

Errick D. Simmons  
Mayor



Office of the Mayor

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**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Mayor Errick D. Simmons Holds Meeting with Religious and Faith-Based Leaders**

### **Attendees**

#### **In Person**

Pastor Matthew Alexander, First Baptist Church  
Pastor Brandt Dick, St. James Episcopal Church  
Pastor Anjohnette Gibbs, United Methodist Church  
Pastor Robert E. Kimble, New Hope First Baptist Church  
Pastor Tommy Benson, Vessels of Mercy  
Pastor Steven Cantu, Grace Fellowship Baptist

#### **Telephonically**

Pastor Alvin Calvin, Mt. Horeb Missionary Baptist Church  
Pastor Gene Fowler, Mercy Seat Baptist Church  
Pastor Jae Smith, Restoration Church  
Pastor Marcus Turner, Old Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church  
Pastor Myron Holmes, New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church  
Pastor Darrell Evans, The Way Church  
Pastor Charles Hamilton, King James Bible Baptist Church  
Pastor Charles Fisher, Greater Faith Tabernacle Church  
Pastor Ruben Lewis, Grace Outreach Baptist Church  
Pastor Larry Benford, Living Word Baptist Church  
Pastor Hasani Tait, Ephesus SDA Church  
Pastor Mark Buckner, Greater Springfield Baptist Church

**GREENVILLE, Miss.** (April 9, 2020) Today, Mayor Errick D. Simmons held a meeting with religious and faith-based leaders to discuss the executive order regarding church services. The executive order regarding church services and the legislative intent were fully explained along with the State of Mississippi's "Shelter In Place" Executive Order No. 1466, along with CDC and the Mississippi Department of Health guidelines. A copy

of the “Executive Order Regarding Church Services” is attached. The State of Mississippi and local statistics on the number of Coronavirus cases, number of deaths, and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Greenville were also discussed. As of April 9, 2020 the number of cases in Mississippi totals 2,260 (52% black, 35% white, and 12% other) and 76 deaths (71% black and 29% white).

The legislative intent and reasoning behind the executive order were to save lives. Several factors were fully discussed by the Greenville City Council including, but not limited to, the number of calls received by residents, church members, and family members of church members of churches who were violating the ten (10) people CDC rule and having in person service before and after local, state, and federal mandates; the Governor’s Shelter In Place Order; the CDC guidelines; the Mississippi Department of Health guidelines; the police force and lack thereof necessary to enforce local, state, and federal mandates the percentage of cases linked to church gatherings; health and other life threatening conditions facing Greenville residents; poverty rate; the amount and lack thereof of medical supplies; the number of cases in Greenville; the number of deaths in Greenville; the amount of hospital and ICU Coronavirus beds available; and the peak date in which PPE and medical supplies will run out. The U.S. Small Business Administration’s Paycheck Protection Program and the C.A.R.E.S. Act were also discussed informing pastors that churches and faith-based organizations are eligible to apply and salaries of pastors can be paid.

After much discussion and remarks, nearly all attendees supported the Executive Order Regarding Church Services and fully understood that the Mayor and Greenville City Council entered said Order for the safety and protection of life.

#### Mayor Errick D. Simmons Statement

The past few weeks have been unprecedented for our local, state, federal government as well as our businesses, restaurants, colleges, schools, churches, and our families and all residents. We have seen businesses, courtroom hearings, restaurants, churches, weddings, funerals, graduations, and events either closed, postponed, cancelled, or affected in some way due to COVID-19.

For the most part, our churches, our businesses, and individuals have done the right thing. Folks want to do the right thing. The success of us flattening the curve depends on folks doing the right thing. The decision to put the latest Executive Order regarding churches is a data driven decision. The high number of cases we have today is due to church gatherings, funerals, and weddings. Please do not put others at serious risk.

This is no infringement on the right to religion or right to worship. Although it impacts on our traditional way of gathering to worship, it does not prevent us from worshipping. We need our pastors and worship leaders to be creative so that people lives are not at risk. Please post your services on social media, Facebook Live, Zoom, and other platforms and help your neighboring churches do the same. Pastors, musicians, and video production teams are allowed in church buildings as long as there are less than 10. Based upon CDC guidelines, we have to have gatherings less than 10.

Despite this COVID-19, I applaud our folks from health care workers to first responders, from our businesses to our churches, who all have been very creative and innovative in adapting to local, state, and federal mandates, orders, and guidelines to save lives.

In the past couple of days, I have received several calls from pastors and religious leaders on innovative and creative ways to worship, receive tithes and offerings, and serve communion. Some include setting specific times in which church members can come to pay tithes and offerings and pick up communion before Sunday worship service. We applaud all of our faith based leaders to preaching and teaching the Word of God under these exigent circumstances and temporary moment in time. I, too, long for the time we all can return to exalting God together in our traditional way of worship.

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