

CHANGES IN COVID PRECAUTIONS

Beginning this Sunday, August 8:

- Masks are required for all people indoors regardless of vaccination status.
 - Like before, children 2 and under are not required to have masks.
 - Social distancing is strongly encouraged while indoors.
 - Music will be led by a soloist or family "pod." There will be no congregational singing or choir.
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PROCESS

OAPC has a Covid Advisory Team, a group of OAPC folks who are also doctors, nurses, medical professionals, and keenly informed individuals. Our Covid Advisory Team met this week as a response to these realities:

- the CDC's revised guidance on wearing masks,
- which was issued due to the increasing and high number of positive COVID-19 cases,
- the increasing and high risk of community transmission, and
- the increasing and high percentage of positive COVID-19 test results.

The Covid Advisory Team also considered local vaccination rates and the fact that children cannot get vaccinated.

The Covid Advisory Team recommended the changes to Session, and Session voted to put the recommendations in place.

PASTOR JEFF'S COMMENTARY

I know it may feel frustrating to hear of these changes in our precautions. Trust me, if anyone knows this frustration, it's me. Your frustrations may not be the same as mine, but I thought it might help to share my thought process.

Whenever I get frustrated about "going backward," I try to remember that viruses don't function in a linear way. It's more like playing a sport. Our opponent changed their offense in the third quarter, so now we have to change our defense. We're not going backward. We're adapting to things as they are, and moving forward with faithfulness.

These changes were suggested by the Covid Advisory Team and put in place by our congregation's elected leadership. I didn't come up with this, but I fully support it. I'm scared by what I read about the Delta Variant, how it is way more contagious and deadly, how vaccinated people can contract it and pass it along, and all this while children are not vaccinated. I think it is brotherly, sisterly, and loving to our neighbors to make sure we're not passing along a deadly virus.

It won't be like this forever. Our Covid Advisory Team has a keen eye on the data, and we will change our strategy when it's appropriate to do so.

Personally, I think these changes are minor (masks, no singing) compared to shutting down everything indoors. We can do this. We've done it before, and we've done it well. Our Rally Day and Sunday School plans are still in place, just now with masks.

Sometimes, I think, "Well, such and such church isn't doing this." Then I hear my mother's voice. If your friends jumped off a cliff, would you? We're not responsible for other church's practices. We are responsible for our own actions, and I have faith in OAPC's leadership.

Sometimes I think, "But I can go to a restaurant, store, or sporting event, why is church different?" Then I remember, many businesses are actually ahead of us on these adaptations. And, businesses and sports teams have a different purpose and "business model" than a church. We work differently, and we answer to a different (and I would say higher) standard.

It is frustrating. Very frustrating. And it's life. We adapt and move forward. God is ahead of us preparing the way and calling us forward. God is behind us sending and encouraging us; and in Christ, God walks with us every step of the way.

Let's continue to pray for patience, diligence, widespread vaccinations, healing, and an end to this deadly pandemic. God help us, and God help us all.