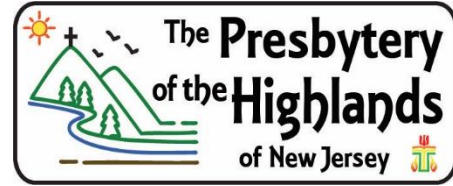


From the Presbytery of The
Highlands of NJ



Recommended COVID Protocols
September 2021

You shall love your neighbor as yourself

³⁶ “Teacher, **which commandment in the law is the greatest?**” ³⁷ He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: **‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’**

Matthew 22: 36 -39

Where are we now?

We all believed that by September we would be traveling, meeting in person, gearing up for church school and singing again. Though we are in a better place than we were a year ago or even 6 or 7 months ago, we are not where we had hoped for the 18 + months after the beginning of the pandemic.

The Property and Insurance Team (P & I) has been tasked with reviewing COVID mandates, information and recommendations and developing recommendations for the congregations, sessions and leaders of the Presbytery.

At this point in the Pandemic season, the Property and Insurance team recommends the following guidance for sessions wrestling with tough decisions about next steps for congregational life.

Recommendations:

Mask wearing

- DO NOT throw your mask away yet. [The CDC and the NJ Department of Health recommend that in general masks](#) should be worn inside if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission, even if you are vaccinated. If you are not vaccinated, you should be wearing a mask indoors no matter what the level of transmission.

- The P & I team recommends using the [COVID ACT NOW](#) website, updated daily, to determine if your area is substantial or high transmission. If your county is Orange, Red or Magenta then it is considered substantial or high transmission. As of early September, all New Jersey Counties are Orange, Red or Magenta.
- As people of faith, who welcome all people to worship and fellowship, a mask policy for your congregation should be in place to protect the most vulnerable. Do not assume you won't have children in worship, or everyone is vaccinated or that everyone is healthy. Assume that someone needs to be protected from the COVID virus and that you can prevent their infection.

Indoor or Outdoor worship and Online

- When Indoor for worship (or other gatherings) masks should be required.
- P & I recommends that you continue with outdoor worship (when practical) and/or online worship so that those who are not vaccinated can continue to feel safe and welcomed.
- **Online worship should continue**, whether meeting inside or outside, for those who can only attend online because they live far away or have health issues or whatever that keeps them from coming to in person gatherings. Basically, plan on continuing online worship indefinitely. [There are webinars scheduled for October to help you plan and continue to provide for a robust online presence.](#)

Church School/youth Gatherings

- P & I recommends that for Church School and other young people gatherings that congregations should follow [the state mandates for schools](#). All children and teachers need to wear masks and that the most ventilated area of the church building or outdoors be used for the class room space.
- Work with parents and teachers on what is comfortable for them and adapt your church school plan in order to reach all children with the good news of the Gospel. Consider ways to use both in person and online for faith formation for children and youth.

Singing

- Singing is a deep-rooted tradition in our faith and our worship. Singing provides another way to connect spiritually to our worship and gatherings. We do miss being able to sing together. Property and Insurance has reviewed all the up-to-date data about singing and indoor worship. They strongly recommend that you do not sing without masks and maintain social distancing.
- Choirs should be masked and distanced from the congregation and each other. Depending on your space this may mean that choirs be small groups both in worship and rehearsal.
- Outdoors singing is encouraged, but only if everyone is socially distanced.

Other Things:

- Church dinners and picnics should be held outside as much as practical. Most Congregations are encouraging participants to bring their own food instead of having potlucks. Wear masks whenever you are not eating.
 - Encourage all members of the Congregation to be vaccinated. However, do not shame those who are reluctant to be vaccinated but instead support them with love. Please do not have a vaccinated section and an unvaccinated section in the worship space. Instead, everyone should be wearing masks.
 - What about those who refuse to wear masks? Kindly remind them that as a faith community **our call is to love our neighbors as ourselves**. Wearing a mask to protect the vulnerable, the children and unvaccinated is a public way of demonstrating **our love for our neighbors**.
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Luke 10: 25 -28

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ²⁶ "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

