



CATHOLIC LEAGUE

*For Religious
and
Civil Rights*

September 30, 2020

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The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Secretary Barr:

As president of the largest Catholic civil rights organization in the United States, I am deeply troubled by San Francisco's outrageous attempts to stifle religious liberty, and I full-throatedly support the efforts of the Department of Justice to restore equality in the city's treatment of religious institutions and secular organizations.

As you know, Catholics and other people of faith in San Francisco face some of the most debilitating limits on their ability to exercise their religion. As Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband put it in his September 25th letter to Mayor London Breed, "the limitation of indoor worship to one congregant without regard to the size of the place of worship is draconian, out of step with treatment afforded other similar indoor activities in San Francisco, wholly at odds with this nation's traditional understanding of religious liberties, and may violate the First Amendment to the Constitution."

Throughout most of the Covid-19 pandemic, San Francisco has limited outdoor worship to 12 participants. As of September 14, the number of participants was increased to 50, while indoor worship has been capped to "one individual member of the public" until at least October 1st.

This treatment of faithful Americans should make the blood boil of anyone who loves freedom; however, what makes these proscriptions truly outrageous is the double-standard and clear favoritism shown to secular organizations. While churches in San Francisco have to limit

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their admittance to one person at a time, the city's hotels are fully opened, and most retail stores are allowed to operate at 50 percent capacity.

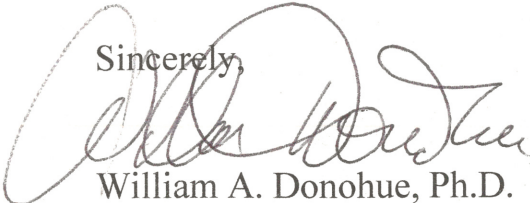
Similarly, on September 7th during a Black Lives Matter protest, hundreds marched across the Golden Gate Bridge. At this same point in time, outdoor church services were limited to 12 participants. It would appear as though an outdoor demonstration of freedom of speech is more equal than an outdoor exercise of freedom of religion.

Clearly, the City of San Francisco has a different standard for religious organizations, and, frankly, that is appalling.

I am sure you fully appreciate the dangers of using a public health scare to curtail the liberties of the American people. As you argued at Hillsdale College on September 16th, a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid-19 would be the "greatest intrusion on civil liberties" in our history "other than slavery."

Unfortunately, even without a nationwide lockdown, Catholics and other people of faith in San Francisco have already seen their religious liberties drastically curtailed. I know you and the Department of Justice will do everything in your power to remedy this situation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'William A. Donohue', written in black ink.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President

CC: Mayor London N. Breed

Dennis J. Herrera, City Attorney San Francisco