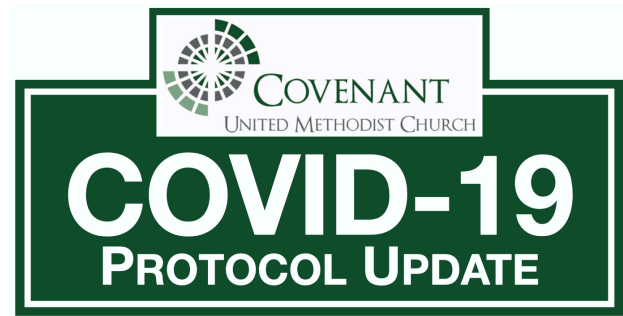


4 August 2021

“I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.” (John 13:34-35, CEB)



First of all I want to say how proud I am and grateful for those who provide leadership at Covenant UMC. All of us are working diligently to lead well into the future as responsibly and safely as possible. It has not been easy to navigate and our decisions may not have always been right, but they have always been faithful to provide the safest possible environment for every person we serve. We continue to work hard at loving one another. So, Thank You!

It's been a year (and a half)! The global pandemic has ebbed and flowed during this time and the ebb of the past many months is now gone and the flow has returned. The latest statistics on COVID-19 around the world are discouraging. Here in Allen County we have seen a consistent rise in cases to levels above where we were months ago and this includes some breakthrough cases in vaccinated people. It's not encouraging news.

However, it is not all bad news either. Here is some good news:

- Most new cases that result in serious illness and hospitalization are in unvaccinated people. (more than 97%)
- While some vaccinated people are contracting the Delta variant, it is still rare (below 3% of reported cases nationwide).
- Vaccinated patients who are hospitalized are less likely to need supplemental oxygen and are clearing the virus much quicker.
- Most vaccinated persons who contract the virus have such mild symptoms they are not diagnosed or tested, however recent studies show that infected-vaccinated persons regardless of severity can still spread the virus.
- Vaccines are working at their primary tasks, to reduce severity of symptoms and to reduce the potential of death. They were never expected to be 100% effective or eliminate COVID-19 completely.
- Masks make a difference, they do no harm to us, and they provide a level of protection for those around us. Most experts agree that vaccinated persons do not need to wear a mask when with other vaccinated persons, but in indoor public spaces are risky especially with the new variants.

It is also true that there are opinions contrary to the above. Not everyone agrees with current conventional wisdom or even common sense. This pandemic and responsible reactions have become politicized to such a degree it is difficult to know what to believe and who to trust. It is our task to utilize the best possible information to make the best possible decisions for the greatest good of our community. We are staying true the call of Jesus to simply love one another.

A friend and colleague, Rev. Shane Bishop, recently shared the following advice that I think can help us fulfill this call:

“Thinking a bit. I wonder if four little things we all can do might help the state of our world:

- 1. Let’s clean up our language. There is just no need for it. Leave yourself something to say when you get really mad. Bad language disrespects everyone.*
- 2. Let’s tap into manners. Please and thank you. Letting other people go first. Helping people. That kind of stuff. Bad manners disrespect everyone.*
- 3. Let’s be civil and if we can’t be civil, let’s be quiet. Everyone who doesn’t think like you isn’t your enemy. You can stand for your truth in love. A lack of civility disrespects everyone.*
- 4. Let’s embrace the Golden Rule and treat others as we wish to be treated. You want to be respected? Show respect. You want to be heard? Listen to others. That kind of thing. This is absolutely foundational. The Golden Rule respects everyone.*

Seems like a reasonable place to begin because it involves us changing our own attitudes and behaviors.

Too simplistic? Perhaps, but it isn’t like things are working so well now. I am committed to these four things. Even if it is a movement of one. Anyone care to join me?”

I believe he is on to something. I encourage you to love in the way Jesus calls us to love especially as we move into the fall and this next phase of a global pandemic.

Beginning Sunday, August 8, 2021, we will abide by the following updated protocols.

Covenant Covid-19 Protocols:

1. **Masks are REQUIRED** for all people at all public gatherings inside the church building, including the sanctuary for worship with the following exceptions:
 1. Worship Leaders and participants on the chancel, Choir Loft, and tech booth.
 2. Sunday School Classes and groups may choose to forgo mask wearing during their meeting **IF** all participants are fully vaccinated.
 3. Staff in their offices or in meetings where all participants are fully vaccinated.
2. We encourage social distancing throughout the church building.
3. Covenant Online Campus will continue on all platforms including: Covenantumc.net, YouTube, Vimeo, and facebook.
4. Coffee Hour will continue.
5. Children’s Ministries:
 - Nursery provided throughout Sunday Morning.
 - Children’s Sunday School will be provided during 9:00a.m. worship.
 - A ZOOM option will still be available.
6. **STAY HOME...IF** you feel sick, have a fever, cough, general illness, and especially if you have been exposed to COVID-19. In respect and love for others please refrain from attending worship or any other church related activities.

Get Vaccinated

The COVID-19 global pandemic is unprecedented in modern history, and so is the Vaccine. We are seeing great glimpses of hope as more and more people across the globe are vaccinated. In fact, we will not beat this disease and get to our new “normal” until most people are fully vaccinated. So, we encourage every eligible person to receive this gift of immunization and be vaccinated as soon as possible. It’s not just for you, it’s for all of us!

We hope these are temporary measures, so thank you in advance for respecting the protocols and recognizing the challenges of this unprecedented time in history. The simple use of masks while we maintain a more normal schedule will go a long way to protect each other and make this effort as brief and safe as possible.

Respectfully,
Rev. Chris Nunley, Lead Pastor

Covenant Leadership Board