



St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church and School (LCMS)

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Matthew V. Moss, Pastor
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"Learning and Living as God's Baptized Children"

Dear St. John's community,

Sunday, July 26, 2020

It is incumbent upon us as pastors to inform you about Governor Walz's latest Executive Order, 20-81, and what this means for your Church. The executive order applies to individuals as well as businesses and public spaces. The governor's office and Health Department of MN have made it clear that Places of Worship are not exempt from this order.

There are exceptions in the Executive Order for medical conditions and presenters:

"Individuals with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that makes it unreasonable for the individual to maintain a face covering... [and] children who are five years old and under". (section 8, "Exempt Individuals")

"When testifying, speaking, or performing in an indoor business or public indoor space, in situations or settings such as theaters, news conferences, legal proceedings, governmental meetings subject to the Open Meeting Law (Minnesota Statutes 2019, Chapter 13D), presentations, or lectures, provided that social distancing is always maintained." (sec. 10, "Circumstances where mandatory face coverings may be temporarily removed", letter C.)

These exemptions mean that your pastors can remove their masks to lead the Divine Service when meeting physical distance guidelines, as we have been doing. These also mean that you may see fellow members who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons. Please be mindful that they may wish to be present at church, but are not obligated to reveal why they are not wearing a mask.

Likewise, the pastors and Safety Team members of St. John's have no authority or ability to police who has legitimate exemptions. We cannot and will not ask for your reasons if you arrive without a mask. Do not worry about your medical or mental health privacy being invaded. We expect all the members of the Body of Christ to act in good faith and in accord with their conscience, so we will extend the same good faith toward you. Beyond our inability to *police* exemptions, St. John's pastors and volunteers also have no possible way of *enforcing* this mandate on members or visitors who choose to attend without obeying the Governor's mandate.

Our members will have differing views on the mask mandate. Some will see masks as a sign that we care about the weakest members of our community. Some will see masks as a sign of infringement on personal rights or the crossing of the line between Church and State. As fellow members of the Body of Christ we can step back and understand why each person has come to the positions they have taken. We can respect those different positions and exercise Christian love for one another so that this issue does not become divisive within the Body of Christ.

Whatever the scientific analysis, whatever the politics, we Christians are called to a heavenly perspective that transcends all earthly divisions and disagreements. From this vantage point we know that our old, satanic foe will take any and every opportunity to sow division and discord in the Church. Resist him, firm in your faith.

These last five months have been taxing for all of us. Despite differing opinions on a host of topics, I can say that all the members of the Body of Christ at St. John's long for the day when we can worship together with no restrictions, protocols, or limitations. God made us to be social creatures, to sing, to smile, and to cram into pews beside one another. He created us for Communion with Himself and with one another. We were made in His image and likeness and restored to this in

Holy Baptism so that we could sit with one another in the hearing of God's Word. Indeed the biblical language of "brothers and sisters" in Christ is not a mere metaphor. We belong together and we belong to one another. The public management of this pandemic has put all of this to the test. The mandating of masks is just another occasion.

May we embrace this challenge as we have the past- as a call to more fervent prayer, as a time to strengthen our resolve to love one another, to call on one another, and to put the best construction on everything. As we become weak and tired, let us turn to the Lord for strength and wisdom. When the lack of information and the indefinite timeline of this pandemic and all its accompanying regulations leave us exasperated, despairing, and hopeless may we remember the irremovable glory that is ours in Christ. Knowing Him removes "the mask," *the veil* over the Old Testament (2 Cor. 3), and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God which is ours now in Christ and ever blossoming into eternity.

As Saint Paul writes of the Church in Christ Jesus, "*And we all, **with unveiled face**, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).*"

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Matthew V. Moss
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