

As of yesterday, July 13, Public Health Madison and Dane County is requiring everyone aged five and older to wear masks in enclosed spaces (excluding their homes). This requirement also extends to people who are guests in others' homes.

In light of the [new mandate](#) for wearing masks in Dane County, we want to clarify what this means for our in-person church services:

- Starting Sunday, July 19, all those over age four entering the enclosed space of the church building must wear a mask.
- The county “*highly encourages*” children ages two to four to wear masks; children aged five and older are *required* to wear masks.
- The county recommends “reasonable accommodations” for those who cannot wear masks. The most obvious accommodation is to worship virtually.
- The county mandate states that while wearing the mask, it must cover your mouth and nose.
- We will have masks available each Sunday morning if you do not have a mask or forget to bring yours.
- If you have already signed up for a service and wish to remove your name, please contact Katelyn Krause at kkrause@highpointchurch.org.

A Short Teaching on Christian Faith, Civil Order, and the Body of Christ:

You must understand that people have varying convictions concerning government orders in the use of its police powers in a constitutional society of free people. You may feel indifferent toward the mandate, or you may feel strongly that it is either morally wrong (tyrannical or capricious) or right (prudential public protection).

There are three considerations that Scripture teaches clearly that you must consider when coming to your convictions about how to handle these issues:

1. We should obey the government as instituted by God (Romans 13), and yet we must disobey the government when we must choose between obeying the government or obeying God (Acts 4). We want to be seen as good citizens and supportive of public order and public virtue because God wants us to draw people to the gospel (1 Timothy 2:1-3).
2. Christians are to live by convictions and conscience in areas where the Bible does not give explicit commands. Different valid courses of reasoning can lead to different conclusions (Romans 14:3). Christians must develop their own convictions and be convinced in their own minds about what God wants in these areas.
3. We should obey our conscience in a way that does not harm the faith of the spiritually weak (believers and unbelievers), and supports the unity of the Body of Christ and reputation of Christ. The Apostle Paul writes, “be careful...that the exercise of [our] rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9), and that we must “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Prudence is the ability to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. In prudence and applying the Scriptures, meeting together as a congregation during this time means at least:

1. Submitting to our conscience and convictions as we see gathered worship and Christian fellowship as fundamental to our Christian identity and service
2. Submitting to our brothers and sisters whose faith is weak so as not to harm their devotion or confidence in Christ
3. Submitting to our non-believing neighbors out of love and according to conscience
4. Submitting to our civil authorities in every way that isn't a direct disobedience to God
5. Submitting to the church's spiritual authorities for the sake of order and unity in the Body of Christ

We will not all come to the same conviction as to what is the conscientious course at each moment. Therefore, as we gather, we should also give space for people to act according to their convictions while we simultaneously work for the unity of the people of God. Whenever liberty comes into tension with order or equality, people will have opposed convictions in good faith. Whether this comes from the tension of the tradeoffs related to isolation and community in a pandemic, or of liberty and equity regarding justice, people of good faith will disagree. The New Testament holds the inviolability of conscience to be the pre-political ruling principle of human conduct—and is what we must support in the church and world whenever possible (1 Corinthians 8:12, 10:25-29, Romans 13:5, 14:22-23, 2 Corinthians 1:12, 4:2, 1 Timothy 1:5, 18-19, 3:9, Heb. 13:18, 1 Peter 3:15-16). Therefore we must each act responsibly in love toward others but also honestly according to what we believe is right and pleasing to God.

These are the principles we must seek to live out, whatever we are grappling with in public life. At times it will be hard to “bear with one another.” Yet I believe that an example of principled unity in diversity is an example that will always force us to grow, be a good testimony for the gospel, help the weak, and honor God. This is part of our sacred duty as his people.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Nic Gibson