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## Focus on Religious Freedom

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### Many Churches Ease Restrictions for Holy Week & Easter 2021

Easter, 2020, found most churches in America unconstitutionally closed or restricted for in-person worship. Limiting, or outright prohibiting, in-person religious services was one of the most controversial directives that states made in 2020 in an attempt to slow the coronavirus pandemic. Ten states prohibited church gatherings altogether. Most states implemented guidelines with various levels of restrictions, and 15 states allowed religious gatherings to continue without any limits.

Churchgoers in several of these states fought against orders banning religious services and, in each case, achieved some level of success modifying the restrictions. CA Pastor Tim Thompson said, "The whole idea of separation of church and state is that the state can't run the church. The state can't tell the church what to do." <sup>(1)</sup>

***"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility - I welcome it." President John F. Kennedy***

As we begin Holy Week, 2021, and after many prayerful protests and court cases, the most onerous restrictions have been eased but not altogether rescinded. Each state has developed its own form of control. In Maine, Bishop Robert Deeley is not satisfied with the recently expanded gathering limits to 50 people. He said, "I think that not giving more latitude to people to be able to exercise their Constitutional right to worship is harming them." <sup>(2)</sup>

The U.S. Supreme Court has struck down restrictions on some religious gatherings in New York and in California, the Court recently granted an appeal from a church that challenged the states restrictions on church services, singing and chanting.

**Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote in the most recent case: "Government actors have been moving the goalposts on pandemic-related sacrifices for months, adopting new benchmarks that always seem to put restoration of liberty just around the corner." <sup>(3)</sup>**

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### Happening Now: Third-grader Forced to Remove "Jesus Loves Me" Mask

"Public schools have a duty to respect the free expression of students that the First Amendment guarantees to them," said Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) attorney in a lawsuit defending a Mississippi 9-year-old ordered to remove her mask. <sup>(4)</sup> "Other students within the school district have freely worn masks with logos of local sports teams or even the words 'Black Lives Matter.' This student deserves an equal opportunity to peacefully express her beliefs." <sup>(5)</sup>

(christianheadlines.com, 4/18/20; dailycaller.com, 5/12/20(1); blaze.com, 4/30/20; wmtw.com, 2/18/21(2); latimes.com, 3/10/21; deseretnews.com, 2/12/21(3); nypost.com, 11/5/20 (4)(5); lifenews.com, 11/2/20)