



“Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” – Phil.2:4-5

**A PASTORAL LETTER REGARDING RE-ENGAGING IN-PERSON
FROM THE HEARTLAND CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE**

May 20, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

For over a year, there has been a yearning for a release from the restrictions of community engagement which COVID 19 has necessitated in order to keep as many people as safe and healthy as possible. Certainly, this yearning has been felt deeply in our congregations as the impact of COVID 19 continued to evolve. One of the great challenges of this long season has been the varying vulnerabilities for persons in each of our church communities. This is part of what makes the revision of COVID 19 precautions announced by the CDC on May 13th a continuing challenge.

It makes guidance regarding practices related to re-engaging in-person worship complicated at best. However, as your Leadership Roundtable, we have been asked by some of you to offer counsel in this in-between season. We do so, recognizing that there are widely varying physical settings of worship that may inform your local practice. The following are some considerations we believe to be important to keep in mind:

As the text above from Philippians reminds us, the mind of Christ must be our foremost guide, placing the interests of others ahead of our own. This is especially important given the fact that there is no vaccination for children under 12 and 40% of adults have yet to get their first vaccination. For these persons, a high risk of contracting COVID remains. **Because our church populations bring together a mix of people of varying vulnerabilities the needs of those most at risk must take precedence.**

This means that protocols related to physical distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, etc. continue to be vitally important. **Even though the CDC has lifted restrictions for those who are fully vaccinated**, around such things as singing, mask wearing and physical distancing, the mix of persons who likely will gather for in-person worship suggests **prudence and caution** to assure those most vulnerable are as safe as possible. If in-person singing is at all engaged, mask-wearing and physical distancing will be very important, though it is our belief that the introduction of such things should be done in a measured and slow way especially given the low full vaccination rate for the population at large.

Further, we urge congregations to **continue alternatives to in-person worship** such as online worship or the mailing of worship materials even if and when in-person worship is re-engaged. Should you desire more guidance, we would direct you to the guidelines of the Wisconsin Council of Churches by clicking [here](#). There you will find a helpful resource titled “Love Builds Up: A Response to the CDC’s May Masking Update”.

Indeed, each chapter in the COVID journey has had its unique considerations. This particular chapter is no different nor is the call to be communities of grace and self-giving love any less important. We hold you in our prayers in this season of discernment and planning. As always, we are glad to be available should you have the need.

Blessings on you!

The Heartland Conference Leadership Roundtable Members:

David Long-Higgins (Transitional Conference Minister), Daniel Busch (Northwest Association Minister), Patricia Battle (Central Southeast Association Minister), Nayiri Karjian (Living Water One General Minister), and Carl Robinson (Southwest Ohio Northern Kentucky Association Designated Minister)

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