



Dear Grace Family,

For most of the last year, we have conducted in-person worship at Grace in accordance with Governor Northam's Executive Order No. 72. During that time, we have done not only what the Executive Order has *required*, but also what it has *recommended*. We had many reasons for doing more than the bare minimum. First and foremost, none of the requirements fundamentally inhibited our ability to worship God and proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We also wanted to assure vulnerable and concerned members that our church supported them and was taking no unnecessary risks.

Compliance with both the requirements and the recommendations was inconvenient, to be sure. But it was an inconvenience we endured lovingly, for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our focus throughout the pandemic has been to prioritize the spiritual well-being of our members in a safe, legal, and most importantly, loving manner. We will continue to be guided by those principles moving forward.

Due to significant increases in vaccinations, as well as our growing knowledge of their effectiveness and the resultant reduction in COVID-19 cases, Governor Northam is lifting most legal requirements in the Commonwealth of Virginia. With short notice on Friday, May 14, the Governor amended Executive Order No. 72 and set it to expire on May 28. Under the amended order, almost every requirement for religious worship remained in effect, except for the requirement that all worshippers wear face masks.

As you know, the Board of Elders decided that worship services on May 16 and 23 would proceed as they have for the past year. We made no

immediate changes for the same reasons that we have done more than the bare minimum for the past year. We also made no immediate changes in order to give members time to adjust to the “new normal”: though many of us are eager to return to pre-COVID norms, many of us are intimidated.

After Executive Order No. 72 expires on May 28, it will be replaced by Executive Order No. 79. Executive Order No. 79 removes all COVID-19 requirements and recommendations for in-person worship. Accordingly, we are making the following changes to Grace worship services, beginning Sunday, May 30:

- Face masks will not be required for worship, nor will face masks be prohibited. Currently, the Commonwealth advises that all individuals aged 5 and older, who are not fully vaccinated, should wear a face mask to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Whether you and your family are vaccinated, whether you follow the Commonwealth’s guidance, and whether you come to worship wearing a face mask are all matters of personal conscience, in which church staff will not interfere.
- Seating restrictions in the sanctuary will be lifted, and all blue tape will be removed from the pews. Members are encouraged to space themselves as appropriate and comfortable.
- Hymnals and Connect Cards will be reintroduced. The order of service and all songs, liturgy, and prayers will continue to be displayed on monitors.
- We will no longer leave the church in “our COVID fashion.” The pastors and vicar will greet worshipers at the pews. Feel free to shake hands, or not, as you are comfortable.
- Post-worship fellowship will be reinstated in June, with safety protocols in place for the distribution of food and drink. Members

are encouraged to socialize outdoors after services, as weather permits.

- There will be no immediate changes to our current practices of distributing communion and collecting offerings. Individually wrapped communion packets and the gathering plate will remain available in the entryway prior to services.
- Live-streamed Sunday worship will continue to be offered.
- We are looking to restart Sunday School and Bible Studies this summer, after Grace Christian Academy is on summer recess. To do so, we will need volunteers and helpers.

Next week and thereafter, as you choose where to sit in the sanctuary, whether to wear a mask, or how long to visit with your brothers and sisters after worship, think not only of what is best for *you*, but also of what is best for *others*. Some of our members are not fully vaccinated and may continue to be unvaccinated for some time, for variety of reasons, including accessibility, age, medical condition, and personal choice. “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others” (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). We encourage everyone to heed Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

We acknowledge there are various opinions about the level of restrictions that have been in place for our in-person gatherings. Notwithstanding those differences of opinion, we have united and flourished throughout this pandemic, which is an amazing testament to you all – thank you! Fellowship is a vital part of our spiritual nourishment, and we look forward to seeing more of you in person, as you feel comfortable. As Pastor Wattles eloquently shared in his sermon

this week, the Gospel Goes Forward!

May God continue to bless you with good health and hope in Jesus,

Grace's Board of Elders

Bryan Killian, *Chairman*

Brian Bishop

Ben Menges

Dale Orth