

*Joyfully loving God,
wholeheartedly
serving others*

Dear Friends,

As Pastor Wes mentioned in his video last weekend, we met this week to discuss our next steps related to masks in the church buildings.

Our decision late last summer to request that masks be worn indoors again was not related to a state government directive. The decision was based on data related to transmission and test positivity rates in our county in accordance with public health recommendations.

Thankfully, the transmission numbers have decreased from a few months ago, and we felt it important to reassess our mask policy, just as the College and the state are doing.

Despite significant improvement recently, the transmission rates for Allegany County are still higher than the recommended thresholds for masking in public indoor settings—thresholds aimed at reducing both individual risk and community risk. Given this, we believe it is prudent in the short term to continue our masking policy for the time being. We will keep a close eye on public health data, including transmission and test positivity rates and local hospital capacities. We will also continue to evaluate a timeline as we see how trends evolve.

We understand that wearing masks is not ideal and, for some, very difficult. We resonate with the fact that we are all weary of it. It has been a long haul. But we also acknowledge that as a community of believers, we take seriously our calling and privilege to care for each other, and for those in our surrounding communities, and particularly those who are most vulnerable. We recognize that our decisions have potential implications that extend beyond our congregation. That said, we know too that our human vulnerabilities are not limited to physical health. We are susceptible to emotional, mental, and spiritual difficulties as well, and many of us have experienced those over these two years. This is not something we take lightly, which is why we have invested so much in the outdoor service and are continuing to make every adjustment that we can.

During this continued monitoring period, in the service of our community, we are asking that everyone continue to wear a mask when in the church buildings. Pray with us for continued reduction in cases and for our collective wisdom to know when to lift the policy. We trust that it will be sooner rather than later.

Thank you for your understanding, cooperation, ongoing support, and all the ways in which you are expressing your love for one another.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Pastor Wes or any of our pastoral staff.

With gratitude during these challenging days,

HWC Covid Task Force