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*“I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.”*  
**Abraham Lincoln**

**U.S. Attorney General Defends Religious Liberty in the Midst of Social Distancing**

U.S. Attorney General William Barr issued a statement this week defending religious liberty and condemning restrictions imposed on religious organizations that are not also required of nonreligious businesses and entities. The [statement](#) noted the importance of following President Trump’s social distancing guidelines as “the best path to swiftly ending COVID-19’s profound disruptions to our national life and resuming the normal economic life of our country.” However, he also stressed that “even in times of emergency, when reasonable and temporary restrictions are placed on rights, the First Amendment and federal statutory law prohibit discrimination against religious institutions and religious believers. Thus, government may not impose special restrictions on religious activity that do not also apply to similar nonreligious activity.” He emphasized, “Religion and religious worship continue to be central to the lives of millions of Americans. This is true more so than ever during this difficult time. . . . Religious communities have rallied to the critical need to protect the community from the spread of this disease by making services available online and in ways that otherwise comply with social distancing guidelines.” He further stressed the administration’s commitment to protecting the First Amendment freedom, stating, “The United States Department of Justice will continue to ensure that religious freedom remains protected if any state or local government, in their response to COVID-19, singles out, targets, or discriminates against any house of worship for special restrictions.”

This statement comes after several local and state officials have attempted to close religious gatherings, with restrictions that applied only to churches and did not include other gatherings. [Greenville, MS](#), church members were fined \$500 for sitting in their cars and listening to a sermon at a drive-in church service. First Liberty Institute is [advocating for the freedom](#) of this church, and the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a [statement of interest](#) in this case, adding weight to the importance of honoring religious liberty. Similar challenges to overreaching state or local government action against religious gatherings have occurred in [Kansas](#), [Charlotte, NC](#), and [Louisville, KY](#). In Louisville, Mayor Greg Fischer declared, the day before Easter, that drive-in church services were prohibited, a move which prompted On Fire Christian Church to file a lawsuit seeking a restraining order against the mayor. Federal Judge Justin Walker quickly approved the restraining order, calling the mayor’s decision “stunning” and “beyond all reason unconstitutional.” In his [opinion](#) the judge stated, “It is true that On Fire’s church members could believe in everything Easter teaches them from their homes on Sunday. So [sic] too could the Pilgrims before they left Europe. But the Pilgrims demanded more than that. And so too does the Free Exercise Clause. It ‘guarantees the free exercise of religion, not just the right to inward belief.’ That promise is as important for the minister as for those ministered to, as vital to the shepherd as to the sheep. And it is as necessary now as when the Mayflower met Plymouth Rock.”

## **Michigan Governor Faces Backlash Over Education Directive in Executive Order**

Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer has [clarified](#) the education portion of her [executive order](#) issued last week which placed extreme restrictions in the name of protecting public health. The executive order, which has received much [national criticism](#) for the severity of the restrictions, imposes strict rules on education. The governor specifically suspended all "in-person instruction for pupils in kindergarten through grade 12," invoking the charge that the language essentially bans homeschooling and violates the fundamental right of parents to direct the education of their children. The Great Lakes Justice Center (GLJC) noted in a [fact sheet](#) that "the Governor has no authority to direct nonpublic schools . . . to operate their educational programs and processes in any particular way." Furthermore, GLJC noted that the governor's order also gave directives regarding the operations of schools, usurping the constitutional authority of the State Board of Education. The realization of the untenable positioning of her executive order caused the governor to offer [clarification](#) that homeschooling was not prohibited and that online and virtual education could continue. Dr. Tim Schmig, executive director of the Michigan Association of Christian Schools, responded, "We will continue to educate our children in homeschooling and Christian online distance learning because our right to educate our children . . . doesn't come from the state; our rights come from God. To say that Governor Whitmer's Executive orders are an overreach would be an understatement. [She should remember] Rosa Parks has her bus on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, MI. Maybe there is room for a homeschool Mom's kitchen table right next to it."

## **Planned Parenthood Forced to Close Due to COVID-19**

Abortion providers across the country are feeling financial pressure from COVID-19. In [New York](#), Planned Parenthood is closing nearly a dozen abortion clinics and laying off one quarter of its staff as the abortion giant faces losses between \$20 and \$32 million through the end of the year. Planned Parenthood of Greater New York President and CEO Laura McQuade stated, "Despite our best effort, this pandemic has put an incredible strain on our resources." Planned Parenthood clinics in California, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota have also been forced to close because of travel restrictions or financial restraints caused by COVID-19. Further, several states have pushed back against the notion that abortion providers are essential businesses that should remain open during a pandemic. Texas Governor Greg Abbott banned elective abortion procedures as a method to conserve valuable medical supplies during the pandemic, a decision that the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals [recently upheld](#). Abortion advocates then asked for an exception for abortion clinics to provide medication abortions, which can be done remotely. The Fifth Circuit also rejected that request, causing abortion advocates to appeal to the Supreme Court. Alabama, Iowa, Ohio, and Oklahoma enacted [similar bans](#) on elective abortions but were immediately blocked by lawsuits from enforcing those bans. Alaska, Arkansas, and Tennessee are currently being challenged by abortion advocates, while Attorneys General in Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and West Virginia are in the process of [enacting bans](#) in those states.

## **In Case You Missed It:**

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACCS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[AACCS Staff: How Christian Educators Respond and Adapt to COVID-19 Crisis](#)

[AACCS Resource Page to Help Christian Schools Responding to COVID Crisis](#)

[Applications Due April 20 for AACCS Youth Legislative Training Conference](#)