

November 28, 2020

Church Family:

On November 24 the Columbus City Council approved an emergency ordinance mask mandate in response to the COVID-19 spread in our community. You are well aware that during this pandemic and, in this politically-charged climate, the issue of masks has become a point of contention for some. It is for this reason that our leadership finds it important to address the effect of this ordinance on the church and look to God's Word so that we may all respond in a God-honoring way.

Firstly, we are thankful for the desire of our local government to protect our community during this time. This includes help to the burdened healthcare workers who are under a tremendous amount of stress in this ongoing crisis. Our city leaders are seeking to do the difficult job of preserving life and this should garner our respect and prayers.

The city mandate requires face coverings for everyone ages 6 years old and up in premises open to the public; this would include the church building. It is important to also note that face coverings are *not required* when 6-feet of separation (social distance) from others can be achieved at all times. As the leadership has examined this ordinance, **we do not believe that it hinders our freedom to worship the Lord when we gather.** We continue to be thankful to the Lord for this blessing of gathering with God's people without opposition. As you know, we are continuing to urge social distancing by blocking off pews and many of you are already loving one another by wearing a mask, maintaining social distance in your fellowship, or both. Out of respect for this city mandate we would ask you to continue these practices when we gather on Sundays and in all other ministries which take place in the church building.

Please remember the Bible's teaching regarding the importance for Christians to submit to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). At the same time, believers need to look with discernment on any laws that might affect the worship practices of the church. Jesus Christ is Lord over all things, including His church. Therefore, He is our ultimate authority and requires our wholehearted obedience to His commands (Mk. 12:17; Acts 5:29; Col. 1:18).

As stated above, the city mandate does not hinder our freedom to worship when we gather and, Lord-willing, it is temporary while COVID cases continue to surge in our area. **We believe that respecting this ordinance is the right response in the present.** We believe that this, along with our continued love for one another and unity as a congregation, will be important to our Gospel witness in the Columbus community.

In Christ,

Pastor Mike and the Highland Park Elders