



Update from the Reopening Task Force

The Reopening Task Force (ROTF) met on 8/30/21 to review the current policies at Highland based on the recent Delta variant surge and to address concerns raised by several members over the past few weeks.

1. Our most important mission is to ensure the safety of our membership and staff using the best information we have. This is always going to be a matter of our best guess and our fervent prayers, and we understand we cannot make everyone happy no matter what is decided. However, Safety First is our motto.
2. We also agree that our worship services have the highest priority, and that we should try as hard as possible to remain open for in-person worship if we can do so with a reasonable level of safety for all present. Smaller gatherings and meetings are also vital to the life of the church, especially as we journey through The Story.
3. Being vaccinated and wearing a mask are the only two measures known to be effective in limiting the spread of COVID, which is now spreading extremely rapidly in our community and around the country. While we cannot mandate vaccination for the congregation, we urge that anyone attending any event inside the building be vaccinated, not only for their health and safety, but for those around them. For the same reason, we strongly recommend that everyone entering the church be masked and remain masked while indoors. The only exception is that while speaking, masks may be removed briefly so that others can understand what is being said. When not actively speaking, masks should be worn. Meetings should be held with as much social distancing as can reasonably be achieved. Masks will be available at entrances for those who forget theirs.

With these three underlying principles, we are recommending the following:

1. Sunday worship- Since the traditional service will take place at 9:30 am every Sunday, with or without an audience, to permit recording and livestreaming, we will continue to offer this service. Those who are comfortable are free to attend in-person and are expected to be masked. Those who aren't comfortable can continue to enjoy the livestreamed services at 9:30 am or any time after that. If we have a viable number attending the Contemporary Service, we will continue to offer it as well at 11 am. Our goal is to keep as many people coming back to Highland as possible, in the hope that we can build on that number once the current surge is over. Those speaking or singing (on stage) at either service can remove their mask to do so but should otherwise keep a mask on. Unmasked speakers and singers should remain as far away from others as possible while singing or speaking.
2. Small groups and meetings should follow the same policy. We understand that there are groups where everyone in attendance is comfortable with being unmasked, though the science is clear that even fully vaccinated people can carry and spread the virus to

others, including other vaccinated people. We are not going to be policing the church looking for the unmasked, but groups who are removing their masks except when speaking at meetings are doing so against our recommendations.

3. All programs for children and youths will be conducted with masks. This is particularly important with children 12 and under, who cannot get vaccinated. To maintain some consistency with where the bulk of our young people go to school, we are following the masking policy of the Manheim Township School District, at least for the present.
4. We are not providing any food at the church, indoors or outdoors for now. Those who prepare and serve the food are elderly and understandably worried about offering food service. Also, you cannot eat with a mask on. Rather than trying to make a complicated set of rules with numerous exceptions, we are recommending cessation of food service at the church, whether for congregational events or for funerals and other activities of that nature.
5. Outside groups who do not have their own established policies will follow the same rules around masking and distancing.

We all hope this surge will soon be over. We are heartsick it even happened, just as we were getting some momentum back at Highland. None of us likes wearing a mask. However, we must make adjustments that reflect the best science and that offer the safest environment for those with whom we gather. We on the ROTF will continue to meet and reevaluate new information as necessary.

In Christ,
The ROTF