

Mayor Lori Lightfoot Plans To Fine Churches That Defied Stay-At-Home Order Rules To Hold Sunday Services

CHICAGO (CBS) — Mayor Lori Lightfoot said the city “will be taking action” to fine churches that violated the statewide stay-at-home order on Sunday, by holding services with more people than allowed by the governor’s COVID-19 restrictions.

“Certainly there were some churches that congregated in excess of the allowable number, and we will be taking action as to those individuals and those churches,” Lightfoot said at an unrelated event Monday morning.

The mayor said officials will determine which churches violated the stay-at-home order on Monday and announce fines against them later in the day.

Lightfoot and Pritzker have repeatedly urged churches to find alternative ways of holding services, without allowing gatherings of more than 10 people, by holding Zoom videoconferences, or live-streaming video of services.

Monday afternoon, Pritzker said he’s “extraordinarily reluctant” to interfere with ongoing services when churches do violate the stay-at-home order, and instead wants to focus on educating faith leaders and parishioners about the need to avoid large gatherings to limit the spread of the virus.

“The job, the goal here is to keep people safe. I want people also to be able to worship. There are many ways in which to do that during this time, and I know it’s very difficult,” Pritzker said. “So many people care deeply about the community that is their church or their mosque or their synagogue; I do too, and so we want to get back to it as soon as we can, but we have to keep each other safe, and I hope that faith leaders will heed the public health concerns, and follow the reopening plan.”

Metro Praise International Church in the Belmont Cragin neighborhood held

three 45-minute services on Sunday, with dozens attending each one.

The decision didn't sit well with neighbors who are following the rules and staged a protest outside the church on Sunday.

The protesters said they have had enough, and believe the church is breaking the law and putting everyone at risk, especially in a neighborhood where there is a higher than average positivity rate for COVID-19.



Vi Nguyen@ViNguyen

Protestors plan to drive around the block and honk as 9 a.m. service at Metro Praise International Church gets underway. @cbschicago









“Nobody’s denying them the right to meet. We’re just wanting them to meet safely,” protester Alonzo Zaragoza said.

Protesters walked and drove outside the church Sunday morning as services were held. They said the church is being reckless, and unfair to them, but pastor Joseph Wyrostek said Gov. JB Pritzker’s stay-at-home rules are unfair.

“If they don’t want to do what Indiana is doing, let’s do what Illinois allows Wal-Mart to do, and there’s going to be more there today than there are going to be here,” he said.

Church leaders told followers on Facebook they have seating for 60 to 80 people with social distancing. Everyone is required to wear a face mask. They have been told not to congregate, and there will be no physical interaction. The church also

reminded people to stay home if they are over 65, have preexisting conditions, or have or may have been exposed to the coronavirus.

<https://twitter.com/ViNguyen/status/1262018327930601472>

Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church in Albany Park also hosted services on Sunday, despite a federal judge rejecting their request for a temporary restraining order allowing them to hold services with more than 10 people in defiance of the stay-at-home order.

Philadelphia Romanian Church in Ravenswood also planned Sunday services, but city officials put no parking signs on nine blocks surrounding the church in an effort to limit how many people could attend.

Ald. Matt Martin (47th) said the mayor ordered those signs put up in response to the church violating the stay-at-home order.

In a statement the pastor of the church said in part, "It is completely ridiculous. The mayor is inciting hate against the church, which is very sad."

He went on to say "their effort to intimidate us will make us stronger."

Source:

<https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2020/05/18/mayor-ori-lightfoot-plans-to-fine-churches-that-defied-stay-at-home-order-rules-to-hold-sunday-services/>

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