

Updated Pastoral response to Covid-19

We are now several months into the Covid-19 crisis. As time marches on, the elder board continues to wrestle with several challenging questions. For instance, should we force people to wear masks on Sunday mornings, should we force people to social distance on Sunday mornings, and should we allow small groups to meet in homes?

While thinking through these issues we are trying to delicately balance the Bible's teaching on civil disobedience (Heb. 11:31; Ex. 1; Dan. 3, 6; Acts 4:17-20; 5:29; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14), with love for neighbor (Mk. 12:31), our witness to the world (Col. 4:5; 1 Thes. 4:12), freedom of conscience (Rom. 14),¹ and the importance of gathering with the saints on the Lord's day (Heb. 10:23-25).

Let me start by addressing masks and social distancing on Sunday mornings. Refusing to wear a mask and practice social distancing at church on Sunday morning is currently against the law. While we are not encouraging civil disobedience at this point, we believe it is important to honor the consciences of every Sunday morning attender by allowing them to make their own decisions on these matters. With that in mind, we want every attender to carefully consider love of neighbor, witness to the world, and the importance of gathering, as they make these decisions.

What about small groups meeting in homes this fall? This is similar to the question raised above. Meeting with more than five people in one's home is technically against the law. Again, while we are not currently encouraging civil disobedience, we think it is necessary to honor the consciences of our members and attenders as they make decisions about small group logistics this fall. Furthermore, we are encouraging everyone to consider love of neighbor, the importance of gathering, and their witness to the world as they make these decisions.

Please continue to pray for the elders as they navigate through trying times. Furthermore, pray that God would use Covid-19 to bring many people to faith in Christ. In addition, pray that God would preserve the unity of our church, despite the diversity of opinions on how to respond to Covid-19. Finally, pray with us for the elimination of Covid-19.

¹ Please refer to Andy Naselli's excellent book titled *Conscience: What it is, How to Train it, and Loving Those Who differ*.