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August 12, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Tuesday afternoon the Omaha City Council passed an emergency ordinance that requires the wearing of face coverings in public places. This ordinance is effective immediately until September 15, at which time the need for a continuation of this ordinance will be evaluated.

We as a congregation have honored the government thus far by taking into account the recommended health precautions insofar as they do not contradict the mandate of Christ. These were undertaken and continue to be done, not in a spirit of fear, but out of love for our neighbor and honor for the civil authorities (2 Tim 1:7; 1 Pet 2:13-17; 1 Jn 4:18; Matt 22:21, 37-39; Rom 13:1-7).

The emergency ordinance includes exemptions from the mask requirement when

- six feet of separation is maintained between households
- providing a public speech with six feet of distance
- immediately consuming food or beverages
- officiating at a religious service.

We give thanks to God that the City Council rightly recognized that it has no place to instruct Christ's ministers in how they may preach, teach, or administer His Sacraments to His people. There are also exemptions for children under the age of 5, and for those who, for medical or mental reasons (including those who are deaf or hard of hearing), or because of a disability, cannot wear a mask.

Social distancing was implemented at Mount Calvary on March 17 when we began to offer daily services for groups of ten. Social distancing practices have continued since May 10 when the numerical limit was lifted and we resumed our normal schedule of public worship. According to the words of the ordinance, our current practices can and will continue unamended. If you wish to wear a mask even with social distancing, you are welcome to do so. Masks are provided in the narthex along with hand sanitizer. The church facility continues to be regularly sanitized. This being said, no one desiring to hear the Word of God and receive His gifts will be refused entry to the church. There is no basis in the Word of God for doing so (Matt 11:28, Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47).

During the City Council meeting, several members of the Council noted that as Omahans are out and about and see people without masks, they are to assume, in good faith, that there is a reason they are not wearing masks, and not berate them. If our civil servants can recognize and encourage this charity in our community, all the more so, as brothers and sisters in Christ, are we able to

explain one another's actions in the kindest way and not judge one another (Eph 4:1–2, 31–32; Col 3:12–15).

Christian love forbids us from seeing a fellow Christian wear a mask and consider him weak in faith and full of panic. Christian love also forbids us from seeing a fellow Christian without a mask and charge him to be a selfish misanthrope. Anyone is welcome to worship at Mount Calvary, with or without a mask, free of judgment or disrespect in this matter.

As we continue to pray that this affliction is soon lifted by our heavenly Father's hand, let us pray also that we may all live with one another in peace and without condemnation before He who has set us free from all judgment and fear:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6–7).

Yours in Christ,

The Board of Elders
The President of the Congregation
Pastor Gerike