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May 21 2021

The Jagged Finish Line

Hello Beloved Community!

Much gratitude for the many conversations these last days regarding St. John's current protocols. I heard many stories of what feels safe to people, and what might be possible. Themes emerged, the most prominent being a concern for others. I am continually grateful for this faith community and God's resilient church! God is good.

Someone described the end of the 1918 Pandemic as "crossing a jagged finish line." The analogy immediately rang true. We are celebrating many "finishes" (Seeing extended family! Going on a vacation! Confirmation classes meeting in-person!), and yet we are still on a cautious approach toward other "finishes."

Here at St. John by the Mall, "the jagged finish line" means we are relaxing some of our modifications while continuing to keep others. We make decisions based on our values, the reality of having a mixed vaccinated/unvaccinated community, and guidance from church resources and the health department.

We had excellent conversations at this month's Council meeting concerning:

- Our gratitude for and trust of God's resilient church;
- events where we have a mixed vaccinated/unvaccinated gathering, such as worship;
- smaller gatherings/meetings where everyone in the room is vaccinated;
- care of children and adults who are unable to be vaccinated, and care for people who are immunocompromised;
- using our "dimmer-switch" analogy as a guide for our decisions (increasing or decreasing modifications step-by-step rather than all at once.

I want to update you on what's changing and what stays the same, so you know what to expect. Expect that each modification will be reviewed on a monthly basis.

Here's what will stay the same this month

- We will continue to wear masks and practice distancing when vaccinated/unvaccinated people gather. This includes worship, confirmation, youth events such as VBS, food pantry distribution, etc. We are wearing masks to protect others, ourselves, and to model it for our children. We are wearing masks because we do not assume everyone *can* receive a vaccination. We are releasing ourselves and others from the onerous task of “checking” vaccination status at the door. We are releasing ourselves and others from explaining or inadvertently shaming. We are not yet ready to have people remove masks for eating.

Here's where we are relaxing modifications for the upcoming month

WORSHIP

- We are removing guidance to take conversations outside after worship; but we are not putting tables/chairs out yet, either. This will naturally provide more space for distancing and naturally limit the amount of time people spend socializing (at least we *think* this will happen naturally— you are a pretty gabby group so we'll see how this goes....I may have to call a “time's up!” :)
- We are offering a choice when receiving communion during worship. People may receive communion in the pews using the communion pod elements (current practice) -OR- people may receive communion in the form of wafers and communion trays from the pastor and deacon. We will distribute at the front of the chancel. People attending worship will receive instructions when they arrive.
- We are asking people to continue distancing themselves between other households/bubble groups; we will need to practice this without ribbons. We will see how it goes and make decisions from there. Please be aware when seating yourself in the Sanctuary.
- As we have in past summers, soloists will sing special music at some worship services. Our soloists may sing without masks. They are fully vaccinated.
- We are removing the need to sign-up to attend worship for two of our three worship services:
 - People attending Sunday's 8:30am worship will continue to sign-up. This is the heaviest attended service and we still need space to distance between households/bubble groups. Remember: not everyone is comfortable sitting right next to others, yet. If technology is not your thing, call the church office at 815-439-2320 and we will sign you up.



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- We are removing the need to sign up for Saturday's 5:30pm worship and Sunday's 10am worship service. Our numbers are lower at these worship services with plenty of room to space yourselves between households/bubble groups. This will give people more freedom, and alleviates the pain associated with using technology.

OTHER GATHERINGS AND MEETINGS

- We have removed the sign-in sheet near the office.
- In smaller groups where all people are vaccinated, the convener/leader can check with a pastor/staff liaison to discuss meeting without masks. We've been able to do some meetings like this already. We've also had some meetings where people mask/social distance to accommodate the immunocompromised. We are keeping in mind not everyone wants to publicly talk about their particular medical condition. We are practicing conversations that encourage caring for one another.
- In instances where people meet outside, a case-by-case situation will be applied. For example: we will wear masks at VBS. We may have a future outdoor worship service where people distance enough so they do not need to wear masks. We will make this decision on a case-by-case basis; see your convener for further information.

More to come in a month, when we send another monthly update.

If you have feedback or comments for me, I welcome the conversation. However, you'll have to catch me quick-- I'm taking a step across that jagged finish line after worship on Sunday (maybe I'm running across it!). Chris and I are taking a week of vacation to prepare for and host the Beamsley Family Memorial Day Weekend Extravaganza, which makes an amazing comeback after a year of highs and lows for our family.

God is good, indeed.

Peace,

Pastor-Ju



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