

2 July 2020

Dear Church family and friends,

Like you, I am very concerned about the rising number of new COVID cases around the country and in the Tri-County area. I'm trusting each of us are doing our part to help hold in check, as best we can, the continued spread. I realize there are many sentiments about participating in certain measures and in particular the wearing of face masks.

This week, working out in the gym, the owner came up and asked me about the mask I was wearing. Although the gym provides masks, I have been the only person wearing one. We had a thirty minute conversation about that very thing. Although it is cumbersome and slightly uncomfortable, as an act of disciplined love, I continue to wear it hoping my silent witness may encourage others to wear one as well. I think of Paul's admonition in Philippians two verse three. There he states, what I believe to be, words of encouragement to be concerned about the well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves."

I've tried to explain to folks who ask what "the problem is" about wearing or not wearing a mask. I believe our theological statement of wearing a mask for our own well-being and well-being of others is often heard through a political ear of heart. Yes, we have individual rights as Christians. Yet we also have loving responsibilities towards others as well. Stanley Hauerwas, my Christian Ethics professor at Duke, had a way of saying things in a crystal clear fashion though often flavored with a non-New Testament vocabulary! He reminded us that when "we became a Christian, our individual rights were gone forever." What I most appreciate about his style of teaching was the visceral love in which he often shared some rather tough principles.

Please read this newsletter and feel that very same love I have for our church family. I believe Paul is conveying that we are all in this together and we are encouraged to look out for one another in many varied expressions of caring. If we don't each care for the other I'm not sure who will.

In closing, our Task Group met this past Wednesday night and has decided to postpone our in-person gatherings until there is a down trend in the number of COVID cases. Our policy was crafted with the flexibility to move forward or backward depending on the trend of the virus and unfortunately, we need to move back to Phase 1. We will continue to closely monitor the situation to guide our moving forward and keep you informed.

Have a safe and happy fourth.

I continue in humility to regard each of you as better than myself.

Grace and Peace,



Pastor Sam