

Texas Governor Deems Religious Services Essential

As authorities arrest pastors for holding Sunday services in defiance of social distancing orders, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced Tuesday that religious services are to be considered essential in his state.

Abbott [issued](#) an executive order relating to statewide continuity of essential services and activities during the coronavirus pandemic.

The order mandated that all Texans will minimize social gatherings and in-person contact with people who are not in the same household, and, among other statutes, clarified that religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship are to be considered essential services.

“‘Essential services’ shall consist of everything listed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, Version 2.0, plus religious services conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship,” the order stated. “Other essential services may be added to this list with the approval of the Texas Division of Emergency Management.”

The governor encouraged those involved in essential services to practice good hygiene, environmental cleanliness, sanitation, social distancing, and working from home when possible.

Announcing the arrest of Dr. Ronald Howard-Browne, Pastor of The River at Tampa Bay Church, who intentionally and repeatedly disregarded state and local public health orders, which put his congregation and our community in danger.
pic.twitter.com/1gERVdzyIp

– Chad Chronister (@ChadChronister) [March 30, 2020](#)

Abbott's order came as authorities arrested pastors in Louisiana and Florida for holding Sunday services and bused large groups of people to attend the services.

Central Police Chief Roger Corcoran [called](#) Rev. Tony Spell of the Louisiana Life Tabernacle Church “reckless and irresponsible” for holding Sunday services, and Florida Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister [called](#) megachurch Pastor Rodney Howard-Browne's actions “reckless disregard of public safety.”

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