

September 29, 2022

During the Monday Sept 26 meeting, church council reviewed our current masking protocols. While the COVID Advisory Committee was unable to come to a consensus on a recommendation prior to council meeting, they provided us with various considerations such as current state guidelines for optional masking, the impact of masking optional policies on vulnerable individuals, new boosters that have just recently become available and new contact patterns with changing seasons. Council discussed and listened to different points and concerns. Before a decision was made, we took a moment for a Meta prayer/meditation where we wished for ourselves these things:

May I be well

May I live with ease

May I feel loved and connected to this community

We then each silently pictured someone in our church community whom we imagined or knew had different needs and wishes regarding masking protocols and wished that person these same things:

May you be well

May you live with ease

May you feel loved and connected to this community

In the discussion, we named the desire of many to make masking optional at the church while also acknowledging that different policies may be needed to keep First Congregational Church Sunday worship in the sanctuary, our most sacred space, accessible to as many as possible. The council approved the following changes to masking protocols:

- Masking is strongly recommended but optional in all areas of the church except in the sanctuary during Sunday worship. This means individuals may choose whether to mask when entering the narthex, in the social hall, chapel and other spaces. We are asking all to mask while in the sanctuary for worship only.
- Coffee hour will be offered in the social hall as masks optional.
- Masking is optional for individuals leading music during worship. Council asked that singers be distanced at least 20 feet from those in the congregation and that they take the precaution to test before singing.



- These policies apply only to First Congregational Church activities. Other groups using the church building will determine their own policies.

We encourage each person to assess their own risk and choose the best risk reduction strategy for themselves while in other areas of the church and outside Sunday worship. We also ask that individuals comply with First Congregational Church staff requests for masking in their respective office spaces.

We highly encourage the use of N95 or KN95 masks as well as encouraging everyone to be vaccinated and boosted as able and to stay current with annual flu shots. We will continue to work with the COVID Advisory Committee to assess our practices. As we do, we would like to hear from the congregation to help inform our decisions in the future.

If you receive this letter by email, please see the link below for a brief survey. The survey will also be attached to the email if you'd like to return a hard copy. If you are receiving this by postal mail, you will find the survey enclosed. Please complete and return via one of the methods outlined in the instructions.

During council's deliberations, one member remarked how our conversation mirrored the division we see in our community and country on this issue. While that is true, it is our hope and prayer that our beloved community will continue to focus on the things that unite and connect us together through God's love.

Prayerfully,

Your First Congregational Church Leadership Team

Beth Tyne, Moderator
Mark Schofield, Vice Moderator
Bill Henkel, Past Moderator
Jen Sandoval, Treasurer
Janet Malley, Clerk

Survey Link: <https://forms.office.com/r/9Jm1XvYQhL>