



August 17, 2021

Grace Family,

I pray this finds you well. I pray that those who are able to be vaccinated have taken advantage of that blessing. If you are eligible but not yet vaccinated, I pray you will reconsider. I pray you are taking every precaution to limit the spread of the latest variant of this deadly virus. And as much as I pray this pandemic would go away and never return, I also pray that we are wise stewards of health and science in this time. This letter is an update from Council, sharing what measures Grace will be taking to do our part for public health as we begin the Fall together.

Beginning today, Grace will be requiring all people who enter the building to wear a mask while they are indoors, regardless of vaccination status. This decision adopts recommendations from our own Health and Wellness Committee, SC DHEC, and CDC. Additionally, Council will await a report from the Learning Committee regarding the feasibility of offering Sunday School for children under the age of 12 in a manner that is safe. For now, these are the only changes.

First, the decision regarding masks. Masks are a proven tool to limit the spread of the virus. Masks are not the best tool, of course, but they make a significant difference. The best tool to limit the spread of the virus in this time would be to stay home and worship virtually. However, the best tool for limiting the spread of the virus is not the best tool for our communal life together. Accordingly, we have to find something that allows for a little of each: limiting the spread, and gathering for worship. We will still be in the Sanctuary. We will still be singing. We will still be communing. All of this could change if the situation worsens, but for now, we hope that the addition of masks will be a sufficient course of action that allows us to worship together with Word and Sacrament. For those who feel uncomfortable being physically present for worship at this time, we will continue to improve the livestream experience.

As for Sunday School, we have to acknowledge what is different about the delta variant of this virus: it affects children. Earlier strains of the virus could affect children, too, but that seems to have been rare. The present strain does impact children, and we all know by now what COVID-19 can do. The current estimate for when children under the age of 12 will be eligible to receive a vaccine is still some months away, so we will be taking these factors into consideration as we look towards the fall and what Sunday School can be. Presently, we still plan to offer in-person classes for those who are 12 and older, which will include multiple options for adults. As with all other plans, this is still subject to change, but we plan to continue offering options for faith formation, regardless.

I think these measures are faithful adaptations to the realities of the pandemic, and I look forward to a day when they will no longer be necessary. Until that day, thank you for your patience and faithfulness as we continue to welcome, nurture, equip, and send in the name of Jesus Christ.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Gregg Hoffman

UPDATES: Returning with Grace

Starting on August 17:

1. Worship services will continue to be accessible online. The format and appearance of these experiences will continue to evolve as new equipment is installed and new approaches are implemented. We are working to improve the livestream experience. We are making progress.
2. Masks will now be required in the building for all events, regardless of vaccination status of those attending. This measure will be in effect until the risk for transmission significantly diminishes in our area.
3. Worship services in the Sanctuary will continue to include hymns and liturgy, sung by all.
4. We continue to ask all who join us for worship to complete a Tear and Share for attendance/contact.
5. Communion will continue to be distributed in the Sanctuary during the worship service.
6. Social distancing is no longer required in the Sanctuary, though it is still encouraged.
7. Those who attend worship in-person may continue to gather in the Fellowship Hall following worship services.
8. Indoor Sunday School for children under the age of 12 will not be offered at this time. Other options are being assessed at this time.
9. Adult Sunday School (Confirmation-aged Youth and older) may continue to meet indoors.
10. Committees may meet indoors, provided that all meetings are scheduled with the Church Office beforehand.
 - Committees are responsible for making it possible for members to attend in-person meetings via Zoom if some members do not feel comfortable attending meetings in-person (pastors will help facilitate this).
11. Outreach programs that take place indoors can continue, provided that the necessary volunteers communicate their willingness to participate in-person in advance of any dates being scheduled.
12. Outside groups may meet indoors, following Grace's protocols, and will assume responsibility for contact tracing, as well as responsibility for informing the church office if one of their members has tested positive for the virus. All coordination and decisions regarding outside groups continue to be made by Grace's staff.
13. Council will continue to evaluate these measures, and make determinations regarding future alterations.