

TIERED COVID SAFETY PROTOCOLS AT GRACE

(Effective 8/5/2021)

CDC Transmission Level for Watauga County	Low (Green) and Moderate (Yellow)	Substantial (Orange) and High (Red)
Overall Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are highly encouraged for all indoor activities (including worship) for those who are vaccinated; and, masks are required for those who are not vaccinated. • Everyone is encouraged to wear masks for outdoor activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are required for everyone for all indoor activities (including worship) regardless of vaccination status. • Everyone is encouraged to wear masks for outdoor activities.
Sunday Morning Gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone will enter through the Narthex door and sign-in when they arrive at church. • The church building will be opened 15 minutes prior to church activities to allow for an orderly check-in process. • Offering plates will not be passed during the offering time. The offering plate will be in the Narthex to be used either while entering or exiting the sanctuary. • We will adjust seating availability based on worship attendance. Worshippers are encouraged to sit in every other pew. • We will not yet resume coffee hour. • Adult Sunday School may be offered in a hy-flex format (in-person and online). • Children’s Sunday School may be led outside when possible with masks highly encouraged. All children under 12 and their Adult leaders will be required to wear masks when inside. • Nursery may be used by families for changing diapers and as a calming space. The Nursery will not be staffed. Masks are required for everyone over the age of 2. • Singing: Everyone (including the Choir) are highly encouraged to place masks over their mouth and nose when singing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone will enter through the Narthex door and sign-in when they arrive at church. • The church building will be opened 15 minutes prior to church activities to allow for an orderly check-in process. • Offering plates will not be passed during the offering time. The offering plate will be in the Narthex to be used either while entering or exiting the sanctuary. • Seating will only be available in every other pew. • We will not yet resume coffee hour. • Adult Sunday School will be offered online. • Children’s Sunday School may be led outside when possible, with masks highly encouraged. All children under 12 and their Adult leaders will be required to wear masks when inside. • Nursery may be used by families for changing diapers and as a calming space. The Nursery will not be staffed. Masks are required for everyone over the age of 2. • Communion: In an environment with high transmission rates, Communion may not be served. • Lay Worship Leaders: Lay Readers and Assisting Ministers will help lead the worship service with Pastor Steve and be asked to wear masks regardless of

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communion: We will continue to serve Communion at the head of the aisle on one side of the sanctuary at a time. Those participating in communion will come forward, one family at a time. ● Lay Worship Leaders: Lay Readers and Assisting Ministers will help lead the worship service with Pastor Steve and be asked to wear masks regardless of vaccination status. Worship leaders may remove masks for readings and prayers. 	<p>vaccination status. Worship leaders may remove masks for readings and prayers.</p>
Online Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High quality online worship will continue to go live each Sunday by 8:30am. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High quality online worship will continue to go live each Sunday by 8:30am.
Other In-Person Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We require accurate registration for all events, with the exception of AA and NA. ● The Fellowship Hall will be the primary meeting space. The Chapel, Parlor, and Lower Fellowship Hall are also available for smaller group gatherings. Each space will need a cleaning block of time between meetings. ● Food and drinks may be served at in-person gatherings, with the exception of any indoor events including children under the age of 12. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We require accurate registration for all events, with the exception of AA and NA. ● The Fellowship Hall will be the primary meeting space. The Chapel, Parlor, and Lower Fellowship Hall are also available for smaller group gatherings. Each space will need a cleaning block of time between meetings. ● Food and drinks may not be served at in-person, indoor gatherings.
Church Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The church office will continue to be open on a limited schedule, as staff members balance in-person and remote work. Staff members will continue to be able to be reached through their church extensions when working remotely, and staff members continue to be responsive on email. ● Staff members will keep masks with them at all times and mirror the mask status of the people they interact with inside church facilities. Staff members will wear masks when interacting with children under 12. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The church office will continue to be open on a limited schedule, as staff members balance in-person and remote work. Staff members will continue to be able to be reached through their church extensions when working remotely, and staff members continue to be responsive on email. ● Staff members will be masked when interacting with other people inside the church facilities.

August 5, 2021

Grace and peace,

Your Council met last night to discuss the current rise in COVID cases in our local area. As of Tuesday, Watauga County has been reclassified by the CDC from a Moderate Transmission Level to a Substantial Transmission Level. In the last week, our local COVID cases have more than doubled. With the return of students and the beginning of a new school year for children and youth, this rise in cases comes at a very problematic time for our mountain town.

I received information yesterday from Watauga Medical Center that they have reached their capacity with ICU and Intermediate ICU beds. The COVID unit is also at capacity and they are preparing to open a second unit. This comes at a time when they have had great difficulty keeping a full staff of medical personnel healthy and available to serve our community. The strain of this rise in COVID cases is also felt throughout Western North Carolina with many of our larger regional hospitals unable to take transfer patients. Suffice it to say, the current situation appears to be surging in the wrong direction.

The Council has decided that we need to update our COVID protocols to reflect our current reality. We also have come to believe that the ebbs and flows of COVID cases in our area is going to be of concern for our ministries for a while longer. Therefore, the Council has put together a 2-tiered approach to allow for more seamless transitions as the local Transmission Level increases and decreases.

Given our current CDC classification of Substantial Transmission, our protocols are listed in the red, right-hand column. **Effective immediately, we will be requiring masks for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, for all indoor events, including worship.** This requirement aligns with the guidance from both the CDC and the North Carolina Synod Regathering Task Force. Please take a moment to review the full listing of safety protocols above.

Our hopes of COVID going away and activities resuming as they were before, seems a long way off. We might ask ourselves, 'How is it possible to continue and not lose heart?' I was reminded of the metaphor of a marathon that is used in Hebrews. It speaks of a race that people of faith run. It speaks of Jesus as one who runs this race alongside God's people, and as one who goes on ahead to show us both the way and that it is possible! But not only that, all those who have gone before us, the great cloud of witnesses, those who have run this race with Jesus, well they are there with us too! They cheer us on; they inspire us by their lives and witness. And, these promises are where we find our hope and our strength for the challenging road ahead.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

In Grace,
Pastor Steve