

Rev's Reflection

Last week a friend sounded awful on the phone. He told me that over the holidays he got Covid. Then RSV. Then the flu.

On my drive in on Sunday morning, I thought about him and the many people in our congregation who'd been sick over the same period. It seemed like the lion's share of us had gotten one or more virus, and I suddenly got anxious, thinking, "what if this morning's service is a super spreader event?"

Even though the very thought of wearing a mask has made me anxious over the last few months, I unwrapped one of the fresh masks I keep in my truck and wore it for the service. Without any direction from the board or anyone else, I encouraged folks, if they could, to wear a mask during and after the service.

Yesterday the Coordinating Council — made up of all the committee chairs in the congregation — talked about the huge uptick in Covid and other viruses this winter. We were all feeling a similar mix of emotions. It doesn't feel right to be unprotected in a crowded room when we are all vulnerable to these viruses. They may not kill us, but they're terrible nonetheless, especially because we can contract all of them. AND, mindful that so many of us just can't wear masks for long periods, because of anxiety or trouble breathing, we know mandates don't work. The conversation was full of compassion, and understanding that we are all in different places *and* all capable of making decisions for ourselves.

The bottom line is that we all want to keep ourselves and each other safe as best we can, but none of us responds well to being told what to do.

And so, Board Chair Nancy Richman and I came up with a statement, approved by your board of Directors:

In the spirit of our covenant of love and helping one another, and in light of the increasing COVID, flu, and RSV transmission rates, we request that — unless you really can't — you wear a mask during services and gatherings so that we can all keep one another healthy.

Notice that it's a request — a humble request — not a recommendation (which feels too distant and abstract) nor requirement (which feels too heavy-handed.)

We also realized in this conversation that if we request masks for gatherings through the winter, then offer food or drink, we negate the request, rendering it empty or meaningless. We want the request to be meaningful. To that end, we will not be offering food or drink during or after gatherings. That means we won't have lunch after our February 3 meeting, and we'll put off our next congregational dinner until spring, probably the first week of April. We'll keep you all posted.

Thanks so much for your understanding. We know this isn't ideal, but we also know that the more masks are worn in our gatherings, the better it will be for everyone. Please know that whatever decision you make for yourself is valid. There's no reason for anyone to pressure or shame anyone else.

On a personal note, I found that on Sunday, because I *chose* to wear a mask during the service, I didn't experience any of the anxiety I've experienced when I've been *required* to wear one. Your mileage, as they say, may vary. But I hope you experience something similar.

In Peace,
Rev Denis