

2 August 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ at St Stephen,

The Reopening Task Force (ROTF) met on Sunday, July 31st. We prayerfully considered the current conditions and information regarding COVID infections in our area. While, due to the highly contagious Omicron variants, BA.4 and BA.5, the positivity rate remains high, our county remains low risk on the Department of Health's Early Warning website due to other factors like lower hospitalization and death rates.

The ROTF discussed questions and concerns raised by various members of our St Stephen family and considered many options and scenarios. The recommendation from the task force is to relax some of our layers of protection and trust in the responsible behavior of each of us as we show care and concern for each other. Going forward the ribbons closing off sections of the pews will be removed and the congregation will join the cantor in singing all the music included in the worship service. We will keep the exhaust fans moving air out of the sanctuary, and windows may be opened when the sanctuary becomes crowded to provide more fresh air circulation. The pastor will explain options for sharing the peace. We encourage anyone, who wants to do so, to please wear a mask and we will keep them available if your wish to have one. We ask that if you are not feeling well, or know you have had contact with some who is sick with a cold, the flu, or COVID, that you participate in worship via our on-line options. We continue to encourage everyone to become vaccinated against the flu and COVID, and receive the appropriate booster shots as they become available. To date we have kept from experiencing a super spreader event and to our knowledge have had no member die from COVID.

Our intent is to continue to provide the same on-line participation for worship as we have perfected over the past year. The pandemic has allowed us to successfully expand our mission further and we will still continue to worship on-line for those who use it occasionally when travelling or sick, or always need it due to distance or other reasons. All are welcome, as are your thoughts.

The use of reasonable protective measures has allowed the church facilities to open up to important mission events like hosting on-site, once again, Dinner with Friends, the Community Assistance Meal, Scouts, and Sunday School. We try to balance the risk of disease with the importance of our mission to best protect each of us.

The ROTF would like your thoughts on what is in place, and, moving forward, what you would like to see change while maintaining the safest possible environment. Please direct your comments via email to Mike Kulikauskas (kulikasm@comcast.net) or mail them to my attention at St Stephen Lutheran Church, 30 West Main St, PO Box 266 New Kingstown, PA 17072.

Sincerely,

Mike Kulikauskas