

March 15, 2022

FELC Council Updates COVID-19 Risk-reduction Procedures

The Congregation Council met March 15th and discussed the new COVID-19 Community Levels metric that was introduced by the CDC in late February. See [COVID-19 Community Levels | CDC](#) for details. Since that time, the community levels for City of Richmond, Henrico County, and Chesterfield County have all moved from Medium to Low. At the Low level, the CDC recommendations are to “1) Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, 2) Get tested if you have symptoms.” The CDC issues the following guidance at the Low community level of transmission: “People may choose to mask at any time. People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask.” In addition, Bishop Humphrey and the Synod Office “encourages everyone to continue to do what you can to protect the community and the most vulnerable among us. Get fully vaccinated. If you are sick, stay home. Follow the CDC recommendations on masking.” (see the full Synod announcement below). As a result, **the Congregation Council has voted to change the FELC in-person risk-reduction requirements as follows:** move from “masks required” to a “masks optional” policy, effective immediately. Continue to encourage up to date vaccination for all who are able and encourage everyone to follow the other CDC guidelines regarding testing and masking. The Council further voted to use the CDC Community Levels metric to determine if or when to reinstate the mask requirement should the COVID-19 Community Levels rise in our area. However, the Council remains hopeful that the low trend will continue to move us out of pandemic. Above all, we continue to treat each other with the patience and grace that have been demanded of us over the past two years, recognizing that everyone will be operating at a different pace in their willingness and ability to relax their own requirements and habits.

FELC Changes to Holy Communion Distribution

Effective immediately, the Pastor and the Worship and Music Committee will offer the option of receiving Communion at the altar once again, for those who are ready to do so. Communicants may come forward using the center aisle, and into the chancel at the direction of the usher using the center rail. You may stand or kneel in a physically distanced manner at the Communion rail to receive the body of Christ from the pastor and the blood of Christ from the assisting minister (both will make use of hand sanitizer). After communing, leave the chancel using the outer rails and dispose of empty cups in the wastebaskets at the ends of the front pews, while returning to your seats using the outer aisles. Those who are not ready to commune in the chancel still have the option to receive Communion using the pre-packaged individual kits and will be invited to receive together as one communing “table” at the direction of the pastor.

Virginia Synod COVID-19 Update – Addressing COVID-19 in a Changing Landscape

As mask mandates and COVID-19 protocols are adapting and changing, the Virginia Synod Office encourages everyone to continue to do what you can to protect the community and the most vulnerable among us. Get fully vaccinated. If you are sick, stay home. Follow the CDC recommendations on masking.

The CDC recently released a new tool to help individuals know how to best protect yourself and others from COVID-19 based on the COVID-19 Community Level in your area. The tool allows you to search by county and then suggests preventative steps based on the transmission rate in your county. In every case, the best way to prevent transmission and severe illness is vaccination, but the tool suggests additional steps for your area. You can access the tool using the link [COVID-19 Community Levels | CDC](#).

Pastor's Note – 1/19/2022

What is our civic duty when it comes to risk requirements?

In the past two weeks we've had an elderly church member spend three days in the ED at Johnston-Willis because there was no room to be had on any floor in the hospital. I watched another man get discharged too soon this past week because the hospital was attempting to free up much-needed beds. I'm glad they could find a hospital bed for him. I'm also glad to be able to perform that part of my job in person, but some facilities have already had to put limits on visits or suspend them again.

The Omicron variant (though still deadly for some) appears to be milder for many and allows for shorter hospital stays.. However, the hospitals are still at capacity (which is 47% higher than in "normal times" according to some reports). Our medical personnel are spending time that could be spent treating patients on the telephone instead, trying to find beds for them in ICU's in widening circles that are hours away. These are not just numbers; these are our own members, neighbors, and loved ones.

If you have grown weary of masking (and really, who hasn't?) and other risk reduction measures, then I encourage you to see it as a civic duty and encourage others to do the same. Our risk-reduction efforts help slow transmission and keep people out of the hospital, spreading out those hospital visits thus making more beds available. This becomes all the more important when other organizations make other choices that don't take into account the common good. Our Christian mandate (Latin: *mandatum*, meaning commandment) is to love one another, and to love the least and the lost. Risk-reduction measures are one actionable and effective way that we can continue to love others, including those most susceptible. In the midst of that we look forward in hope to the day when these efforts have paid off and risk-reduction is no longer a necessary topic of conversation, but that day has not yet come.

The Lord bless you and keep you,

Pastor Chris