California pastors vow to defy Gov. Newsom and reopen: 'Churches are part of the answer not the problem'

By Caleb Parke

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A network of 3,000 California churches, representing 2.5 million members, plans to defy Gov. Gavin Newsom by resuming in-person services, as pastors insist they've been left out of the process.

California Church United pastors announced Thursday in front of a Fontana megachurch that they plan to open May 31, instead of waiting until stage 3, when gyms, movie theaters, and other venues open, the San Bernardino County Sun reports.

Danny Carroll, senior pastor at Water of Life Community Church in Fontana, California, argues that churches should reopen during phase 2 of the governor's plan to reopen the state. (Church United)
May 31 was chosen because it is Pentecost, marking the birth of the Christian Church when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and followers of Jesus, according to Christian tradition, fitting for a "rebirth" of services.

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“Our churches are part of the answer, not part of the problem,” said Danny Carroll, senior pastor at Water of Life Community Church. “We're an essential part of this whole journey and we've been bypassed ... kicked to the curb and deemed nonessential.”

On Tuesday, a federal judge ruled that Newsom had the right to ban churches from opening during the coronavirus outbreak, following a lawsuit from Cross Culture Christian Center in Lodi.

Newsom, after meeting with religious leaders Thursday, acknowledged the work of the faith community, helping the homeless, seniors, and children. He said he might allow them to reopen earlier than expected.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom is getting heat from pastors across the state who say he's treated them unfairly during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP)

“Our fear is simply this,” Newsom said, “congregations of people from far and wide coming together in a closed space at a large scale remains a point of concern and anxiety for us. We are working on guidelines for physical distancing and working with faith leaders talking about unique conditions in their own facilities. Nothing is etched in stone.”

**KENTUCKY AG JOINS CHURCH'S LAWSUIT AGAINST GOV TO RESUME IN-PERSON SERVICES**

Matt Brown, pastor of Sandals Church in Riverside, blasted Newsom for deeming churches nonessential during the pandemic: "We are torn between caring for and loving our people and his order.

"He didn't ask us. He overstepped and he's overreached," Brown said. "And he needs to step back and he needs to declare that the church is an essential part of what we do as Americans, as what we do as Californians.
Matt Brown, pastor of Sandals Church in Riverside, blasted Newsom for deeming churches nonessential during the pandemic. (Church United)

"We have a pastor in the south, in Chula Vista feeding hungry people a mile long in cars, socially distancing," said Jim Doman, pastor and founder of Church United. "How can the church not be essential?"

"It's the heart of Jesus to love and care for all people. The heart of God supersedes government."

Eli Loera, pastor of Family Christian Assembly in Fresno, told Fox News Newsom has "ignored" the churches as they continue to run food ministries, counsel, pay rents for the need, and provide other services.

Pastor Eli Loera of Family Christian Assembly in Fresno, Calif., spoke in Spanish, urging Gov. Gavin Newsom to reopen churches earlier than expected. (Church United)
California pastors vow to defy Gov. Newsom and reopen: ‘Churches are part of the answer not the problem’
Carroll "wants to cooperate with the state" as part of phase 2 and believes the churches are ready to "roll out, no matter what. That said, we are not trying to be rebels or activists here."

**BEN SHAPIRO SAYS POLITICS ARE DRIVING STATES' CORONAVIRUS POLICIES AND IT'S A 'PROBLEM'**

Church leaders said they are upset by being lumped in with sports leagues.

“We are not the MLB or the NBA,” Carroll added. “We are not a gathering of strangers. As pastors, we bury these people. We bleed with these people. We are a family, not a group of strangers.”

But some churches already have begun to meet in person, including the 412 Church in Murreittta and a sister congregation in San Jacinto, the Orange County Register reports.

Liberty Counsel, a religious freedom law firm, kicked off "ReOpen Church Sunday" this week with a Texas megachurch as its prime example.

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"Churches have always been essential, now more than ever, whether government recognizes them or not. They've been discriminated against with these orders," Mat Staver, Liberty Counsel founder and ordained pastor, told Fox News.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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