

NEW MASK POLICY AT ST. JOHN – MASKS ARE NOW IMPERATIVE

Earlier this week we received a 'Covid contact tracing' phone call from Julie Lauf, Director of Nursing for the *Henry County Health Department*, informing us that an individual confirmed positive for Covid-19 had attended our late service last Sunday (July 12). This is the classic case of the virus making its way into public by means of an asymptomatic, unwitting carrier. Julie told us that there is no need to panic and that we don't need to shut our doors, but she was emphatic that while the state of Ohio has not yet mandated masks in public places, a more stringent policy for masks in worship is **strongly** recommended. She reminded us that masks, as simple as they are, are the single most effective way to fight the Coronavirus and to protect one another. For this reason, and with Covid cases increasing in our area, more and more churches and businesses are mandating masks. Social distancing remains another important weapon in this battle.

This recent incident is a harsh reminder that the Coronavirus is a real and present threat that we need to take seriously, and against which we need to protect one another. This is love's duty to our neighbor under the Fifth Commandment, that we "fear and love God so that we...help our neighbor in every physical need," and do not "hurt our neighbor in his body, or do anything which may shorten his life." (Small Catechism)

Upon the recommendation of the Health Dept., the Church Council, at a special meeting on Friday, adopted the following more robust policy regarding masks in worship:

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Starting this Sunday (July 19), it is expected that worshippers wear a face mask when entering and exiting the church and sanctuary, and when singing or responding verbally as part of the service. Those with special breathing problems are exempted. Masks may be removed during listening portions of the service, such as Scripture readings, sermon, and prayers. Disposable and cloth masks will be available at the church.

We understand that this is awkward for some, but we're all in the same boat. If, however, you are not comfortable wearing a mask to church, we encourage you to continue participating in worship by listening to the live FM broadcast in our parking lot on Sunday mornings, or by tuning into our YouTube channel on Sunday mornings where you will find a recording of the previous Thursday evening service. You can find information and links on our church website, sjl.org, and on our **Facebook** page.

Also, we remind everyone to try to maintain social distancing in the sanctuary as much as possible, by sitting in the pews designated by color for each service, and by spreading out laterally as well, so that you are not sitting directly in front of or behind someone else.

We thank everyone for their understanding during these difficult times, and we thank God that He has so far preserved us in this pandemic from physical harm and danger. Please pray for those who have contracted Covid, for our political leaders as they make tough decisions and enact policies, and for medical professionals and researchers as they seek answers for us in this health emergency.

God be with you, and if at all possible for you, we hope to see you in God's house this Sunday morning!