



Bishop's Message – July 28, 2021

I believe and trust in science. Data and research have shown that the vaccines for Covid 19 are safe, highly effective and that if enough people get vaccinated, we can end this pandemic. That is why I got fully vaccinated as soon as I was able. Not only to protect my own health but to participate in bringing an end to the suffering this pandemic has caused. Now with the highly transmissible Delta variant being so widespread, I will follow the guidelines of the CDC and resume wearing a mask in all public settings.

I also believe and trust in the way of Jesus. Calling me to live in community with others and to obey the commandment to love my neighbor, rather than insisting that I have the right and freedom to do whatever I choose without regard for my neighbor. I am fully vaccinated and will resume wearing a mask because this is a public health crisis. My neighbors, fellow children of God, are suffering and dying throughout the world. For me, this choice is a decision grounded in faith.

This is not a debate about who has the right to make requirements or mandates regarding one's personal health. This is not about blaming or shaming individuals who have different views and opinions. This is about doing what is right and what is necessary to end this pandemic and save lives.

As faith leaders, I urge you to do what is right and what is necessary. Be examples of how we can come together, care for one another, and live the way of Jesus. I am recommending that we, as the church, as people of faith, encourage individuals in our communities to get vaccinated. While I am not recommending that we again suspend in-person worship, I am recommending that we resume wearing masks in all public gatherings. This includes worship. It doesn't need to be a debate, it's not a mandate. It is simply the way we gather together in a time of a pandemic. While we cannot, nor should not, tell people what to do, we can invite, ask, and even challenge people to connect their actions to their faith. We can listen compassionately and respectfully to the concerns of others and still do what is right and necessary.

What does this mean for our Fall Theological Conference, scheduled to take place in October at Lake of the Ozarks? –

I am respectfully requesting that all participants at the conference be fully vaccinated or have a negative covid test within a few days of the conference.

- These last several months have been challenging times to do ministry. As wonderful as technology has been, I believe it is important that we gather in person to be renewed in our relationships and support one another as we continue to ground ourselves in Scripture and wrestle with what it means to follow the way of Jesus and participate in God's justice for the world. To gather as safely as possible, we will follow CDC guidelines regarding wearing masks, social distancing, etc. We will communicate this same request and expectations to the staff of the Lodge of the Four Seasons.

If you have any concerns or issues with this request for the Fall Theological Conference or any of my recommendations, I invite you to contact me directly. We can and do make a difference in our words and our actions. May they be actions that bring healing.

Rev. Susan Candea
Bishop

God's work. Our hands.