

*Congregants and Friends of St John's,*

*A pandemic that has brought so much isolation, suffering, and difficulty continues to afflict us. The Delta variant has spread rapidly, including transmission among fully vaccinated persons. In multiple areas of our country healthcare professionals and hospital systems are pushed to their limits, and patients are suffering alone. While that level of spread has not occurred in our immediate area, case counts have risen steadily, as have the concerns that the imminent opening of schools will accelerate the rise in cases. How do we continue to be Christ's Church, shining the light and hope of Christ into these uncertain times? I and the Leadership Board have spent significant time praying and discerning how to do that in a meaningful and safe way.*

*Throughout the pandemic, guidelines from the CDC and local public health authorities have been a significant barometer in our decisions. Those guidelines, in combination with vaccinations, have enabled us to gather and resume many ministries safely. Leadership is agreed that aligning with those guidelines is the appropriate course of action to enable us to continue to gather and expand our in-person activities.*

*Based on this, masks will be needed for indoor gatherings regardless of vaccination status, effective Sunday, August 22. As the local level of transmission/case counts decrease below the level of substantial spread as defined by the CDC, this will be relaxed for fully vaccinated persons. I recognize this isn't what anyone wants – myself included. It is another sacrifice – a meaningful sacrifice made in love, offering our children and the most vulnerable among us an increased level of protection. Thank you for your patience and sacrifices to enable us to continue to gather together safely.*

*In conjunction with this update, significant discussions have occurred regarding our approach to worship and congregational ministries this fall. All discussions focused on our enabling our St. John's family to engage with each other in meaningfully and safely. Beginning Sunday, September 12, we will proceed as outlined below.*

*I want to thank you again for your patience and willingness to sacrifice out of love for each other as we continue to expand our ministries together!*

*Grace and Peace,  
Pastor Brad and the Leadership Board*

**1. Fall Worship:** two worship services will be offered, both in our Sanctuary.

Contemporary Worship will move to 9am, with Traditional Worship following at 10:30am. Both services will encourage congregational participation while limiting direct contact (i.e., incorporating scripture readers, acolytes, musical offerings, etc.).

- a. Half of the Sanctuary will be open seating without distancing; the opposite half will continue to maintain distancing. Reservations to attend worship are not required at this time.
- b. Seating in the Choir Loft will be reserved for our A/V volunteers and their families, and for Choir members who are singing.
- c. Music Ministries, including Vocal Choirs, Bell Choirs, and Praise Band will rehearse and participate in worship as scheduled by Director of Music Ministries.
- d. Ushers will be available to answer questions and help guide you to seats.
- e. Nursery coverage at both services will resume September 12, 2021, provided sufficient volunteer help is available. All Nursery volunteers must be vaccinated.
- f. The 10:30am (traditional) worship service will livestreamed, and a recording will be posted on our website shortly after the conclusion of the service.

**2. Masking procedures:** St. John's is aligned with the current CDC guidance, meaning masks are required indoors when Covid transmission in Bucks County meets the CDC designation of Significant or High. When county transmission levels are Low or Moderate, masks are optional indoors for fully vaccinated persons. Unvaccinated individuals should continue to wear masks or clear face shields when inside our facility. Outdoor activities are mask-optional.

- a. ***As of August 22, 2021, masks are required for all persons.***
- b. The most recent CDC guidance can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>
- c. As per CDC guidelines, individuals are considered fully vaccinated if at least two weeks have passed since the final dose of their vaccine course (two weeks after the second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or two weeks after the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine).
- d. Congregants are asked to be considerate of those who choose to mask when transmission levels are Low or Moderate.
- e. Due to the fluidity of the situation, Covid masking protocols may change with little notice. It's best to bring a mask.

- 3. Congregational singing will continue in worship services. Aspects of worship that require close contact (collection of offerings, Passing of the Peace) will remain distanced at this time.**
  - a. Communion will continue to be offered in prepackaged, sealed cups that are picked up prior to the beginning of worship.
  - b. You are welcome to use the Bibles and hymnals in the pews.
  - c. Bulletins will not be available/distributed at worship at this time. You will continue to receive the Order of Worship by email on the Friday before the worship service; please print this at home and bring with you if you want to have a paper guide at worship.
  
- 4. Every offering given, during the Covid crisis and at all times, is greatly appreciated.**
  - a. Collection plates are in the narthex before and after worship services
  - b. Please use automated giving as a safe giving method or mail in your offerings to the church office

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP!
  
- 5. Adult Bible Studies, Children and Youth activities, Small Groups, Circles, etc. are encouraged to meet in-person, indoors or outside.**
  - a. Indoor: prior to first meeting, contact the Pastor or Leadership Board via email/writing with a general plan for approval. Groups currently meeting are considered approved.
  - b. Outside: Pre-approval not needed; groups are advised to contact the office to ensure other activities are not scheduled.
  - c. Groups are encouraged to continue to offer virtual Christian education/participation options if possible.
  - d. Activities where food will be served and consumed indoors are to be pre-approved by the Leadership Board. Participants in Bible studies, small groups, etc. are welcome to bring individual water bottles/drinks if desired. Partaking in food and beverages outdoors is at the discretion of the leaders in consultation with their group.
  
- 6. Use of the kitchen requires pre-authorization from the Leadership Board.**
  - a. A detailed plan should be submitted in writing/via email to the Pastor and will be forwarded to the LB for approval.
  - b. Thorough cleaning of all areas used will be required.
  
- 7. Currently, and until further notice:**
  - a. There will be no Grace Café.

- 8. Your attendance at any St. John's activity signifies your acceptance of the Covid Legal Liability waiver.**
- a. St John's is doing everything reasonable and practical to ensure the safety and health of you, your family and friends, and the staff.
  - b. This waiver only protects the church, staff, and volunteers from liability in the unlikely event you do get infected.
  - c. The waiver is attached at the end of this letter.
- 9. As a reminder, please do not attend any activity at St. John's if you do not feel in your usual state of health or have any symptoms of Covid recognized by the Centers for Disease Control:**
- a. Fever or chills
  - b. Cough
  - c. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - d. Fatigue
  - e. Muscle or body aches
  - f. Headache
  - g. New loss of taste or smell
  - h. Sore throat
  - i. Congestion or runny nose
  - j. Nausea or vomiting
  - k. Diarrhea

## **ASSUMPTION OF THE RISK AND WAIVER OF LIABILITY RELATING TO CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19**

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, has been declared a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization. COVID-19 is extremely contagious and is believed to spread mainly from person-to-person contact. As a result, federal, state, and local governments and federal and state health agencies recommend social distancing and have, at various times in many locations, prohibited the congregation of groups of people.

St. John's United Methodist Church has put in place preventative measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19; however, St. John's cannot guarantee that you or your children will not become infected with COVID-19 while present in our facilities. Further, your and your children's presence in church facilities could increase your risk and your children's risk of contracting COVID-19.

By attending in-person worship services at St. John's, I acknowledge the contagious nature of COVID-19 and voluntarily assume the risk that my children and I may be exposed to or infected by COVID-19 by being present in church facilities and that such exposure or infection may result in personal injury, illness, permanent disability, and death. I understand that the risk of becoming exposed to or infected by COVID-19 at St. John's may result from the actions, omissions, or negligence of myself and others, including, but not limited to, Church employees, volunteers, members, attendees and others present in Church facilities.

In consideration for being permitted to use St John's facilities, I voluntarily agree to assume all of the foregoing risks and accept sole responsibility for any injury to my children or myself (including, but not limited to, personal injury, disability, and death), illness, damage, loss, claim, liability, or expense, of any kind, that I or my children may experience or incur in connection with our presence in church facilities ("claims"). On my behalf, and on behalf of my children, I hereby release, covenant not to sue, discharge, and hold harmless the church, its employees, trustees, volunteers, members, agents, and representatives, of and from the claims, including all liabilities, claims, actions, damages, costs or expenses of any kind arising out of or relating thereto. I understand and agree that this release includes any claims based on the actions, omissions, or negligence of the church, its employees, trustees, volunteers, members, agents, and representatives, whether a Covid-19 infection occurs before, during, or after our presence in church facilities.

Signature:   **By attending St John's in-person worship you accept this agreement**  

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_