



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH LOVELETTER

Share God's Love; Serve all People

329 East State Street, Mason City, IA 50401

641-423-7749

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday and Thursday 9 a.m. to Noon

October 2020

Is It Christ-Like to Wear A Mask?

I've always wanted to be a superhero. If I were one, I would want to be one like Superman. Think about it! His disguise is his daily reporter clothes and a pair of glasses. While all the other superheroes wear a costume to hide their day to day identity, Superman uses his day-to-day identity to hide that he is Superman and therefore, when he is doing his Superman thing, he doesn't have to wear a mask. That's my kind of superhero-ing. I've never liked having anything over my face. Call it vanity... call it claustrophobia... call it what you want... I'm truly not fond of wearing a mask, and a number of you may feel likewise. None of them seem to fit my big head and strangely shaped face all that well. The nonverbal cues that add vital texture to conversation get obscured. It's hard to speak clearly through them and then they fog up my glasses, making it impossible to wear both at the same time. And then there's the fact that the masks are an ever-present reminder that the world we knew pre-Covid is gone.

But I've also come to dislike the disunity and divide that people have allowed the "Mask War" to bring about. One article I read last month stated that, *"The mask has become the ultimate symbol of [the] new cultural and political divide... For progressives, masks have become a sign that you take the pandemic seriously and are willing to make a 'personal sacrifice' to save lives... On the right, the mask is often seen as the symbol of a purported overreaction to the coronavirus."*

For Christians, though, it's important to rise above the loyalties to a particular faction or tribe and think through what our *faith* would call us to with regard to wearing or not wearing masks.

In Luther's Small Catechism he wrote of the Fifth Commandment, " 'You shall not murder.' *What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in their body, but help and support our neighbor in every physical need.*" This may seem like an odd place to start, because I am not saying that not wearing a mask is murderous, but if you read closely Luther's explanation of the commandment, it calls us through love of God to help and support our neighbor in every physical need! It then becomes clearer that as much as I personally dislike wearing a mask, there are a few simple biblical callings that encourage us to take seriously the thought of wearing them for the sake of our siblings in Christ and in the community as a whole.

Now, don't get me wrong: I truly sympathize with some skepticism about their use, and I *cringe* at the horrid and shameful attempts to *shame* people into wearing them. But

in the end, my Christian faith leads me to wear one when I'm in indoor public places and when I am moving about amongst people in a leadership role: because in the end, to wear a mask or not wear a mask is not about me. And while I do not see a *commandment* especially about mask wearing, what I do see in Scripture are a couple of important points to inform our mask wearing decision.

1. To Love Your Neighbor (Matthew 22:39)

The fact that the science on masks during COVID-19 has been caught up in as much ugliness and partisanship and therefore inconsistency is frustrating. However, with the fact that our knowledge about the virus continues to grow, changing what we know and how we respond is not surprising. We probably won't know for years which of our responses are for sure right or wrong in our efforts to stop COVID-19. But there does seem to be an emergent agreement that wearing masks does slow the virus's spread and thus can save lives. And when it comes to what we know and what we are unsure of, slowing the spread of this allows for the best use of our resources throughout our communities across the board in caring for those who do contract this often-deadly virus. It is vital that followers of Christ ask ourselves, What if our view on masks were shaped more by our identity in and through Christ than our identity as a United States Citizen with all the freedoms and rights that we know we can claim? What then would we be doing?

For Christians called to love our neighbors as ourselves, wearing a mask in public—especially indoors when physical distancing is difficult—seems like a fairly painless way to practice **neighbor love**. Even if it's annoying to wear one, and even if **you** aren't convinced by the science behind it, why not wear one anyway? Given the enduring uncertainty about the way COVID-19 spreads, shouldn't we err on the side of **more** protective measures rather than less, for the sake of the neighbor we might—even if it's a slim chance—unknowingly infect?

2. To Use Freedom for the Sake of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 8:13, 9:19–23)

Christians in the United States especially seem to be prone to understanding “freedom” in a way more shaped by the U.S. Constitution rather than by the Bible. But it's no knock on the beauty and legitimacy of human-won freedoms to suggest that the Holy Scripture often calls us to “give up” or in some ways “curtail” our freedoms for the sake of the gospel.

Paul, as an archetype, seems happy to give up his freedom for the sake of loving others: *“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them,”* Paul writes. *“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”* There is such a great potential for Christ-love proclamation in we who are the Body of Christ at work in the world taking a posture such as this. Few things are more beautiful to witness than someone giving up their rights and freedom for the sake of another. What is it that Jesus himself says? *“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”*

There's a lot at stake for Christian witness during COVID-19. Do we want the non-believing world to look at Christians as reckless [virus super-spreaders](#) who put their own freedoms (to gather in person as soon as possible, to not wear masks unless absolutely forced) ahead of the health of their larger community? Or do we want them to look at Christians as "servants to all," willing to forego their freedoms out of Christlike neighbor love? If the small annoyance of wearing masks can help not only save lives but also souls, winning more to the gospel, isn't it worth it?

People keep asking me...

Pastor, are you going to make people wear masks in worship? And my answer is always the same:

I shouldn't have to, and I can't MAKE any adult human being do anything that is against their will. Though law enforcement training and experience as a bouncer are in my background, those are not now my calling and not now what I want to be doing. But I do have a question for we who are siblings in Christ: Do you think in the midst of all that is happening, if Jesus were among us in physical form, Would Jesus Wear a Mask?

How would Jesus respond to the pandemic? Some argue that refusing to wear a mask defies the Golden Rule that underpins many Christian teachings: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. One of my pastoral colleagues wrote an [op-ed](#) recently declaring that Jesus himself would wear a mask --

"The bottom line for Christians is this: Even if you believe that the fear surrounding COVID-19 is not justified, that fear is still real. And Jesus didn't insult or belittle people who were afraid. He went out of his way to come alongside them. Jesus went out of his way to show— in his flesh— that their lives mattered to him... Wearing a mask is a practical way to show that you love your neighbor, to lift the burden of someone who is afraid instead of adding to it." Pastor Kate Murphy

When it comes to my own decision, and my own identity in and through Christ, wearing a mask reminds me that ***my identity is found in my relationship with God and with those who God has called me to love.***

When I wear my mask, my intention is to show that I am a Christ-follower who cares for my neighbor above myself. Whether or not other people understand that is less important than whether God understands my heart. I have come to understand in this time choosing to wear a mask to be ***a spiritual practice*** that is about loving others more than I love myself. This is a spiritual practice that I have found has deepened my faith and increased my commitment to my neighbors during this time of pandemic and has opened up opportunities for discussion with my son for our role and calling in caring for and serving others in the world. Though I hope and pray for the time face masks are no longer necessary, I pray too that what we learn about how to care for and serve others during this time of trial would remain part of our life together in and through Christ.

Pastor Matthew Muters

St Paul Lutheran Church Council Minutes
September 9, 2020

Attendance: Pat Steinfert, Linda Koopman, Dave Janssen and Pastor Muters and Geri Barker (guest).

Pastor Opened with a prayer.

Pastor's Report: Pastor gave an overview of activities for August 2020.

Treasurer's Report: Reviewed August 2020 financial information. One large gift recently came through. We should be good on bills through September but will have to draw money from savings likely in October. Pat made a motion to accept the report, seconded by Dave.

Monthly Benevolence: Monthly Benevolence is on hold until a known need arises.

Action Committee Report: Dave reported that the team will meet again Sept 16th. Dave reiterated the purpose and plan for the action team. Spoke about the questions and report again and the plan to meet next week.

Church Maintenance:

Mowing and Yard Maintenance – discussion was shared about the care for the yard and the physical property.

Geri B shared highlights of discussion with Harold Gaiser and shared a handout with requests for council approval for certain repairs and improvements in the physical property.

Focus for this list is on improvements that will be especially important in the coming fall and winter months.

Council discussed whether it was allowable to empower Harold to do small repairs up to a certain dollar amount that he sees need doing.

Discussion about thermostats and who would have the know-how and have interest in making sure they are working and programmed properly. Dave will follow up on this matter and make sure that the thermostat is working that was identified as not working and will replace as he is able or make sure it is replaced properly. Dave will contact Diane Murphy and discuss the sanctuary thermostat programming.

Motion for Harold Gaiser to be called as Maintenance Supervisor. Since Harold has been functioning as the maintenance supervisor for various areas of the building for many years, the council would like to give the authority of the council to Harold Gaiser to either do the repair or call the appropriate vendor to provide the proper service need to repair the physical property as he sees the needs. Linda moved and Pat seconded. Passed Unanimously. Council would further like to commend and thank Harold for all that he has done and continues to do for this congregation and for caring for the ministry property that we have been blessed with.

Request to call Kirk or others for estimates on certain “fixes” are approved currently by the council but further requests can be run by Harold as the maintenance supervisor.

Fall Clean up: the hope is to schedule a fall clean-up for the property sometime in October.

Outdoor Worship: Debriefing of outdoor worship service change over and our first service on SPLC property. Discussion about possibilities and plans for the future and any suggestions. There has been some discussion from certain SPLC members regarding, “why did we fix what wasn't broken” – why did we move from OSLC to SPLC we were doing simply fine over there? Answer is at least two fold, one so that SPLC could be more active in sharing in the ministry of worship and the proclaiming of God's word, and in showing the community at large that we are alive together in this community that they are not alone in everything they are going through. Question of putting a more visible sign for worship – Dave will ask Mike O of OSLC about utilizing sandwich sign?

Thank you to Geri B. and all the members of both congregations. Question was raised about what to pay Mary G. and how to pay Mary G. for playing for worship at SPLC? Pastor Muters will

look into how to do this and how much she should be paid.

Return to Indoor Worship service questions. Discussion about how and when to do this is ongoing. Discussion about doing Facebook Live with open door policy but with signs requiring masks and having the congregations have supplies of masks for those who do not remember or have them.

Old Business: Covered

New Business: CCLI Music Licenses - discussion was had about what CCLI covers and why it is needed. Linda said this is a known expense and she believes we are covered until the end of the year. So the question is do we need a motion or should we just give worship permission to do what they are expected to do and to do the normally expected “thing” and have us be in compliance with the copyright laws? Yes please go ahead with council permission as worship team sees fit.

Council Leadership: Discussion about calling new council servant leaders. Pat and Linda both have terms that are ending, Dave has another year. Further discussion needed.

Linda Motion to adjourn and Dave seconded. Meeting closed with Lord’s Prayer. Next Meeting is Thursday October 8th, 2020 6:30 pm, Fellowship Hall.

Notes taken by Pastor Matthew Muters

Worship Update

In October we will continue meeting on the south lawn at St Paul at 9:00am and continue to worship outdoors until October 18 when the tentative plan is to move inside. The worship team has been working on the plan and it will be shared with the councils at the joint council meeting on October 8. At that time a final plan and decision will be made. Watch for updates.

You can also join the service live on St Paul’s Facebook page. Recordings of the service are also being loaded to Pastor Matthew’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/PastorMuters/videos..> We have also added the weekly bulletins to the St. Paul webpage, stpaulmc.com. The home page contains the current week and if you want to view previous bulletins go to Groups then Worship and Music. If you want the bulletin emailed to you let the office know.

OFFICE HOURS CHANGING

The office at St Paul is open just Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Diane will be checking and replying to voicemail, email and mail the other days of the week. **If you need immediate pastoral care be sure and contact Pastor Matthew directly at 641-231-4418.**

It's important to pray for ALL our family & friends, so our list is rotated among our congregation.

Keep this in a convenient place for prayer time. If you don't have a daily prayer time, this might be a good time to begin.

1. NE Iowa Synod
2. St. Paul Lutheran Church
3. Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
4. Our government, military leaders, troops & families
5. All who suffer from illness, infirmity or loneliness
6. Confined shut-ins (home, hospital, nursing home)
7. Those who are dealing with losses in their lives
8. All who hunger and/or are homeless
9. All who seek God; finding comfort, peace, renewal
10. Jean Harms & family
11. Kay Harms & family
12. Dixie Howell & family
13. Dave & Sara Janssen & family
14. Carol King & family
15. Linda Koopman & family
16. Ron & Becky Lundblad & family
17. Dennis & Nancy Marsh & family
18. John & Carol Meyer & family
19. Margaret Movick & family
20. Jim & Diane Murphy & family
21. Marv Murphy & family
22. Ron Nielson & family
23. Mary C Paulsen & family
24. Tim & Beth Rozen & family
25. Carol Rye & family
26. Diane Sage & family
27. Jayne Schiek & family
28. Crystal Schriber & family
29. Carlyn Schriver & family
30. Kirk Schriver & family
31. Megan & Gary Slocum & family

PRAYER CHAIN

Please call any Prayer Chain member below if you have a prayer request. All requests are kept confidential and you can share as much information as you are comfortable with. You may call any member and they will start the chain.

Prayer Chain members:

Geri Barker 641-423-5525

(please do not leave message)

Anne Gannett 641-421-6852 (leave message)

Margaret Movick 641-201-1250

(leave message)

Diane Murphy 641-512-5851

(leave message)

Happy October Birthday!

- 10/12 Ken Truka
 10/13 Annabelle Janssen
 10/19 Mason Walters
 10/22 Tom Wetter
 10/24 Amelia Slocum
 10/28 Madison Stockberger
 10/31 Dawn Truka

