

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we get closer to returning to what our new normal will be, it is getting more complicated. Yet, the love of our neighbor is still our guide, and we continue to make decisions that unfold the love of our neighbor while considering the most vulnerable.

Throughout scripture, we are given the mandate to love one another and to care for those around us. On the night before he was betrayed, Jesus said to his disciples, "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul advises Christians that "love builds up," and warns to "take care that your liberty does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Corinthians 8:1, 9).

As the Ecumenical Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacramental Practices conveners wrote in their recommendations on May 13, 2021:

*'When we are among those who may be unvaccinated, we recommend being as the unvaccinated for the sake of the unvaccinated-- for their safety, and to avoid stigmatizing them. ... We are one body in Christ, no more protected than the least protected among us.'*

With these biblical goals in mind, our COVID-19 Sub Committee has done the necessary research to make the best possible recommendation for moving forward in light of our current context. The Congregation Council has thoroughly discussed the pros and cons of the recommendation and voted by majority to approve the following changes to our COVID-19 Policies:

- When outdoors, we recommend wearing a face covering while moving about, such as when checking in for worship as you may be close to people who are vulnerable. When stationary, masks are optional, so during worship, feel free to either leave your mask on or remove it.
- When indoors, we still require a face covering as a way to protect those who are unable to get the vaccine (primarily our children). We are a congregation with deep conviction to support families and youth, and we believe this allows us to live into that conviction.
- We are increasing the capacity of indoor worship from 25% to 50% by utilizing full pews in every other row. With the lower community spread and the use of face coverings, we feel the added risk is minimal. People may choose where to sit in the open pews with a physical distance from others that is comfortable for them.
- We will sing together again on a limited basis. Our Worship and Music Team will bring back the joy of singing together gradually in order to keep the risk lower.

In addition to the changes listed above, there are several small changes to our COVID-19 Policy to relax precautions and procedures. Please see the full policy on our website for more information.

We owe the council gratitude for the deliberate ways they have navigated the pandemic thus far, and for creating the safest and most welcome worship and gathering opportunities for our situation. We thank the congregation for understanding that there is no perfect answer and for respecting the council decisions in unity, as one body of Christ.

Blessings,  
Linda Golinghorst, President  
Pastor Carrie Lewis-LaPlante, Senior Pastor