

Groups of 10 Now Allowed: Governor Pritzker Amends Religious Gathering Portion of Executive Order

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker has amended the recent executive order until May 30 to allow for a gathering of up to 10 people in a religious gathering as long as they comply with social distancing requirements.

Alton Police Chief Jason Simmons said he received notification Thursday evening about the church changes.

"The governor agreed to allow people to gather at church services with 10 or less people, with social distancing and everyone having a face mask," Simmons said.

As of Friday morning, it remained uncertain how area religious organizations will respond to the governor's new order.

The revised order does encourage religious organizations to continue online or drive-in services to protect the health and safety of those in their congregations.

Bethalto Mayor Alan Winslow said he knows of one Bethalto church that purchased a microphone and will use a public address system for outside drive-in services.

"Church staff will make sure the vehicles are parked 6 feet apart and staff and will be directing traffic wearing masks," Winslow said.

Winslow said the ability to have drive-in church services is a step in the right direction for congregations wishing to do that.

One Illinois congregation on Thursday filed a lawsuit against the governor and others and said it planned to host services this weekend. The Beloved Church in Lena made the allegation the state breached its First Amendment right to practice religion and appeared the prime reason for Gov. Pritzker's church gathering amendment.

Gov. Pritzker described the religious institution - The Beloved Church in Lena - as "a bit of an outlier," because many faith leaders across Illinois have found different ways to connect with their parishioners.

The governor added: "Nobody is going to run in and break up a gathering of churchgoers at that moment, but I will tell you that there are consequences, of course," Pritzker said. "The state has the ability to enforce orders. We've been looking to people to do the right thing and they should do the right thing, and I think the parishioners, by the way, ought to do the right thing and ask those who are faith leaders, either not to hold those services or simply ask that they have something online."