

Dear Members and Friends of Cornerstone Community Church,

As we move into the fall season and begin to hold our worship services indoors once again, we believe it would be helpful for us as elders to explain and clarify how we intend to continue applying the health guidelines given to us by our state government leaders in light of the COVID pandemic. We will begin by sharing the key conclusions and convictions behind our decisions and then set forth some specific guidance on how we would like our members to carry out the government guidelines.

Conclusions and Convictions

1. We believe the COVID pandemic is real and deadly. Although death rates and other relevant information may be distorted at times through ignorance or even deliberate manipulation by a few officials, we do not believe this issue has been fabricated out of thin air.
2. Although we realize that some officials may be using the pandemic as an opportunity to gain and manipulate power for their own selfish ends, and that some officials in other parts of the country may be seeking to enforce decrees that deliberately discriminate against churches, we have seen nothing that indicates that our state, county or city officials are acting with such motives. Some officials may be making decisions that eventually prove to be unwise or unnecessary, but we've seen nothing that causes us to believe that our officials are deliberately and maliciously seeking to exercise excessive control over Montana citizens or to deliberately discriminate against churches. To put it in positive language, while some public officials' judgments and directives may eventually prove to have been unwise or unnecessary, we believe that most of our public officials are acting in good faith and are sincerely seeking to protect Montana citizens from the harm of this disease.
3. Although there are conflicting studies regarding the effectiveness of wearing masks and practicing social distancing, our personal research has convinced us that these measures do in fact provide some benefits in reducing the spread and the severity of the COVID virus. Time may show that this protection is not as great as we hope, but we believe there are some benefits to these measures and valid reasons behind the mask and social distancing directives. Therefore, wanting to make every reasonable effort to protect our congregation, especially members who are more vulnerable to this disease due to age or immune deficiencies, as well as members who serve as healthcare workers and care for many vulnerable people, we believe it is loving and prudent to support these government directives while we are gathered to worship the Lord.
4. Moreover, we believe that the Bible provides clear and repeated commands for us to submit to the laws and directives of our civil authorities, provided those laws and directives are not contrary to the clear and explicit teachings of Scripture (see 1 Peter 2:13-3:1; Romans 13:1-6; Matt. 22:15-22; Acts 4:13-22). Since we find nothing in Scripture that teaches that wearing masks and social distancing during worship are sinful, we believe it is honoring to God and loving to others for our people to respect the social distancing and mask directives, as summarized below.
5. We believe that the reason our congregation has been shielded so much from this disease is that God has graciously moved our people to respond to the virus with wisdom and prudence, showing love for others and respect for the guidelines that have been established by the public officials the Lord has placed over us.

Health Guidelines

For the reasons given above, we are encouraging all of our members to follow these guidelines until the government directives are changed or new circumstances dictate otherwise.

1. We plan to go back to two services on October 4 (8:30 and 10:30 am) to give us room for social distancing during the worship service when members sit next to one another for long periods of time.
2. Please keep a close eye on your health each week and refrain from attending public worship if you have any of the following symptoms:
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
3. Please wear a mask whenever you are in the church building. Children under the age of five and persons who have a medical condition precluding the safe wearing of a face covering are not expected to wear masks and are fully welcomed in our worship service. If you have such a medical condition, please notify one of our elders so we can be sensitive to your situation.
4. Please use one of the hand sanitizer stations in the foyer to sanitize your hands upon entering the building.
5. As much as we all miss the hand-shakes and hugs, please refrain from this type of contact until further notice.
6. Since we are not in close proximity with a single person for prolonged periods of time while entering and leaving the building or the sanctuary, strict social distancing will not be required at those times or during brief conversations in the foyer. However, we still encourage you to keep modest distancing even at these times to protect one another from possible infection.
7. People who “do life together” (are in close regular contact during the week) may sit together during the worship service without social distancing.
8. Please allow two empty seats between you and those with whom you are not in close contact during the week. The ushers will continue to assist you in finding an appropriate row to sit in.

If you are unable to carry out any of these guidelines, please explain your situation to an elder so we can do everything possible to accommodate your concerns and needs. Please also feel free to take advantage of our live stream video on Sundays, which will enable you to enjoy the worship service and the preaching of God's Word from your home. As soon as you are able, however, we hope you will rejoin us in person for public worship!

If you have any questions or concerns about the reasons for these guidelines or how to implement them, please feel free to contact any of our elders during the week or on Sunday morning.

In the meantime, please continue to pray that God would shield our church from disease, that he would use these challenging times to help each of us grow in humility, wisdom and love for others, and that he would enable all of us to live with such confidence and peace in the face of adversity that others would ask us to share the reason for the hope we have, which is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Warmly in Christ,

The Elders of Cornerstone Community Church