



January 2022

Dear Friends,

I write to provide an update on our Covid-19 policies, changes on the horizon, and the considerations that continue to inform these policies. With a new year and a new virus surge upon us, an update is in order.

Throughout the pandemic the goals of the Knox Medical Team and Covid-19 Task Force have been simple: we have sought to minimize death, serious illness, and transmission of the virus through thoughtful safety precautions in our ministries. We have erred on the side of safety to protect the most vulnerable among us, and to prioritize access to church, not only for the healthy and vaccinated, but for those who are at greater risk.

Although there is no way to fight this virus perfectly, we have been successful. Since Palm Sunday 2021, we have held in-person worship weekly with no evidence of virus spread resulting from our activities. We have held creative events and retained the engagement of children who were not vaccine eligible and adults who are vulnerable. Our activities have not resulted in serious illness among our guests, members, and staff. We have, at no time, had to quarantine or suspend a class in the Knox Preschool.

An important principle of dealing with this pandemic is flexibility; that is, when the facts change, our approach must change. Since the pandemic began, certain key facts have changed:

- Vaccines are now available for our entire community, with the exception of children under 5.
- 90% of our staff are vaccinated. Unvaccinated staff members submit to weekly testing.
- New treatments have been developed to prevent serious illness from Covid-19.
- Many of us, including our school-aged children, participate in daily activities that

present a higher risk of transmission than what we experience at church.

It is increasingly clear that we will be living with Covid-19 for a long time, and that spiritual, emotional, psychological, and community health must be balanced with virus prevention. In light of these considerations, you can expect that in the weeks to come, Knox Presbyterian Church will shift its response to the virus. We will move, in many respects, from a regulatory approach to an approach of identifying risks and recommending safe practices. We will continue to provide a range of ways to engage at Knox, including rich opportunities for virtual church participation and outdoor ministry, while bringing back many of the regular experiences we have missed so much. We all look forward to more familiar approaches to Communion, sharing meals when we gather, the presence of coffee on Sunday, and seeing the unmasked smiling face of a friend at church. We will get there!

We are not yet ready to announce a definitive date for changes. The Omicron variant is resulting in unprecedented community spread of the virus, and in the short term we will proceed with caution.

Our responses to the virus will continue to be data driven and aligned with public health guidance. Many of our regulations have regarded masking, and I am sure you will have questions; here are answers to some that we find being asked more frequently:

- *Will we continue to require masks indoors?*

Yes. In the short term, we will continue to require masks indoors. As case rates drop on the other side of this current surge, we hope to make masks optional, first for vaccinated persons and in smaller group settings.

- *If our policy changes to mask-optional and another surge arrives, might we go back to requiring universal masking?*

Yes. As always, we will be guided by data, and if the facts change, we will change our approach to meet those new facts.

Thank you for your partnership in navigating these challenging times. God's love in the midst of hardship and the strength of our community has shone through in difficult circumstances.

Peace to you,

Rev. Adam H. Fronczek, Pastor and Head of Staff