



December 6, 2021

Dr. Jong Kim
Chief Medical Health Officer, Northern Health

Dr. Kim,

Your leadership in these challenging times is appreciated. We have been fully supportive, moving swiftly to meet or exceed the requirements of each new health order. We have encouraged others to do the same. The latest health order will receive the same treatment – full compliance. For the first time, however, we must vigorously challenge the order's language. The current MHO contains blatantly, and unnecessarily discriminatory language based on religious affiliation. Further, such language is counterproductive and divisive.

To be clear, we doubt this offence was intentional. We suspect that you were trying to solve a particular problem. But the language of the order cannot go unchallenged. In addition to being offensive, and possibly unlawful, it provides fuel to conspiracists seeking proof that the real goal of these last 2 years is the elimination of religious freedoms altogether. As we lead our congregation, we will be forced to admit that the language in parts of this order is impossible for us to fully endorse.

According to the order, an acceptable 'Indoor Event' could include the singing of *Jingle Bells* and a telling of the story of Santa Claus. The organizer would just need to meet all the requirements of 'Part D: Indoor Events.' An event with identical activities, meeting all the same standards but singing *Silent Night* followed by a Bible-based telling of the story Jesus, would constitute leading worship; and therefore, it would violate the order. A religious event on Sunday morning is banned, but a seasonal concert on Sunday night is permissible. People sing at concerts, shout at sporting events, and laugh, scream, and eat at movie theatres. We doubt the virus can tell the difference. Neither can northern BC faith-based communities.

Equally troubling, the order specifically singles out the Bible as prohibited in group study (Order of November 30, 2021; DEFINITIONS; "worship service"). Not the Koran, Book of Mormon, or Granth Sahib – just 'Bible study.' We want to trust no ill-intention in this reference, but it is a careless misstep that points to the need for thoughtful revision.

We are not alone in our concerns. An association of Christian ministers in our area discussed their unanimous frustration over the wording in this order. To be clear, all the churches in Prince Rupert—without exception—have exercised complete compliance to all previous orders.

We strongly encourage you to require of churches no more or less than you do of any similar gatherings. At issue is *practice*, not *purpose*; the order must focus on activities, not religious associations. As responsible leaders, please trust us to determine our ability to meet the requirements for 'indoor events.' Some churches would rather offer virtual services than require

proof of vaccinations, but this order paints us all with too broad a brush. Each faith community is unique. In Prince Rupert, and specifically at Fellowship Baptist in Prince Rupert, we are being prejudged by our religious associations rather than by our past actions. If we had been non-compliant in activities, we would fully deserve fines and building closures. But our congregants are nearly all vaccinated and our organization has been fully compliant. Reciprocate the trust. Give us the same protocols you gave for all other indoor events, and then give us the choice to meet according to protocols.

The loss of trust will only be multiplied if this inconsistency remains unchecked through the Advent and Christmas seasons. Please make rectifying this order's language an urgent priority.

We appreciate you and your team so very much. We know the work requires your full attention. We would not distract you if the issue were less important or urgent.

Thanks for all you do to keep us safe. We hope you get at least a small reprieve over the holiday season. We wish you and your team a very Merry (and restful) Christmas.

On behalf of the board at Fellowship Baptist Church in Prince Rupert,

Herb Pond
Chair

cc.
David Horita, Regional Director, Fellowship Pacific
Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer
Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Honourable John Horgan, Premier
Jennifer Rice, MLA North Coast