



Dear Friends,

Not to be overly dramatic about things, but I'm beginning to understand how the Psalmist must have felt when they wrote, "How long, O Lord? How long?" My most recent missives have been hopeful, as we've slowly reopened our doors to public worship, office staff and volunteers, and outreach ministries. It has, for the first time since March of 2020, felt like the Church around here. Yet, there has been this lingering worry, a heaviness, that has existed just off the horizon or in the back of my mind, that the pandemic isn't over and that things could change at any moment.

While on vacation last week, I began to feel that change in the air. My parents are big news watchers, and the Delta Variant of COVID-19 was a part of those broadcasts every evening. As we returned home, report came from Shawn Rhodes that the positivity rate at the Medical Center was up over 12%, three times our restart threshold. Then came new CDC guidance on mask wearing. Then, Warren County turned red, indicating a high transmission rate. With the program year and the return of children's ministries looming large, for the first time in months, the Restart Task Force met via Zoom, something we had really hoped we wouldn't have to do again.

I am so appreciative of the wisdom and care our Restart Task Force continues to show for our entire congregation: 8 and 10, young and old, healthy and immune-compromised. After a difficult conversation marked with sadness, frustration, and a healthy dose of anger, we feel compelled that the next right thing is to return some of our COVID-19 Church in the Pews protocols beginning this Sunday, August 1, 2021.

- Masks will be required for all, regardless of vaccination status.
- Communion will remain in both kinds, with wine by intinction (dipping) only.
- Coffee Hour will be moved to the State Street porch and front yard.
- Sunday School for children and youth will be postponed until at least September 19.
- Children's Church during the 10am service will begin this Sunday, in Moore Hall.
- The nursery will be staffed beginning August 29.

Having read this list, you too might be felling sad, frustrated, or angry. That's understandable, and I am right there with you. If you need to talk, don't hesitate to reach out.

See you Sunday for the Blessing of Backpacks and Lesson plans, and know that behind my mask, I'll be smiling, knowing that you've chosen to join us in worshipping God with joy and wonder, even under difficult circumstances.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.