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April 1, 2020

Legal Opinion
Church of God of Prophecy
COVID-19 Compliance

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To: COGOP State Offices

Re: Compliance with state and Federal guidelines
COVID-19

Dear Bishops:

As General Counsel for Church of God of Prophecy in the United States, Bishop Coalter, on behalf of the Church of God of Prophecy North America, has asked this office for an official position statement regarding compliance with all local, state and federal government guidelines and directives regarding the current COVID-19 national crisis.

Historically, as Americans, we are not accustomed to regulation of any governmental entity on our freedom of speech or freedom of religion. The current national crisis and worldwide pandemic has dictated unusual governmental regulation based on another power of the government: its power to protect the health and welfare of the nation and each state.

As the federal government leads the national response to COVID-19, state and local health departments stand on the front lines. State or public health emergency declarations have been issued in each state and territory, including the District of Columbia.

At this time, at least thirty-five states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have introduced legislation to support state action related to COVID-19.

The official position of the Church of God of Prophecy at this time is for all churches to comply with local, state and Federal mandates regarding the assembling together of non-essential businesses and groups, under “Social Distancing,” “Stay at Home” and “Shelter in Place” orders. Failure to comply with the rules and regulations can result in criminal prosecution as well as civil liability and exposure of the church or church leadership.

This is a time for the church to demonstrate its care and concern for its congregants and also for the community as a whole. Complying with all governmental guidelines demonstrates responsibility, respect and concern for our communities and enhances the testimony of Jesus in each community. Clearly, Romans 13 exhorts us to obey and honor civil government, except in

unusual cases where commands directly violate God's direction. Your denomination affirms this theological position at this time.

There may be unusual cases where churches are not part of a general order but singled out for disparate treatment. If your church is singled out for what looks like unfair or disparate treatment, please feel free to run those matters past our office. This would not include being subject to a general order affecting all of us. Rather, if other places of meeting open again but churches are *excluded*, this could become a constitutional issue.

On behalf of the national office, thank you for your cooperation. Our office is available as a resource to help in any way at this time and to answer the unique questions that understandably arise in times like this.

Sincerely in Christ,

Stephen D. Lentz, Esq.

Stephen D. Lentz, Esq.
General Counsel
Church of God Prophecy