

Church Leaders to California Governor: We're Reopening on Pentecost

Several church leaders announced Thursday, May 7, that they will reopen their churches on the Day of Pentecost, May 31, despite California Gov. Gavin Newsom's continued lockdown. The group, led by Pastor Dan Carroll and Pastor Matt Brown, represents 1,500 churches in California

Gov. Newsom's plan to reopen the state schedules churches to reopen in the third stage, a time for which has not yet been specified.

Dan Carroll, senior pastor of Water of Life Community Church, says the churches are not trying to be rebellious with their reopening. During a press conference outside the church building, Carroll said the plan for reopening involved following all the CDC's guidelines and taking every safety precaution.

"Our churches are part of the solution," Carroll says. "We're not the problem here. But we've been deemed nonessential. We've been kicked to the curb."

Carroll tells *Sun* that churches across California are providing masks to health care workers and food for needy families in their communities, yet they're being prohibited from meeting together for religious services. Carroll says this is a problem for those who are in difficult situations and are struggling emotionally from not being able to gather with fellow believers. He recounts a widower who attends his church that he ran into just a few days prior. When he asked the widower how he was doing, the man burst into tears.

"I just can't function without my church," the widower told

Carroll.

Newsom said churches may be allowed to reopen earlier than anticipated, but he clarified his concern about houses of worship opening too quickly: "Our fear is simply this: Congregations of people from far and wide coming together in a closed space at a large scale remain a point of concern and anxiety for us. We are working on guidelines for physical distancing and working with faith leaders talking about unique conditions in their own facilities. Nothing is etched in stone. ...

"I take very seriously those concerns about people of faith, and I'm very sensitive to those who want to get back to church. But the health of those communities is foundational."