



March 1, 2022

Dear congregation,

Two years have passed since COVID-19 first emerged. I am very proud of the steps we have taken throughout this time to ensure each other's health and safety here at Central. It hasn't always been easy. (That's an understatement.) But I greatly appreciate your cooperation and patience along the way.

Although COVID-19 has not disappeared by any means, the situation has improved greatly in recent weeks, as case numbers, hospitalizations, and deaths have all declined significantly.

Throughout the pandemic, we have adhered very closely to guidance issued by the CDC. When they first advised that it was unsafe to gather in person, we closed our doors and moved worship and programs online. When they made recommendations about how to resume gathering safely, we implemented them. When they advised last May that masks could come off, we took them off. When they changed course a few months later and urged wearing masks again indoors, we did the same.

On Friday, February 25, the CDC issued new guidance and new metrics for assessing levels of COVID-19 transmission, county by county. **According to the CDC, Polk County is now considered at low risk for COVID-19 transmission, and masks are no longer deemed necessary.** Our Reopening Task Force has recommended that we change our church's COVID-19 guidelines accordingly, and the Session has approved those recommendations.

Therefore, effective immediately, masks are no longer required at Central Presbyterian Church. Some of you may well choose to continue wearing masks, particularly if you are at higher risk, are unvaccinated, or simply feel safer with a mask on. Others will likely choose not to wear one. I ask that everyone be gracious and courteous to those who make different decisions.

There are two areas where masks will continue to be required for a limited period of time. **The mask requirement will remain in effect in the nursery through May 29, for staff and children age two and older.** Those younger kids are not yet able to be vaccinated, and so we want to take extra steps to safeguard their health. We know that it's hard to expect toddlers or preschoolers to keep a mask on, and so aren't looking for miracles. But we do ask parents and staff to do the best they can to have kids wear a mask while in the nursery.

Masks will also be required for choirs through May 29, while they are singing. We feel it's best to err on the side of caution here, since choir members are in such close proximity to each other and are using their lungs a bit more robustly than the rest of us.

We are making other changes to our COVID-19 guidelines, which will be phased in gradually over the coming weeks.

In worship, we will continue to encourage social distancing on every other pew for a few more weeks, until April 3. This is intended to make those who may be uncomfortable being around unmasked people feel somewhat safer.

We will resume the exchange of peace on March 27. You can feel free to shake hands again with the people around you. But please be mindful there will probably be some who prefer not to have physical contact, and it's important to respect that and look for other ways to make them feel welcome.

We will resume more traditional ways of partaking of communion on Maundy Thursday, April 14.

For our Christian education programming, **kids will not have their temperature checked at the door any longer on Wednesday nights.**

And finally, **we will be able to share meals together again for church activities.**

We know that COVID-19 may well be with us for a while longer. If the levels in our area should increase in the future to the point that the CDC considers Polk County "high risk," our Reopening Task Force will meet to discuss and consider further changes.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns about these new guidelines, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. And thanks again—from the bottom of my heart—for all the amazing patience and flexibility that you all have shown over these past two years.

Grace & Peace—

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wallace W. Bubar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Wallace W. Bubar