



May 3, 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ at St Stephen,

The Reopening Task Force (ROTF) met on Sunday May 1st. We prayerfully considered the current conditions and information regarding COVID infections in our area. We are again above a five percent positivity rate, this time with the highly contagious Omicron variant BA.2, which means that COVID is again spreading. However, our area remains low risk on the Department of Health's Early Warning website due to other factors like lower hospitalization rates.

The recommendation from the task force is to maintain the status quo with several layers of defense in place to limit the transmission of the disease within our congregation. Maintaining distancing, keeping the air moving up and out of the sanctuary, limiting singing to the last hymn, and encouraging everyone to become vaccinated and receive the appropriate booster shots have kept us from experiencing a super spreader event. Proof that things are working can be found in Pastor Matthew and Abby's recent infections. Both were contagious at the Easter worship service as their symptoms started less than 48 hours after that service. Even with Pastor being in the center of the congregation and distributing communion, to the best of our knowledge, no one was infected by being there. Thus, if one layer of defense fails, others remain in place to offer protection. Although, other congregations have relaxed their protection efforts further than St Stephen, our goal from the first was to protect our congregants, which I believe we have done and continue to do.

Using a similar combination of protective measures has also allowed the church to open up to important mission events like hosting on-site, once again, Dinner with Friends and adult Sunday school. When combined, we believe that these protective measures allow us to make optional some other measures, like masking. We try to balance the risk of disease with the importance of our mission to emphasize core elements like gathering together for communion.

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