to worship God, but the word of God commands us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We have done our best to temporarily adapt to extraordinary circumstances, but this must not continue.

It is also clear that church is essential under both our state and federal Constitutions. The free exercise of religion and the freedom of assembly are prominently enshrined in the first amendment to the US Constitution and the words of the Massachusetts Constitution still declare that "It is the right as well as the duty of all men in society, publicly and at stated seasons, to worship the Supreme Being."

As we look at the date of May 18th, when your order banning gatherings of more than ten people is set to expire, we understand there is a "Reopening Advisory Board." We note with disappointment that, despite the 8,000 churches in the Bay State and the millions who worship in and are served by them, they have no representation on that board. We therefore hope that you will hear directly from us now.

When the phased reopening of our Commonwealth begins, the reopening of our churches must be in the first phase. It is upsetting that, unlike roughly half the states across our nation, churches in Massachusetts were not deemed 'essential' at the outset, but this must come to an end. This is consistent with the federal guidelines for a phased reopening, where in phase one, "places of worship can operate under strict physical distancing protocols."

The U.S. Department of Justice said earlier this week, "For many people of faith, exercising religion is essential, especially during a crisis." They went on to specifically question the Governor of Virginia's treatment of churches as his Commonwealth "has offered no good reason for refusing to trust congregants who promise to use care in worship in the same way it trusts accountants, lawyers, and other workers to do the same." We are asking you to trust us now, so we can better minister to our flocks and in turn assist you in our own small way in your efforts to serve the most vulnerable of the Commonwealth.

We are fully prepared to exercise extraordinary care and precaution to protect the health of our members and our broader communities. Loving our neighbors is part of who we are as a church. We are capable of following the guidelines for social distancing recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, just as other businesses Massachusetts has deemed essential. We are able to take the same precautions that their staff and customers have taken.

Please do not underestimate or dismiss the abilities of the church. Many of us have members who are doctors and nurses. We will listen to their expert advice as well, and they will help us be models of safety.

We ask you to swiftly and publicly recognize churches as essential and ensure that they are included in the first phase of reopening on May 18th.

Sincerely,

Pastor James Hopkins

First Lutheran Church of Boston Boston

Pastor James Montoro

Pioneer Valley Baptist Church Westfield

The Rev. Mark L. Booker

Park Street Church Boston

Pastor Fernando Oliveira

Catedral de Adoração Waltham

Pastor Stephen Georgeson

Rice Memorial Baptist Church Northborough

Bishop Pacific M. Zagabe

Seedtime and Harvest Bible Church Everett

Marlene J. Yeo

CCF Ministries of Haverhill, Inc. Haverhill

Dr. Roberto Miranda

Congregation Lion of Judah Boston

Pastor David Therrien

New Hope Christian Church Swansea

Pastor Roland E Cooper

Destiny Life Center International Randolph & Boston

Pastor Phillip Shearer

North Shore Bible Church Essex

Pastor Stephen Kakaira

New Life International Center Stoneham

Pastor Ricardo Valle

Iglesia La Luz De Cristo inc. Chelsea

Pastor Dean McIsaac

Quaboag Church Brookfield

Rev Raffoul Najem

CCF Ministries Lowell

Pastor David Hill

Abundant Grace Church of Boston Brighton

Pastor Gary Collette

Bread of Life Church Westminster

Pastor Jeffrey Chandler

Cottage Hill Church Springfield

Pastor Graham Jones

Sturbridge Worship Center Sturbridge

Pastor Ronald Grimley

Abundant Life Church Wilmington

Pastor Jeanne O'Leary

New Life Christian Fellowship Fairhaven Pastor Kodjo Agblekpe

Miracle Arena For All Nations Boston

Sam Kim

Intercultural Mission Church North Andover

Pastor Mason Adair

Branch Church Peabody

Rev. Frieda Sebalu

New Life International Christian Center Stoneham

Pastor Bruce Hanlon

Forestdale Church Sandwich

Pastor Mark Broderick

Faunce Memorial Union Church Plymouth

Pastor Juan Barbosa

I.P. Casa de Oracion Camino de Santidad Canton

Pastor Mageldi De La Roca

Centro Cristiano De Adoración Waltham

Assistant Pastor Kevin Hicks

New England Baptist Church West Bridgewater

Rev David Brezina

Messiah Lutheran Church Lynnfield

Pastor William Brian Crump

Lighthouse Baptist Church Holbrook

Pastor. Neftali Matul

Ministerios Vision Cristiana Lynn

Rev. David Young

Westfield Evangelical Free Church Westfield

Rev. John D Brownlee

Massachusetts Baptist Association Chicopee

Pastor Rick McDonnell

West Church Peabody

Pastor Dave Aucoin

Abundant Life Assembly of God Swansea

Deacon Peter Mulholland

Emmanuel Baptist Church Norfolk

William Shoemaker

West Church Peabody

Rev. Revedacs Francis Adonteng

Jesus Power Assembly of God Worcester

Pastor Chris DiGiacomo

Lifeline Baptist Church Haverhill

Assoc. Teaching Pastor Isaias Rivera

Congregation Lion of Judah Roxbury

Pastor Skip Gunn

Lifestream Hampden

Pastor Adam Riveiro

Liberty Baptist Church Easton

Pastor Moisés Domínguez

M.R.S. Ciudad Santa, Redimida y Deseada Salem

Pastor Nickolas Stelzig

Community Baptist Church Lawrence

Pastor Susan J Santos

Ministerio Apostolico Jesucristo es el Señor Lawrence

Pastor John Brackbill

The Church of the Open Bible Burlington

Pastor David Meunier

Plainville Baptist Church Plainville

Pastor Genaro Corporan

CCRA Lowell

Lead Pastor Pete Hoglund

Emmanuel Baptist Church Norfolk

Rev. Dr. Robert A Langevin

For His Glory Christian Assembly New Bedford

Elder Jose Frias

Ebenezer Christian Church Lawrence

Pastor Sérgio Coelho

Brazilian East Gate Missionary Peabody

Rev. Esmeralda Collazo

Movement of the Living God, Inc. Framingham

Pastor David Berroa

Peniel Spanish Christian Church Lowell

Pastor Patrick Kilroy

Chapel on the Hill Shrewsbury

Rev. Dr. Jeremy R. Pekari

Messiah Lutheran Church Lynnfield

Pastor Dr. Montel B. Wilder

Grace Baptist Church Pepperell

Pastor Jaime Perdomo

Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Vida East Boston

Lidelmar Eduardo Cacerees

Iglesia De Dios de la Profecia Inc Lynn

John Busolo

International Faith Outreach Ministry East Longmeadow

Rev. David Martinez

Tabernacle Gospel Church AOG Revere Pastor Huston Crayton Jr

Lincoln Congregational Church Brockton

Fr. Thomas F. Bouton

Saint Ambrose Dorchester

Pastör Wayne Carle

Destiny Life Center International Randolph

Francisco Caro

Pentecostal Church of God Chelsea

Pastor Jack DaGraca

Father's House Family Church Dighton

Rev. Renzo Ventrice

Christian Cathedral Springfield

Pastor Neal Davidson

Hope Chapel Sterling

Pastor Jason Corbett

Calvary Chapel Berkshires Pittsfield

Nick White

Victory Baptist Church Dedham

Rt. Rev. Philip Raczka, PhD

Annunciation Melkite Catholic Cathedral West Roxbury

Pastor Tim Crockett

Bible Way Baptist Church Auburn

Pastor Robert Sargent

South Swansea Baptist Church Swansea

Pastor Robert Sargent

South Swansea Baptist Church Swansea

Pastor Brian Krogh

Mount Hope Christian Church Belmont

Rev. Dr. Eno Mondesir

Pastor Doug Conley

First Baptist Church Webster

Pastor Steve Blumer

Hope Chapel Sterling

Pastor Francisco J. Isaac

Casa de Adoracion Inc.

Pastor Sharon Lunsford

Antioch Church

Pastor Frederick A. Poulin

Grace Gospel Church Somerset

Dr.Rogers Steven Warner

Brockton Assembly of God Brockton

Pastor Tim Hatch

Waters Church North Attleboro

Rev Dr. Richard R. Stewart PhD

Breath of Life Turners Falls

Michael Rondeau

ViewPoint Christian Church Southbridge

Pastor Eric Malachuk

Mount Greylock Baptist Church North Adams

Pastor Joseph Hawkins

New England Baptist Church Medford

Pastor Seth Opoku

Lifeway Baptist Church Int. Leominster

Alejandro Matias

I.M. Movement Of Glory Worcester

Pastor Dave Hanshumaker

Renaissance City Church Bradford

Rev. Luciano R. Taveras

Pastor James Peterson

Calvary Baptist Church Easthampton

Pastor John Volante

Calvary Baptist Church Easthampton

Pastor Edna L. Isaac

Casa de Adoracion Inc.

Pastor David Braxton

The River Church Haverhill

Pastor Tom A. Faulk

First Baptist Church Groton

Bishop H Tenorio

The Growing Church Everett

Katherine Puleo

Weeping Willows Holden

Rev. Paul McManus

St. John the Baptist Peabody

Rev. Aleksandar Vlajkovic

St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral Cambridge

Rev. Nelson R Santini

Iglesia Evangélica Hispana A/D Peabody

Pastor Bill Stack

Haven Baptist Church New Bedford

Rev. Richard. E. Cannon

St. John the Evangelist Parish Hopkinton

Pastor Mageldi De La Roca

Centro Cristiano De Adoración Waltham

Pastor Lori Jane Simmer

CCF Ministries of Haverhill Haverhill

Pastor Donna Hanshumaker

Haitian Baptist Church Cambridge

Pastor Joe Faulk

South Middlesex Baptist Church Framingham

Pastor Christina Desjardins

Lighthouse Christian Church Feeding Hills

Pastor Sharon Porter

Way of Hope Pentecostal Church Quincy

Pastor Patrick Kilroy

Chapel on the Hill Shrewsbury

Rev. Sergio Perez

Harvest Ministries of New England Weymouth

Pastor Jeffrey Bailey

Grace Baptist Church Attleboro

Rev Robert L Riggins

Holistic Life Baptist Church Miniseries Dorchester

Pastor Cristian Borbon

Iglesias Adventistas de L&W Lawrence & Worcester

Pastor Abimael Ayala

IDDPMI Fitchburg

Lider Carmen Delgado

Crossover Springfield

Pastor Ramon Arce

Pentecost Church of God Springfield

Pastor José A Santos

M.A. Jesucristo es el Señor Lawrence

Pastor Wilson Ramos

Charis Centro de Adoración Holyoke

Ventura Loredo

First Spanish Free Methodist Church Lawrence

Elder Robert Olmstead

Lighthouse Christian Church Feeding Hills

Pastor Doug Mann

Berkshire Hills Baptist Church Lee

Rev. Abraham Hernandez

NHCLC New England Springfield

Pastor Raphael Germain

MAHC Church Of God IN Christ Hyde Park

Pastor Baron Rodrigues

First Baptist Church of Bellingham Bellingham

Pastor Chad E. Correia

Mountain View Baptist Church Holyoke

Pastor Thomas Michael

New England Baptist Church Medford

Pastor; Cesar Matul

Ministerios Vision Cristina Lawrence

Pastor Jefte Santos

C.A. Jesucristo es el Señor Lawrence

Pastor Luis Feliciano

Casa de Gracia y Restauracion Fitchburg

Pastor Wilfredo Santos

Kingdom Life Church

Worcester

Pastor Efrain Santa

Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal El Siloé Springfield

Pastor Juan A. Ocasio

La Iglesia Cristo Sana y Salva Inc. Springfield

Pastor Madaline Martinez

Renaissance City Church Haverhill

Pastor Nathan Desjardins

Lighthouse Christian Church Feeding Hills

Rev. Paulo de Tarso Ribeiro

Portuguese American Baptist Church Fall River

Jim Morose

South Congregational Church Peabody

Pastor Roger Qualls

Faith Bible Baptist Church Clinton

Pastor Robert Sargent

South Swansea Baptist Church Swansea

Pastor Blass Mercedes

Iglesia Evangelica Luz y Vida Lynn

Pastor Anthony Galan

Iglesia Adventista la Esperanza Lawrence

Pastor Hector Claudio

I.E. Esperanza De Vida Springfield

Louis Perez

La Piedra Viva Dalton

Jeremias Cruz

Centro Cristiano Salem Lawrence

Rev Victor Parra

Spanish Free Methodist Church New Hope Lawrence

José Bautista

Iglesia Pentecostés Rayos de Luz Lynn

Jeremias Rosa

Apostoles Y Profetas East Boston

Esli Martinez

Metodista Libre de Salem Salem

Ivelisse Vargas

Tabernáculo de Gozo Springfield

Pastor Carlos Barranco

Ministerios Hogar de Restauración Lawrence

Pastor Jainesio Ramos Jr.

Waves of Revival Church Framingham

Diana L. Pares

Iglesia del Dios Soberano inc Holyoke

Pastor Alberto Fonseca

The Salvation Army Casa de Luz Lawrence

Pastor Daniel Trepanier

Fellowship Bible Church Methuen

Pastor Frances Lariviere

Jesus to the Nations Lawrence

Pastor Daniel Trepanier

Senior Pastor of Fellowship Bible Church Methuen

Pastor Daniel Peloquin

Our Father's House Ministry Center Chicopee

Pastor Luis Morales

Vida Real Evangelical Center Somerville

Pastor Esteban Carrasco Jr

House of Destiny Church Southbridge

Pastor James Thomasson

MeetingHouse Church Middleborough

Pastor Dilcia Prudencio

Vida Real Evangelical Center Somerville Spanish Christian Church A/G Springfield

Pastor Erasmo Capellan Jr

Casa de Bendición Springfiled

Pastor Manuel J Hernandez

I.P. Jehova Es Mi Luz Inc Springfield

Pastor Dr. Gabriel Almeyda

Nueva Imagen Ministry Springfield

Pastor Jerry Del Valle

Iglesia Levantando Al Caído Inc. Chicopee

Pastor Juan Feliciano

Calvary's Love Church Springfield

Pastor James A. Fontaine

Friendship Baptist Church Brimfield

Esli Martinez

So. Lawrence Assembly of God Lawrence

Pastor James A. Fontaine

Friendship Baptist Church Brimfield

Pastor Eli Serrano

Restoration Worship Center Springfield

Pastor Christian Cole

Vida Real Evangelical Center Medford

Pastor Dr. Jeff Black

New Life Community Fellowship Pittsfield

Pastors Adrianna & Adrianna Cambara

Ministerio Abba Padre Int'l. Waltham

Pastor Marisol Martinez

Victory Brockton Brockton Assembly of God Church Lawrence

Pastor Manuel J Hernandez

I.P.Jehova Es Mi Luz Inc Springfield

Pastor Michell Plaud

I.P. Casa de Misericordia Inc. Springfield

Pastor Catherine Morales

I.P. Redimidos en Cristo Inc. Springfield

Pastora Evelyn Edwards

C I D Iglesia la Hora Zero Springfield

Pastor Elizabeth Ortiz

I.P. Dios Te Levanta Holyoke

Rev. Robert Wise Jr

Liberty Church Shrewsbury

Pastor Donald Bryant

Retired Pembroke

Rev. Robert Wise Jr

Liberty Church Shrewsbury

Pastor Frank Campos

Community Christian Fellowship Haverhill

Pastor Richard Picariello

Mount Hope Christian Church Burlington

Rev. David J. Beguin

Pittsfield Evangelical Free Church Pittsfield

Genaro Corporan

Casa Cristiana de Restauración y Adoracion Lowell

Pastor Workneh Tesfaye

Emmanuel Disciples Church Cambridge Dr. Diane Gunn, Sr. Pastor

New Life International Ministries Hampden

Pastora Virginia Smith

M. Apostolico Internacional Pan de Vida Inc.

Chelsea

Pastor Steven Ortega

Templo De Adoración, Inc. Lawrence

Rev Michael Johnson

Baptist Temple Church Fall River

Pastor Allen Johnson

Anchor Baptist Church Woburn

Pastor Joseph Coppola

New England Baptist Church West Bridgewater

Pastor Zach Nicholson

The Fellowship Easton

Pastor Guillermo Rodriguez

Vida Real Evangelical Center Medford

Pastor Luis Aldana

Vida Real Evangelical Center Medford

Pastor Benjamin Haskell

Faith Assembly of God Hyannis

Pastor Jose A Arriaza

Iglesia Pentecostes Sinai Waltham

Pastor Lucy E. Rodriquez

Iglesia Pentecostal del Dios Vivo Inc. Chicopee

Abiud Chacon

Centro Cristiano Emanuel - Boston Dorchester Pastor Kristine Zinnanti

Victory Church Sharon

Pr. Sérgio Coelho

Brazilian East Gate Missionary Peabody

Pastor Milagros Polanco

Iglesia Esmirna Lawrence

Rev. Richard Amendola

New Life Christian Assembly of God Haverhill

Pr Robert Paiva

Rivers of Living Water International Ministry-Mirav Marlborough

Pastor Miguel E. Montesino

Christ the Rock Church Boston Dorchester

Pastor Andrés Cisterna

Centro Cristiano Tiempo de Dios Waltham

Pastor Juan Carlos Morales

Vida Real Evangelical Center Medford

Pastor Joseph Biddle

Calvary Temple A/G Fall River

Pastor Ernesto Pineda

Centro Cristiano Emanuel New Bedford

Genaro Corporan

Casa cristiana de Restauracion y Adoracion Lowell

Dr, John Amaral senior pastor

New Destiny Christian Assembly Seekonk

Aleksandr Tsvor

Crosslight Gospel Church West Springfield Bishop Brian C. Greene

Pentecostal Tabernacle Cambridge

Pastor Juan Barbosa

Iglesia Pentecostal Casa de Oracion Camino de Santidad Inc. Canton

Pastor Eric Smith

Collinsville Bible Church

Pastor Karl Vanderhoof

Life Spring Worcester

Pastor David Oluwadara

Day Spring Chapel, Boston Hyde Park

Rev. Louis Zinnanti

Victory Church Sharon

Pastor Benjamin Morales

Vida Real Evangelical Center Medford

Pastor Daniel Kohn

Victory Church Sharon

Pastor David Fisher

New Beginnings Plainville

Jeffmie Arriaza-morales Pastor

Iglesia Pentecostes Sinai Waltham

Pastora Raquel Gonzalez

Iglesia Vida del Reino Worcester

Pastor Dennis Dockham

Disciple of Christ Ministries Quincy

Fr Luke A. Veronis

Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church Webster

Rev. Dr. Roger D. Haber

First Baptist Church of Randolph Randolph

Rev. Carlos Flor

St Thomas Aquinas Jamaica Plain

Pastor Daniel Herr

Chester Baptist Church Chester

Rev. Todd Cravens

Hope Christian Church Winchester

Pastor Elizabeth Frias

Apostolic Ministry Jesus Christ Is Lord Lowell

Guillermo Reyes, Senior Pastor

Eternal Covenant Church Brookline

Rev. Esmeralda Collazo

Movement of the Living God, inc. Framingham

Wilson y Marelina Jiménez

Amanecer De La Esperanza Lawrence

Rev. Dr. Mark T. Oliver

Trinity Baptist Church Brockton

Pastor Alieen Abreu/Robert Abreu

Iglesia Pentecostal Dios Es Bueno Inc Springfield

Pastor Fausto Escotto

Casa de Refugio Betel Lawrence

Pastor Chris Dyer

Fellowship Bible Church Methuen

Pastor Gary Piette

Solid Rock Bible Baptist Church Blackstone

Rev Samuel J. Hollo

The Community Church of Alton Alton

Pastor Bryan A Tomes

Crossroads Community Church Fitchburg

Lider Carmen Delgado

Crossover Springfiled

Graciela Bautista

Iglesia de Dios el Sinai East Boston

Rev Brenda A Brown Pastor

Massachusetts Ave Baptist Church Cambridge

Pastora Erica Nuñez

Amanecer De La Esperanza Lawrence

Pastor Bob Butler

Open Door Baptist Church Belmont

Pastor Henry Garcia

Iglesia Tabernáculo de Gozo Springfield

Pastor Samuel Kasozi

Victory Family Church Int Newton

Pastor Luis Aldana

Vida Real Evangelical Center Medford

Pastor Raphael Germain

MAHC Church Of God IN Christ Hyde Park

Reverend David Langford Sr

Community Christian Fellowship Ministries Lowell

Pastor Jesus Carrasco

Cento Familiar Cristiano EL Sinaí Lawrence

Pastor: Ezequiel Rivera

Iglesia Pentecostal del Dios vivo inc. Holyoke

Rev Victor Jarvis

Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer Lawrence

Pastor Fred Poulin

Grace Gospel Church Somerset

Danneza Torres

New Haven Church Lowell

Rev. Ismael Carrasquillo

Assembly of Christian churches Inc Worcester

Pastores Rodriguez

Generation Without Limits Lawrence

Rev. Joseph James Rizzuti Sr

Cornerstone Bible Baptist Church Worcester