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Lyonsville Congregational Church

Dear Lyonsville Members and Friends:

Throughout the pandemic, our leadership has been carefully and prayerfully seeking ways to be God's faithful people. The COVID-19 pandemic is not over, and there is a new wave of uncertainty with variants. Even so, in these months public health experts have learned a lot about what it takes to have safe in person gatherings. We also know that our congregation has a high vaccination rate, and that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective especially against hospitalization and death.

Therefore with great joy we invite you to join worship in person once more starting September 12! It is time to once again seek the spiritual nourishment of in person gatherings. This letter contains essential information about what the gatherings will look like for the time being.

We also remain committed to providing a robust and fully interactive online option on Zoom for those who don't yet feel ready to return to in-person worship, need to worship at home for other reasons, or live outside the area.

While the experts are still figuring out how best to understand the interplay between vaccination and the variants, **we do know that combining three main precautions reliably leads to safe indoor gatherings: masking, distancing, and ventilation.**

Our policies are consistent with guidance and requirements from local, state, and federal public health authorities and our wider United Church of Christ. As conditions change, we will review and adjust these policies as well:

- **Everyone over the age of 2 will need to wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose, regardless of vaccination status.** Scientists are still studying the extent to which vaccinated folks can spread the virus, even if not sick themselves, and "breakthrough" infections of vaccinated folks do happen. And please keep in mind that many people, including all children under the age of 12, are still not able to be vaccinated.

- **Every other pew will be available for seating.** Unavailable pews will be marked off. You may choose where you would like to sit, maintaining at least six feet distance from those outside your household.
- **Windows will be open to provide ventilation.** Even in warmer or cooler weather - though we'll open them less they will remain open. Layers will be your friend!
- **Fellowship Hour will be outdoors (weather permitting).** We ask that people leave the building as soon as the service ends (those who are able may exit the back or the front) and encourage you to bring a lawn chair or blanket to enjoy distanced fellowship in the parking lot together after worship. You may remove your mask outdoors, if you'd like. In case of inclement weather, fellowship time will be held indoors without food or beverages.
- **Worship leaders may choose to lead without a mask while on the chancel if they are vaccinated AND have tested negative for COVID within the previous 72 hours.** Otherwise, leaders must remain masked, though will be encouraged to use a clear mask which the church can provide.

If you can help, whether with setup or greeting or just thinking through the details, please let one of us or the office know.

We are aware that some folks may be unhappy to hear about some of these requirements. This is a difficult stage of the pandemic. Even if you are vaccinated and would prefer more relaxed protocols, we have to make decisions for the good of the whole congregation and community. We are reminded of Paul's reminder to "look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others."

As we prepare for this transition, we encourage you to reach out if you have any questions about our plan. We continue to give thanks for your flexibility and grace as we move through this period of experimentation. We know we will get some things right and other things wrong and we'll be covered by God's grace each time.

In gratitude and joy,

Pastor Sean Williams
Sanna Bashor, Moderator

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