

Kentucky Churches Defy Virus Orders, Hold In-Person Services

Some Kentucky churches held Palm Sunday services in defiance of Gov. Andy Beshear's warning against in-person worship.

Dozens of people were at Maryville Baptist Church in Louisville on Sunday, news outlets reported. A video showed a pianist playing and choir members singing during the late morning service.

Beshear warned during his daily briefing on Sunday that if facilities are still allowing mass gatherings, then "perhaps those facilities shouldn't be allowed to be open anymore."

Maryville Baptist Preacher Jack Roberts had told *The Courier Journal* that he would rather go to jail and court than pay a fine for violating the March 19 order of Kentucky's health department.

He said the prohibition violates First Amendment and state constitutional rights. Roberts said he has encouraged social distancing at his church and asked people at high risk of infection to stay home and watch livestreamed services.

Beshear said in direct reference to Roberts that "at Christmas he's going to have fewer people in his congregation. My faith would never let me put someone's health in that position."

Louisville's Our Savior Lutheran Church streamed its in-person service live on YouTube. The church had required online registration beforehand and restricted seating to every other pew. The video stream did not show the congregation, although one person's head could be seen.

Pastor Joshua Cook asked churchgoers to pray for medical and

emergency services workers and National Guard members “who are serving in this time of crisis.”

Some states, including Florida, have made exemptions to allow religious gatherings to proceed during the coronavirus. Kentucky does not have that exemption.

Before it became an order, Beshear first issued guidance that churches cancel in-person services on March 11.

Beshear said Kentucky has at least 955 positive virus cases and 45 deaths.

Most people who contract COVID-19 have mild or moderate symptoms, which can include fever and cough but also milder cases of pneumonia, sometimes requiring hospitalization. The risk of death is greater for older adults and people with other health problems. {eo}

The Associated Press