

COVID-Safety Guidelines Update

August 2, 2021

Dear Faith United Members and Friends,

I praise God for you and for our worship together in-person and online! Thank you for continuing to be the church with your prayers, your presence, gifts, service and your witness.

In light of recent news of rapidly growing cases of the COVID-19 Delta Variant and the status in Stark County going from Moderate to Substantial Virus Spread, Faith United will be following the CDC guidelines, requiring all persons age four and older, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a mask covering the mouth and nose in worship and at any inside gathering. These changes are highlighted in the guidelines that were updated on July 20 provided below.

A key reason for requiring masks even for persons who are fully vaccinated is for the safety of others. According to the CDC, fully vaccinated persons can be asymptomatic carries of the COVID-19 virus and unknowingly spread the virus to others. Not everyone at Faith United is fully vaccinated and no one under 12 years old is vaccinated. Even when two fully vaccinated persons are in close proximity, one person may pass the virus on to the other, neither experiencing any symptoms, and both subsequently spreading the virus to persons at church and in our community. Persons who are not vaccinated and/or those who are immunocompromised who contract COVID-19, are at a higher risk of suffering more severe symptoms and of dying.

While none of us enjoys wearing a mask, we can endure this small sacrifice together to do our part to slow the spread of the virus, to more quickly end this pandemic and to do no harm, do all the good we can and stay in love with God.

Please note that these guidelines are subject to change at any time. The pastors and staff continue to monitor the reports on the pandemic and are prepared to make changes to our practices if necessary.

Summary of our existing Guidelines that will remain in practice

1. **At All Times, for worship and all events or gatherings including coming into the church office**
 - If you have any of the common symptoms of COVID-19 or other spreadable illnesses, please stay home. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea

2. **Masks are required for all persons age 4 and older regardless of vaccination status**
3. Nursery Care and Children's Ministry staff and volunteers will be required to wear a mask at all times indoors regardless of vaccination status.
4. No one will be asked to verify if they have been fully vaccinated though all staff and leaders will be briefed on these guidelines and trusted to follow them.
5. Ribbons closing off every other pew in half of the seating sections in the sanctuary will remain in place to provide a social distancing option in worship for those who prefer it.
6. Giving electronically or giving by text continues to be available and is encouraged. The offering box remains in the Narthex for checks or cash. Offering plates will still not be passed at this time.
7. Worship manipulatives are available for children and adults who find them helpful.
8. Nursery care on Sunday mornings is provided as long as there are sufficient volunteers comfortable and willing to serve in this way.
9. Communion – on the first Sunday of each month – will be served with the following options:
 - a. Come forward, receive bread and small cup of grape juice
 - b. Come forward, receive gluten-free bread and small cup of grape juice
 - c. Come forward, receive self-contained communion kit
 - d. Remain in pew, notify an usher, receive communion served at your seat with any of the three options above

What is new as of July 13

1. Food may now be served.
 - a. This includes coffee and donuts on Sunday mornings in the Gathering Area.
 - b. Groups and gatherings are permitted to bring and serve food and drinks.
 - c. We continue to remind all leaders deciding to serve food to be sensitive to persons with allergies and gluten sensitivity.
 - d. We also remind groups serving food to restore the room(s) used to their original condition or better. Sterilizing wipes are provided in every room to make it easy to wipe down tables and chairs.
2. Outside Groups are now welcome to meet at the church.
 - a. Groups need to schedule their use through Sharyl Syler, Director of Finance and Administration in the office.
 - b. Groups need to follow our clean up procedures (wipe down tables and chairs and clean up any trash, etc.).

Yet to be Determined

1. Wednesday Night Dinner

- a. It is our hope to return to Wednesday night dinners and programming starting sometime in September. The final decision on a date for this is still being determined and depends in part on the comfort level of the many volunteers necessary. If you would like to be a volunteer, please contact Kathy Schmucker.
2. Water-Drinking Fountains
 - a. At this point, the water fountains remain turned off. The New Beginnings Team sent a recommendation to the Trustees to install water-drinking fountains designed to fill refillable water bottles for a more hygienic and environmentally friendly option.

Ongoing Best Practices Encouraged for All

1. Social Distancing
 - All are encouraged to be mindful of the comfort level of other when engaging in fellowship.
 - All are encouraged to fellowship outside if possible.
 - Maintaining 3-6 feet of distance is still recommended.
 - When sitting next to someone, please ask them if they are comfortable with your distancing or simply sit more than 6 feet apart.
2. Methods of Personal Greeting
 - All are encouraged to communicate their own level of comfort regarding personal greetings. Even pre-pandemic, people have different comfort levels related to hugs, handshaking, etc. It is especially important, at this time while the pandemic is not yet over, to honor one another's comfort level for personal greetings. The best way to know is simply to ask.
3. Other Important Considerations
 - In the same way that the safety of our elders has been honored throughout this global crisis let us demonstrate the same concern for our children who have yet to be vaccinated, as well as persons who are immunocompromised.
 - Please honor the safety and preference of those persons who, for personal reasons, choose to continue to wear face masks.
 - Keep in mind that there are many reasons people choose to wear a mask and we welcome all without question. Please do not assume that someone wearing a mask is not vaccinated. Respect that those wearing a mask have their own reasons and we want them to feel comfortable doing so.
 - All groups and teams who plan to meet by Zoom or in-person whether at the church or a different location need to coordinate with Sharyl Syler in the church office. In addition, Study Groups and Fellowship Groups who plan to meet in-person or by Zoom, please also contact Kathy Schmucker to help with coordinating your group plans.

I hope these guidelines make sense and that whether you agree with all of them or not, I pray that the caring spirit and best intentions with which they were discerned and drafted is felt.

Again, thank you for your patience, understanding, and support. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Stultz Costello". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S".

Rev. Steve Stultz Costello

Sr. Pastor, Faith United

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