



## A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

The Task Force met recently to address new developments in the virus that continues to threaten our community, our nation, and our world. Their particular concern, which we share, is the rapid rise of the Delta variant. The aggressive nature of this disease now has our full attention. My thoughts for you come from a more pastoral nature, though a few medical facts are appropriate.

Two initial observations are important. First, the level of frustration for having to deal with this resurgence is high. All of us had hoped that the days of actively dealing with COVID-19 were behind us. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. Secondly, you should know that from the beginning this challenge for me has been one of public health. How something this widespread, affecting millions of people, ever became a personal or political issue is almost beyond comprehension. Our church will continue to respond as though the health of our membership is the primary focus, for indeed it is.

A review of recent data speaks for itself. The number of current cases has risen significantly in days, affecting young adults in higher numbers than before. Most alarming is that the fact that unvaccinated persons are those at greatest risk. One local hospital reported a daily count of 33 cases (including several on ventilators)—not one of the 33 had been vaccinated. Though it is extremely rare for vaccinated persons to be hospitalized (with most having mild or no symptoms), it is possible for them to contract and to spread the illness.

So how do we remain healthy as we weather this storm? The Task Force makes three recommendations:

- 1) You are encouraged to get vaccinated. The CDC recommends vaccines for almost everyone age twelve and older. Having a high percentage of vaccinated persons is necessary for in-person worship. Vaccinations are readily available in the community, and they are free.
- 2) The CDC also recommends wearing masks in public indoor spaces, whether or not you have been vaccinated. Our previous policy of requesting unvaccinated persons to wear masks in worship remains in place. Please consider this advice as you make your decisions. Maximum protection against the Delta variant still includes the option of attending services online.
- 3) The final recommendation is of great importance—please demonstrate kindness, care, and respect for others who may or may not agree with your decisions. Our conversations on this topic need to remain civil and supportive. In the coming weeks you will likely see more and more people wearing masks and practicing social distancing, including those who are vaccinated. Treating one another with loving acceptance is a high mark of the Christian life.

Peace, John