

Ohio's New Public Health Order

FPC responds to the May 17, 2021 COVID guidelines

Since the onset of the pandemic, FPC's COVID policies have complied with Ohio's orders and directives, and we have followed CDC guidelines for our community health protocols. With the cooperation and perseverance of this congregation, we have minimized the risk of exposure within our community. I am prayerfully confident that this attitude will keep our gatherings safe as we enter into the next phase of Ohio's recovery process.

The May 17 Ohio Department of Health Director's Order (The Order) states that **fully vaccinated persons may safely do most activities without a facial covering and without socially distancing. Unvaccinated persons should continue to protect themselves with masks and social distancing.** (details at www.coronavirus.ohio.gov) The Order is effective retroactively to May 14 and remains in force until June 2. We anticipate the elimination of most public mandates to take effect on June 2 as announced by Gov. DeWine.

The Session (ruling elders of the church) met on May 15 and voted to comply with the latest Ohio guidelines. By this action, we adjusted our policies and procedures to reflect the Ohio guidelines announced in the previous week. The May 17 Order codifies and clarifies those announcements. The implications for our church are as follows:

What the May 17 Order means for First Presbyterian Church

- Effective immediately, the wearing of facial coverings is not necessary for fully vaccinated individuals. Those who are not yet vaccinated should continue to wear a mask and practice social distancing. The Order states that masks are not required for individuals below the age of 10.
- Congregational singing will continue. Facial coverings are not necessary for fully vaccinated individuals, and those who are not yet vaccinated should keep their facial covering on.
- An officiant or worship leader does not need to wear a mask when speaking or singing from the pulpit, lectern, or chancel, regardless of their vaccination status. However a distance of 6' should be maintained with respect to others in the chancel area and the congregation.
- The Order recognizes religious observances as a protected activity, and only the facial covering guidelines apply to us. Although we are exempt from social distancing and seating capacity requirements, FPC will continue to mark the pews for social distancing for the time being to give people a chance to be vaccinated.
- When eating or drinking we will comply with the guideline of remaining seated when doing so.

- Outside users of our facility will need to adhere to the guidelines regarding facial covering and social distancing as described above. Unmasked speakers should maintain a distance of 6' from others.
- We will continue to follow handwashing and hand sanitizing practices and provide hand sanitizer in public areas.
- Regardless of vaccination status, each individual should perform a daily health assessment and stay home if there is a fever, cough, or other symptom of COVID-19.

This list reflects the guidelines that pertain to the life and ministry of the First Presbyterian Church and will apply to worship and other gatherings. As we enjoy the benefits of the relaxed guidelines, let us pay close attention to minimizing the risk of exposure, especially with respect for others who have not yet had the opportunity to become vaccinated. Each individual is encouraged make their own determination about attendance and participation with respect to the guidelines we have put in place. We will respect personal decisions which result in an individual taking extra precautions. Please direct any questions or concerns to Pastor Joe.