

Five Points Community Church
FAQs Regarding Our Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic
February 28, 2021

1) What are the key principles or criteria we considered in determining our protocols? Have those changed since last year?

- a) Philippians 2.1-5 shapes our priorities of gospel unity, humility (nothing from a ‘me first’ attitude), and love (others-focused consideration resulting in action). Simply put, we find that this passage encapsulates one of the key imperatives of our faith that is found throughout scripture: loving others.
- b) The elder council established four Biblical principles for decision making regarding the pandemic: Fear God [1Pet2.13-17]; Honor/obey the leaders God has sovereignly placed over us [1Pet2.13-17, Rom13.1ff; Ps22.28]; Pursue living at peace with our neighbors as far as we’re able [Rom12.18]; and Protect the vulnerable during this pandemic as far as we’re able [Ex20.13]
 - i. Calvin, *Institutes*: “We are accordingly commanded, if we find anything of use to us in saving our neighbors’ lives, faithfully to employ it; if there is anything that makes for their peace, to see to it; if anything harmful, to ward it off; if they are in any danger, to lend a helping hand.”
 - ii. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q68: “What is required in the sixth commandment? The sixth commandment requires all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others.”
- c) There were no changes in the principles over the last year. Our honoring the government God placed over us, and our desire to care for and to love each other, and a witness to our surrounding neighbors and nations [living peaceably with all as we’re able] have remained constant throughout.
- d) An increased understanding of the virus and how it spreads has enabled some things to be changed. Our prayer is that this continues.

2) It's my right as an American to have religious liberty. How then can we require masks to worship God at church? That's not liberty.

- a) In the context of this question, liberty is: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.* The purview of this statement is the freedom to worship without government intervention. Masks do not prohibit us from worshiping Jesus.

The church has the ability (sometimes responsibility) to impose some restrictions. Examples include dress code, prohibition of alcoholic impairment inside, interruptions in the service/sermon, no adults allowed behind the desk of the children's wing other than that morning's volunteers and LSM team, etc.

- b) Using 'religious liberty' in order to defy wearing a mask reduces some of our 5P family's ability to worship in-person, by increasing their risk (medically compromised and older members, etc. who feel sufficiently safe to worship with their brothers and sisters when everyone is masked) [Phil2 and Eph4.1-3]
- c) Christian liberty is not for our sake, but to be used in service of others [Gal5.13]

3) Why are we still requiring face coverings (masks)?

- a) The pandemic isn't over and its spread is still very much a reality. Our love and care for others therefore shouldn't change. This includes masks, distancing, sanitizing, etc.
- b) The church isn't doing anything above and beyond what you'd see in any public area.

4) The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' orders say churches are exempt from face covering requirements and others. Why do we not take advantage of this exemption?

- a) Our response has never been solely concerned with government response or orders.
- b) Not being ordered to do something doesn't mean we shouldn't, and this is in keeping with our understanding of the Biblical principles we've laid out from the beginning.
- c) Our gatherings are not safer than other similar gatherings. Public, unmasked singing in particular seems to be something that facilitates coronavirus spread among us.
- d) We're called to love and serve as Christ first did for us and make daily decisions to complete each other's joy through unity, humility, and love. We believe that there is greater joy in serving brothers and sisters this way than there is in exercising any actual or perceived individual 'rights.'

5) Might masks be the mark of the beast? How about vaccinations?

- a) Rev13.16-17 says that the mark of the beast is a way to discriminate economically. One respected, orthodox view is that the 'mark' is symbolic of any means to exclude worshipers of the One True God from the marketplace unless they give allegiance and worship to the beast. Just as the seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 in Rev7 is symbolic, so we take the 'mark' to be symbolic, not literal. And Rev14.9-11 seem to support this, as it's a warning against giving allegiance to everything anti-God and worshiping anything or anyone but God. 'Accepting the mark' is a metaphor for giving your allegiance to anything but God alone. So the warning in Rev14.12 is "*a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*"
- b) One cannot accept the mark accidentally.
- c) Masks have been used by medical professionals and in other cultures for the same reasons that they are prescribed during this pandemic. Doing so is not a statement of allegiance to anyone/anything. The heart behind masking is care for others.

6) We're told in scripture to '*fear not*'. Aren't our face covering and other protocols fomenting fear of the virus and fear of death?

- a) Biblically, there is a right kind of fear and a wrong kind of fear.
- b) There is a difference between being responsible and caring for others, and fear. We are responsible when we reduce risk by purchasing items such as insurance and car seats, and visit dentists for preventative care. We demonstrate responsibility when we pursue things such as healthy eating and exercise. Fear of death is at a different level, leading to slavery [Heb 2.14-15].
- c) In a large church body, there will be various levels of risk and comfort. What may be perfectly safe for a teenager could be considered quite foolish for a senior with health difficulties.

7) What other approaches to meeting together did we consider, such as separate rooms for mask-wearers and non-mask-wearers? Why did we choose the protocols that we did?

- a) We chose our protocols to preserve unity for our church body. This is the same reason that we don't have rooms or services based on worship style preferences, Bible translation preferences, time of worship preferences (morning and evening 'same service'), etc.

JJ Sherwood, as the lead elder, from time to time, finds it necessary to lead towards a decision that we know will cause tension. How do we determine whether a decision is one in which to exhibit patience, allowing time for the body to be taught from scripture, or one that must be made quickly and decisively? The Covid-19 pandemic situation is a good example of the latter – one which required a prompt response. And, as noted herein, we prioritized Biblical unity around the gospel, and a laying down of personal preferences. Satan is at work and loves disunity. Our sin can focus us inward, yet this was a time to call the people of Five Points to a posture of 'I don't like this or that, but for the sake of the gospel, Christ's glory, and to enable those in our community who are at risk, I'll lay aside self and preferences to worship together'. Working towards unity is not a call to say that one must agree with everything we have decided, but a call to submit on these secondary/tertiary issues to have a primary unity in the gospel.

- b) We did consider separate rooms, and found the approach to be physically and logistically feasible (except that those in rooms other than the gym would not be fully 'in person'). However, we wanted to lead from our Biblical principles; we didn't want to create unnecessary and unhelpful divisions. We wanted to care for others well, and clearly demonstrate that we consider others' needs as more important than ours.
- c) We also considered suggesting or even requiring high-risk congregants to stay home. We also rather briefly considered allowing everyone to make their own decision (mask/not). Requiring a subset of folks to stay home did not seem Biblically consistent. Based on the principals noted herein, we decided that asking those who can wear masks/distance to serve others is the way that seemed best to us, allowing Five Points to be able to have the most people possible worship together regularly.

8) Will we require the COVID-19 vaccination to enter the building?

A requirement to be vaccinated was not recommended by the task force, nor was it embraced by the elders. Where the Bible isn't explicitly clear, the elders choose not to dictate such individual health decisions.

9) What will it take to enable us to reduce or stop our current protocols?

It's difficult, and unlikely, that we would gravitate to one metric or 'gate' to be met before reducing or eliminating our protocols. There are many moving parts (government, medical guidance, rate of new cases, vaccine availability, ...). That said, at present it appears most likely that various aspects of our protocols will be gradually removed. And it must be noted that when it can be more unifying to resume 'maskless/undistanced' congregating than to continue these protocols, it is possible that Five Points would exhibit care for those who remain cautious by providing a special area or room.

10) If I've recovered or been vaccinated, can I remove my mask? I'm technically immune.

Present guidance from the task force through the medical community, and given to those vaccinated, is that there isn't enough information yet to determine whether the vaccinated or recovered can still be a carrier. As the vaccine is administered to the arm and the virus fighting occurs in the body, there is a possibility that virus particles could be in the respiratory system and multiply. The particles would be attacked further down in the respiratory system, but could be potentially spread to others

Scripture References

Phil 2.1-5 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

1Pet2.13-17 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, **14** or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. **16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Rom13.1ff Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **2** Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, **4** for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. **5** Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. **6** For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. **7** Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Ps22.28 For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Rom12.18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Ex20.13 You shall not murder.

Phil2 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father... **14** Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Eph4.1-3 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Gal5.13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Heb 2.14-15 ¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Rev13.16-17 Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, **17** so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

Rev14.9-11 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

Rev14.12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.