

**Congregational Council**  
St. John's Lutheran Church  
March 22, 2022 | 7:00 p.m.

Members: Pr. Pam Fickenscher, Pr. Jonathan Davis, Paul Beck, Marilyn Calcutt, Rod Christensen, Dale Gehring, Mark Gleason, Candace Godfrey, Trish Goodrich, Kristy Harms, Tamara Jackman, Dennis Rinehart, Jane Rizzo, Kathleen Shea, Jerry Ugland

**Present: Pr. Pam Fickenscher, Pr. Jonathan Davis, Paul Beck, Marilyn Calcutt, Rod Christensen, Dale Gehring, Candace Godfrey, Trish Goodrich, Dawn Tommderdahl, Tamara Jackman, Dennis Rinehart, Jane Rizzo, Kathleen Shea, Jerry Ugland**

**Not Present: Kristy Harms, Mark Gleason**

Meeting was called to order at 7:04pm

1. Opening devotion and prayer led by Dale Gehring
2. Dale Gehring moved to approve minutes from February 22, 2022. Candace Godfrey seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
3. Financial Report – Jane Rizzo
  - a. We are on track this early in the year for expenses so far. In terms of monthly budgets, it's typical that we don't see a lot of movement at the beginning of the year from the boards
  - b. Utilities - already at 25% of budget for the year in February, but this tracks with prior years spending history
  - c. We received \$8K back in rebates from Xcel; will most likely go back into Utilities in the budget - will confirm at a future date.
  - d. Education Funds update - the \$17,000 for Continuing Education under Designated Funds cannot fund the \$5,000 in the personnel budget for Continuing Education (because those funds are assigned to specific individuals). Not a problem at this point, but the Council should note the discrepancy.
4. Dale Gehring moved to approve the February financial report. Kathleen Shea seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
5. Council Updates & Action Items
  - a. **Safe Operating Committee Update**
    - i. Prior to tonight's Council meeting and upon recommendation from the Safe Operation Committee, the Congregational Council was twice asked to approve changes to St. John's COVID protocols.
      1. March 3rd recommendation from the Safe Operating Committee (see Addendum A attached). Council responded over email with support of the plan unanimously.
      2. March 16th recommendation from the Safe Operating Committee (see Addendum B attached). Council responded over email with support of

the plan unanimously. New recommendations will be effective 3/20/2022.

- ii. Case counts are favorable and going in the right direction (towards Green)
  - iii. Feedback from congregation: members seem in support of plan, attendance has been steady, although not back to pre-pandemic numbers
- b. **Adult Ministry and Education Board** - brought up the need for Wi-Fi boosters in certain areas of the Church
- i. Dale Gehring mentioned that the city will be installing fiber optic internet along 3rd St as early as this Fall. Council agreed that it makes sense to tie this in when that upgrade is completed
6. Pastor's Report – Pr. Jonathan Davis
- a. Large amount of pastoral and upfront ministry this past month (funerals, Lent, Sunday services)
  - b. Julie and Emmanuel having conversations about children and youth - attendance on Sunday versus Wednesday evening
  - c. Starting to plan for Jonathan's sabbatical starting in July
  - d. Tim Byers thinking about retirement, reducing hours but still in a leadership role. Hoping he can be part of the transition with the new hire replacement.
7. Board Reports: included in the materials for the Council meeting
- a. Benevolence & Social Concerns – update to minutes included in this packet: they will be sending \$1,000 to *Lutheran Disaster Response (Eastern Europe Crisis Response)*
8. New Business
- a. Fellowship Opportunities
    - i. Overall consensus is to get these opportunities rebooted. Open question from Rod Christensen: are we set up to take advantage of as many opportunities as we can, without burdening a few or a minority of us? Marilyn Calcutt agreed about boards working together on various events where it makes sense. Children's, Youth, and Adult have many crossover ministries.
  - b. St. John's Hall Acoustics
    - i. Biggest question for proceeding forward is whether we should solicit a 2nd bid. The bid that currently exists is proprietary; the E&C Board would have to approach a large firm to do that. Council agrees that a 2nd bid is ideal from a credibility standpoint and as a stewardship issue. Council will ask Mark to investigate the process and costs associated with getting a 2nd bid.
    - ii. If we continue to pursue the project after getting a 2nd bid, the Exec Committee discussed that we'd need a communication plan to be able to begin raising funds
    - iii. Update from Finance Board - Grace Overflowing Capitol has \$24K leftover that could start the finance plan (about 50% of the estimated cost).
  - c. April Board Night
    - i. Because April Board Night falls on Holy Week, Council agrees to focus on May 10th for getting back together in person

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18pm

Other Notes: none.

Respectfully submitted by Trish Goodrich

## Addendum A

### Letter sent to congregation 3/4/22:

Update from Safe Operating Committee

Dear people of St. John's,

On February 25<sup>th</sup>, the CDC released new guidelines for the use of masks to prevent serious illness from Covid-19. On March 3, the Safe Operating Committee met to discuss our response to those guidelines, and sent our recommendations to the Congregational Council, which affirmed the plans described below. Throughout the pandemic, we have relied on expert guidance to make our decisions, and we continue that practice now.

The CDC is assigning a weekly risk level to each county in the United States, and is only recommending the required use of masks in indoor public settings for counties at high risk. Currently Rice County is designated as low risk, because there are fewer infections occurring now and our hospitals are no longer overwhelmed. We have reviewed the CDC's rationale and agree with their approach. Covid-19 is still a serious risk for those adults who are not fully up to date on vaccinations, and for some who have compromised immune systems or other serious health conditions. But for children and fully vaccinated healthy adults, the risk of serious illness or death from the omicron variant is very similar to that from other seasonal respiratory infections, including influenza. It is also true that immunocompromised people have risks from those other respiratory infections as well.

Our provisional recommendation is that masks will no longer be required at St. John's effective Sunday, March 20<sup>th</sup>. The committee will meet again on March 16<sup>th</sup> to review the latest data, and any comments and questions we receive before confirming this change. We believe this will give the members of the congregation time to become familiar with the new guidelines and recommended changes, and to ask questions and provide feedback.

We also acknowledge that this is not a permanent decision, as we know we may need to resume mandated masking or other measures in the future if the situation changes.

The details of our plan:

Because Rice County is currently designated by the CDC at a low level of risk, masks will no longer be required for worship or other activities at St. John's, effective 3/20/2022. We expect and welcome that masks will be worn by some of us for a variety of reasons for quite a while, and by many of us at one time or another. For example, St. John's Chorale and Preschool Sunday School is choosing to continue masking for now, and other small groups or individuals may choose to do that as well.

We can help protect one another and our broader community by doing several things:

1. Staying completely current on vaccinations for Covid-19 and other respiratory infections, including influenza.
2. Not coming into St. John's when we have symptoms of a respiratory infection.
3. Not coming into St. John's for 10 days from the onset of a proven Covid-19 infection, even if asymptomatic. (This is more cautious than the CDC recommendation.)
4. Wearing a well-fitting, high-quality mask (such as an N-95 or KN-95) for at least 10 days from the onset of any respiratory infection, even when symptoms have cleared. (This is more cautious than the CDC recommendation.)
5. Wearing a high-quality mask for 10 days after a known exposure to Covid-19.

Thank you for your patience, respectful consideration of each other, and faithful support and participation throughout the last two years. We look forward to gathering and worshipping together.

Rod Christensen  
Congregational President

## Addendum B

### Letter sent to congregation 3/19/22:

Update from Safe Operating Committee

The Safe Operating Committee met on 3/16 to review the status of Covid-19 in our community before implementing the announced changes we had planned for 3/20. The committee brought the recommendations described below to the Congregational Council, which approved them, effective 3/20/2022. First, the background.

The CDC releases a risk level for each county every Thursday evening. These are based on weekly case counts, new hospital admissions, and the percentage of locally hospitalized patients who have Covid-19. Green is low risk, Yellow is medium risk, and Red is high risk. Here is the link to the CDC information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>

Rice County was green on 2/24 and 3/3, then red on 3/10, then yellow on 3/17.

This variation in risk level could be frustrating, or worrisome, but it is better for us all to accept that this is likely the way things will be for a while. While the general pattern of fewer infections and less serious illness is encouraging, the virus is not disappearing, and we will likely see flares from time to time. The committee recommends that we follow the CDC's guidance, taking more precautions when our status is red or yellow, and loosening restrictions when the status is green. This approach will allow us to take advantage of our opportunities, and still take precautions together when we need to, especially to help protect those among us who are at higher risk. As Minnesotans, we can learn to do this. While we might wish the weather is good all the time, we have learned to watch the forecast and adjust, and we can do that for Covid-19, too.

Since we announced our plans we have heard from many of you, demonstrating the wide range of perspectives we knew existed in our congregation. Most people we heard from are comfortable with our approach. Some are eager to be done with masks more quickly. Some are concerned that we still all need to wear masks for a while for them to be safe. We respect all these points of view, and we will continue to adapt our practices as we learn together. We value every member of our community, and we recognize how different our individual circumstances may be.

Beginning March 20, we will adjust our masking practices weekly in response to the CDC's county risk level report. We will make it easy to know what to do by including this risk level in our weekly E-Voice, and by using signs on the entrances.

When Rice County is RED or YELLOW (including this Sunday):

- We will use masks at both worship services, and when moving throughout the building.

- We will continue the current policy of allowing leaders and members of group activities to make their own decisions once the group is in place. This includes removing masks if desired at coffee, once seated.
- We will follow the same guidelines for funerals.

When Rice County is GREEN:

- Masks will be optional at both Sunday services, vespers, and funerals.
- We know that some people will continue to wear masks for a variety of reasons, and we welcome that. We will require masks in some circumstances as listed below.
- Small groups and their leaders may continue to decide what is best for their groups.

Again, from today through Thursday, March 24, we are operating with the YELLOW recommendations.

You can help make this work for everyone, and help keep everyone safe, by following these simple steps:

1. Stay completely up-to-date on vaccinations for Covid-19 and other respiratory infections, including influenza.
2. Always bring a mask to church (even if we are in the green). You will then have it available if you are in a conversation with someone who needs to use masks.
3. Watch your E-Voice for the updated level on Thursday evening/Friday morning, and read the signs we will keep posted on the doors.
4. Expect things to change, even weekly.
5. Do not come into St. John's if you have symptoms of a respiratory infection.
6. Do not come into St. John's if you have a proven Covid-19 infection for 10 days, even if you are asymptomatic.
7. Wear a well-fitting, high-quality mask (such as an N-95 or KN-95) for 10 days after known exposure to Covid-19, or for 10 days with any respiratory infection.
8. Expect that some people will be wearing masks for quite a while, and all of us will probably wear masks from time to time.

Thank you again for your patience, goodwill, and support of one another and our congregation. Please send any comments or questions to Pastor Pam, Pastor Jonathan, or Council President Rod Christensen. The Safe Operating Committee will reconvene in a few weeks to reassess the situation.