

Pastor Christopher Ogne
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SUPPORT

Greetings. My name is Christopher Ogne. I have been a citizen of Maryland for almost 19 years. I have been a pastor of the Lutheran Church of our Savior in Bryans Road MD for my entire tenure here in Maryland. Please know that I am not making this testimony as a pastoral representative of the Lutheran Church of our Savior. This is not official testimony of the church. This is my personal testimony being made as a pastor and a citizen. My words are my own.

In order to begin I think it is important to highlight a few points about myself. A cursory examination of my time here in Maryland will show that I have not been overly politically active. I have truly focused solely on being the pastor of the church and bringing the love of Jesus to the community. This is important to note simply to showcase that this entire entrance into the political sphere, outside of voting, is new to me. I simply believe it is this important.

In addition to this I also believe it is important to know that I am a registered Republican. I voted for the Governor both times he ran for the office. As a church body we weekly pray for the Governor and our legislators. Furthermore I personally pray for him also. When the Governor was battling cancer I was one of many pastors that participated in particular church services to lift him and his healing up in prayer. I write this simply to say that my testimony should not be taken as particular political animus towards the Governor or his party. I am registered with his party. The reason I am writing this and the reason I am speaking is because of deep concern over what has taken place this past year.

I firmly believe that the human person is a psychological, spiritual, and physical being. As such I firmly believe that the human person needs to be treated as such. The church and the ministry offer help in all three of these areas. When the Governor ordered the State of Emergency and closed the doors of the churches it was quite a shock to the system. Such a thing had never been done. I believe it was a shock to all of our systems.

Immediately weddings needed to be rescheduled. Families with loved one's dying were unable to properly mourn. I know that as I write this I am not speaking to a group of Christians, yet please know that to the Christian receiving the bread and wine of communion, which as Lutheran Christians we truly believe is the body and blood of our Lord, is absolutely essential to our psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. To be forcibly denied this was quite damaging spiritually and psychologically.

In addition the State of Emergency is consistently renewed, from my perspective, by one man's judgment. This also is very frightening. It has been nearly a year and one individual is deciding which businesses, which institutions, and which spiritual centers are allowed to be open and to

whom. This does tremendous spiritual and psychological damage to anyone trying to operate these places as well as to those on whom are dependent upon them.

The Governor's press conferences are some of the most frightening things to watch. Not because of the virus updates, as important as these are; but because at any moment one human being can shutter the doors of the church. I have found this to be deeply damaging. Quite literally I have sat on my bed terribly frightened that at any moment the Governor may shut us down.

I want the committee to know that I am not a COVID denier. I fully understand that this virus is real and I fully understand that this virus can be lethal. At the church that I serve we have complied with all of the guidelines. We go even further; we have completely outfitted our HVAC systems to bring in outdoor air, we have added ultra violet lights that kills germs and viruses to our HVAC system and we have added air scrubbers. We keep our capacity at 50% and our council and elders did vote to mask during our worship experience.

I tell you all of this to tell you that I am not simply some, "rabble rouser." I am a man that is deeply concerned for our democratic republic that feels genuine fear that one person can, for almost a year, tell us all what remains open and what remains closed.

I am in full support of this bill, as a republican, as someone that has not been overly political by any stretch until this time, and as a Christian and citizen.

All I am asking is that future State's of Emergency be implemented and reviewed by votes of the Legislature. It is far closer to the people to speak to their individual legislators. Please pass this bill.

Thank you,

Christopher Ogne