

16 April 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The elders would like to thank all of you for your patience, support, and submission to the various decisions that we have had to make in order to respond to the changing nature of the Covid-19 crisis. One of the most consequential decisions we made occurred last July, when we asked the congregation to submit to the Governor's mask mandate order. When we made that decision, we did so because many unknowns still remained concerning the effects and transmissibility of Covid-19. At the time, we believed it was Biblical to encourage submission to this order from our civil government, because it appeared that the Governor was acting in the best interests of the community by enacting certain emergency health and safety measures designed to curb the spread of Covid-19 in the near term. In light of the stated limited duration of these emergency measures and the potential to prevent the spread of infection of Covid-19 among the saints, we determined that we could encourage submission to the Governor's order without relinquishing our biblical authority and obligation to shepherd the Chapel flock. We acknowledged then, and we reassert now, that our chief responsibility is to keep the commands of Christ by gathering, worshiping, and ministering as a local church (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Since July of 2020, our experience with mask wearing at the Chapel and further developments in the Covid-19 crisis have caused us to re-evaluate whether we should continue to submit to the Governor's mask mandate. In these intervening months, the elders have observed that mask wearing negatively impacts the ability of the saints to worship together and minister to one another. While we were concerned that this may become an issue back in July, our concerns were offset by our desire to protect the flock from a novel virus about which we had little good information. However, most of the saints at the Chapel have now received a Covid-19 vaccine and/or recovered from infection with the virus. Moreover, the vaccine is now widely available for those who wish to receive it. Thus, it is now the case that the potential health benefits of mask wearing in our congregation are significantly outweighed by the negative effects it has on our corporate worship and ministry opportunities.

The spiritual health and well-being of our church family is now more at risk than the physical health of the saints. Given these developments, we have decided that we can no longer submit to the Governor's mask mandate while at the same time fulfilling our Biblical obligation to care for the spiritual needs of the saints as shepherds of the flock. When faced with these competing interests, we must align our priorities with God's priorities, and we

must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). The fellowship of the saints is suffering, the worship of Christ is hindered, and the ability of the elders to do the work of shepherding is greatly diminished by our continued churchwide submission to the Governor's mask mandate. The wearing of masks is a burdensome weight upon the souls of many in our congregation (and upon our own hearts) as we come together for worship.

In light of these observations, effective immediately, the elders will no longer submit to the Governor's mandate as it pertains to the gathering of the saints at the Chapel. We did not arrive at this decision flippantly, for we recognize that obedience to the governing authorities is a command we generally must follow. However, such obedience has its limits, and those limits have been exceeded in this case for the reasons stated above.

While as a church body we are no longer going to submit to the Governor's mask mandate at the Chapel, we want to recognize that each individual saint must determine whether he or she wants to practice mask wearing for their unique medical circumstances or according to personal conscience. Such mask wearing should not be disdained or criticized by others who opt not to wear a mask. Whoever decides to wear a mask is welcome to sit wherever they choose for worship. Moreover, we will continue to provide an area in the fellowship hall for social distancing.

Brethren, let us come together in unity and harmony, seeking to honor Christ and bring glory to Him in all that we do.

Philippians 2:1-4 *"Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*

Your servants,

The Elders

Pastor/Teachers:

Dave Damschroder

Jonathan Edwards

John Fahrback

Keith Merriman