

Official Statement on Decision to Re-open Calvary Baptist Church
By Senior Pastor Stacey Shiflett

The time has come to re-open our church. We are re-opening our church because I believe God is leading us to do this. That is first and foremost. We are not seeking notoriety or publicity. We are not trying to cause trouble. We just want to go back to church; together; the way God intended. We believe that the CHURCH IS ESSENTIAL - and to say otherwise is an offence to Almighty God and to every churchgoer in this state.

The decision to re-open Calvary Baptist Church came as a result of:

OUR DETERMINATION

1. Compliance for two months to the unconstitutional Governor's order, even with our members begging me every service to let them come to church.
2. Two months of agonizing prayer and fervently seeking the face of God.
3. Multiple conference calls and in person meetings with the Deacons of Calvary Baptist Church.
4. Countless hours of Zoom phone calls with pastors from all over the USA; mainly the Northeast region, including four weeks of meeting with Maryland pastors; both in person and in video calls to form a coalition of churches willing to re-open at the same time if the Governor did not re-open.
5. Hours of participation in the Governor's Faith-based Workgroup to safely reopen the churches, including a direct conversation with the Lieutenant Governor and key officials in the Governor's office.
6. Multiple counselling sessions with numerous Christian law firms and Constitutional experts.
7. Hours of phone calls, a host of text message conversations and petition letters to state Senators, State Delegates and County Council members.
8. Numerous letters and emails to the Governor's office.

OUR DILEMMA

After exhausting all other options, we made the decision to re-open the church on May 24th along with scores of other pastors across the Northeast corridor; with or without the State's consent.

We wrote a letter on May 11th and mailed it out to our congregation announcing that decision.

We continued to pray that the state would be re-opened before to May 24th.

On May 13th, our faith was honored, and our prayers were answered. After weeks of pressure from all sides, the Governor announced the re-opening of our churches to 50% capacity.

We rejoiced at that Wednesday, 5 PM announcement and two hours later during our mid-week service,

I told the church via Livestream that we would see them at church on Sunday at 11 o'clock. Our church members reached out to me by phone; rejoicing at the answer to prayer; excited about being able to return to church services.

Wednesday evening, we were made aware of the County Executive's announcement to make a decision on Thursday. On Wednesday night after church, I immediately wrote the County Executive a strong email, along with a host of other Council members, urging them to leave the churches open.

We provided the email addresses of the entire County Council to our church members. Many of them also wrote letters Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

Thursday, May 14th at 5 PM, the Baltimore County Executive, without conferring with the other Council members and in direct opposition to the Governor's Roadmap to Recovery press conference, shut the churches again.

I did not have it in me to inform our church that we would NOT be having church on Sunday after I had already announced to them that we would. Proverbs 13:12 says, "*Hope deferred maketh the heart sick...*" Our hearts have been sick for two months over the closing of our church; I refused to add to that disappointment.

I have been telling our precious church people for two months - (twenty-four church services) - that they could not come to church. It killed me inside to do that - knowing that they should be there and that they wanted to be there. I can no longer with a clear conscience keep my church members from worshipping together if they desire to do so.

Furthermore, I had no desire to repeat with the County Executive, that long process of letters and unanswered appeals that I had directed at the Governor.

I decided, along with the backing of our Deacon Board to abide by our announcement to re-open our church on the 17th to 50% capacity - per the Governor's Phase 1 guidelines.

OUR DUTY

Either we have liberty to worship, or we have permission to worship.

It has become abundantly clear that if we settle for permission, we will never have liberty again. The CHURCH is granted special, undisputable rights within the Constitution.

If we do not stand up for our liberty to worship and assemble now, what will stop someone from taking them from us again? This governmental overreach can NEVER happen again.

The **First Amendment** says:

- Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

If the most powerful legislative body in the country is forbidden from prohibiting the free exercise of religion, then it stands to reason that no other individual or politician can do it.

We do not believe the churches should have ever been shut in the first place. We maintain with strong conviction that the Governor did not have the authority to shut the doors of our church, and neither does the Baltimore County Executive.

The freedom of religion found within the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Maryland did not become obsolete with the arrival of a virus.

I am grateful for the many hours that our staff members and church family have worked behind the scenes to make this May 17th re-opening possible. I can assure you that there is not another place in Dundalk that will be cleaner and safer for you and your family than Calvary Baptist Church.

I invite you to go to our website, **cbcdundalk.org** for additional essential information about our re-opening plans, rigid COVID-19 protocols and service times.

We desire your prayer as we strive to please God in all that we do.

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