

Dear High Point Church family,

In light of the new Dane County public health order, which became effective at 12:01am today, August 19, I'm writing to address both the practical and spiritual implications for our church body.

Before reading further, it only takes a few moments to read the order yourself. If you have not yet done so, you can find it [here](#).

In the past 18+ months, we have collectively experienced waves of fear, fatigue, outrage, loss, and grief in varying degrees, and for sometimes opposite reasons. I hope you have also experienced a renewed appreciation for the reality that our hope and security rest solely on the character and promise of Jesus our Christ and king. Members of our congregation will inevitably have different reactions to this latest mandate. Regardless of our personal positions, I think it is important for us to examine carefully the ways in which this latest order is like and unlike previous orders.

WHAT THIS ORDER REQUIRES OF US

Here is what the order requires of us **as individuals**:

“Every individual, age two (2) and older, shall wear a face covering when: i. In any enclosed space open to the public where other people, except for members of the person’s own household or living unit are present,” with exceptions as noted in section 1.b and 1.c of the order.

What it asks us to do **as an institution**:

*“All places subject to this Order must develop and implement a written protective measure policy and procedure that **ensures employees** are provided with and wear face coverings at all times when required under Section 1 of this Order.”*

“All places subject to this Order must post a sign in a visible location that notifies the public that face coverings are required upon entering the property.”

This seems to mean that, **relative to our employees**, High Point Church is required to have a written policy for our employees in keeping with this order, provide masks for them, and ensure that they wear them according to the circumstances detailed in the order.

Relative to the public, this order directs us to post at least one clearly visible sign stating the current county mask requirements.

WHAT THIS ORDER DOES NOT REQUIRE OF US

This order does not ask us to:

1. Abide by reduced occupancy or distancing limits
2. Stop gathering in person
3. Refuse entry or service to any members of the public who do not comply with this policy

These three points are important to recognize for two main reasons. First, we are clearly directed in Scripture to gather as the local body of Christ. It is a grave thing for any government to restrict our right to obey this command. *But this order does not do that.* Second, this order does not require that we *as an institution* ensure

that members of the public comply with this order while on our property. It leaves the responsibility for compliance with individual citizens. I am not pointing this out to encourage people not to wear masks, only to note that the order does not place on institutions the obligation of enforcement. For us to refuse entry or service to any member of the public because they choose to violate this order, or for us to mediate which people can credibly claim exemption from this requirement, would be to go beyond what the order asks us to do.

AGES 2 AND UP

This order departs from previous orders in another significant way: in lowering the masking age requirement to 2 years and older.

Doctors tell me that this element of the order is part of a larger plan to keep schools open for in-person instruction. Keeping schools as open and in-person as possible is extremely important for kids, especially those who are behind in school, a gap made worse by last year's school closings.

While I personally maintain concerns about both the developmental appropriateness and feasibility of this policy, one of our preschool staff in our school said that masking preschoolers was not a problem in the last school year. Also, I don't see this as an issue of Christian conscience and therefore cannot advocate that anyone in our congregation violate the law of the land in this case on the basis of Christian principles.

Therefore we will encourage parents to send their children with masks, and if those parents so desire, we will attempt in a kind, non-threatening, non-punitive, way to assist those children with keeping their masks on during their time in our care. If parents choose to bring their children without masks, we will not refuse them service.

Our early childhood staff and volunteers will face the tension of being hospitable to kids while trying to encourage them to comply with this mandate according to parents' wishes. To reduce the time when children of this age group need to wear masks, we will try to accommodate these classes outdoors when weather permits. We'll do our best to safeguard the spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of children while they are entrusted to us.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT HIGH POINT CHURCH

See below for details regarding the actions High Point will take in various ministry areas in order to comply with this current public health order.

- I. Sunday Mornings
 - A. Outdoor lobby: Since this order does not include wearing masks outdoors, our Sunday morning outdoor lobby will continue as is. When the weather is bad, we will host it indoors. Masks will be required when not eating or drinking. Please be considerate of others' comfort level regarding distancing while in this space.
 - B. We will encourage people to gather outside between and after services rather than congregate near our indoor Welcome Center.
 - C. Volunteers: We encourage all volunteers in every ministry to abide by this order in accordance with their conscience.
 - D. Kids Ministry: We encourage all children to be masked while in our building. As always, kids experiencing flu- or COVID-like symptoms should remain at home. Our [KidsMin wellness](#)

[policy](#) can help you determine when this is the case for your child. We will continue the careful sanitization of all our Kids Min spaces.

II. Other ministries

- A. All ministries or groups that use the HPC facilities during the week will be expected to abide by the current masking requirements, including Youth Group.
- B. Small groups: Groups that do not meet in an enclosed, *public* space, are able to make decisions on their own about how they'd like to meet. Groups that meet in our building will be expected to wear masks, since it is a public space. Don't hesitate to reach out to Erin at ehesse@highpointchurch.org if you have questions or concerns about how your group will meet while this order is in effect.
- C. The leadership of High Point Christian School will be communicating its policies to students, families, and staff.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact us with any care needs—whether physical, spiritual, financial, mental or emotional—[using this form](#), or send us a prayer request [here](#).

CLOSING EXHORTATIONS

I believe it's important at this point in our COVID journey to speak briefly on the topic of volunteerism and the gathering of the church. All of our ministries—all of the ways in which we as a body are practically working out the implications of the gospel in our congregation and broader community—depend on the time and dedication of volunteers. You each, individually, compose this local expression of the body of Christ.

We honor the many men and women who have given faithfully of their time and energy throughout this pandemic. We know that for some of you, this masking requirement may seem unbearable or even unlawful. Others of you will embrace it as a natural and sensible precaution and demonstration of care for the most vulnerable in our population, and you may wish to see us enforce it more rigorously. In either case, you may be tempted to stop participating.

Wherever you land on this prudential spectrum, I deeply, earnestly, and wholeheartedly exhort you not to forsake your post of service or the gathering of believers because you're upset about any aspect of this policy or our response to it. Whether we are for or against this order, we are for the Church of Christ and for the gathering of believers. We love the local expression of the body of Jesus Christ to the degree that we will obey something that seems like a nuisance without neglecting our participation as the body. That means we must also persevere in love and compassion for all our brothers and sisters, being extremely vigilant against sowing discord or mistreating each other over our differences. Let us not allow our personal feelings to restrict or wound the church in a way that our government does not, and let us not forsake meeting together and encouraging one another (Hebrews 10:25). Our primary scriptural directive in matters of conflicting conscience is to accommodate other's conscience, and not flaunt our freedom or push our constraints.

If we oppose this order, I believe we do so on political and prudential grounds—not on spiritual and doctrinal grounds. Therefore I cannot in good conscience use my position as a pastor to encourage people to disobey this act of Governing authority. But neither will I use it to dictate the actions of individuals beyond what the government asks us to do.

As our Christian brothers and sisters globally encounter very grave and imminent threats to their lives for the sake of Christ, let us also bear in mind that "you have not yet resisted sin to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4). Let us receive all trials as discipline (Hebrews 12:7) and "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles," including our instincts to withdraw, divide, and resent, and "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1) as individuals and as the church, remembering that in Christ we "are being built *together* to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

We welcome your questions and concerns about anything above.

We love you, we pray for you, and we thank God for you. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Romans 15:5-6, 13).

Grace and peace,
Nic Gibson
Lead Pastor