



January 26, 2022

Dear Friends of New Song,

As we continue to weather this pandemic, we have maintained the priority of everyone's safety, including the most vulnerable. In addition, we know that there is a profound need for spiritual nourishment, particularly in trying times, and have taken precautions to continue providing in-person and live-stream services and gatherings.

We continue to monitor the best practices for our congregation's health, including monitoring the rates for positive case counts, hospitalizations, and mortality. Unfortunately, since the latest variant hit our region, we hear of widespread reports where entire households are exposed, infected, or are having to quarantine. The upside has been that many recover within ten days; however, we have also had several admitted to the hospital. In addition, we have had members from just four months old up to 80 years old test positive, and the impact remains unique for each case.

Our Conference office recently shared, "COVID cases in our local churches have dramatically jumped since Omicron's arrival, alongside increases in cases in the communities. Taking action to keep people safe and healthy is good leadership; caring for your neighbor is good discipleship."

The data suggests this virus remains very active in Hanover County. We have seen hospitals delay elective surgeries and prioritize their resources and staff to care for patients connected to COVID. Hospitals report that most of those suffering severe COVID symptoms are unvaccinated. We encourage everyone to consult their physician for guidance around vaccine options and fully consider this opportunity.

Several have inquired about the topic of natural immunity. Per CDC reports, patients who have had COVID will experience a form of immunity against the variant they had for 3-6 months post-infection. We continue to have persons experiencing their second and even third round of COVID as natural immunity, alone, does not provide full protection.

The latest variant has proven to be highly transmissible. Vaccinations assist in keeping cases from becoming as severe but are not full-proof. However, with so many testing positive, in addition to those receiving boosters, the evidence suggests this surge will likely peak in the next month. So it is likely we will see a reduction in cases and we pray for that trend to occur.

That being said, despite changes at the school level and because we have members with medical concerns and children not eligible for vaccinations, in addition to the way the virus is present prior to symptoms, we will remain with masks while indoors for the time being.

What would change the practice of masking is when we see a downturn in the positive cases in our community per the guidance from the Chickahominy Health District. In no way do we foresee the need to suspend in-person worship similar to when the pandemic began. We all remember those days and have no desire to return to a shutdown.

If you are sick or have been exposed, please remember to self-quarantine and seek medical attention. If you test positive, don't hesitate to contact the Church Office, especially if you have been on campus in the days leading up to your test result.

We care about you and our neighbors. God is with us, and we trust that God will lead us through. We have missed many of you and would love to hear your latest updates. Feel free to share how you are doing and please know: you are loved and we are praying for you!

Faithfully,
Pastor Chad