西雅圖證道堂
Evangelical
Chinese Church
of Seattle

**ECC COVID-19 Update**
3.10.2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As many of you have heard, Governor Inslee plans on lifting the mask mandate for Washington State as of March 12, 2022. This announcement reflects a shift in the CDC approach to the pandemic to create a new metric called "COVID-19 community levels," which incorporates not only community transmission level (new COVID-19 cases), but also factors in the severity of the virus (COVID-19 hospital admissions) as well as the capacity of our healthcare system to handle COVID-19 (% of inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients)*. The Omicron variant has been shown to cause less serious infection (hospitalizations and death) compared to prior variants. We, as a society, are learning how to live and function with this virus. Likewise, we as a church are learning how to remain true to our primary calling of glorifying God and serving the spiritual needs of our members, while balancing our concern and care for the physical well-being of our congregation, especially those most vulnerable to serious infection. Currently, we are in a unique time in the pandemic, as we transition from "pandemic" to "endemic." Under endemic conditions, we have accumulated more experience and strategies to deal with the virus, which enable us to gather more safely. Just a clarification of terms:

Epidemic: an outbreak is an epidemic when there is a sudden increase in cases.
Pandemic: a disease is a pandemic when it spreads across several countries and affects a large number of people.
Endemic: a disease becomes endemic when it will still spread from one person to another, and it will still affect people all over the world, but it will do both of these at stable and predictable levels.

Because COVID-19 is a new virus, and one that mutates very quickly, we must keep a humble attitude to what it might do. In the past, many times when there has been a relaxation in safety measures, there has been a subsequent spike up in cases. And there is no guarantee that future variants will cause less severe disease. But there is a lot of hope due to greater immunity in our local area from both high vaccination rates and prior infection. The introduction of new treatments, including oral treatments, may decrease the severity of infection and prevent hospitalizations. As such, the Covid Taskforce would like to take a gradual approach to relaxing our COVID-19 policies to be careful for the sake of our elderly, our immunocompromised, and our children, some of whom are still not yet able to receive vaccinations (those age <5 yrs).

**Masking:** For now, we will continue to require masking at all ECC activities and re-evaluate in the first week of April. That will give us enough time to see what happens to COVID-19 rates locally as mask mandates drop.

**Worship teams:** Worship teams are now mask optional. However, if you choose to not mask during the worship time, you will need to do a rapid COVID-19 Antigen test that day before serving. We would recommend that choirs remained masked due to the larger size of choirs.

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Speakers/moderators can decide to forgo masks and Plexi-glass, but would need to do a rapid COVID-19 Antigen test the day of preaching.

**We recommend that you conduct the rapid test at home before you come to church.**

**Food:** We still recommend no food on ECC campuses, but will re-evaluate in April. Small groups may decide to have food at their homes based on the risk tolerance of the members in their group. Ways to mitigate risk would be outdoor eating and/or rapid COVID-19 Antigen testing.

**Baptism:** For Easter baptism, we will plan on allowing submersion baptism with rapid COVID-19 Antigen testing that day.

**Children's Ministry:** We will continue to mask (all teachers, volunteers, and students) and re-evaluate in April.

**Retreats:** Because retreats are considered the highest risk activity, we do not recommend overnight retreats until June. That will give enough time to see how COVID-19 progresses.

Please continue to pray for the spiritual, emotional, and physical health of our church and wisdom as we navigate uncharted waters.

May God bless you and keep you safe,

ECC Covid Taskforce and Executive Committee

- *https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html
- https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/community-level.aspx

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