

## Sample Letter #1 – Long Format

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I first want to acknowledge the significant efforts and actions you have taken to provide for the health and safety of the residents of the State of California. Nonetheless, I am writing this letter to express my concern regarding the most recent decision to ban in-person worship services in churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and other faith-based buildings of worship.

This decision appears to be arbitrary and, in reality, biased against communities of faith. It is inconsistent with the decision to allow schools that were open to remain open. It is inconsistent with the decision to allow stores that were open to remain open. In fact, there appears to be a double standard when applied to religious organizations.

Consider this: I attend a church that meets in a giant auditorium with a capacity of 1300 people. Let me describe in detail what our church did when we were allowed to reopen earlier in the Fall: Congregants were seated six feet apart, wore masks and had their temperatures checked prior to entering the building. A health team made up of doctors and nurses was present in an outside venue to provide both physical screenings and information regarding the safety protocols necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19. There were two services on Sunday mornings, each lasting 60 minutes - with approximately an hour and a half in-between services, where a team of people disinfected the entire sanctuary prior to the start of the second service.

How does it even make sense that schools were allowed to remain open with students in the same classroom or changing classrooms for 6.5 hours a day, 5 days a week; and yet a building of worship could not remain open with congregants for only 1 hour per week? How does it make sense that businesses were allowed to remain open for 8-10 hours a day, 7 days a week, with hundreds of people going through them each day, picking up items and handling them, and then placing them back on their shelves; and yet a building of worship that no longer passes out bulletins nor uses hymnals, with a restricted number of congregants, cannot meet for two services of worship on one day per week?

This is outright discrimination against the faith communities of the State of California.

In addition, in this decision, you have overlooked the essential and critical nature of the services provided by communities of faith. These are the most essential places that must be open at this time. Not only do they provide emotional and physical support for their own congregants, they also extend benevolence to the vulnerable people in their communities.

It is important to emphasize that the spiritual component is a vital part of millions of peoples' lives in California. In these faith communities, people find emotional support and encouragement to endure, and even thrive, during times of crisis.

This mandate to close our places of worship has taken a major resource of support away, and resulted in the isolation of many people who are desperate to meet together and seek comfort and mercy from their God.

I believe that this mandate specifically aimed at the shutting down of places of worship is unjust. I am praying that you will reconsider this mandate and allow churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and other buildings of worship to reopen.

As a Christian, I am called to submit to those in authority: "Every person must submit to and support the authorities over him." Romans 13:1. I am reminded of another verse in Scripture when Peter was told by the authorities to no longer preach the Gospel, and he replied, "If we have to choose between obedience to God and obedience to any human authority, then we must obey God." Acts 8:29.

It's important to accept the fact that, in a way, this mandate is an infringement on my religious liberty and is in direct conflict with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits the government from enforcing any law prohibiting the free exercise of religion; and fundamental to that is my right to gather with other believers and worship my God.

Sincerely,

## **Sample Letter #2 – Short Upset Tone**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I write today to express in the strongest terms that I believe that shutting down in-person worship in the churches of California is a grievous infringement on my religious freedom granted in the Constitution of the United States.

Christianity is a congregational faith. In other words, part of the exercise of our faith is gathering together for worship, prayer and edification from the Word of God. Furthermore, from the church, its ministries and its people, we derive emotional, relational, spiritual and physical blessing. Church gatherings do much to push back against the insidious harm caused by isolation, and provide comfort and counsel that is much needed.

It makes no sense to see that retail stores are open, and even schools that were continuing to meet in-person can do so in San Joaquin County, but church services that occur just once per week are banned. This decision seems like discrimination to me! It is especially harmful as the holidays draw near.

I urge you to provide a way for churches to meet even in purple tier counties like mine. Failure to do so is to ignore the will of the people. Please stop these harmful restrictions.

Sincerely,

### Sample Letter #3 -- Short Legal Sounding

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I first want to acknowledge the significant efforts and actions you have taken to provide for the health and safety of the residents of the State of California. Nonetheless, I am writing this letter to express my concern regarding the most recent decision to ban in-person worship services in churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and other faith-based buildings of worship.

I recognize that not all citizens of this state have a religious background, or even a desire to participate in religious affairs. However, millions of Californians do, and we have been disenfranchised by the recent decisions made to not allow in-person worship. This decision is preventing the numerous ministries and social services provided by churches to the poor, the unemployed and the distressed, in addition to hindering the basic practice of those with religious faith.

Justice Samuel Alito recently stated, "Religious liberty is fast becoming a disfavored right." The truth of this statement is evidenced in the restrictions that are currently being placed on the churches of California. Don't forget that the government is meant to derive its just powers from the consent of the governed, not by fiat of the authorities. The faithful in California specifically do not give consent to being locked out of their churches. Fundamental to the free exercise of religion is the right to gather for worship. These current restrictions are a discriminatory act against those of us who value our religious practice.

Please reconsider the restrictions against in-person worship across the state of California and restore the proper balance between public safety and individual liberty.

Sincerely,