

As you know, our government issued new guidelines for churches this week. I discussed it with the deacons and crafted an email to announce our plans going forward.

Not surprisingly, I got a lot of response!

Some of you might wonder how we got to our position.

Some are not entirely sure they agree with the position we published.

Regardless, new regulations or no, the fact is that among us we are disagreed personally on some of the measures the government is encouraging.

I propose to help you understand the thought behind our view. I hope it will help you understand the position, whether you agree with it or not.

I. The New Guidelines

A requirement that worship services must be limited to 50% of seated capacity, unless all the participants are vaccinated, in which case the capacity could increase to 100%. While the BC Vaccine Card is an option available for this purpose, faith leaders will have the flexibility to design their own system to ensure that all participants are vaccinated, if that is the model they choose to follow.

A requirement that participants attending worship services, including choirs, must wear a face covering during worship services, including as participants come in to the place of worship and when they leave, until outside. Participants will be able to remove the face covering when consuming food or drink to allow for ceremonial activities. Readers and celebrants will be allowed to speak without a mask, subject to distancing requirements or barrier to prevent transmission.

II. The attendance guideline

A. Relatively easy to address for us

1. With our two rooms, we can easily accommodate a 50% occupancy
2. Our average attendance usually is right around 50% of our main room
3. Our fellowship hall allows any excess to occupy that room with streaming so as to participate in the service

B. Also note: the government allows churches flexibility here

“faith leaders will have the flexibility to design their own system to ensure that all participants are vaccinated, if that is the model they choose to follow”

III. The mask guideline

A. The guideline is simple enough

1. We are used to following this in stores
2. It is an inconvenience, but relatively minor in the overall scheme of things

B. There remain questions

1. What about when we sing – will a minor inconvenience become major?
2. What about during our break time and lunch time? How shall we address that?

C. Clearly, the objective of the guideline is that we must wear masks at all times while inside — but there is an exception here as well

“Participants will be able to remove the face covering when consuming food or drink to allow for ceremonial activities. Readers and celebrants will be allowed to speak without a mask, subject to distancing requirements or barrier to prevent transmission.”

IV. The rationale for the position we took

A. Our position on attendance

1. Comply with the attendance guideline at 50% - we will not restrict anyone from attending

Joh 7:37 ¶ Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

Luk 18:16 But Jesus called for them, saying, “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

2. We do not agree with any societal discrimination against attendees

B. Our position on the mask policy

1. We understand the expectation: wear masks while indoors (with some exceptions)
 - a. I encourage you to follow this guideline, it is a minor inconvenience
 - b. At the same time, we left compliance up to you, we would not take it on ourselves to enforce compliance
2. The rationale for leaving it up to you: Baptist doctrine of religious liberty
 - a. While these directives are relatively mild, they require the church leadership to enforce directives of the state
 - b. We desire to be good citizens, and believe government has an appropriate role

From our proposed (but not yet adopted) doctrinal statement:

The Church and Government

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interests and good order of human society; that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honoured and obeyed, except only in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the only Lord of the conscience, and the coming Prince of the kings of the earth.

Acts 4.19-20, 5.29, Romans 13.1-7, 1 Peter 2.13-17

- c. We are uncomfortable with the government enlisting spiritual leaders to enforce secular edicts
 - 1) I have said, "I will not be their policeman"
 - 2) The government has the authority to police their own edicts
 - 3) The church should not become an arm of the government
- d. At the same time, as good neighbours and good citizens, I can encourage you to go along with these directions

C. Our position on our non-church fellowship activities

1. As we are within occupancy guidelines, and...
2. As the government itself allows citizens to frequent restaurants
 - a. Unvaccinated (for fast food)
 - b. Unmasked (while seated)
3. It follows that during our fellowship activities
 - a. You may participate unmasked while seated
 - b. We ask that you follow the guideline while gathering your food/drink, and be seated to consume

D. Our position on differences of opinion about the regulations

1. We recognize that not all will see these issues the same way
2. We remind you of Romans 14 and the spirit of grace we should extend to one another over differences of opinion
3. Therefore, we ask that you allow others to follow the guidelines according to their own consciences before God, without criticizing or questioning one another