



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 5, 2020

Chicago Churches Tell Governor They're Reopening Despite His Orders

Fed up with Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker's ordering them to remain closed while allowing restaurants and liquor stores to operate, six Romanian-American churches in the Chicago area have notified Pritzker that they plan to reopen on Sunday, May 10 — and to sue him in federal court.

"The Romanian-Americans in our congregations have chosen Chicago as their homeland, many of them after fleeing communist oppression that targeted religious gatherings, houses of worship and communal exercise of their religion and faith," the church pastors, who collectively serve over 2,700 congregants, wrote in a [letter](#) to the Democrat Pritzker.



Pritzker's executive orders "unlawfully" required their churches to stop holding in-person services, even with social-distancing and other measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, yet allowed "many other non-religious businesses and organization[s] to remain open," they continued.

"We love our adopted country, and the freedom we have found here, too much to stay silent as you trample on our God-given rights," the pastors declared. "In light of our shared experience living behind the Iron Curtain — where discriminatory treatment of churches by authoritarian governments was the norm — we are determined to do everything that we can to ensure that our beloved country and our state remain the beacons of freedom that brought us here."

Pritzker's slight modification of his order on April 30, which allows services with no more than 10 people in attendance, did not satisfy these pastors, either. They called it "wholly inadequate" and said they "regard it as further evidence of the arbitrary nature of your orders."

The pastors maintain that their churches have as much right to open their doors as any other institutions and that they have been singled out for closure despite their willingness to abide by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, which they detailed in their letter.

In a powerful [video statement](#), Cristian Ionescu, pastor of Chicago's Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church, claimed churches "will prove to be the most conscientious and responsible organizations in their approach" to preventing COVID-19 transmission. Addressing government officials, Ionescu said, "Don't for a moment pretend that you care more about our people than we do."

Deeming churches "nonessential," Ionescu averred, "is dangerous, and putting up with it will invite more abuse in the future."

"The Constitution and the rights enshrined therein are not suspended during a pandemic, and neither is our religion," the pastors penned, after which they informed Pritzker that they intended to resume in-



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person services this Sunday and ignore “the 10-person limit or the other unconstitutional restrictions comprised within your orders.”

They further notified the governor that they would be filing a federal lawsuit challenging his orders.

The pastors are confident of prevailing in court. They pointed out that two federal courts have already [issued injunctions](#) against enforcing Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear’s orders against churches, while another [blocked](#) Kansas Governor Laura Kelly from limiting attendance at church services. (Beshear and Kelly are both Democrats.)

Summarizing the decisions, the pastors wrote, “The government may not prohibit churches from hosting drive-in and parking lot worship services ... and may not prohibit churches from hosting in-person worship services on equal terms with other businesses and organizations that are permitted to remain open provided certain guidelines are practiced.”

The pastors are being represented in their lawsuit by Horatio Mihet, chief litigation counsel for the legal-aid group Liberty Counsel.

“I am proud to stand with the Romanian-American community against the unconstitutional, government-imposed conditions and restrictions that discriminate against the church,” Mihet said in a [statement](#). “There is no good reason to prohibit the church from implementing the same social distancing and safety precautions that liquor stores, hardware stores, law firms and accountants are allowed to implement. We must not let our fundamental constitutional guarantees become another casualty of COVID-19.”

In the same release, Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver said, “Having heard many stories from my Romanian friends about the repression of their religious freedom under Communism, I never would have thought that in America they would experience similar treatment. We are proud to stand with these pastors who understand the importance and value of religious freedom. This shocking discrimination against houses of worship and people of faith must end.”



Image: screenshot from [YouTube video](#)

Michael Tennant is a freelance writer and regular contributor to The New American.



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