

May 18, 2021

Dear Calvin Family,

As you no doubt know, there has been encouraging changes in the CDC's most recent guidelines – good news that indicates we are, God willing, heading out of the pandemic! While we rejoice with this news, we also know that this also raises some questions, not least of which are questions about what this means for Calvin Presbyterian Church.

Over the past 14 months, we have sought to respond to the circumstances and science of the virus in ways that are faithful to our call to be a worshiping community and a community that loves one another and our neighbors, and especially our more vulnerable neighbors. Currently, this means we live stream our worship services for those worshiping from home, as well as providing the opportunity for in-person worship in a manner that is consistent with our call to love and care for one another.

The current guidelines from both the CDC and the State of Rhode Island are that fully vaccinated do not need to wear a mask in most indoor settings. Those who are not fully vaccinated should still wear masks in all indoor group settings. Current CDC recommendations also indicate that while activities such as group singing are fine for those fully vaccinated, they are still in the highest risk category for those not vaccinated even if wearing a mask.

Communities such as ours currently find ourselves in the 'in-between' and a 'hybrid community' – in the in-between time when not everyone has had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated. Because of the vaccine roll out schedule and ongoing trials for our younger youth and children, many of us are fully vaccinated and have been for a little while now, while others of us have not yet been able to be vaccinated. We also have those in our community with health conditions such that, even with being vaccinated, the risks are high.

Additionally, and without recounting all the various ways this pandemic has affected us, all that we have had to navigate and respond to over the past 14 months has taken an emotional toll on all of us; let us not minimize this. We have formed necessary habits in our life together that carry a lot of emotional weight. (Please do not discount this in your own life during this time, and allow yourself, and others, grace.)

For some of us, therefore, these new guidelines comes like a switch to be flipped, either on or off, and we are immediately able to pivot to the idea of being maskless, gathering in groups, and returning to many of our pre-pandemic activities. For others of us, it will take a little longer, like a dimmer switch, to feel secure and comfortable, even accepting the sound science behind the guidelines. Others still are not yet but anxiously waiting to be fully vaccinated. And still others of us are reliant on the wider community reaching full herd immunity, even with personally being vaccinated.

Given all of this, at the most recent Session meeting on Monday, May 17, the Calvin Church Session approved **the following adjustments and reaffirmations of our guidelines for Calvin Church, as we are in this ‘in-between’ time, *beginning Sunday, May 30*:**

- **We will be adding more pew seating in the sanctuary to allow for more attendance and more opportunities for those who are fully vaccinated to sit together in larger groups.**
- **We will continue to wear masks in the church building, including during worship services and we will not yet return to congregational singing indoors.**
- **Worship services will continue to be live streamed online going forward (including post-pandemic).**

While adding pew seating means most pew sections will then be spaced 3 feet apart (rather than the current 6 feet; following the guidelines for facilities such as schools), we will continue to have some seating that maintains greater spacing.

While we are *all* aching and anxious for the end of these guidelines, some of us will feel these adjustments to our guidelines are too cautious. Others of us will feel unsure about adding more seating in the sanctuary. We are a community with a variety of needs and desires that are sometimes in tension. But more than that, we are a community formed and shaped by Jesus Christ, called to live out and display the love of Christ in our very body together as the body of Christ. Let us therefore be gracious and understanding to one another.

If you have any concerns or questions, please let us know. You may reach out to Pastor Kevin, Peter Cameron, or any of our Elders on Session.

“Beloved, let us love one another...”

Rev. Kevin White  
Pastor  
Calvin Presbyterian Church

Peter Cameron  
Clerk of Session  
Calvin Presbyterian Church