



9 Critical Lenses To Help See COVID More Clearly

THE ELDERS' POSITION ON REGATHERING IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

BY JOSH MCPHERSON, LEAD PASTOR

BY KYLE STRONG, CPA, PASTOR OF FINANCE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020

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Our Position on Regathering in Light of COVID

On the evening of March 11th, my phone started ringing off the hook. Friends in positions of influence were calling from all over the country to process what one described as “very serious rumblings” of “something big coming.” In his words, it was “stock-up-on-ammo-and-beans” big. The next day I talked to the mayor of the City of Wenatchee. He confirmed, “This thing is getting pretty serious.” Later that day the NBA announced it was shuttering its season. March Madness cancelled its legendary tournament. Over the next 24 hours America watched as pro sports and iconic businesses shuttered for this new and strange virus from China.

The following day the elders and key staff of Grace City met at my house. We wrestled over the decision...should we really cancel our church gathering on Sunday? We had never considered such an option before. We were the church that met during blizzards and ice storms. We couldn't remember a time we had “cancelled” a Sunday gathering. Should we start now?

Many churches, to our surprise, already had. With minimal information on the virus, our first question, which turned out to be the most prescient, was...*if we go down this road, where's the off-ramp? If we pull the plug, what's the standard for returning?*

We decided if the schools were staying open, we would stay open too. A few hours later we received word that school was cancelled and all children were being sent home. With much hesitation, we decided to cancel our gathering. A few hours later, our decision didn't matter... all church gatherings were cancelled by the Governor of our State.

That was late Friday afternoon. From there the whirlwind really took off. Saturday morning found my living room full of pastors. The mayor and assistant school superintendent joined us to

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share what they knew and answer questions about how we could help. The last pastor left mid-afternoon, and in my living room our staff circled up and started solidifying plans. Pivoting to a full-online service would not be easy.

I scratched a few sermon notes on a whiteboard as Pastor Adam and Pastor Carey strategized mass communication. They left for the chapel while I stayed to collect my thoughts. Driving to meet them a few hours later, I filmed a message on the fly in a half-finished chapel with no heat and our breath hanging visibly in the cold air. The Story Team guys then raced to the office, edited all night, and finished just in time to broadcast the sermon that morning. We were officially 100% online.

That was 31 weeks ago.

What we were told would be two weeks has turned into 7 months with no end in sight. Our original question that Friday afternoon still remains the most pressing: *“What truly constitutes an emergency, and what is the standard for returning to normal?”* As of this writing (Sept, 2020), Chelan County remains one of only a handful of counties in our state still stuck in a modified Phase 1. You can buy marijuana inside a store, but you can't buy pumpkins outside at a u-pick farm. You can terminate your future kid with an abortion at a clinic, but you can't have your kid's friends over for a birthday party. If your construction site is a government job, it powers ahead unhindered; if it's a private job, the list of regulations all but make progress impossible.

Restrictions are stifling. Businesses are crippled. Schools are stymied. Fear is rampant. The rules change constantly. Double standards abound. Winners and losers continue to be arbitrarily chosen by a heavy-handed and fully-centralized state government. Local government remains neutralized. New mandates flow regularly from press conferences held by our Governor. Division and anger over masks is rampant. Social-shaming and moral browbeating are commonplace. Phrases like “science and data” are weaponized for political manipulation, bias confirmation, and social engineering. Confusion abounds. Families are exhausted. People are reaching their wits end.

The following is our position on why we are choosing to gather again as the Church.

Some Preliminary Thoughts

The following is a series of introductory thoughts, in no particular order, to help frame the conversation.

***Let's Get Together.** At the time of this writing, it is currently "illegal" (a term this paper will take up in detail) in Chelan County for more than 50 people to gather at one time to worship as a church.¹ These arbitrary and unequally applied restrictions (and more) have been in place, with no end in site, since March 15th. Our church family has not been allowed to physically gather for 7 months.

That is coming to an end for Grace City Church, not because the Governor has changed his mind, but because we are now choosing to meet in spite of his continued restrictions. Because these actions will directly challenge that "edict," we felt it necessary to present, in ordered form, the thorough process we've gone through to arrive at this decision.

***Rule of Law.** Some will call our church gathering an act of "civil disobedience." We do not believe this is true. Rather, our gathering is an act of upholding the rule of law (which has been so badly trampled in our state in these days). We do not take these actions lightly. Quite the opposite, it is precisely because of our high esteem for the rule of law, our concern for it's future, and our desire to preserve it for generations to come, that we have taken the time to carefully articulate our position and explain our actions.

***Safety vs. Freedom.** The following is our rationale for why we believe it is not only safe for us to gather our people, but more importantly, it is the most loving thing we could do for our church family and local community. Agree or disagree, we pray this document adds constructively to the necessary and critical

¹ This number and particular regulations have changed continually, and we anticipate will continue to change. Which means by the time you read this, that number could have either gone up or down. Which only serves to illustrate our point; fundamental inalienable rights promised Americans, without exception, by the highest law in the land, are currently being given and taken, adjusted and curtailed, at the whim of one's man prerogative.

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conversation regarding the tension between public safety and government intrusion into our lives.

***Sacred Calling.** It is our job as the Elders of Grace City Church to exercise wisdom and discernment as shepherds of the local body of Christ we've been charged to oversee and care for. This is a responsibility we take very seriously.

***Differences do not equal Disunity.** We realize different pastors and churches will come to different positions on this due to a variety of theological, contextual, and practical factors. The difference in context from state to state and county to county make one blanket approach difficult, we fully recognize. But we also believe there are general principles that should be considered. How they work those out will look different for every church.

This is our attempt to think clearly about this issue so we can faithfully lead our own flock, taking into consideration national realities while focusing more specifically on the practical, local outworking. Other pastors and church leaders may come to different conclusions based on their own study and that is okay. Our unity in Christ is much deeper and stronger than one's take on how to lead their church through such an unprecedented event. We agree with the 17th century theologian Rupertus Meldenius: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

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***Called to Love.** We affirm our calling to love our neighbor and always want to be careful to act in a way that is most loving to the brothers and sisters of our church and the community we live in and serve. We also acknowledge that this will not always mean we act in a way everyone in the community agrees with. The Church has always lived with this tension.

***Careful Thought.** Not all will agree with our conclusions. But while they may disagree, they cannot accuse us of acting rashly, recklessly, or thoughtlessly. We have devoted many hours to reading, studying, and tracking this situation from its very beginning. We have spent countless hours in consultation with legal and medical experts. We have been in almost constant dialogue with locally elected officials. And we have spent considerable time consulting with wise and godly Christian

leaders who serve as overseeing elders to Grace City. Our thinking is the prayerful culmination of many wise perspectives.

***Tension.** The two general tensions for churches seem to be: *“How do we act in fidelity to God and in love to neighbor, when it appears that one could be in conflict with the other?”* And, *“What is our obligation to follow the government when their restrictions appear arbitrary, nonsensical, and unconstitutional?”*

For instance, if we gather to worship Jesus, is that putting our neighbor unnecessarily at risk, and therefore unloving? Or, if the government tells churches they can’t meet, but allows casinos to continue functioning, is there a double standard being applied that should be challenged?

***Camps.** The three general camps we see churches and church leaders falling into are as follows:

- The Bible Camp (*What does God say?*)
- The Neighbor Camp (*What is most loving?*)
- The Pragmatist Camp (*What is most practical?*)

While perhaps over-simplified, we believe this fairly and succinctly captures the fundamental essence of the starting points for different churches. To be clear, we think all these questions are important to ask. We also think there is a priority to the sequence of these questions, especially in times of crisis. While not making this situation any easier, clear cut, or removing the need for wisdom and discernment, our starting point is unapologetically the “Bible Camp.”

***Slippery Slope.** Someone somewhere once said: *“Be careful of the questions you ask; they will lead you to answers you live by.”* We think it is a slippery slope if our starting point is to ask the wrong question. Take, for example: *“What will work the best?”* Or, *“What is most loving?”* These questions, while appearing innocent enough, can subtly lead pastors into a compromising thought-pattern. If they’re not careful, what pastors will really be asking is: *“What will people think?”* At this point, they’ve disqualified themselves from spiritual leadership.²

² Galatians 1:10 “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

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Some Preliminary Thoughts

Our concern is that these questions, if asked out of order, could unintentionally prioritize *practical results* or *people's opinion* over the clear Word of God. Or worse, they could reveal a heart that fears man over God. We believe these legitimate and appropriate questions, when asked and applied at the wrong time, could lead to wrong answers.

Concern for what people think is a real thing for every leader to wrestle with. Rarely have we seen or experienced such levels of social pressure and social-shaming as with the recent "Cancel Culture" phenomenon. But for the leader of the Church, this fear must be squarely faced. It is a dangerous thing to tremble with the fear of man. We do not answer to culture; we answer to Christ. While love for man is our calling, fear of man has no place in the thinking of a leader of the Church of Jesus Christ.

We think loving our neighbor is a really, really big deal. And thankfully, loving our neighbor and obeying God will never be in conflict, unless you define "love" as "never offending anyone." We understand that the Bible clearly teaches we will not always be appreciated or understood. Sometimes loving God will bring scorn from the world. So, we can never gauge whether an act is loving or not based on whether or not the world agrees with it.

***Witness vs. Rights.** Some have stated that we should be more concerned with the *witness* of the Church in our community than the *rights* of the Church in our community. We think this is a nice-sounding, yet misleading, false dichotomy. History records that Church leaders in Germany in 1939 were more concerned about protecting their "church witness" over exercising their "religious rights"...right up to the point they couldn't find their Jewish friends.

If the Church gives up her rights to gather and govern itself, inherent with it will come a violation of many other individual liberties. No society has thrived where religious freedom has been curtailed. The harm is never isolated to one local church or one specific religion, but widespread across that particular society. Therefore, it is not out of self-preservation that we express deep concern about the loss of religious freedoms. Rather, it is precisely *because* we care for and love all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, that our concerns have grown increasingly serious.

Some Preliminary Thoughts

We feel that one of our responsibilities as the Church is to stand for the rights of everyone in our community...even those with whom we disagree. We believe in the rights of every citizen to live free from government oppression, social-shaming, stifling political correctness, and fear of reprisal from the vindictive cancel-culture.

When the Church stands for individual liberties, freedom of speech, civil discourse and dialogue, and a truly free market of diverse ideas, it is a gift to the entire community (including those who don't agree with us). When the Church rolls over on issues of religious and civil liberties, everyone loses. When the Church stands up for itself, it stands up for all.

In the end, if people say they are "concerned for the witness of the Church," but really mean "people may not like us," they will eventually lead the Church into compromise, apostasy, and the loss of God's favor and blessing. It is our fundamental conviction that a church's sloppy thinking, fearful cowering, and abdication of Her authority to a rebellious culture or rogue government will always hurt the true witness of the Gospel more than careful thinking, wise discernment, and bold action wrapped in love and humility.

***Truth.** Our stock and trade is truth-telling. Our job is to tell the truth about God and the world. It is not loving to perpetuate a lie in the name of love, whether it be regarding sexuality, gender, marriage, children, or a virus reeking fear across our community. Many people have been crippled with a level of unnecessary fear. We are not saying that there are no real dangers related to COVID-19. But we firmly believe the fear narrative has been significantly ratcheted up by a 24-hour hyped news cycle, distorting reality and resulting in a level of panic and fear that is simply not warranted.

***Fearless.** We are not afraid and we will not act out of fear. We are not afraid of the virus, the culture, or the government. We believe that all have the potential or capacity to inflict harm (from coordinated social media attacks to unlawful government

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finer). While that does cause us sadness, it does not cause us crippling fear.³

***Spiritual Conspiracy Theories.** We do not believe any one man or woman or group of people are sophisticated enough to orchestrate global chaos. We do, however, believe that behind the social unrest, lies, misinformation, confusion, political agendas, hate, anger, rage, riots, looting, burning, law-breaking, accusing, truth-twisting, attacking, killing, slandering, robbing, pillaging and fear-mongering of our day is an evil spirit orchestrating the destruction of the world. This has always been the case, and stands forth now more than ever in our lifetimes. We must never lose sight of the reality that the backdrop to the Christian life is spiritual war.⁴

***Categories and Lenses.** Social media commentary has turned this into a one-dimensional conversation... *"how many positive cases today?"* We believe it is much more complex than that. While it is not an issue in which we think every church has to share the same opinion, we do think every church should use more than a single lens through which to view it. There is a COVID lens to be sure. But there are is a much broader impact to COVID than just the virus. Consequently, more lenses are needed than just a single viewing port in order to bring this issue into focus. This broader perspective will aid in giving context for making the most helpful decisions regarding how we will lead the church to be faithful to Jesus and love our neighbor.

³ 1 John 4:4 - "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

⁴ Ephesians 6:12-13 - "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

The 9 Critical Lenses To Help See COVID Clearly:

- Theological Lens (what does God say?)
- Constitutional Lens (what does the highest law in our land say regarding religious freedom?)
- Missional Lens (how can we act so as to reach as many people for Jesus' sake?)
- Medical Lens (what does the science and data actually say?)
- Contextual Lens (what does the statistical context say?)
- Political Lens (how is our current political climate influencing this crisis?)
- Societal Lens (how does our response to this crisis affect our communities?)
- Ethical Lens (what are the ethical and moral implications of our actions?)
- Historical Lens (what can we learn from past experiences?)

The Elders' Decision-Making Grid

It is our desire to think carefully through these complex (yet stunningly simple) issues and then communicate our convictions clearly to our church family. We believe unity in the house of Grace City Church is more essential now than ever before.

It is to this end that we have articulated our following convictions under each of the identified lenses. A one-dimensional view of this issue will not yield the necessary clarity for us as a church given how complex this issue has been made. But with each lens carefully focused, we believe a broader perspective is gained.

The following is not intended to represent the totality of our thoughts on each matter; rather, it is a flavor of the informed convictions we have cultivated throughout this crisis. These are not meme-driven social-media-culled thoughts, but studied-conviction arrived at through reading, researching, praying, dialoguing, observing, assessing, and discerning.

Theological Lens

Christ is the Head of the Church

There appears to be some confusion along this matter, so while it may appear obvious, we state it here for clarity. Jesus Christ, not the State, is the Head of His Church. Jesus tells us what to do. He tells us how to live. He governs the affairs of the Church. The State has no God-given authority over any church matter. This is clearly taught in Scripture and was the primary motivation of our nation's founders in penning our Constitution. God is over all things, including both the Church and the State.⁵

We, as elders, are charged with the spiritual well-being of our church

We do not have a choice in the matter of when or how we will lead the Church. We've been charged with caring for the Church in good times and bad; in peaceful times and challenging times; when it's culturally accepted and when it's culturally ridiculed; when the government supports the Church and when the government is antagonistic towards the Church. No matter the direction the cultural winds blow, we are called to listen to God and lead the Church.⁶

⁵ Ephesians 1:22, "And God placed all things under his (Christ) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church..."

-Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."

-Romans 13:1-2, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God."

⁶ Hebrews 13:17 - "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you."

-Acts 20:28-31 - "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"

We are called to give conscientious obedience to human authorities and ultimate allegiance to God.

We owe complete allegiance to Jesus as the Head of the Church, not to politicians or kings or governors as men also under God's authority. Human authority, whether it be a father in his home, elders over a church, or government over a society, is all under the authority of God. This should go without saying, but at no time will the word of man...coming from protestors or politicians...rank higher for us than the Word of God.⁷

Our job as church leaders is to hear from God and lead boldly, not take surveys and bend to the masses.

In a time of social media and social-shaming, it would be tempting for church leaders to lead by taking the temperature of its community or checking the cultural winds of the time and adjusting their direction accordingly. This is a prostitution and violation of their sacred responsibility. Church leaders are to fundamentally ask: "What does God say?" not "What do people want?"⁸

We are commanded by God to gather the saints for corporate worship, and suffer great harm as a body when we don't.

The writer of Hebrews promises the Day of Judgement is coming. Times will become increasingly chaotic, and in those days the Church must not forsake or give up meeting together.

⁷ Acts 5:26-32 - "The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

⁸ Exodus 32:22-24 - Moses said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us.' ... So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

No caveat. No asterisk. The crazier the times, the more essential the gathering of the saints to worship Jesus.⁹

God has created jurisdictions and identified leaders of those jurisdictions.

The three jurisdictions God created are the Family, the Church, and the State. Each jurisdiction has certain God-ordained roles to play in the community for the good of mankind.

The *Family* is charged with the primary responsibility and privilege of overseeing the health, education, and welfare of their the multi-generational family (from young kids to aging parents). The *Church* is charged with faithfully administering God's Word and Sacrament. The *Civil Government* is charged with securing its nation's borders and maintaining law and order.

With each of these jurisdictions God has also identified leaders and granted those leaders authority. The husband is called to be head of the family. The elders are called to lead the Church. And the civil magistrate is called to work for the good of society in representing and working for the people.

When a jurisdiction abdicates their God-given authority and responsibility, or blurs the lines of their God-given authority and responsibility with that of other jurisdictions, everyone suffers.

For instance, God has given the Church the primary responsibility to care for widows and orphans. When the government says, "we'll do that for you," the government gets bigger, the church gets lazier, and more of the righteous poor fall through the cracks. No matter how hard it tries or how good its intentions, the government will never be as good as the Church at caring for widows and orphans because that is not the role God has given government.

Or, God calls husbands to love their wives and lead their families. If the Church steps in and says, "we'll do that for you,"

⁹ Hebrews 10:25 - "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

the husband gets lazy or leaves, the family isn't cared for as well, and everyone suffers. Certainly, the Church helps the husband lead his home by teaching him the Word, calling him to leadership, holding him accountable, and providing him with a community. But, that is very different from taking a responsibility that God did not give the Church.

Sometimes confusion over jurisdictions results in direct sin. For instance, in Romans 12:19, God says that it is a sin to avenge yourself. "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" Then, just a few verses later in Romans 13:4, when talking about government officials, the Apostle Paul says: "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

So, if a man was to track down his wife's murderer and kill him in an act of vengeance, the Bible says that would be evil. But if the government tracked down that same murderer, found him guilty and put him to death, the government would be acting as the very hand of God in accomplishing justice and restoring order to society. Same act, different jurisdictions. One is sinful, the other righteous. Understanding jurisdictional authority matters.

Societal order and human flourishing are predicated upon the three jurisdictions staying in their lane and fulfilling their mandate. Each jurisdiction, when properly functioning, serves to assist and strengthen the other. When righteous civil magistrates defend law and order and keep the peace, individuals are given the freedom to flourish. When a man and woman marry and unite to build strong families, children are raised to respect authority and others. When elders lead a church to love God and others, all are strengthened in their roles in the community.

This brings us to our primary point. Biblically qualified elders bear responsibility for leading the Church. This is not a role given to the government. When the government starts telling churches what they can and can't do, no matter the reason or excuse, they have crossed jurisdictional lines and are working against God Himself. It is the responsibility then of the

jurisdiction being violated to remind the other of its proper place in God's law and design.

Spiritual warfare, edification, unity, growth, strengthening, encouragement, sanctification and means of grace through Word and Sacrament are all experienced in a unique way when we gather that aren't experienced when we don't gather.

When believers lift the name of Jesus in worship, heavenly warfare happens. The Church is strengthened and the enemy is weakened. The shuttering of these meetings and the squelching of these voices (especially when other political gatherings ARE allowed) speaks to a larger spiritual battle at play. This is an evil conspiracy against the Church of Jesus Christ.

Constitutional Lens

- ***We believe that government restrictions are doing little more than unnecessarily restricting individual liberties, specifically the free exercise of religion.***
- ***We believe the COVID crisis does not give the governor carte blanche to restrict individual liberties for as long as COVID exists.***
- ***We believe the governor's current "emergency powers" were wrongly initiated and violated standing legislative law by overriding local authority during a pandemic.***
- ***We believe the governor's current COVID restrictions are unconstitutional, in part, because they are not temporary, but open-ended with no clear end in sight. "Emergency powers" are temporary and have a clear and measurable end. If they don't, then they prove to be arbitrary, oppressive, unreasonable, and, as a result, unconstitutional.***
- ***We believe the Governor has usurped his emergency authorities expressly granted to him by the state legislature as he cannot rely on emergency powers indefinitely while he sorts through an "unending pandemic."***

We have a Constitutional right to be the Church

The United States Constitution is the highest law of the land.¹⁰ It recognizes that political authority in this country is ultimately in the hands of the people, who created the federal government and gave it limited powers to govern in the people's best interest. Any power not given in the Constitution is a power the government cannot lawfully exercise. The restrictions on the

¹⁰ This is not obvious to all. We hear many people regularly fail this simple, civic quiz: *Who is the highest law in Washington State?* "The Governor" is the wrong answer. The Governor is *not* the highest law in our state, just as the President is not the highest law in our nation. They are servants of the highest law in our land, namely, the Constitution. This has important theological ramifications for the Christian. When Peter says, in 1 Peter 2:17, to "honor the Emperor," he was essentially saying, *honor the highest law in the land*. The key question for us as Christians then becomes, "Who is the Emperor?" The answer for us as Christians living in a Constitutional Republic is simple: the Constitution.

The restrictions on the government contained in the Bill of Rights are not fundamentally a grant of rights, but rather a recognition that the government's power to interfere with the people's inalienable rights is limited.

government contained in the Bill of Rights are not fundamentally a grant of rights, but rather a recognition that the government's power to interfere with the people's inalienable rights is limited.

These rights are not given by the government, but by God. The Declaration of Independence recognizes "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness..." As the Declaration goes on to say, the purpose of government is to protect these rights. The government does not give rights and, as a result, cannot take them away.

The Washington Constitution likewise recognizes the authority of the people and the purpose of government to protect individual rights: "All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and are established to protect and maintain individual rights" (Wash. Const. art. 1, sec. 1).

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution says: *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.*

Likewise, the Washington Constitution states: "Absolute freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment, belief and worship, shall be guaranteed to every individual, and no one shall be molested or disturbed in person or property on account of religion..." (Wash. Const. art. 1, sec. 11). It also states that "The right of petition and of the people peaceably to assemble for the common good shall never be abridged" (Wash. Const. art. 1, sec. 4).

Both Constitutions recognize that the enumeration of some rights is not exclusive, and other rights are retained by the people (U.S. Const. amend. IX; Wash. Const. art. 1, sec. 30). Further, the Washington Constitution advocates for a frequent appeal to first principles to protect freedom: "A frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the security

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of individual rights and the perpetuity of free government" (Wash. Const. art. 1, sec. 32).

These principles serve as our guide. The rights of freedom of religion, assembly, and protest, among others, are inherent to each individual citizen. They don't stop or cease to exist during times of war, pestilence, famine, or pandemic. These rights are assumed and spelled out in the Federal and State Constitutions precisely as restrictions on governmental intrusion, not as restrictions on the people.

These rights have not been equally applied in Washington State. Several political figures in Washington State, including Governor Inslee and Mayor Durkan of Seattle, have repeatedly affirmed a citizen's constitutional right to peacefully protest even in the middle of COVID. And, they have done so without placement of restrictions, like social distancing and masks. Some of the protesters have openly flouted the governor's decrees, and yet he has still affirmed their rights. The recognition of such individual rights to protest should also be applied to the free exercise of religion since such rights are given by the very same documents.

The free exercise clause of the First Amendment does not protect grocery stores, abortion clinics, casinos, pot shops, hair dressers, law enforcement or the government itself. None of these activities, however "essential" they may be considered, are explicitly called out for protection in the Constitution. But the free exercise of religion is. As a result, churches shouldn't need to wait for potential discrimination claims like, "the casinos are open, but churches are still restricted," to make a case for reopening without continued government prohibition or restriction.

We have a Constitutional Obligation to Stand against Tyranny

Consenting to tyranny is promoting tyranny and failing in our role as faithful citizens. We are given this right not just as a freedom, but as a mandated responsibility as citizens of a constitutional republic form of government. The people are fundamentally responsible to safeguard their freedoms from government aggression. The Declaration states that the people have the right to alter or abolish their government when it ceases to protect their rights. Indeed, it is their duty to do so.

“Rebellion to tyranny is obedience to God” (Benjamin Franklin, proposal for the Great Seal of the US).

Of course, “throw[ing] off such government”¹¹ is not a step to be taken lightly, nor in the first instance. We are blessed by our Constitutions to participate in the affairs of government in various ways. We can vote. We can speak with and appeal to our representatives. We can instigate legal proceedings. We can gather. We can seek redress of grievances. We can speak and convince others of our viewpoint, precisely because we are a constitutional republic.¹²

In our country, citizenship requires that we be involved in government and STAND AGAINST IT WHEN IT GOES OUTSIDE THE LINES OF THE CONSTITUTION. We are the government’s boss. We hold the government to account. At times, this may require disobeying a rule of the government to stand up for the freedoms we are given by God. The apostles continued to preach the Gospel though ordered to stop. The founders of our nation committed treason by opposing the king. Corrie Ten Boom and her family disobeyed the Nazis by harboring Jews.

¹¹ Preamble of the Declaration of Independence: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to **throw off such Government**, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”*

¹² See “Letter from Chelan / Douglas County Pastors” and “Letter from Chelan / Douglas Counties Small Business Owners” in the appendices. At the request of locally elected officials, in early May we wrote these letters appealing to the Governor to allow us to move at our own pace, as directed by our local health district, through the Governor’s “Safe Start” plan. 30 pastors and hundreds of local business owners signed these letters in agreement. This application, which included our letters of request, was denied within hours of being received.

History is full of examples of godly men and women opposing the government when the government tramples their God-given rights or those of others.

The Danger of Incrementalism

The extension of governmental power is rarely reversed. When the government exercises a power, rightly or wrongly, it is extraordinarily challenging to once again corral the government within proper bounds. Each assertion of authority sets a precedent for the next one. Over time, the people grow dull and do not vigilantly guard their freedoms, even willingly abandoning them for evaporating offers of security.

No One Is Above the Law, Including the Government

A fundamental principle of our government is that no one is above the law, including the government and government officials. Furthermore, the ability to make law in this state and country is expressly vested in the legislature or Congress, respectively. “The legislative authority of the state of Washington shall be vested in the legislature, consisting of a senate and house of representatives, which shall be called the legislature of the state of Washington...” (Wash. Const. art. 2, sec. 1). “All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives” (U.S. Const. art 1, sec. 1).

A fundamental principle of our government is that no one is above the law, including the government and government officials.

These legislatures have authority from the people to make law. The president cannot make law. The governor cannot make law. Judges and justices cannot make law. For them to do so is usurpation and abuse of power. These are ultra vires acts (*acting beyond one’s legal authority*) and are therefore void.

Law, Governors, Powers, and Emergencies

In Washington State, the legislature has granted to the governor the authority to declare an emergency “after finding that a public disorder, disaster, energy emergency, or riot exists within this state or any part thereof which affects life, health, property, or the public peace” (RCW 43.06.010(12)). That is, the governor cannot declare an emergency for any reason at all; rather, the governor only has the authority specifically granted by the legislature under the law.

Further, the governor is obligated under the law to terminate an emergency proclamation “when order has been restored in the area affected” (RCW 43.06.210). This language limits the governor’s discretion and suggests that public order is the touchstone of the emergency power. If the presence of sickness is defined as “public disorder,” then the power of the governor is essentially unlimited, as sickness will, sadly, always be with us. Further, it sets the precedent for declaring emergencies for any other perceived “disorder” that affects society. And the people have little recourse if judges refuse to hold the governor to his narrowly-defined authority. While some degree of deference to the executive in a true emergency may be proper, by maintaining a state of emergency that continues for months on end with no visible end in sight, the governor makes mockery of the law.

There is no blood in the streets from COVID. There is no social unrest from COVID. There are no riots because of the disease. (Note: There have been riots related to racial tensions that the governor has supported without declaring an emergency, even when the rioters seized control of ground in Seattle and expelled the police). Rather, there is an illness that is disproportionately affecting certain at-risk segments of society, and yet the governor is acting as though we are under invasion. He is behaving as though COVID is a material threat to all citizens of Washington State. He multiplies proclamations that have the effect of law, and yet the people’s representatives (the legislature) have not voted them into law. The governor does not have the authority to arbitrarily declare an unending emergency and then to legislate rules that curb individual rights and freedom.

COVID is a Challenge, not a Crisis

The presence of an illness is not in itself an emergency. Recognizing the need for planning for particularly virulent and contagious influenzas, the legislature directed local health districts to create plans to ensure proper local response (RCW Ch. 70.26). In this case, local authority has largely been ignored and assumed by the state. Perhaps if an illness threatens to overwhelm the health system’s ability to treat infected patients, some level of an emergency may exist, but only for such time as the threat is real and immediate. At present, there is no threat to medical resources, nor has there been in this state. At least one

The governor cannot declare an emergency for any reason at all; rather, the governor only has the authority specifically granted by the legislature under the law.

temporary hospital was set up, then taken down without treating a single patient.

Indeed, the narrative has changed from “flattening the curve” to an increased obsession on the number of new “cases,” an indefinite term that includes people without symptoms. For no other illness is the government so concerned by “cases” when most of the people affected recover without medical intervention.

And this raises the question: *When does it end?* Without a clear statement of what the emergency is, standards governing its termination are equally obscure. What do numbers of self-resolving “cases” have to do with an emergency? Again, illness itself is not an emergency; it is not “public disorder, disaster, energy emergency, or riot.” Where does the governor’s authority to maintain this state of emergency arise? It is not found in the law duly enacted by the people’s representatives.¹³

Press Conferences Are Not Legislative Acts

The governor’s proclamations are not law, nor is there any obligation to obey them if they are ultra vires. Law by news conference is not, and has never been, permitted in this state and country. Perhaps the governor’s proclamations are good policy, but without express authority, they are lawless. If he thinks he should have broader authority, he can convene the legislature and ask them for it. His failure to do so runs roughshod over his narrowly-defined emergency authority and usurps power to the detriment of individual rights. The very purpose of government is subverted by such actions.

Self-Government is the Foundation of Freedom

Our civil government is predicated on the principle of self-government. Without self-government, there is no foundation for

¹³ In a statement from Chelan County Sheriff Brian Burnett (who is also the Director of Emergency Management) to Chelan County Superior Court Judge Kristin Ferrera, on May 20, 2020, he stated: “*Through my training, experience and evaluation of our current situation and information, I do not believe Chelan and/or Douglas Counties are in an emergent situation, specifically in regards to COVID-19. To the contrary, I believe that our citizens are at greater risk if we do not lift the state emergency restrictions, as the concern of civil unrest and disorder that is likely to come from personal lives and businesses being financially ruined through the state’s continued lockdown and closures.*”

The narrative has changed from “flattening the curve” to an increased obsession on the number of new “cases,” an indefinite term that includes people without symptoms. For no other illness is the government so concerned by “cases” when most of the people affected recover without medical intervention.

the ordered liberty called for in our constitutional system. Robert Winthrop wrote that men will be governed either by the Bible or by the bayonet. It should come as no surprise that the latter has increased as the former has diminished.

Ordered liberty is the happy medium between chaos or licentiousness on the one hand, and oppressive tyranny on the other. Freedom, properly considered, is not the absence of law, as is commonly held today, but is instead the right and ability to keep the law, primarily the law of God. To be free is to have oneself under control according to the law. In the absence of that control springing from within, it will be imposed from without. And here is the true foundation of the American system of government. To paraphrase John Adams, our system of government was made for a moral and religious people; it is wholly inadequate for the government of any other. Without virtue, vice will reign. And no imposition of force can restore lost virtue. Instead, the government inevitably slides toward either extreme, tyranny or chaos, neither of which promotes human flourishing.

Recognizing that we must first govern ourselves, we do not lightly oppose the government, nor do we seek to stir civil unrest in any of our actions. To the contrary, we simply seek to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience, and to do so peacefully and in order.

Missional Lens

In order to be on Mission, we need to be the Church.

As the Church, we are the body of Christ, the temple of God, and the spiritual house. God made us for community and relationships...not for Zoom calls and computer screens. We are given a mission and are called to collectively worship, to exercise our spiritual gifts, to minister to one another, and to be united.¹⁴

As church leaders, we are expected to care for the church, protect the church, minister to and lead the church, and to administer sacraments with the Church.¹⁵

If we can't corporately gather OR our ability to corporately gather is seriously restricted, then all that we, as a church, are called to do and have a godly desire to do is negatively impacted.

This "scattering and isolation of the sheep" is the greatest threat to the American Church. Isolation stumps, thwarts, and kills spiritual growth. Without the spiritual unity and solidarity experienced by the collective gathering of the saints, the Mission will be impeded.

The Church, in order to reach the world, must be "...a pillar and buttress of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15)

If other states are allowing churches to meet, then there isn't a pandemic. If other states are allowing schools to meet in person, then there isn't a pandemic. If more people can gather just one county over, then there isn't a pandemic. The pandemic doesn't fall off of you as you cross county lines or step over the threshold of an abortion clinic or protest a movement that is politically supported by the Governor. It either exists to the degree of the control being exerted or it doesn't.

¹⁴Mt. 28:18 - 20; Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:18 - 21; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:11 - 12; Jam. 5:16; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pt. 4:10; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24 - 25; 1 Cor. 1:10; Col. 3:11

¹⁵Acts 20:28; 1 Pt. 5:1 - 4; Rom. 16:17; Jam. 5:14; 1 Cor. 12:25 - 26; Eph. 4:11 - 13; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Jn. 1:9; Heb. 13:17; Mt. 18:17; Acts 20:7; Rom. 6:3; 1 Pt. 3:21

Much of Jesus' truth that needs to be heralded today is courage in the face of fear, honesty in the face of hypocrisy, self-control in the face of hysteria, personal responsibility in the face of blame-shifting, and repentance in the face of moral browbeating.

Electronic means of communication cannot be the only (or even primary) medium for these kinds of conversations. The Church and our community needs real people, real faces. We cannot be "a pillar and buttress of the truth" to humanity if we can't actually be with humans.

We are commanded to love our neighbor and work for the flourishing of our community at every level...economically, mentally, socially, physically, educationally, and spiritually.

"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." Jeremiah 29:7

The Christian worldview and commission are to live a fully-orbed life...all of Christ for all of life. We do not separate Sunday worship from Tuesday at the office, which means we think about all of life through the grid of our Christianity and the good of all people.

From unconstitutional intrusions into citizen's lives, to overriding citizen's rights, to restricting private citizen's ability to conduct commerce, to arbitrarily closing social activities, to choosing winners and losers in the economy, to favoring big business over small business, we believe our State Government's current response to the virus is doing more harm than the virus itself.

Furthermore, our Governor's overriding of local government, his centralization of political power, his blanket approach to the virus response, his continual blaming of the federal government, his shuttering of public and private schools, his public shaming of anyone who disagrees with him, his general distrust and disrespect of the citizenry, his bullying of small businesses, his moral lecturing about the sanctity of life, and his repeated lie labeling churches as "super-spreaders" while simultaneously fawning over the moral necessity of "patriotic protests" that just so happen to align with his own agenda, has grown quite tiresome. We believe our Governor and his policies pose the truest threat to our community's short-term and long-term

health. His controlling our entire State through centralized emergency powers are causing astronomical harm to our community's economic, educational, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

We CAN gather responsibly and safely.

Unlike the government, we are not compelling anyone to come or do anything. Everything we do is by invitation. We do not share our Governor's general mistrust of adults nor his need to control their daily lives and behavior. We trust our people to self-govern and make decisions in the best interests of themselves and their families.

If casinos can be trusted to reopen, if hundreds of people can be trusted to shop at their local grocery store, if thousands of people can be trusted to peacefully protest, then our church can be trusted to responsibly gather.

Multiple service offerings, online streaming options, sanitation stations, and light sanitation in between services all demonstrate a heart of pastoring and caring for our people. Our relational and missional priority is to care for our people and community...not to obey every whim of the Governor and the Department of Health. They are not law-making entities and we will not grant them that power by treating their "mandates" as law.

We are responsible and trustworthy. We don't "leap before we've looked." We have months of data and commentary that we can look to and say, with a clear conscience, "COVID isn't what it was originally feared to be. Praise God. Time to move on. Nothing but grace on our end. Come if you feel comfortable. Don't come if you don't feel comfortable. No second-class citizens in the family of Grace City. There is grace and patience for all as we work through this together."

If casinos can be trusted to reopen, if hundreds of people can be trusted to shop at their local grocery store, if thousands of people can be trusted to peacefully protest, then our church can be trusted to responsibly gather.

Medical Lens

- **COVID-19 is not a death sentence for humanity.**
- **COVID-19 presents a very small risk to a very small percentage of people. And, as a result, should be considered an acceptable part of life.**
- **A large and increasingly loud movement of scientists are saying lockdown measures are dangerous and ineffective.**

The First Wave of Fear

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a *pandemic*. On March 13, 2020, the United States declared COVID-19 a *national emergency*. By that time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had reviewed various scenarios of the COVID-19 fallout, which included:

- An estimated 160 million to 214 million Americans infected over the course of the pandemic;
- An estimated 200,000 to 1.7 million American deaths. Other pandemic models suggested total American deaths up to 2.2 million;¹⁶
- An estimated 2.4 million to 21 million Americans hospitalized, which would cripple the nation's hospital system.¹⁷

Additionally, on March 11, 2020, in front of a U.S. Congress House Oversight and Reform Committee, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), reported that COVID-19 had a mortality rate of 1%, which is 10x greater than seasonal influenza.

¹⁶ Why COVID-19 death predictions will always be wrong. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/covid-19-death-predictions-analysis-modeling-pandemic-2020-4>. September 19, 2020.

¹⁷ Worst-Case Estimates for U.S. Coronavirus Deaths. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/13/us/coronavirus-deaths-estimate.html>. September 19, 2020.

These initial forecasts and testimonies of the dangers of COVID-19 looked very grim indeed. However, it was the specific threat to our hospital system that ultimately led to a frenzied ripple of government ordered lockdowns and quarantines across the country. Such actions were a first in our nation's history. Even during past pandemics, government restrictions like we experienced (and continue to experience) had never happened before, especially on such a grand scale. And, though pandemics are rare, they also happen more often than you might think.

This Isn't Our First Rodeo

The last time the WHO declared a global pandemic was in June 2009. The novel influenza A, also known as H1N1 or the Swine flu, had spread to more than 70 countries prompting the WHO to declare it a pandemic.

Over the last 100 or so years, the United States has experienced *four flu* pandemics beginning with the Spanish flu in 1918 followed by the Asian flu in 1957, the Hong Kong flu in 1968, and the Swine flu previously mentioned. The CDC estimates that the Asian flu and Hong Kong flu killed 116,000 and 100,000 Americans, respectively, which currently puts the death toll of these pandemics on par with COVID (when adjusted for total population).

Though COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus, which is a different genus than influenza, it nonetheless behaves very similarly to seasonal influenza as a contagious respiratory virus. Both COVID and influenza affect lungs and breathing. Additional similarities include fever, cough, fatigue, sore throat headache, runny nose, etc. Currently, the CDC lumps COVID together with influenza and pneumonia as it tracks the nation's epidemic threshold for "influenza-like illnesses."

Not Everyone Agreed with the Initial Public Health Response

Dr. John Ioannidis has an impressive resume. He is professor of medicine and professor of epidemiology and population health, as well as professor of courtesy of biomedical data science, at Stanford University School of Medicine, professor of courtesy of statistics at Stanford University School of Humanities and Sciences, and co-director of the Meta-Research Innovation Center at Stanford University. Additionally, Dr. Ioannidis is the

"...author of some of the most cited journal articles in medical history..." and, prior to COVID-19, was considered "...one of the most influential scientists alive."¹⁸

On March 17, 2020, just days after a national emergency was declared by the United States, Dr. Ioannidis published an opinion piece. In his article he: (1) questioned the "draconian countermeasures...adopted in many countries..." to curb COVID-19, including social distancing and lockdowns; (2) determined "the data collected...on how many people are infected and how the epidemic is evolving...*utterly unreliable*;" (3) wondered how policymakers could "...tell if they [were] doing more good than harm;" (4) concluded that the "...evidence fiasco create[d] tremendous uncertainty about the risk of dying from COVID-19;" and (5) believed that the "...vast majority of [COVID deaths] would be people with limited life expectancies."¹⁹

Summarily, Dr. Ioannidis warned that "...locking people up without knowing the fatality risk of COVID-19 could have severe social and financial consequences that could be totally irrational." He continued: "It's like an elephant being attacked by a house cat. Frustrated and trying to avoid the cat, the elephant accidentally jumps off a cliff and dies."²⁰

Rhetoric - Not Science or Data - is Ruling the Day

Not surprisingly, Dr. Ioannidis's questions and conclusions were torched by many others in the medical and science community

¹⁸ John Ioannidis and Medical Tribalism in the Era of COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://undark.org/2020/06/11/john-ioannidis-politicization/>. September 19, 2020.

¹⁹ A fiasco in the making? As the coronavirus pandemic takes hold, we are making decisions without reliable data. Retrieved from <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/17/a-fiasco-in-the-making-as-the-coronavirus-pandemic-takes-hold-we-are-making-decisions-without-reliable-data/>. September 19, 2020.

²⁰ John Ioannidis warned Covid-19 could be a "once in a century" data fiasco. He was right. Retrieved from <https://fee.org/articles/john-ioannidis-warned-covid-19-could-be-a-once-in-a-century-data-fiasco-he-was-right/>. September 19, 2020.

"...locking people up without knowing the fatality risk of COVID-19 could have severe social and financial consequences that could be totally irrational. It's like an elephant being attacked by a house cat. Frustrated and trying to avoid the cat, the elephant accidentally jumps off a cliff and dies."

- Dr. John Ioannidis

as “content free, logic-free drivel.”²¹ When an accomplished, respected, and renowned scientist’s critique of public health officials’ reaction to a novel virus is cast aside as nothing more than nonsense and bunk, it is because rhetoric and narrative are ruling the so-called days of “science and data.”

How many times have you heard a political leader or public health official say something along the lines of: “We’re going to follow the science and data in making policy decisions?” The fundamental issue with this position is that there is a “depravity of the data” that is being fundamentally and systematically ignored.

False positives, reporting of probable cases vs. confirmed cases, questionable criteria for what qualifies as a probable case (lab confirmed vs. doctor diagnosis), false attribution of the actual cause of death to COVID-19, testimony of medical professionals being pressured to add coronavirus to death certificates, reports of anywhere from 25% to 80% of people unaware they had COVID-19,²² widespread testing of asymptomatic people as a means to justify subsequent policy response, blatant hypocrisy, and the woeful misses of epidemic forecasts has resulted in a deep questioning of the accuracy of the “science and data” by many.²³

Initially, the lack of general agreement or consistency by scientists and public health officials in responding to COVID-19 was tolerated given the newness of the pandemic. However, the continued rhetoric supported by an “evolution of the science and data” coupled with a censoring of medically-licensed physicians by publicly-traded, for-profit corporations with zero background or standing in healthcare, pandemics, or public health (cue Facebook and Instagram) has grown tiresome and troubling.

When an accomplished, respected, and renowned scientist’s critique of public health officials’ reaction to a novel virus is cast aside as nothing more than nonsense and bunk, it is because rhetoric and narrative are ruling these so-called days of “science and data.”

²¹ John Ioannidis and Medical Tribalism in the Era of COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://undark.org/2020/06/11/john-ioannidis-politicization/>. September 19, 2020.

²² As many as 80% of people with COVID-19 aren’t aware they have the virus. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/50-percent-of-people-with-covid19-not-aware-have-virus>. September 19, 2020.

²³ We’ve received anecdotal testimony from medical professionals in our church witnessing some of the above first-hand.

Dr. Ioannidis's initial warning opposing such "draconian measures" based on "utterly unreliable" evidence is being posthumously vindicated as the initial models that provided policy justification for the lockdowns have proven to be astronomically wrong.²⁴ And yet, certain state governments continue to revel in their historic and continued restrictions as the *key to victory* over COVID-19.

We Now Know A Lot More

Over seven months into the COVID-19 crisis, we have a much better understanding of the novel virus, including:

- **Age plays a significant role in COVID-19 severity.** According to the CDC, people 85+ years of age are 630x MORE LIKELY to die from the virus than someone in their 20s. Conversely, a teenager is 16x LESS LIKELY to die from the virus than someone in their 20s.²⁵ It's particularly important to highlight that, according to the CDC, "...the risk of complications for healthy children is *higher for flu* compared to COVID-19."²⁶ To date, 92% of COVID-related deaths have occurred in people 55 and older; 79% of COVID-related deaths have occurred in people 65 and older; and 57% of COVID-related deaths have occurred in people 75 and older.²⁷
- **Comorbidities play a significant role in COVID-19 severity.** According to the CDC, your risk for hospitalization is 3x greater if you have diabetes, 4.5x greater if you are severely obese, and 5x greater if you have three or more

²⁴ Lockdown supporters embraced wildly wrong COVID-19 projections that fit their preconceptions. Retrieved from <https://reason.com/2020/06/04/lockdown-supporters-embraced-wildly-wrong-covid-19-projections-that-fit-their-preconceptions/>. September 19, 2020.

²⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-age.html>. September 19, 2020.

²⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>. September 17, 2020.

²⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#AgeAndSex. September 19, 2020.

comorbidities, such as asthma, chronic kidney disease, or coronary artery disease.²⁸ Additionally, a recent report from the CDC determined that 94% of COVID-related deaths possessed an underlying medical condition or comorbidity. "For 6% of [COVID-related] deaths, COVID-19 was the only cause mentioned. For deaths with conditions or causes in addition to COVID-19, on average, there were 2.6 additional conditions or causes per death."²⁹

The contributing role of comorbidities in COVID-related deaths is a material component in assessing the relative danger of COVID to the general population. There is some suggestion that had the CDC "...used the same criterion that it did with the SARS virus...the [COVID death] figure by the end of June would have been some 16,000" vs. over 127,000.³⁰

- **The risk of dying from COVID-19 is very, very, very low.**

Based on the CDC's best estimates, the infection fatality rate, which is the percentage of infected individuals who die of the disease among *all infected* individuals (symptomatic and asymptomatic) is:

- ➔ 0 - 19 years = 0.003%
- ➔ 20 - 49 years = 0.02%
- ➔ 50 - 69 years = 0.5%
- ➔ 70+ years = 5.4%³¹

To state it differently, the *survival* rate for those who actually contract COVID-19 is:

- ➔ 0 - 19 years = 99.997%
- ➔ 20 - 49 years = 99.98%

²⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-underlying-medical-conditions.html>. September 19, 2020.

²⁹ Excess deaths show the true impact of Covid-19 in the U.S. Retrieved from <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/09/01/comorbidities-and-coronavirus-deaths-cdc/>. September 20, 2020.

³⁰ The COVID coup. Retrieved from <https://americanmind.org/essays/the-covid-coup/>. September 19, 2020.

³¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/planning-scenarios.html>. September 19, 2020.

- ➔ 50 - 69 years = 99.5%
- ➔ 70+ years = 94.6%

- **Not every single person is going to contract COVID-19.**

According to the CDC, approximately 1/3rd of the world became infected with the Spanish flu.³² Further, both the Asian flu and Swine flu possessed infection rates of roughly 20% or less in the United States. Though it's certainly plausible that a higher percentage of the American population could catch COVID-19 as compared to the Spanish flu, the 80+% infection rates used in some initial models, such as from the Imperial College, appear wildly high based on past pandemics.

- **A lot more people have contracted COVID-19 than current case counts suggest.**

According to the Washington State Department of Health, over 2 million COVID tests have been performed resulting in nearly 93,000 confirmed cases in the State of Washington.³³ However, recent seroprevalence survey data from Western Washington, which is used to determine the number of people who have actually had COVID, reveals the estimated number of infections is at least 4x higher than reported case counts. And, these estimates are deemed conservative as, according to the CDC, "...some studies found that infected persons who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms do not have detectable antibodies. Some studies found that antibody levels decrease and become undetectable in some patients over time."³⁴

Seroprevalence survey data from other areas of the country demonstrate even greater infection rates than Washington State. For instance, the CDC estimates that over 22% of New York State's total population has already contracted

³² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/1918-pandemic-history.htm>. September 19, 2020.

³³ Washington State Department of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>. September 19, 2020.

³⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#serology-surveillance>. September 19, 2020.

COVID-19, which is over 9x higher than the state's reported case counts.³⁵ These studies further support the CDC's estimates that *40% of all COVID infections are asymptomatic*.³⁶ Meaning, a significantly higher amount of people have already had COVID than the current case count suggest.

- **Government restrictions are proving ineffective in controlling virus transmission rates.** A recent working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) analyzed 23 countries and 25 U.S. states, each of which had experienced more than 1,000 COVID deaths as of late July 2020. The authors concluded "...that data trends observed...likely indicate that non-pharmaceutical interventions...such as lockdowns, closures, travel restrictions, stay-home orders, event bans, quarantines, curfews, and mask mandates - [did] not seem to affect virus transmission rates overall."³⁷ The paper reasons that even if such restrictions and controls "...were effective early on, they do not appear to be anymore...."
- **COVID-19 forecasting has been a total disaster.** "Poor data input, wrong modeling assumptions, high sensitivity estimates, lack of incorporation of epidemiological features, poor past evidence on effects of available interventions, lack of transparency, errors, lack of determinacy, looking at only one or a few dimensions of the problem at hand, lack of expertise in crucial disciplines, groupthink and bandwagon effects and selective reporting..."³⁸ has proved crippling for much of the epidemic forecasting that was used (and is still being used) to justify public health response.

³⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#national-lab>. September 21, 2020.

³⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/planning-scenarios.html>. September 21, 2020.

³⁷ Lockdowns and mask mandates do not lead to reduced COVID transmission rates or deaths, new study suggests. Retrieved from <https://www.aier.org/article/lockdowns-and-mask-mandates-do-not-lead-to-reduced-covid-transmission-rates-or-deaths-new-study-suggests/>. September 19, 2020.

³⁸ Forecasting for COVID-19 has failed. Retrieved from <https://forecasters.org/wp-content/uploads/loannidisetal25062020-1.pdf>. September 19, 2020.

It is vitally important to note that not a single conjecture or model given to us by policy-makers at the outset of this crisis has come even remotely close to being accurate. Not a single one. Were these “expert” prophets in the Old Testament, they would have already been stoned. And yet there has been zero to very little accountability for their wildly inaccurate estimations that has led us to our current state.

- **COVID-19 isn’t going away anytime soon.** Genetic remnants and offshoots of the past three pandemics, including the Asian, Hong Kong, and Swine flus, still exist as part of our seasonal influenza cycle. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) has only declared two diseases to have been eradicated from humanity: (1) smallpox, which has been around for hundreds and hundreds of years; and (2) rinderpest, which existed from the 18th to the 20th century.³⁹ Both diseases were declared “permanently reduced to zero” within the last 50 years. The point being that COVID-19 will not be eliminated or destroyed with a vaccine, another lockdown, or perfect adherence to social distancing and mask-wearing. Such rhetoric as... “if everyone would just wear a mask, we could destroy this virus in a month,” is scientifically impossible and socially dangerous.

COVID-19 will not be eliminated or destroyed with a vaccine, another lockdown, or perfect adherence to social distancing and mask-wearing. Such rhetoric as... “if everyone would just wear a mask, we could destroy this virus in a month,” is scientifically impossible and socially dangerous.

³⁹ Disease eradication: What does it take to wipe out a disease? Retrieved from [https://asm.org/Articles/2020/March/Disease-Eradication-What-Does-It-Take-to-Wipe-out#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20the%20World%20Health,the%20rinderpest%20virus%20\(RPV\)](https://asm.org/Articles/2020/March/Disease-Eradication-What-Does-It-Take-to-Wipe-out#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20the%20World%20Health,the%20rinderpest%20virus%20(RPV).). September 19, 2020.

Contextual Lens

- ***Numbers taken out of context, or without consideration of context, distort reality.***
- ***The constant 24-hour news cycle reporting of every positive case and COVID-related death has skewed public perspective and caused unnecessary fear.***
- ***Death is a part of life and has always been with us as a human reality.***
- ***We do not believe that the statistics back the pandemic narrative that has resulted in such wide-spread panic, fear, disruption, and pretext for ongoing government control, intrusions, and shutdowns.***

Numbers are important, but numbers taken out of context present a skewed or incomplete picture of reality. The continual COVID case count and death toll that makes the front page of nearly every major news website every day exacerbates an already high-level of fear, while creating a rather narrow view of life and death. The fact of the matter is many thousands of people die every day for many other reasons. The morbid fixation on COVID has led to a warped perspective and unwarranted fear.

To help restore a saner perspective, here are some additional numbers to set a more meaningful COVID context.

Past Pandemics

- 1918...adjusted for today's population, over 100 million Americans would have contracted the Spanish flu resulting in over 2 million deaths.⁴⁰
- 1957...adjusted for today's population, over 220,000 Americans would have died from the Asian flu.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>. September 19, 2020.

⁴¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1957-1958-pandemic.html>. September 20, 2020.

- 1968...adjusted for today's population, nearly 165,000 Americans would have died from the Hong Kong flu.⁴²
- 2009...adjusted for today's population, over 65 million Americans would have contracted the Swine flu.⁴³

Through all of these pandemics, the U.S. federal and state governments NEVER locked down or quarantined such a broad swath of the population, especially the healthy, for such a long period of time.

COVID Compared to Seasonal Influenza

The 2017-2018 flu season proved to be the most difficult since 2009 for the United States. The "CDC estimates that the burden of illness during the 2017-2018 [flu] season was high with an estimated 45 million people getting sick with influenza, 21 million people going to a health care provider, 810,000 hospitalizations, and 61,000 deaths from influenza."⁴⁴ Additionally, the CDC estimates there were 643 deaths due to the season influenza for children 0 - 17 years of age.⁴⁵

By comparison, there have been an estimated 420,000 hospitalizations⁴⁶ from COVID nationwide and over 420 COVID deaths for those 0 - 24 years of age.⁴⁷

⁴² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1968-pandemic.html>. September 20, 2020.

⁴³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/basics/past-pandemics.html>. September 21, 2020.

⁴⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden-averted/2017-2018.htm#:~:text=CDC%20estimates%20that%20the%20burden,from%20influenza%20\(Table%201\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden-averted/2017-2018.htm#:~:text=CDC%20estimates%20that%20the%20burden,from%20influenza%20(Table%201)). September 21, 2020.

⁴⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden-averted/2017-2018.htm#table1>. September 21, 2020.

⁴⁶ US Coronavirus Hospitalizations. Retrieved from https://ycharts.com/indicators/us_coronavirus_hospitalizations. September 21, 2020.

⁴⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#AgeAndSex. September 21, 2020.

Finally, it is worth noting that deaths due to pneumonia and influenza exceeded the CDC's epidemic threshold for the years 2017, 2018, and 2019.⁴⁸ And yet it did not dominate the news cycle.

Nationally^{49, 50}

- **Life expectancy**...the average life expectancy for Americans is 78.7 years. One study concluded: "data on deaths from COVID-19 show an association with age that closely matches the 'normal' age-related risk of death from all other causes that we all face each year..."⁵¹ *Meaning*, in a world where we all die at some point from something, COVID isn't materially increasing one's overall risk of death that didn't already exist.
- **Total deaths**...over 2.8 million Americans died in 2018 for a variety of causes. Nearly 74% of ALL deaths occurred in Americans 65+ years of age. *Meaning*, it's not a new phenomenon for the elderly to makeup the highest percentages of deaths.⁵²
- **Leading causes of death**...heart disease and cancer killed over 1.2 million Americans in 2018. We do not see such a "moral" attempt by policymakers to outlaw or greatly restrict McDonalds, ice cream, cigarettes, and alcohol. They just increase their taxes.
- **Accidents**...for reference, over 167,000 Americans died due to unintentional injuries in 2018. If every single death had been chronicled by a 24 hour news cycle, people would

⁴⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>. September 21, 2020.

⁴⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db355-h.pdf>. September 21, 2020.

⁵⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db355_tables-508.pdf#2. September 21, 2020.

⁵¹ COVID deaths closely match 'normal' age-related risk pattern, says expert. Retrieved from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-covid-deaths-age-related-pattern-expert.html>. September 21, 2020

⁵² Currently, 8 out of 10 COVID-related deaths have occurred in Americans 65+ years of age, and yet they make up only 15% of the confirmed cases.

be paranoid to leave their houses for fear of being struck by lightning or hit by a train.

- **Suicide**...over 38,000 Americans took their own lives in 2018. And, there were an estimated 1.4 million suicide attempts. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the nation.⁵³ This real and present threat has only been exacerbated by heavy-handed COVID lockdowns.
- **Abortions**...in 2017, there were over 862,000 abortions nationwide, which is 4x greater than the current deaths involving COVID.⁵⁴ *Meaning*, in America, it's significantly more dangerous for a baby in a mother's womb than for the average person to go out in public during COVID.
- **Schools**...in 2019, there were nearly 57 million K-12 students in the nation.⁵⁵ One study concluded that, for Fall 2020, over 50% of students would attend school online and only 25% would receive full-time, in-person instruction.⁵⁶ *Meaning*, over 27 million students are experiencing unrecoverable education loss because of COVID-related school shutdowns. The generational, economical, and resulting social and relational ramifications (addiction, increased poverty, increased crime) are not quantifiable.
- **Jobs**...According to the Labor Department, 10.9 million more Americans are collecting traditional unemployment benefits compared to a year ago. That's 50+ more Americans collecting traditional unemployment for every COVID-related death. This is economically unsustainable and will have far-reaching, negative consequences for the most vulnerable in our communities.
- **Bailout**...The CARES Act equaled around \$2 trillion, which is the largest stimulus ever passed by the U.S. government.

In 2017, there were over 862,000 abortions nationwide, which is 4x greater than the current deaths involving COVID. Meaning, in America, it's significantly more dangerous for a baby in a mother's womb than for the average person to go out in public during COVID.

⁵³ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved from <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>. September 29, 2020.

⁵⁴ To put another way, there were 13.5 abortions for every 1,000 women of reproductive age in the country. Meanwhile, the current case fatality rate of COVID-19 for every 1,000 cases reported nationally is 0.64.

⁵⁵ Educationdata.org. Retrieved from <https://educationdata.org/k12-enrollment-statistics>. September 21, 2020.

⁵⁶ Half of U.S. elementary and high school students will study virtually only this fall, study shows. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/11/half-of-us-elementary-and-high-school-students-will-study-virtually-only-this-fall-study-shows.html>. September 21, 2020.

That means, as of this writing, each death involving COVID cost the American taxpayer around \$10,000,000.⁵⁷

Washington State^{58, 59}

The following is a series of numerical reference points for life and death in Washington State. The primary purpose is to show that thousands and thousands die in Washington State every year. This is tragic, of course, but normal. When the sole focus of government and media is disproportionately isolated on one specific cause of death, it can morbidly skew society's perspective and cause unnecessary fear.

- **Life expectancy**...the average life expectancy for Washingtonians is 80.5 years.
- **Total deaths**...over 53,000 Washingtonians died in 2018 for a variety of causes. Nearly 77% of ALL deaths occurred in Washingtonians 65+ years of age.

⁵⁷ Early on, the government made very clear its liberal approach to counting COVID deaths. At a White House press conference on April 7, 2020, in response to how the US was charting COVID deaths, White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator, Dr. Deborah Birx, said: "There are other countries that if you had a pre-existing condition and let's say the virus caused you to go to the ICU and then have a heart or kidney problem – some countries are recording that as a heart issue or a kidney issue and not a COVID-19 death...(our) intent is...if someone dies with COVID-19, we are counting that as a COVID-19 death."

The key phrase is "*with COVID*." There is a significant difference between dying *with COVID* and dying *from COVID*. This combining of "*with*" and "*from*" in the counting of "COVID death numbers" has significantly skewed the numbers to present it as a larger threat than it actually is. Many deaths charted as COVID had little or perhaps nothing to do with COVID (e.g. heart attacks, car accidents, strokes, cancer, liver failure, shootings, accidents). The CDC reported that COVID was the *lone* cause of death on only 6% of all COVID-related deaths. Meaning, at the time of this writing, roughly 12,000 people have died from COVID alone, while all other COVID-related deaths included *at least* one significant comorbidity. This would suggest that the taxpayer's cost for deaths *directly caused* by COVID is closer to \$167,000,000 per death.

⁵⁸ Washington State Department of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.wa.gov/DataandStatisticalReports/HealthDataVisualization/MortalityDashboards/ACHAllDeathsDashboards>. September 21, 2020.

⁵⁹ Washington State Department of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>. September 21, 2020.

- **COVID**...currently, there are over 2,200 deaths *involving* COVID-19 or approximately 0.03% of the population. Over 89% of COVID-related deaths have occurred in Washingtonians 60+ years of age, and yet they make up only 17% of the confirmed cases.⁶⁰
- **Leading causes of death**...heart disease and cancer killed over 24,000 Washingtonians in 2018. COVID doesn't crack the *top 6* causes of death in Washington State.
- **Accidents**...over 3,400 Washingtonians died due to unintentional injuries in 2018. This is roughly 60% greater than current COVID-related deaths in the State.
- **Suicide**...over 1,250 Washingtonians took their own lives in 2018. Suicide levels have increased 14% since 2010. And, suicide was the #2 cause of death for Washingtonians 10 - 24 years of age.⁶¹
- **Drug overdose**...over 1,300 people died from drugs in Washington State.⁶²
- **"Death with Dignity"**...over 250 people died through the *Death with Dignity Act* in Washington State. This is where patients have their doctors kill them by "dispensing medication." The youngest was 28 years old and the oldest was 98 years old.⁶³
- **Abortion**...in 2017, there were over 17,700 abortions in Washington State.⁶⁴ This is more than 8x greater the number of COVID-related deaths.

⁶⁰ Washington State Department of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>. September 20, 2020.

⁶¹ Harborview Injury Prevention & Resource Center. Retrieved from <https://hiprc.org/outreach/suicide/>. September 21, 2020.

⁶² Alcohol & drug abuse institute - University of Washington. Retrieved from https://adai.washington.edu/WAdata/major_drug_deaths.htm. September 21, 2020.

⁶³ 2018 death with dignity act report. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/422-109-DeathWithDignityAct2018.pdf>. September 20, 2020.

⁶⁴ State facts about abortion: Washington. Retrieved from <https://www.gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/state-facts-about-abortion-washington>. September 20, 2020.

- **Schools**...in 2019, there were over 1.1 million K-12 students in the state.⁶⁵ More than 94% of public school students began their 2020-2021 academic year online.⁶⁶
- **Jobs**...the statewide unemployment rate for August 2020 was 2x higher than the same rate for August 2019.⁶⁷

North Central Washington (*Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, Grant Counties*)⁶⁸

- **Life expectancy**...the average life expectancy for NCW residents is 80.7 years.
- **Total deaths**...nearly 2,100 NCW residents died in 2018 for a variety of causes. Over 80% of ALL deaths occurred in NCW residents 65+ years of age.
- **COVID**...currently, 58 people have been charted as a COVID-related death or 0.02% of the population. Over 77% of COVID-related deaths have occurred in NCW residents 60+ years of age. As of this writing, Chelan County has experienced 16 COVID-related deaths and Douglas County has experienced 9 COVID-related deaths.
- **Leading causes of death**...heart disease and cancer killed over 930 NCW residents in 2018. COVID doesn't crack the top 7 causes of death in NCW.
- **Accidents**...over 120 NCW residents died due to unintentional injuries in 2018. This is over 2x greater than COVID-related deaths in NCW.
- **Suicide**...over 45 NCW residents took their own lives in 2018.

⁶⁵ Office of financial management. Retrieved from <https://www.ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/statewide-data/washington-trends/budget-drivers/kindergarten-through-grade-12-k-12-enrollment>. September 21, 2020.

⁶⁶ More than 94% of public school students in Washington state learning remotely this fall, new data show. Retrieved from <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/more-than-94-of-public-school-students-in-washington-state-learning-remotely-this-fall-new-data-shows/>. September 21, 2020.

⁶⁷ Monthly employment report. Retrieved from <https://esdorchardstorage.blob.core.windows.net/esdwa/Default/ESDWAGOV/labor-market-info/Libraries/Economic-reports/MER/MER%202020/MER-2020-09.pdf>. September 24, 2020.

⁶⁸ Chelan-Douglas Health District. Retrieved from <https://cdhd.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/Chelan-Douglas-COVID-Weekly-Data-Oct8-graphs.pdf>. September 21, 2020.

- **Schools...**In 2019, there were over 14,100 K-12 students in the Wenatchee and Eastmont School Districts. Both school districts began the 2020-2021 academic year completely online. Additionally, more than 50% of students in both districts are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch.⁶⁹
- **Jobs...**Chelan and Douglas Counties have lost 2,300 jobs since September 2019.⁷⁰ Chelan County's unemployment rate was nearly 91% higher in August 2020 as compared to August 2019.⁷¹

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- Source: National Center for Education Statistics

⁶⁹ National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=5309660. September 21, 2020.

⁷⁰ Leisure and hospitality hardest hit by job loss rates. Retrieved from https://www.wenatcheeworld.com/news/local/leisure-and-hospitality-hardest-hit-by-job-loss-rates/article_d931decc-fe81-11ea-aca4-3bd2a4a4958e.html. September 24, 2020.

⁷¹ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/WACHEL7URN>. September 24, 2020.

Political Lens

- ***There is a growing body of knowledge of COVID-19 that is being underrepresented or systematically ignored by certain politicians and media outlets for the sake of political convenience.***
- ***The terms “Science & Data” have been weaponized to push political agendas and shut up voices not supporting a fear narrative.***
- ***The true threat of this virus has been largely blown out of proportion and weaponized for political gain and social-structural change.***
- ***In the State of Washington, we fully anticipate restrictions loosening as we approach the election, whether or not “science and data” support it or the “numbers” change.***

The Gross Politicization of COVID-19

The act of politicization is to knowingly mishandle, skew, or misrepresent information for personal benefit and/or convenience. To politicize science then is to weaponize it to further your own agenda.

We believe there has been a gross politicization of COVID-19 and the “science and data” contained therein by public officials. To make matters worse, there has been a focused attack on political opponents who have had a different policy response or who don’t share the same narrative. It’s no surprise then that COVID-19 has become a “red vs. blue” phenomenon or that the media has become viciously engaged.

Though we feel no need to defend Republicans and run-down Democrats or come to the aid of Democrats, while lambasting Republicans, we do believe addressing our current political climate is a particularly important part of the COVID-19 conversation. This is especially so since our political leaders are the ones who, quite literally, are making decisions that directly impact our daily ability to go to our jobs, go to our churches, and send our kids to school.

Last summer, COVID-19 “ravaged” the sunbelt, particularly Arizona, Florida, Georgia, and Texas, which happen to be governed by Republicans. It didn’t take the average citizen long to find the latest case numbers or rising death toll in these states. All you needed was an internet connection.

Certain politicians and media outlets, whose world-views seem more systematically organized by the day, were quick to pounce on these states’ and their governors’ mishandling of COVID and the innocent lives lost as a result of their recklessness. And, since it’s an election year, an “us vs. them” or “blue vs. red” narrative injected itself into the “policy response of COVID” with astonishing speed. It became a fierce browbeating of the political opposition, all in an attempt to be more favorably positioned as the “party of deliverance and salvation.”

And yet, California, a Democrat-governed state, was seeing the highest number of new cases and was somehow missing from much of this great debate surrounding states’ COVID response. At the same time, the governor of New York, also a Democrat, was applauding his handling of COVID, while his state’s COVID-related deaths were more than 3x greater than the next highest state.⁷² So, at the least, it seemed a little disingenuous to flog the “sun-belt red states” for their COVID response, while many blue states continued to struggle with their own COVID response. But rather than let the click-bait news of the day actually win the day, we decided to do more investigating.

According to an analysis of CDC information, some blue states, such as New York, Michigan, and California, which have produced some of the most restrictive lockdown measures in the nation, are faring worse than red states. According to this analysis, Democrat-governed states, on average, experienced a case fatality rate 55% higher than republican-governed states. Additionally, 5 of the top 10 states for most COVID cases, 6 of the top 10 states for most COVID deaths, 7 of the top 10 states for most COVID-deaths per population, and 8 of the top 10

⁷² Cuomo defends Covid poster that doesn’t mention New York’s pandemic death toll. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/16/politics/andrew-cuomo-coronavirus-poster-new-york-cnntv/index.html>. September 20, 2020.

states for highest COVID-case fatality rate were all governed by democrats.⁷³

This isn't some lame attempt at "gotcha" at blue states' expense; rather, it is a rooting out of the chicanery exhibited by certain political leaders and their media cohorts. It has become much too easy to blame your political opponent for lack of COVID results, while simultaneously cheering your handling of the COVID crisis. When the "going is good" it's because of you, but when the "going is bad" it's because of someone else. Or, to say it negatively, you can't take all the credit with none of the blame. To do so not only lacks self-awareness, but is also manipulative and hypocritical.

Hysterical Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is rooted in cowardice, jealousy, denial, and irresponsibility. Hypocrisy is pretending you have one standard when you're really just living out a double-standard. As evidenced by the aforementioned examples, there has been a consistent double-standard applied during the COVID crisis to people of different political stripes and persuasions.

Perhaps one of the most blatant examples of our hypocritical climate can be found in an open letter signed by 1,288 public health professionals, infectious diseases professionals, and community stakeholders. In the letter, the signers declare that "[p]rotests against systemic racism, which fosters the disproportionate burden of COVID-19 on black communities and also perpetuates police violence, must be supported." They go on to say, "...[a]s public health advocates, we do not condemn these [protests against systemic racism] as *risky for COVID-19 transmission*...[but] this should not be confused with a permissive stance on all gatherings, particularly protests against stay-home orders. Those actions not only oppose public health

⁷³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesinlast7days. September 24, 2020.

interventions, but are also rooted in white nationalism and run contrary to respect for black lives.”⁷⁴

So, according to these “medical experts”, if you are gathering by the thousands to protest systemic racism, you are exempt from perpetuating the COVID-19 pandemic. However, if you’re there to protest existing lockdown measures, you are threatening public health and disrespecting black lives. All hypocrisy is gross, but such blatant, explicit, condoned, and celebrated hypocrisy as this is evil.

Here are some gross displays of political hypocrisy we’ve seen over the last several months:

- More Seattle Seahawks players are allowed to play football on Sunday than Chelan County citizens are allowed to go to church on Sunday.
- For many months it was “illegal” to support a small business through buying blueberries outside at locally-owned u-pick farms, but “legal” to gamble inside a casino with hundreds of people all day.
- For months you couldn’t get a cancer screening, but you could get an abortion.
- Law-abiding citizens across the country are threatened with arrest and jail time for not obeying COVID mandates, while thousands of criminals, many of them murderers, rapists, and kidnapers, are released early from prison because they’re in “danger” of COVID.⁷⁵
- Millions of people can travel for hours on end in jam-packed airplanes every single week with zero regard for social distancing, but citizens of Chelan County can’t attend church

⁷⁴ Open letter advocating for an anti-racist public health response to demonstrations against systemic injustice occurring during the Covid-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Jyfn4Wd2i6bRi12ePghMHtX3ys1b7K1A/view>. September 20, 2020.

⁷⁵ Amid Covid-19, California releases some inmates doing time for murder. Advocates push to free more. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-08-09/covid-19-california-releases-violent-crime-murder-prisoners>. September 20, 2020.

for 1 hour in a huge room with more than 50 people and all must be 6 feet apart.⁷⁶

- COVID is too dangerous to call the Washington State legislature into session, but not dangerous enough to cancel protesters and disperse CHAZ occupiers.
- COVID is too dangerous for a kindergarten student to receive in-person instruction, but not dangerous enough for a preschooler to receive in-person instruction.
- The Constitution protects *protests* without restrictions, but not *religious gatherings* without restrictions.
- Protestors and even rioters have continued to gather in large groups to chant, yell, sing, speak, often without any attempts at social distancing or masking, with impunity from certain politicians and the press. But, a few hundred people gathering for an hour to sing, support each other, pray for their community, and listen to the Word of God preached is labeled a “super-spreader” event.
- L&I is fining businesses for creating an “unsafe work environment” if they do not follow the Governor’s COVID mandates, but the Seattle Police Department is told to leave illegally squatting CHAZ/CHOP members alone. So, law-abiding, productive citizens are punished; law-breaking squatters are issued a pass.
- You must wear a mask as you *stand* in a restaurant, but not when you’re *sitting* in a restaurant.
- King County has a COVID case fatality rate over 400x higher than Chelan County, but is further along in the Governor’s “Safe Start” plan.
- Pot shops, liquor stores, and abortion providers are deemed essential; churches, weddings, and funerals are not.
- You can’t go to the library right now, but as long as you own property, you still have to pay taxes for it.
- The “powers that be” can figure out how to safely let LeBron James play basketball and make millions, but can’t figure out

COVID is too dangerous to call the Washington State legislature into session, but not dangerous enough for protesters and CHAZ occupiers.

⁷⁶ US Passes 750K Daily Air Travelers Over July 4 Weekend. Retrieved from <https://onemileatatime.com/data-how-many-people-are-still-flying/>. September 10, 2020.

how to safely allow developmentally-disabled children to go to school or have access to occupational therapy even as critical windows of developmental opportunity close forever.

- The governor can pick apples off a tree in Olympia and violate state-wide transport laws with impunity and an “oops I’m sorry,” but we can’t pick apples from Stutzman Farms down the street without fear of them losing their business license.
- Some people morally browbeat and shame others for not wearing masks, while they wear masks incorrectly and violate many other “mandates” knowingly or unknowingly. The point...it’s okay for them to pick and choose which rules they follow, but not you.

The Latest Virtue Signal

Saying “science and data” is a politician’s new favorite phrase. Never before have political leaders been so persuaded by the near immediate and favorable verdict provided by the popularized phrase “science and data.” It has become the virtue signal for political leaders and their closely-aligned public health advocates. By merely uttering these words, political leaders reassure their citizenry of the certainty and objectivity in their decision-making because, after all, “science and data” is on their side. What’s particularly interesting about this is the obvious denial of the natural limitations of science.

To start, science is most *objective* and correct when it is given time to self-correct. After all, that is what the scientific method is built upon. Ask a question, form a hypothesis, make a prediction, test your prediction, then use what you’ve found to make a new hypothesis or prediction. The more this is repeated, so goes the theory, the less one’s own biases and limited anecdotal observations influence the process.

Second, science has gotten “it” wrong before. The earth used to be flat. Remember? Or, in the late 1800s, it was widely accepted by scientists that the north pole was more like Hawaii once you simply broke through its ring of ice. Or, how about Joseph Lister and his antiseptic medicine being regularly disregarded by American doctors? Or, how about Chernobyl? Nuclear experts intentionally (and foolishly) turned off the reactor’s backup cooling system, which resulted in an explosion

that released 100x more radiation than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Finally, even if science is correct, it still doesn't mean politicians always follow it. We know when the baby's heartbeat starts, when brain activity begins, when lungs form, and when fingers and toes develop. And yet, for some political leaders and public health officials, this scientific truth is irrelevant because it isn't consistent with their preferred worldview.

For politicians and public health officials to so heavily rely on the virtue signal of "science and data" as a means of demonstrating the moral correctness of their decisions is lazy, inconsistent, and dishonest. Further, it only continues to perpetuate the environment of fear that is so prevalent during this COVID crisis.

For politicians and public health officials to so heavily rely on the virtue signal of "science and data" as a means of demonstrating moral correctness of their decisions is lazy, inconsistent, and dishonest.

Societal Lens

- ***The existing COVID restrictions, including lockdowns and quarantines, are doing more harm than good to humanity. The “solution” has become the “problem.”***
- ***The consequences of severe and ongoing lockdown measures are producing wide-spread devastation orders of magnitude greater than COVID.***
- ***Those who are at minimal risk of death should be allowed to resume normal lives immediately.***

The COVID Toll

There is always a consequence, whether good or bad, to every government decision. Whether reducing the speed limit or lowering the age of sexual consent or directing more taxpayer funds to subsidized school lunches, every legislation passed or policy enacted or rule created possesses intended and unintended consequences.

This has been keenly felt by recent and ongoing lockdown measures and government controls designed to restrict social mobility. Regardless of the motives behind such decisions, it is imperative upon any government, for the sake of its citizenry, to continually address, examine, and *appropriately respond* to the consequences of its decisions.

U.S. governments, specifically state governments, have conducted an unparalleled experiment in attempting to control millions of people’s behavior through emergency proclamations. All for the stated goal of ensuring and sustaining public health. Yet, this historic exercise of states’ police powers is coming with significant cost to the economy and humanity.

Within four weeks of declaring a national emergency, 22 million Americans had filed for unemployment benefits. By May 2020, the U.S. was experiencing unemployment rates not seen since the Great Depression. Though there was surprising job growth in June - thanks in part to the largest economic stimulus ever passed in U.S. history - the country has still lost over 10 million

jobs as a direct result of the public response to COVID. And, there has been an historic contraction of personal income.⁷⁷

Currently, the national unemployment rate sits at nearly 8%—far higher than the 3.5% unemployment rate immediately preceding COVID. Significant or protracted job loss is never good because lost jobs mean lost wages. And, lost wages mean lost livelihoods.

There has been extensive study surrounding recessions and high unemployment levels in an effort to “count the human cost” of such economic realities. Past recessions and high unemployment levels have proven to:

- Disproportionately impact minorities; result in inadequate and low-quality housing; provide fewer recreational activities; restrict access to services and public transportation; and reduce life expectancy;⁷⁸
- Result in more domestic abuse and lower birth rates;⁷⁹
- Increase emotional and behavioral difficulties in adolescents during critical development stages; and reduce funds for public schools and community health centers;⁸⁰
- Lead to higher rates of crime and vandalism; produce greater political instability; increase homelessness; result in

⁷⁷ U.S. economy contracted at fastest quarterly rate on record from April to June as coronavirus walloped workers, businesses. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/30/gdp-q2-coronavirus/>. September 19, 2020.

⁷⁸ The psychological consequences of unemployment. Retrieved from <https://www.spssi.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1457>. September 19, 2020.

⁷⁹ The Great Recession, families, and the Safety Net. Retrieved from <https://irle.berkeley.edu/the-great-recession-families-and-the-safety-net/>. September 19, 2020.

⁸⁰ What the economic downturn means for children, youth and families. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/economy>. September 19, 2020.

higher levels of depression, substance abuse, admissions to psychiatric hospitals, death by suicide, and violence;⁸¹

- Focus job losses in “middle skill” jobs like parts manufacturing, assembly, telemarketing, mail delivery, cooking, and administrative-support work; disproportionately impact rural areas and distressed communities; disproportionately impact housing prices in the poorest communities; and encourage a more racially-divided community and country.⁸²

The COVID crisis is historically unique because it is being driven by government officials’ intentional decisions to limit social mobility and interactions in an effort to slow virus transmission. This is much different than past economic recessions that were not a *direct result of direct decisions* by government officials, but a correction, however painful, of unhealthy excesses in our economy.

Throughout COVID, there have been attempts to quantify or measure the fallout of lockdown decisions made across the country and the world. Following is a sample:

- The World Food Program estimated that 265 million people could face starvation in 2020, which nearly doubles the levels experienced in 2019;⁸³
- Food insecurity amongst mothers with children 12 and under increased 267% during COVID.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Economic costs of unemployment. Retrieved from <https://www.economicshelp.org/macroeconomics/unemployment/costs/>. September 19, 2020.

⁸² The great recession is still with us. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/12/great-recession-still-with-us/547268/>. September 19, 2020.

⁸³ 265 million people could face hunger in “unprecedented” crisis, world food program expert warns. Retrieved from <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/265-million-people-could-face-hunger-in-unprecedented-crisis-world-food-program-expert-warns/ar-BB14BZap>. September 19, 2020.

⁸⁴ The Covid-19 crisis has already left too many children hungry in America. Retrieved from [https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america/#:~:text=In%20total%20for%202018%2C%207.4, enough%20food%20\(3.1%20percent\)](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america/#:~:text=In%20total%20for%202018%2C%207.4, enough%20food%20(3.1%20percent).). September 19, 2020.

- An estimated 815,000 excess deaths over the next 10 to 17 years may result from COVID-related job losses;⁸⁵
- Over the next year, an additional 2.4 million people could die from tuberculosis, AIDS, and malaria as COVID-19 continues to interrupt the distribution of bed nets, diagnostics, and treatment.⁸⁶
- Certain psychologists have determined the toxic effects of prolonged isolation resulting from social distancing to be "... a major risk factor for disease, akin to smoking cigarettes and more of a threat to long-term health than obesity."⁸⁷
- Research performed by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America concluded that the lockdown measures "...unevenly affect the poorer fraction of the population." Additionally, "[i]n the absence of targeted lines of intervention, the lockdown would most probably induce a further increase in poverty and inequality."⁸⁸
- To further cement the prior point, the World Health Organization (WHO) has now repeatedly warned against the adverse global effects of lockdown measures. "We in the World Health Organization do not advocate lockdowns as the primary means of control of this virus. We really do appeal to all world leaders: stop using lockdown as your primary control method...lockdowns have just one consequence that you must never, ever belittle, and that is making poor people an awful lot poorer."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ What if the lockdown is worse than the disease? Retrieved from <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/265-million-people-could-face-hunger-in-unprecedented-crisis-world-food-program-expert-warns/ar-BB14BZap>. September 19, 2020.

⁸⁶ How to stop Covid-19 fueling a resurgence of AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02334-0#ref-CR1>. September 20, 2020.

⁸⁷ What is the human cost of stopping Covid-19? Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-refugee-experience/202004/what-is-the-human-cost-stopping-covid-19>. September 20, 2020.

⁸⁸ Economic and social consequences of human mobility restrictions under Covid-19. Retrieved from <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/27/15530>. September 20, 2020.

⁸⁹ YouTube. Retrieved from <https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&t=915&v=x8oH7cBxgwE>. October 12, 2020.

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- World Health Organization

What about the children?

It is well-established that lost learning leads to lost earnings. Research clearly indicates that uneducated children will, on average, make less money over their lifetime as compared to educated children.

Highlighting this reality, the Brookings Institution concluded that a four-week closure of the schools in New York City would result in an economic cost of \$1.1 billion. Further, a nationwide closure of schools for 12-weeks would cost 1% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) or roughly \$194 billion.

In yet another study, the Brookings Institution estimated that school closures in response to COVID could add up to \$10 trillion in lost earnings worldwide as measured over the lifetime of students.⁹⁰

Finally, a higher education research and marketing company determined that the effect of COVID-19 on higher education enrollment could be catastrophic. Their surveys and research found that due to COVID-19:

- 10% of college-bound seniors who had planned to attend four-year universities had made alternative plans;
- 26% of college students said they were unlikely to return to their current college in the Fall of 2020 or that it was too soon to tell;
- 85% of college students wanted to return to in-person instruction to complete their college degrees.
- 41% of minority high school seniors said they likely won't go to college at all in the Fall of 2020 or that it's too soon to tell.⁹¹

Returning to Normal is the Most Compassionate Thing to Do

In early October 2020, three doctors gathered in Great Barrington, Massachusetts for a private summit to discuss

⁹⁰ Learning losses due to Covid-19 could add up to \$10 trillion. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/07/30/learning-losses-due-to-covid-19-could-add-up-to-10-trillion/>. September 20, 2020.

⁹¹ Colleges could lose 20% of students. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/04/29/colleges-could-lose-20-percent-students-analysis-says>. September 20, 2020.

COVID-19. Dr. Kulldorff is a biostatistician, epidemiologist, and professor of medicine at Harvard University. Dr. Gupta is an epidemiologist and professor at Oxford University. Dr. Bhattacharya is a physician, epidemiologist, health economist, public health policy expert, and professor at Stanford University.

Much like Dr. Ioannidis, these epidemiologists are challenging the established “COVID science” being put forth as “gospel.” As infectious disease experts and public health scientists, these doctors have expressed “grave concerns” over the COVID-19 policies being carried out across the country. They state: “current lockdown policies are producing devastating effects on short and long-term public health. The results (to name a few) include lower childhood vaccination rates, worsening cardiovascular disease outcomes, fewer cancer screenings and deteriorating mental health – leading to greater excess mortality in years to come, with the working class and younger members of society carrying the heaviest burden. Keeping students out of school is a grave injustice. Keeping these measures in place until a vaccine is available will cause irreparable damage, with the underprivileged disproportionately harmed.”⁹²

These scientists espouse a *Focused Protection* approach whereby the most vulnerable to death from COVID, which include the elderly and those with comorbidities, be protected through targeted public health responses. On the other hand, the doctors urge that “those who are not vulnerable should immediately be allowed to resume life as normal. Simple hygiene measures, such as hand washing and staying home when sick should be practiced by everyone to reduce the herd immunity threshold. Schools and universities should be open for in-person teaching. Extracurricular activities, such as sports, should be resumed. Young low-risk adults should work normally, rather than from home. Restaurants and other businesses should open. Arts, music, sport and other cultural activities should resume. People who are more at risk may participate if they wish, while society as a whole enjoys the protection conferred upon the vulnerable by those who have built up herd immunity.”⁹³

“Those who are not vulnerable should immediately be allowed to resume life as normal... People who are more at risk may participate if they wish, while society as a whole enjoys the protection conferred upon the vulnerable by those who have built up herd immunity.”

- The Great Barrington Declaration

⁹² The great Barrington declaration. Retrieved from <https://gbdeclaration.org/>. October 12, 2020.

⁹³ The great Barrington declaration. Retrieved from <https://gbdeclaration.org/>. October 12, 2020.

Since it's crafting, their statement has been signed in agreement by nearly 9,000 medical & public health scientists, over 23,000 medical practitioners, and nearly 403,000 concerned citizens.⁹⁴ Just some of the cross-section where these public health scientists and medical practitioners work include the Veterans Administration, the University of Sussex, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, the University of Edinburgh, the University of London, Tel-Aviv University, the University of Cambridge, Stanford University Medical School, National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, the University of Arizona, Oxford University, and Baylor University.

Failure to Ask the Right Questions

We still don't know how many of the reported deaths involving COVID were actually *caused* by COVID.

What we do know is that over 90% of those deaths involving COVID also involved significant comorbidities, like heart disease, chronic lung disease, and obesity. *What we do know* is that COVID is not systematically taking out healthy people. *What we do know* is that the harms caused by lockdown measures will be felt for a generation or more. Trillions of taxpayer dollars have been spent to financially support businesses that were forced to close and to financially support millions of workers who had a stable job taken away. This has created a crushing burden of debt that will we hand down to our children.

How does a 5th grader make up for a lost year of learning? How does a 25-year-old make up for 7 months of lost wages? How does a business owner makeup for months of lost profit and crippling debt incurred as a result of the lockdowns? How does a nonprofit make up for months of lost donations? How does Washington State make-up for hundreds of millions of dollars in lost tax revenue?

These and hundreds of other serious questions remain unaddressed when considering the true cost of our state's continued, irrational, and devastating heavy-handedness.

⁹⁴ The great Barrington declaration. Retrieved from <https://gbdeclaration.org/view-signatures/>. October 12, 2020.

Ethical Lens

- ***Government leaders and public health officials have a moral and ethical obligation to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.***
- ***If the moral and ethical imperative is to save lives and minimize harm, then existing policies and restrictions, such as the arbitrary closure of schools and businesses, are misaligned and ineffective.***

Centered at the COVID-19 crisis is the issue of ethics and morality due to the tension created by the public health goal of “saving lives”, albeit at the cost of devastating many people’s livelihoods. Some have been quick to say that COVID is a collective risk and that it threatens everyone, and therefore, everyone must cooperate in order to reduce virus transmission and save human lives. Hinting towards a moral browbeating, these folks are also quick to point out that to disobey or disregard public health guidelines is to work against the greater public good.

Many others, however, are beginning to realize that the “COVID view of the world” being presented by many politicians and mainstream media is myopic, short-sighted, unhelpful, punitive, and unjust. In short, we believe our state government’s ongoing actions in response to COVID have moved from foolish and arbitrary to harmful and immoral.

In relationship to what we’ve experienced in Washington State, we believe:

- It is immoral for government to choose winners and losers in the *marketplace*. Why is it that public works construction jobs were never shut down in Washington State, but private construction jobs were?
- It is immoral for government to choose winners and losers in *society*. Why is it that we can figure out how to let multi-million-dollar athletes play professional football, but can’t figure out how to let a 1st grader receive in-person schooling?

- It is immoral for government to restrict, either through action or *threat* of action, the freedom of association of one group, but not another group.
- It is immoral for government to force its citizens to beg and ask permission for rights and liberties that are fundamentally granted by God and protected by our Constitution.
- It is immoral for government to use the “sanctity of life” argument as grounds for interfering with people’s God-given liberties, and simultaneously inflict wide-spread collateral damage at every other level of the human experience, all the while promoting and upholding laws that defend the murder of babies.
- It is immoral for government to determine “public health” standards that directly interfere with an individual's ability to exercise personal discretion, personal responsibility, and personal conviction regarding their own life and health.
- It is immoral for government to make decisions for “public health” that directly result in catastrophic damage to everyone’s overall health.
- It is immoral for government guilty of gross hypocrisy to then lecture its citizenry on the morality of its decisions.
- It is immoral for an officer of our government, specifically the governor, to create “laws” without due process and representation.
- It is immoral, not just foolish, for an agent of our government, specifically the governor, to centralize all response and control in one office, with no end in sight, and to remove the authority from locally-elected officials best positioned to serve those who elected them. All representation is lost. This is the very reason we have a Constitution.
- It is immoral and dangerous when unelected public health officials are given authority to create policies that negatively restrict and disproportionately affect the private sector, decisions from which they are insulated from, and decisions for which there can be no legal challenge or voting recourse from the people.
- It is immoral and arrogant for our governor to attempt to navigate an unprecedented crisis on his own wisdom and authority without convening the state’s representatives...men and women the people of this state elected for such a moment.

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“Americans Don’t Get Ruled”

Below is an excerpt from State Court Judge of Illinois, the Honorable Michael McHaney, on his ruling against Governor J.B. Pritzker’s lockdown orders in *Mainer v. Pritzker*:

Since the inception of this insanity, the following regulations, rules or consequences have occurred: I won’t get COVID if I get an abortion but I will get COVID if I get a colonoscopy. Selling pot is essential but selling goods and services at a family-owned business is not.

A family of six can pile in their car...without contracting COVID but, if they all get in the same boat, they will. We are told that kids rarely contract the virus and sunlight kills it, but summer youth programs, sports programs are cancelled. Four people can drive to the golf course and not get COVID but, if they play in a foursome, they will. If I go to Walmart, I won’t get COVID but, if I go to church, I will. Murderers are released from custody while small business owners are threatened with arrest if they have the audacity to attempt to feed their families.

These are just a few examples of rules, regulations and consequences that are arbitrary, capricious, and completely devoid of anything even remotely approaching common sense.

When laws do not apply to those who make them, people are not being governed, they are being ruled. Make no mistake, [such] orders are not laws. They are royal decrees. ...[C]itizens are not being governed, they are being ruled. The last time I checked...citizens are also Americans and Americans don’t get ruled. The last time a monarch tried to rule Americans, a shot was fired that was heard around the world. That day led to the birth of a nation consensually governed based upon a document which ensures that on this day in this, [or] any American courtroom tyrannical despotism will always lose and liberty, freedom and the Constitution will always win.

“These are just a few examples of rules, regulations and consequences that are arbitrary, capricious, and completely devoid of anything even remotely approaching common sense. When laws do not apply to those who make them, people are not being governed, they are being ruled.”

- Hon. McHaney

Historical Lens

- ***There is a long, terrifying history of governments abuse of power.***
- ***There is a long, rich history of civil disobedience by the Church.***

If the 20th century taught us anything, it was that citizens should cultivate a healthy suspicion of government's motives in curtailing individual freedoms and liberties in the name of "public health and safety."

There will always be a tension between safety and liberty. Giving up liberty for safety is rarely a wise trade. If a government says, "it's for your own safety", it's probably not for your long-term well-being. Country after state after leader has proven this tragically true, and it is arrogant to think that we would be any different.

Contrary to what most American Christians are aware of, there is a rich history of civil disobedience by the Church. The warm blanket of freedom has lulled many American Christians to sleep, but for the vast majority of the history of Christianity, the church has been at odds with the government it finds itself under.

What we forget is that a majority of the Christian heroes we hold in honor were either killed by their governments (while resisting) or spent a large portion of their life working, preaching, arguing, and writing against those governments for the sake of human flourishing.

For many, it was their very act of civil disobedience that is the reason we even know who they are (John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, William Tyndale, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, John Wycliffe, etc.). And many of these godly men's writing and examples provided the foundation and fountainhead for the ideals and truths that filled the hearts of the men who penned the foundational documents of our nation.

Summary Statements

On COVID:

- *COVID-19 is a real virus posing a serious threat to a very, very, very, small percentage of the population, specifically the elderly and the infirm, and can be mitigated through common-sense practices of focused protection and personal hygiene.*
- *COVID-19 is not a death sentence to all of humanity. Therefore, we should not disrupt all of humanity for it. To disrupt and destroy life for everyone for the sake of mitigating risk for a few is not prudent or wise, ethical or moral, especially when simple steps could be taken to protect the most vulnerable without disrupting the general populous.*
- *COVID-19 is here to stay. It's not going anywhere. Viruses just don't just get "put out." We must learn to live with it, not in spite of it.*
- *COVID-19 does not pose a risk to normal society beyond that which should be considered "acceptable" in every day life.*
- *COVID-19 "positive cases" do not spell the end of the world, nor should they be cause for wide-spread panic. As has been demonstrated, the vast majority recover. We affirm the growing list of scientists and medical professionals stating that herd immunity is our most effective weapon against COVID-19, even more effective than a vaccine.*

On government:

- *The Washington State legislature gives the Governor the authority to declare an emergency only after finding that a "public disorder, disaster, energy emergency, or riot" exists (RCW 43.06.010(12)). COVID-19 is none of those things. The only category that is even close is "public disorder".⁹⁵ However, the*

⁹⁵ See statement from Sheriff Brian Burnett in appendix

Summary Statements

mere presence of an illness is not a public disorder, otherwise, there would always be an emergency, as there will always be illness among us (at the very least, something more is needed, such as inadequate hospital resources, people dying in the streets, etc.). Thus, the governor's emergency proclamation is ultra vires, or beyond his authority (it might be a good idea, but it is not warranted by existing law)

- *Without a lawful emergency declaration, none of the Secretary of Health's mandates carry any legal authority whatsoever.*
- *The Governor's initial claim to declare an emergency was based solely on the threat of a collapsing of our hospital system. Thankfully, that threat never materialized. As Washington State law demands, once the "emergency" has passed, the Governor's emergency powers must be immediately rescinded. Our Governor's continued use of emergency powers are illegal. Whether people think his actions a "good idea" or not is irrelevant; no one is above the law.*
- *Our Governor has not established a clear basis for the emergency declaration (people getting sick just doesn't cut it). As a result, there is no basis for determining when the emergency is over. This indefinite and amorphous standard is the true threat to citizens' freedoms, as it puts us at the mercy of the Governor's whims.*
- *There is no "COVID" or "pandemic" clause in the 1st amendment or the Bill of Rights or the Constitution. To act as though there is such a clause sets a dangerous precedent at best and is tyrannical at worse.*
- *We are, fundamentally, a representative and decentralized form of government. These two cornerstones of both our Federal and State Constitutions have been functionally erased by the actions of our current Governor. Thankfully, we are not helpless. Our government "derives it's just powers from the consent of the governed." This means, like it or not, we have an obligation as citizens, given us by the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the clear teaching of Scripture, to stand up when the jurisdiction of the government*

overreaches and to humbly, respectfully, but firmly say: "We do not consent!"

- *The growing consensus is that the current, ongoing, draconian lockdowns are not only ineffective as a long-term strategy to deal with COVID-19, but do astronomically more harm than good on a comprehensive human scale. The collateral damage is guaranteed and far reaching. We believe it foolish to continue choosing a known set of consequences, which are orders of magnitude greater than the unknown set of consequences experienced from living normal life in light of the new virus (with focused protection on those most vulnerable).*
- *It is disingenuous, hypocritical, and immoral to publicly support, and even defend as "patriotic", the mass gathering of thousands to protest, riot, destroy private and public property, and illegally occupy property, while simultaneously maligning the peaceful gathering of churches (much smaller groups, over much smaller timeframes) as dangerous to society and potential "super-spreader" events.*
- *Our response to COVID-19 will not be judged kindly by history, not in "not doing enough", but in doing far too much of the wrong things. We believe historians will look back with sad humor at the self-inflicted and wide-spread devastation we brought on ourselves through overly-drastic and ultimately ineffective lockdowns driven by a media-hyped, politically-charged election-year environment.*

On Our Response:

- *We, as elders, are given responsibility and authority over the jurisdiction of the local church and are charged to shepherd the spiritual well-being of our people. A significant part of this involves gathering our people in person to worship Jesus through Word, song, and sacrament, and to encourage one another as the Family of God.*

"The liberties protected by the Constitution are not fair-weather freedoms — in place when times are good but able to be cast aside in times of trouble. There is no question that this Country has faced, and will face, emergencies of every sort. But the solution to a national crisis can never be permitted to supersede the commitment to individual liberty that stands as the foundation of the American experiment."

-Hon. Stickman IV, Butler v. Wolf

Summary Statements

- *We believe the Church is essential to any community thriving. The Church is not an accessory to a community but right at the heart of keeping a community healthy and whole. What the Church offers is needed now more than ever.*
- *Early on, we gave our federal government and state officials the benefit of the doubt and supported their leadership in the face of an unknown threat. However, we want to be clear...we shut down our gatherings as a voluntary act of submission and honor to our governing officials in the face of an unknown danger. We did not do it as an act of relinquishing our spiritual authority over the local church to the state.*
- *We have remained shut down for weekly face-to-face gatherings, at great cost to our church family, for 7 long months. We have demonstrated we have taken this seriously.*
- *We are grateful for technology and will continue to use it and every means available to spread the Good News of Jesus to the world. However, great technology will never replace real people. We believe this season has shown us both the wonderful benefits of technology as well as its limitations and shortcomings. Humans need human interaction. Hugs. Handshakes. To be together. Watching a sermon online will never replace the experience of gathering in the same physical space with the Church to worship Jesus.*
- *We would have begun meeting sooner but had no place to gather our large church family until we finished our own building, which was materially delayed due to the arbitrary closure of private construction jobs (though public works jobs were allowed to remain open).*
- *The President of the United States has repeatedly asked churches to meet, declaring them “essential” to the health of our nation; the Constitution protects the gathering of people to worship; the courts are increasingly recognizing the gross overreach of governors’ infringing on citizens’ individual liberties all in the name of “public safety;” our local law enforcement agencies and many elected officials have affirmed their support of our local churches.*

Summary Statements

- *It is unloving to continue promoting a narrative of fear by acting like everyone's life is in danger every time they go outside when the empirical and universal data says that is simply not the case.*
- *Through simple common sense measures of personal hygiene and responsibility, we believe we can gather the people of God safely for an hour each week to worship Jesus, and do so in a way that does not harm our people nor put our community at grave risk.*
- *Therefore, in glad submission to God, and with deep love and concern for each other and our community, we as the elders of Grace City will call our church to gather once again.*
- *We understand not all churches will come to these same conclusions. That is perfectly fine. Our unity is in Christ, not uniformity of response to this very complex crisis. We are not responsible for their flock but for the flock of Grace City, and each must lead according to their context, conviction, and conscience. That's all any of us can do.*
- *We hope that in a few months this will all have passed. If circumstances change from the trajectory they have been consistently on for many months, we will regroup and reconsider what best path to take at that time. But as for now we are clear...it is time to gather our church. And gather we will. We have arrived here with careful study and a clear conscience before God. To Him be the glory.*

**“May the Lamb that was slain receive
the reward of His sufferings.”**

Frequently Asked Questions

When the Governor says churches can't gather in the way we are gathering, are we acting like we are above the law?

We have a very high view of the rule of law, which is precisely why we are choosing to meet. We find our Governor's sweeping disregard for both the state and federal Constitutions to be appalling. His disregard for the process in which our laws are made, and his insistence that his unending "Emergency Powers" give only him the right to create laws and then release them through press conferences, is a serious threat to our Constitutional Republic.

To go along with his proclamations and act as though they are "laws" only emboldens him. In other words, to give in to a bully on the playground won't make him less of a bully tomorrow.

Therefore, we will not pretend that what he's doing is right, lawful, or binding. Encouraging everyone to "just go along with it" so we might find enough favor with the Governor to "open up" is a doctrine of appeasement we find degrading to the dignity afforded us in the Constitution. We will not beg from the Governor those inalienable rights promised us by God and guaranteed in the Constitution.

The sad reality is, though most citizens have tried very hard for many months to follow his "proclamations" (in many cases at great personal cost), it has simply become impossible to follow the Governor's always-changing, arbitrary, capricious, petty, and sometimes downright silly "laws." This has been proven time and again when, after studying each new adjustment to the rules carefully, we can't find anyone, citizen or public official, who can give us straight answers as to what is or isn't "allowed." Nobody has followed our Governor's proclamations perfectly because no one can keep up with all of the changes. It's simply impossible.

This means every person is choosing to ignore some portion of the Governor's proclamations based on their own personal comfort level. This is one of the tragic casualties of our

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Governor's poor leadership: a devaluation of rule of law leading to each individual picking and choosing which "law" to obey. It has had the negative result of lowering the citizen's confidence in government and creating an indifferent attitude towards rules and laws in general. It's created a "pick and choose and look the other way" attitude. Even law enforcement has been forced to choose which laws they will enforce and which ones they won't enforce (a very frustrating position to be in).

In choosing to meet, we are not acting above the law; we are acting perfectly within our rights guaranteed by the highest law in the land. It is the Governor who, in claiming to have the authority to interject himself between the citizens of this state and their God, is superseding the law and acting as if he is above it. He is not.

Either the law matters or it doesn't. When you create unenforceable, arbitrary, unequal "laws" that defy all common sense and legal sense, it lowers the overall value of all laws. It is precisely because of our high esteem for the rule of law and our Constitution that we are choosing to meet.

Is there any legal liability for those who choose to gather to worship in person?

Currently, we've been told "no." We are a voluntary association gathering. No one is being mandated, required, or forced to come. Each person comes at their own risk, the same as when you ride your bike or drive a car.

We believe in and support the personal responsibility of adults to make their own decisions in relationship to their own personal health.

Is there any liability or risk for the church?

L&I was tasked with aggressively enforcing the Governor's edicts through threats of crippling fines on any business who didn't fall in line with his stifling regulations. So, theoretically, we could be fined for creating an "unsafe work environment" for our paid staff (even though we have given our staff the same options as our church family...do what is best for your health).

If this situation were to happen, we have two options. The first is we've had donors say they will pay the fines until the "edicts"

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change, and to chalk it up as a “cost of doing business”...all of which is very kind.

The second, and better, option is we will simply call our Sunday gatherings "peaceful protests." While the 1st Amendment should already protect our rights as individuals to freely exercise our religion, this categorization of our gathering as a protest should finally guarantee it. The Governor has repeatedly said he supports people's Constitutional rights to peacefully protest. And, he has allowed these protests without enforcement of his mandates, like masks and social distancing. Our weekly protests would be in protest of Satan and his destructive work in our world.

Do I need to wear a mask when attending a Grace City Church gathering?

Pastor Josh addressed this question and our church family's posture towards it in a letter he sent the week before we gathered. Please reference that letter located in the appendices.

Appendix I: On Masks and Grace City

Letter sent from Pastor Josh to the church family, dated October 7, 2020, regarding our public gatherings and how we will view the potentially divisive issue of social distancing and masks.

Greetings Dear Friends!

First of all, Sharon and I have missed you! To go through these challenging months without weekly gathering with the Church has made a trying time even more difficult. Thankfully that will end soon!

I wanted to reach out to our church family and give a little explanation for what our gatherings will look like as we prepare to start meeting in our new forever-home.

I understand everyone has a different comfort level regarding going out in public these days. Some feel comfortable going out without any concern for "social distancing." Some are exercising a small measure of "social distancing" by wearing a mask whenever they are required to. And still others have chosen more strict measures and have kept their interaction to a few close friends and family.

OPTIONS

It is our goal to love and serve as many as possible, whatever their current comfort level. To that end, we'll be providing 3 options for how to participate in the family of Grace City moving forward.

For those members of our family preferring to stay home for now, we will continue providing our online services and resources. For those comfortable with a few more folks, we are encouraging them to meet with their City Group (or join a City Group for the first time!) and watch the service together. And for those comfortable being around more folks, we'll begin in-person meetings with the soft-opening of our new home on

October 18th! (See details on our app, website, or sign up for Grace City News).

If you're wondering what, if anything, we will be requiring of our church when we gather, our answer is simple: whatever you feel is best for your personal health, we will fully support. You know your situation best, and are free to do what you feel most comfortable doing.

UNITY & LOVE

I realize there may be differing opinions on this, and that is ok. To be quite honest, it would be easier to forge a false sense of unity by handing down a hard directive we ask everyone to follow. But we've never before found unity as a church around following social or cultural protocols, and we won't start now. It is our conviction that unity will be best achieved not by forcing everyone to follow a certain policy, but rather by encouraging everyone to look to Jesus. Our unity is firmly rooted in Him. Loving Jesus, loving each other, grace towards all. This is the higher road, the better road, the surer road.

For those who are tired of the regulations, masks, fear narrative, government overreach, and who feel this has all been blown out of proportion, I get it. I would encourage you to consider this a wonderful opportunity to extend love and grace to those in our church body whose situation you may not fully understand.

For instance, one brother in our church recently had a kidney transplant and now has only one working kidney. His wife is in the same boat (because she gave one of her kidneys to him... true love!). They have been told they need to be more cautious than others.. Another church family member works in an assisted-living facility and must take precautions she might not normally take due to her work regulations and threat of crippling government fines. We totally understand and support that.

For those who feel this is a legitimate health threat to the entire populous and anyone not "social distancing" is acting recklessly and carelessly, I hear and understand your fear. My encouragement to you is the same...this is a wonderful opportunity to extend love and grace to those in our church body whose convictions or situation does not match your own.

For instance, a sister I know in our church family has struggled with serious asthma her entire life. You might assume she would have to wear a mask, but on the contrary, her doctor warned her in the strongest possible terms of the danger to her lungs if she wore a mask. Another brother recently had a double-lung transplant, and the last thing his surgeon told him when leaving the hospital was, "Whatever you do, don't wear a mask!"

Still others feel that the heavy-handed mask rules are an egregious act of government overreach creating a slippery slope of government control and abuse. Or they're concerned for the unknown health risks to immune systems and other issues that come from masking healthy people.

What is my point? Simply this...there are many sides to this complex issue, and none of us knows the unique set of personal or vocational circumstances behind whether or not someone is wearing or not wearing a mask. So rather than drawing hard lines and yelling across them, we will take this issue that has become such a point of contention in our culture and use it as a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate love and understanding towards each other that is thoroughly and distinctly Christian.

GATHERING DETAILS

For those who've asked about our in-person services, we are adding additional services in an effort to create room for folks to spread out if they want. We'll also have touch-less sanitation stations available, perform light sanitation between services, and encourage everyone to exercise responsible personal hygiene. As well, we encourage anyone who is feeling sick or feverish to simply stay home and watch online. (As a reassurance, much of this, like cleaning and sanitation, was already being done well before COVID).

The big idea here is personal freedom and individual responsibility. We trust our people to take responsibility for themselves and extend grace towards all. There are no first, second, or third-class citizens at Grace City. Mask or no mask, come in person or participate from home, we are one family and will love and care for each other as such. And I know we will. That's just how Grace City rolls.

Appendix I: On Masks and Grace City

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out. Please know that we will be moving our offices over the next couple of weeks, so most of our staff will be working from home in the interim. If we don't answer the phone or respond to an email right away, we will get back to you as soon as we can!

Sharon and I love you and miss you all and can't wait to see you soon. We are moving into the most exciting chapter of our young church's history, and we could not be more hopeful. These are good days to be on Team Jesus.

God Bless,

Pastor Josh

Appendix II: Letter to Governor Inslee From Local Pastors

This letter, dated May 13, 2020, accompanied the Chelan-Douglas Health District's application to request permission from the Governor's office to use local data to determine the pace at which our counties moved through the proposed phases of reopening. The request was denied without review.

To: Governor Jay Inslee
From: Churches of Chelan / Douglas County
Re: Partnering with Local Authorities to Apply the Phased Reopen Plan

It is with the utmost respect for your office that we reach out to you as pastors of Chelan & Douglas County.

Regarding closing our state due to Covid-19: We appreciated the steps you took early on in the face of this pandemic to protect our state. We understand leadership requires making the best decision with the best information one has at the time in order to do the most good for the most people. We did not second-guess you but rather supported you.

Regarding closing down churches: We supported the drastic steps to close down houses of worship. We understand this was a very hard decision and appreciate you did not make it lightly. We all stand in agreement with the essential nature of expressing one's religious convictions through corporate public worship; it is one of the core tenants of our great nation. But we understood the unprecedented nature of this unknown threat and willingly suspended our public services (many of us voluntarily before it was mandated), even though it came with a significant price.

Regarding the preservation and protection of life: We are grateful for the continued emphasis on the protection of life you

have regularly spoken of in each of your press briefings. This is a core belief and conviction we share. God has made all of life precious. We are never better than when banded together making personal sacrifices to protect the most vulnerable and least able to defend themselves among us, no matter their race, socio-economic status, or stage of life. Thank you for prioritizing this value.

Regarding the Phased Plan: We applaud the release of the 4-phased plan with the accompanying details and appreciate the hard work and careful thinking that resulted in its creation. We feel it represents a measured, responsible path back to the essential rhythm of life we all desire.

Regarding new data and information: We are greatly encouraged by the science and data now indicating the infectious fatality rate is far lower than originally predicted. It is a needed shot of good news to know the vast majority of those who test positive for Covid-19 recover. This is not information we had earlier, and we are relieved to have that data available now.

Regarding the response of our communities: We are grateful for the exceptional and selfless character our local communities have shown in coming together. At great cost to some, we sheltered in place so as to flatten the curve and prevent the systemic overloading of our hospitals, as was the stated goal. The stories of generosity, creativity, sacrifice, and love are many. We could not be more proud of our communities.

Regarding wide-spread and growing impact: In many ways, we pastors are on the front line of the human experience. Our churches contain the cross-section of our communities: young, old, women, men, business owners, medical personnel, teachers, workers, first responders, elected officials, stay-at-home moms, etc. We are seeing first-hand the weight and toll of the Covid-19 crisis.

We are deeply alarmed at the emotional, mental, psychological, and relational damage this extended “stay at home” order is taking. Anecdotally, we are seeing pornography, alcohol, and drug use skyrocket. Those prone to depression and mental illness are spiraling further into isolation and despair. Suicide attempts have spiked. Domestic abuse calls are up. Those

suffering from PTSD or struggling with addictions of all kinds are drifting further beyond recovery with each day the shelter in place continues.

Medically, doctors in our churches are expressing grave concerns about the ongoing deferral of simple preventative medicine (proactive health care like colonoscopies, mammograms, routine medical checkup, diabetes care, heart disease check ups, etc). The longer we do this, they tell us, the more we increase the certainty of health complications and death in the near future, that could have otherwise been avoided or mitigated substantially.

We are concerned that a sustained “stay home order” after we have demonstrably “flattened the curve” is now actively contributing to more wide-spread damage that is less visible but certainly just as devastating. And it will last much longer than Covid-19 itself (teen pregnancy, pornography, depression, substance abuse, psychological disorders, addiction, domestic violence, devastating economic loss, fear, stress, etc).

Regarding our approach to reopen: Our concern is holistic. We believe that Covid-19, as serious of threat as it presented, is but one of the myriads of challenges now facing us and threatening the health, happiness, and sanity of our communities. We are concerned that the extended shelter in place order is choosing a known set of vast and far-reaching negative consequences impacting 100% of the people in an attempt to avoid a less broad set of unknown negatives affecting a much smaller percent of people.

This does not mean we do not care for the smaller percentage impacted directly by this virus. Quite the opposite. As we mentioned above, we hold deep convictions as to the preciousness of all life, young and old, healthy or sick. That is precisely why we feel the need to keep as many in our community as strong as possible mentally, emotionally, physically, and economically, so we are able to stay in a position of strength to continue caring for those who are impacted by Covid-19.

Our Request: It is for these reasons that we would respectfully ask that you grant Chelan and Douglas County the variance proposal for which our elected Commissioners are applying. We

support their request and are committed to working with them to make sure this return to normal life is done in a responsible way. We trust their desire to protect everyone while using regional data and science to set the pace of local reopening. We are committed to working with them here at the local level to make that happen.

Our Conviction & Commitment: We believe that freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of worship are all essential to the American experience. They are unalienable rights granted us by God and protected by the Constitution we all hold dear.

We also believe that churches are an essential service to the mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational well-being of a community. As pastors, we will share the brunt of dealing with the fallout coming from this time of death, fear, loss, mental anguish, and devastating economic uncertainty. These things do not happen in a vacuum, they happen to people. People we know, love, and pastor. Let there be no question: we stand ready to step into that work with all our might. That is our calling and privilege.

Our Priority: Even with the above constitutional convictions firmly in place, we reluctantly agreed to the suspension of our worship services. This was a unique moment in history facing an unknown threat. Erring on the side of caution was right and proper and we did so willingly. We happily acted to love and protect our neighbor. It is that same love for neighbor that motivates us now.

As churches, our immediate priorities are helping to provide the necessary support so that local businesses can open as soon as possible and local hospitals can reopen safely to serve the many critical human needs currently going unaddressed. We are committed to providing whatever community assistance necessary in order for the variance requirements to be met. We have thousands of willing volunteers ready to help. It is with these intentions that we request you allow our local elected officials to use regionally specific data to determine the timing and implementation of your phased plan in a way that makes the most sense for us locally.

Appendix II: Letter from Local Pastors

We think our community has demonstrated extraordinary care for their fellow man. They have exercised restraint in personal freedoms and judiciousness in personal responsibility. We will continue to do so moving into the future. We all have a vested interest in the health and well-being of our fellow man, and we are committed to exercising the utmost care to ensure we reopen safely.

Thank you for your consideration. We are grateful for our local elected officials, including sheriffs, mayors, and county commissioners. We support them 100% in this proposal to apply your plan with regionally-specific precision. Led by our local officials, we will work for comprehensive health and well-being in the face of Covid-19. We pray for you regularly.

Respectfully,

Pastor Josh McPherson - Grace City Church	Pastor Jeremy Walker - Four Square Church
Pastor Jay Caron - Calvary Crossroads	Pastor Dennis Hen - Saddlerock Presbyterian
Pastor Joe Savino - Seventh-Day Adventist	Pastor Jeremy Payton - Living Hope
Pastor David Hunter - Wenatchee Valley Baptist	Pastor Jerry Beebe - Wenatchee First Assembly
Father Matt Canlis - Trinity Church	Pastor Sal DiMare - Praise Center
Pastor Mike Wilson - Sage Hills Church	Pastor Steve Whitney - Calvary Bible Church
Pastor Tye Davis - Valley View SDA	Pastor Daniel Kellog - Awaken Church
Rev. Gene Helsel - King's Cross	Pastor Dallas Stringer - Eastmont Baptist
Andrew Thompson - Columbia Grove	Pastor Eric Barnes - Eastmont Community Church
Pastor John Brossoit - Living Room	Pastor Gary Beck - Abundant Life SDA
Pastor Steve Haney - Christ Center	Pastor John Smith - Evergreen Baptist
Pastor John Romine - Light in the Valley	Pastor Mike Moore - Mid-Valley Baptist
Pastor Darryl Wall - New Life Church	Pastor Kyle Plew - Real Life Lake Chelan
Pastor Nick Longmire - Christ Center	Pastor David Belcher - Christ Center
Pastor Scott Morris - Living Stone Church	Pastor Keith Finkbeiner - Gateway Ministries
Chaplain Ben Torkelson - Chelan-Douglas County SO	

Appendix III: Letter to Governor Inslee from Local Businesses

We also wrote this letter to accompany the Chelan-Douglas Health District's application to request permission from the Governor's office to use local data to determine the pace at which our counties moved through the proposed phases of reopening. The letter was signed by over 130 local business owners. The request was denied without review.

Dear Governor Inslee,

We write this letter with tremendous respect for your office. We do not presume to know the burden of your position, especially during the Coronavirus Pandemic, and believe your decisions have not been easily or whimsically made. For that, we are very grateful for your service to our State.

As small business owners of Chelan & Douglas Counties, we are "main street." We are essential to the fabric and well-being of our local economies and communities. And we really care about our communities. In many cases, we have cast aside other, more fruitful financial opportunities to stay local. In many cases, we have taken on undue or imprudent financial and personal risk, so as to continue to invest in our communities and our employees. We love our communities. We know faces and names. We know families and stories. We are "small town America."

The statewide shutdown has been devastating to our local economy. We know we're not alone in this. Millions across the nation are hurting. Nonetheless, our pain is real.

A survey recently performed by our local Chamber of Commerce regarding the impacts of COVID-19 discovered that:

Appendix III: Letter from Local Small Businesses

- 52% of local businesses have experienced a decline in revenue of 50% or more;
- 30% of local businesses have experienced a decline in revenue of 80% or more;
- 53% of local businesses cannot sustain operations for another 3 months; and
- 28% of local businesses are unsure how long they can even remain in operation.

These are very concerning. Many of our small businesses do not possess the capital or liquidity to sustain a continued shutdown of business activities. A loss of local businesses as identified in the aforementioned survey would be devastating and take years to rebuild. We do not possess the net population growth or local industry to quickly rebuild permanent business closures of this magnitude. And the economic devastation is just the tip of the iceberg for the social devastation that follows. This isn't about money, this is about people's lives; their physical, social, mental, emotional, and relational well-being.

Our counties have not experienced a similar pace or trajectory of COVID-19 infections and deaths as those counties hardest hit in our State. Additionally, we do not possess the population levels of other, hard hit counties. We are small, rural communities. And so, we believe a case-by-case approach, in cooperation with our communities, is best and best decided at the local level.

We are a sharp-thinking, deeply caring community. We are mothers and fathers, parents and children. We are husbands and wives, grandchildren and grandparents. We are family and we are friends. We have great medical providers that faithfully serve our communities, as well as the surrounding areas. We have governing authorities with faces to their names and personally known by their citizens. Our leaders in law enforcement are approachable and kind. And, we have some of the brightest minds in business.

Perhaps the greatest thing about our communities is you don't come here to get ahead. You come to our communities because

Appendix III: Letter from Local Small Businesses

you love the beauty, you love the people, and you love the way of life.

And so, we believe that in concert with our local governing authorities, medical professionals, law enforcement leaders, business owners, and citizens, we hold the greatest opportunity to successfully lead our communities through and beyond this pandemic. We believe that, in concert with our communities, we can develop great ideas and practices to keep people safe, while responsibly getting people back to work.

In light of this, we respectfully ask that you allow our local communities to follow your phased approach to reopen on a timeline established by our local governing authorities. We respectfully ask that the discretion given to states at this time be extended to our local communities in an effort to best respond to our unique context. We respectfully ask you to allow our counties to take hold of this great opportunity to make decisions for, and act upon, what is best for our local communities during this Coronavirus Pandemic.

Sincerely,

Small Business Owners of Chelan & Douglas Counties

**The letter was signed by over 130 local business owners in Chelan & Douglas Counties*

Appendix IV: Letter to Judge Ferrera from Sheriff Brian Burnett

This letter, dated May 5, 2020, accompanied a lawsuit arguing that the original stated emergency allowing the Governor's emergency powers (i.e. the threat of overwhelming hospitals) had passed. Therefore, the Governor's emergency powers must be rescinded and local government control of the pandemic response be restored. The letter was in support of the lawsuit and spoke to the confirmation that there was no pressing public emergency in our county.

To whom it may concern:

I have been working in full-time law enforcement in the State of Washington for over 22 years. The following is my experience in this field:

- June 1997: Reserve Deputy, Chelan County Sheriff's Office
- January 1998: Corrections Deputy, Chelan County SO
- November 1999: Field Deputy, Chelan County SO
- April 2004: Patrol Corporal, Chelan County SO
- December 2006: Patrol Sergeant, Chelan County SO
- January 2011-Present: Elected Sheriff, Chelan County
- 2011-Present: Chair for Chelan County Regional Drug Task Force
- 2014-2020: Co-Chair Sex Offender Notification and Registration Committee
- 2015-2016: (WASPC) Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs Executive Board / Sheriff at Large
- 2016-2017: WASPC Vice President
- 2017-2018: WASPC President
- 2018-2019: WASPC Past President
- 2018: Legislative mandated Mass Shooting Group (WASPC / Sheriff Representative)
- 2018-2020: Secretary / Treasurer for Washington State Sheriffs Association

Appendix III: Letter from Local Sheriff

- 2020: In Coming Vice President Washington State Sheriff's Association
- October 2018-Present: Governor Appointed Commissioner for Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (Term Ends June 30, 2024)

During my 22 plus year career in local law enforcement with the Chelan County Sheriff's Office I have witnessed firsthand many events that have qualified as a declared emergency in and for the County of Chelan. Many of those events being flash floods, mudslides and wildland fires that have burnt hundreds of thousands of acres and many residences and businesses valued into the millions of dollars, endangering or destroying personal property, wildlife, livestock and human lives. As the elected Sheriff of Chelan County, I also hold the title for Director of Emergency Management. The Chelan County Sheriff's Office overseas emergency management for the entire county, to include contract cities of Wenatchee, Cashmere, Chelan, Entiat and Leavenworth.

Chelan County Commissioners passed a resolution of an Emergency Declaration for COVID-19 (Resolution 2020-32) on March 17, 2020. This was preceded by both the Federal Emergency declaration on January 31, 2020 and the State of Washington Emergency Proclamation for all 39 counties on February 29, 2020. This is all designed in order for state and local jurisdictions to take guard and precautions to prevent our local and regional health care facilities of becoming overrun by what was predicted to be both high in numbers of infected persons, but also mass casualties that were being predicted from COVID-19.

Many local leaders and elected officials took these declarations of emergency with the utmost respect for in the aspect of preservation of life and protecting our citizens, by putting many policies, protocols and emergency continuity plans in place. As part of the Sheriff's Office continuity plans, we implemented a rotating (2 week) work schedule for our Records Staff March 18, 2020. We also allowed those employees that qualified as "High Risk" the option of continuing to work at our office locations or working remotely from home. As of May 6, 2020 all Records Staff have returned to regular work schedules, pending one "high Risk" employee that chose to continue to work remotely,

with a plan to return to their regular scheduled work hours June 1, 2020. We also closed our office to the public on March 18, 2020 and we have re-opened our office to regular business hours as of May 11, 2020.

The Chelan / Douglas Counties Regional Emergency Operations Center was stood up early on as a two county Unified Emergency Operations Center to assist in COVID-19 within our two county areas and was at full activation, staffed seven days a week. As of today's date the Regional EOC report shows a total of (6) deaths in Chelan County related to COVID and 191 positive tests being recorded. The original state of emergency declaration was to prepare and / or prevent our local health facilities from being over-run with serious COVID-19 patients in need of ICU and ventilator like equipment for life saving care. This hasn't happened as most reports have had the number of hospitalized COVID patients at or around (2).

In speaking with my Assistant Emergency Management Director, Sergeant Kent Sisson, this morning he stated he didn't believe that we were in an emergent situation and in fact the Regional EOC has already transitioned from full activation to partial activation or what he called, "Recovery Mode". Recovery mode isn't an emergent mode.

Through my training, experience and evaluation of our current situation and information, I do not believe Chelan and / or Douglas Counties are in an emergent situation, specifically in regards to COVID-19. To the contrary, I believe that our citizens are at greater risk if we do not lift the state emergency restrictions, as the concern of civil unrest and disorder that is likely to come from personal lives and businesses being financially ruined through the states continued lockdown and closures.

I testify to the foregoing matters under penalty of perjury:

Respectfully,

Brian Burnett

Recommended Readings

A Christian Manifesto - Francis Schaeffer

A Conflict of Visions - Thomas Sowell

A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants - Junius Brutus

Christianity and the Constitution - John Eidsmoe

How Should We Then Live? - Francis Schaeffer

In the Hands of the People - Jon Meacham

Lex Rex: The Law and the Prince - Samuel Rutherford

The DNA of Democracy - Richard Lyons

The Reader - Thomas Sowell

The US Constitution and Other Writings - Multiple contributors

Total Truth - Nancy Pearcey

