



September 10, 2021

Dear congregation,

I want to share with you an update from our Reopening Task Force, which met last night to discuss our church's COVID guidelines.

We looked at the current data for Polk and Dallas Counties, which shows that the number of COVID cases, the positivity rate, and the number of COVID hospitalizations in our region have all increased substantially from the beginning of August to the present. And we reviewed current guidance from the CDC, which specifies that in counties like our own with high transmission, everyone should wear a mask in public, indoor settings—vaccinated or unvaccinated.

Therefore, the Reopening Task Force decided to continue with our existing guidelines for the time being, which include the requirement that everyone above the age of 2 wear a mask while indoors at church.

It won't surprise you that there is a diversity of perspective on the issue of masks within our Task Force—just as there is within our congregation. But everyone on the Task Force agreed that this is the responsible thing to do under the present circumstances.

No one likes wearing masks. I don't. I was thrilled back in May when the CDC issued guidance that those who are vaccinated could safely remove their masks. And we followed that guidance at the church. When conditions improve in Polk County, and it is safe to do so, we will again be able to put our masks away. But for the time being, having everyone wear a mask while in church is what will allow us to conduct our worship services and other programs in person as safely as possible.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns. And thanks for doing your part to help keep everyone safe.

Grace & Peace—

The Rev. Wallace W. Bubar