

Presbytery of Lake Michigan

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

September 8, 2021

Presbytery of Lake Michigan
Clerks of Session
Pastors with congregations
Church Administrators

For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Jeremiah 29:11-15

Dear Siblings in Christ:

For more than a year and a half the COVID-19 virus has made us exiles from our friends, our families and our congregations. Just when we thought we were about to return, the Delta variant threatens to send us back into exile. We hear God's Word from the prophet, Jeremiah, and receive them as words of hope, just as the people of Israel received them so long ago.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently recommended that individuals, both vaccinated and unvaccinated, wear masks when participating in indoor activities, especially in areas of substantial or high transmission. Further, the CDC recommends that individuals who are unvaccinated should wear masks in outdoor gatherings as well.

As we continue to note, every choice involves an element of risk for us and for those participating in activities in our churches. Our recommendations are for reduced risk but are not without potential danger if implemented.

The level of COVID infections continue to vary according to geographic location and the number of individuals in the community who have been vaccinated. The Delta variant is more contagious and individuals who are vaccinated are able to be infected with and spread the virus. Michigan is now in *High Transmission* and models are projecting a continued increase in hospitalizations and deaths over the next four to six weeks, maybe longer. These factors, along with factors unique to each congregation and community, should be considered as sessions make decisions about worship and gatherings. We offer the following guidelines as they make their decisions.

We continue to recommend that our congregations not meet in-person/ within buildings until:

1. After 70% of those present in person have been vaccinated.
2. All pastors and worship leaders who will participate in or lead worship are vaccinated.
3. The community's fourteen-day average number of new cases is fewer than eight (8) cases per 100,000.
4. The community's fourteen-day average positive test rate is lower than 7%.

We continue to recommend the following process steps of faithful stewardship:

1. That faith communities carefully consider the level of COVID infection in their community when making the decision to meet in-person or via electronic meeting technology.
2. That all groups using the building maintain all the recommended prevention protocols.
3. That re-implementation of hybrid worship and ministry is faithful stewardship.
4. That congregations make use of outdoor gathering areas for worship and meetings.
5. That decisions to include congregational singing as a congregation should be based on the latest infection rates within your particular community.
6. That church meals – including funeral luncheons – continue to be places where disease is too easily spread. We do not recommend hosting or attending them. As a ministry to those who are hungry among us, we can modify our options to distribute meals to go until it is safe to host people in the building again.
7. We strongly recommend making wearing face masks indoors mandatory for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals and advise having someone other than the pastor be responsible for ensuring that people adhere to this policy.
8. We strongly recommend that it be mandatory for unvaccinated individuals to wear a face mask at outdoor gatherings and advise having someone other than the pastor be responsible for ensuring that people adhere to this policy.
9. Communicate clearly that congregation members should stay home if they feel at all “off,” if they know they have been exposed, or if they are waiting for COVID test results.
10. Use less than the full capacity of your space and increase physical distance between household groups. (Distancing between six (6) and ten (10) feet is recommended.) Think about ways to maintain distancing outside the sanctuary – outside the door, in entryways, by coat racks, and in restrooms.
11. Sessions are urged to recognize that pastors, worship leaders, musicians and other members of staff may have extenuating circumstances that affect their ability to get the vaccine to safely protect themselves and family members. If the Session and any of those mentioned above are not able to come to agreement, then the Commission on Ministry will be asked to assist them in resolving the impasse.

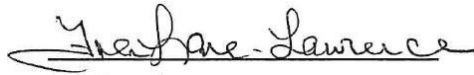
The September 18, 2021, Stated Meeting of Presbytery is scheduled to take place virtually. A decision regarding the December 7, 2021, Stated Meeting will be made at a later date.

These guidelines are to cover the next few months through the end of November at which time updated advisory guidelines may be offered.

We realize that returning to previous COVID-19 protocols can feel more difficult than when they were first implemented nearly a year and a half ago. As people of God, we are called to care for one another, especially those most vulnerable. This means taking every precaution to assure the safety and health of those within our worshiping communities.

It is an honor and privilege to serve alongside such faithful partners in ministry and pray without ceasing for your health and well-being.

Thanking God for each of you,



Fran Lane-Lawrence
Transitional Co-Leader/ Stated Clerk



Cal Bremer
Transitional Co-Leader