Dear St. John’s Members & Friends,

When I wrote to you in June of 2021, I was happy to announce that strict COVID-19 guidelines were relaxing, and that we would no longer require social distancing, and uses of face coverings would be at the discretion of every person who is fully vaccinated. As we all know, that guidance was short-lived and we were soon back to mask mandates, and even spacing out in our pews.

Since then, much has been learned and accomplished with regard to the pandemic. Vaccines made their way to us and now the booster. Children over the age of 5 are now eligible for the vaccine and soon it will be made available to children under the age of 5. And although this past year also brought us the Omicron variant, we are seeing that the surge seems to be moving downward. And so, we have much to be thankful for. We have had staff members and St. John’s families afflicted with varying degrees of illness from the pandemic. And yet, we have much to be thankful for in answered prayers.

Today I bring you encouraging news. According to the California Health Department, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are declining. This is due in large part to the collective efforts of Californians to get vaccinated, get boosted, and wear masks. Effective February 15, the guidance from the State is: “Masks are required for unvaccinated individuals in indoor public settings. Fully vaccinated individuals are recommended to continue indoor masking when the risk may be high.” And Sacramento County has declared that they will follow and concur with this guidance.

What that means for St. John’s is that beginning February 20, the wearing of face masks will be at the option, and at the discretion of every person, who is fully vaccinated. We will remove social distancing signs in pews and will rely on your own good judgment for your personal health and for those around you. We will resume communion by intinction and host meetings at the church. Sunday School and adult education will resume in the classrooms for all ages (Sunday School teachers and students will all remain masked).
While we are all (especially me) tired of masks, we honor each individual’s personal choices and preferences. We know we have folks in the pews that may be of high-risk and for many possible reasons, may not be vaccinated. We want and urge our people to use any and all best practices to stay safe, for yourself and for the sake of our neighbors. Everyone deserves our efforts toward keeping St. John’s a safe place to be.

I also raise up for your prayerful consideration, the challenging place our families with young children find themselves in (and have been in for these past two years). Although the vaccine is in progress for the little ones, it is not here yet, and families may still not be ready to come back to communal life inside our walls. We know there are hard decisions for these parents to make and we know there are no right or wrong answers. What we remain committed to is supporting them in the varied decisions they make. Therefore, we remain committed to affirming our parents and children in their discernment of best practices they should abide to stay and be safe and will continue to provide opportunities for them to do so.

Indeed, we support the decision-making of every individual, and hope that we will all make prayerful decisions about our own actions including mask wearing or not. If you are sick or not feeling well, please join us at our online campus offerings including worship. We continue to find ways to engage fully with all of you, including with those who worship and participate online.

We have been on a very long journey these past two years with many unexpected twists and turns. And through it all, God’s steadfast love and grace abound. Be good to yourselves and to one another, for the sake of Christ.

Sincerely,

Pastor Frank Espegren