

## **P-05-1059 Classify Places of Worship as essential, to allow people to attend church during lockdowns, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 16.11.20**

Whilst I and the other signatories understand the challenges at this time relating to Covid-19, to make public worship illegal is an incredibly bold move by any government. This is a constitutional right that goes back hundreds of years and thousands are concerned that a vast overstepping of our liberties has taken place here. We are simply asking that places of worship are reclassified as essential.

Prior to the firebreak lock-down, local churches like ours had worked incredibly hard to make environments Covid-safe and track and trace has revealed zero cases of transmission through our gatherings. Furthermore, the scientific evidence points to the fact that closing churches makes no change to the 'R' rate, meanwhile making a huge difference to the victims of mental health crisis who would otherwise have the support they need from us.

For Christians, assembling together is a Biblical mandate, the 'Ekklesia' (original biblical text language) means the gathering together of God's called out ones. To forsake this presents huge issues for the Christian conscience and therefore forces Christians to neglect their core values and belief, which amounts to religious discrimination.

As local church communities, we have been at the forefront of support for communities across Wales. The volunteer base that churches offer is worth billions UK wide. These volunteers ultimately are Christians who are doing this to practice their faith, but if their faith-based practice of assembling is effectively cut off, this has drastic consequences for the nation as a whole.

We also applaud the work of local churches across the UK in finding innovative ways to limit the damage that ceasing public worship has caused, but we must stress that damage limitation cannot be allowed to continue. Zoom, and online church may reach some people, but statistics now show that 1 in 3 people have stopped attending church, and up to 70% of people are disengaged from online facilities. Online is simply not a valid alternative to in-person, Covid-safe services.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.