



*Office of Archbishop Alexander K. Sample*

November 19, 2020

### Statement on the Governor's Latest Restrictions

I am speaking out publicly to express my great disappointment and frustration at the Governor's latest restrictions on faith communities in Oregon. I understand the need to address the spike in COVID-19 cases, but we know that spread of the virus is not happening at faith gatherings. Our churches have been carefully following the masking, distancing, and sanitizing protocols. They work. Why are we limited to 25 people in a church that can seat 1000 while certain businesses are allowed to operate on a percentage of capacity? I would like to know the Governor's rationale for tighter restrictions on churches. It is not data driven. It does not make sense. Our neighbors to the north in Washington are facing greater spread and tighter restrictions, yet their Governor's formula for restrictions on faith communities is much more reasonable (25% occupancy or 200 maximum). It follows the science. A similar policy makes sense for Oregon.

The Catholic Church and other faith communities have bent over backwards to observe Governor Brown's directives and implement strict protocols to keep people safe since the pandemic began. We operate in a controlled environment where we can keep everyone who enters our doors from having "close contact." We are asking the Governor, following the two week "freeze," to reconsider her gathering restrictions for faith communities. We ask her to remember that the Christmas holiday is a little over a month away, and it is a season when people of many faiths turn to their churches. We need a policy that matches our current situation, keeps people safe, and meets the spiritual needs of people of faith in Oregon. It is unfortunate that a person's ability to worship does not seem to be considered an essential activity. I can assure you that the Catholic faithful under my pastoral care consider Sunday worship vital, especially when facing the challenges of the pandemic.

The Catholic community continues to pray for the Governor and her staff while she does the very challenging work of navigating the state of Oregon through this terrible pandemic.