

From: Pastor Dave

RE: NMC Policy regarding Elkhart County Health Department Red Status

Date: November 21, 2020

This week the Elkhart County Health Department issued two new Orders to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Elkhart County is currently a “red” county, which is the most serious in our state’s color-coding system. Like many other churches, businesses, and organizations in our county, we are wrestling with the best way to proceed given the dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases and the new county mandates.

Yesterday, I spent time with county officials to clarify how these mandates impact our ministries. Whether you agree with the decisions made by the Health Department, we ought to all be grateful for the hard work, dedication, and sacrifice of our local officials. Many of them are people of faith and simply want to be wise and diligent in fulfilling their responsibilities. They have an enormous and nearly impossible job. Let’s remember them in our prayers.

The NMC COVID TASK FORCE connected yesterday to process our options and plan a path forward. We strongly desire to protect lives and reduce the spread of infection AND to continue to provide for the spiritual and emotional needs of our church family and the community. We believe it is possible and necessary to do both.

The county orders relate to (1) mask wearing and (2) other steps to mitigate the spread of the virus. **Churches are excluded from the 25-person limit on social gatherings**; however, all other aspects of the county mandates apply. It is our conviction that we can continue to meet in-person as a church family and stay within the county mandates. The following steps will allow us to continue in-person services as well as help us do our part to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Physical distancing – *The most effective tool for reducing risk is physical distance.*

- Keep six feet of separation between yourself and others not in your household. We will be diligent in trying to accomplish this. Your cooperation is essential.
- Refrain from handshakes and hugs. This will be difficult but necessary.

Mask wearing – *The county mandate requires that everyone wear a mask or face shield in public indoor spaces.*

- Our Staff and various volunteers will be required to wear a face covering.
- Please refer the Elkhart County Health Department Order No. 05-2020 for a list of exceptions for the mask mandate.
- We will continue to have extra masks on hand for anyone who needs one.

Sanitation measures

- We will continue to thoroughly clean and sanitize the church prior to Sunday morning, and our cleaning team will continue to sanitize bathrooms and other spaces and surfaces during each service and between services.
- Hand sanitizer will continue to be available in various stations throughout the building.
- Remember to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible.

Online access – We are thrilled to provide a high-quality livestream option for those who do not feel safe or comfortable attending in person.

- If you have any flu or cold-like symptoms, please watch our livestream rather than attend in person.
- Those who are at greater risk are encouraged to watch the livestream (e.g., those age 65+ and anyone with underlying health conditions).
- If you are in quarantine because of exposure to the virus, please watch the livestream rather than attend in person.

Following these simple and common-sense guidelines, we will help reduce the risk of spread and be able to continue to offer in-person services for those who prefer it.

The negative consequences of COVID-19 are more than physical. People are experiencing increased financial hardship, emotional difficulties, loneliness, and hopelessness. We want to help. Feel free to contact the church if you have a need of any kind. We can be reached by phone at 574-773-7773 or email at prayer@nmc.church. You can reach me personally at daveengbrecht@nmc.church.

I know that some of you will think we should be discontinuing our in-person services out of love and concern for others. Others will think we are implementing too many restrictions and giving the government too much control. Some may feel we are operating from a place of fear. Our desire is to balance love and concern for everyone's physical health with love and concern for everyone's emotional and spiritual health. We also want to do our best to honor the mandates and efforts of our state and county health department in fighting the spread of COVID-19. Feel free to contact me (daveengbrecht@nmc.church) or Pastor Joe (joefocht@nmc.church) if you have questions or concerns. Please continue to pray for the leadership of our church as we wrestle with hard and difficult decisions. Pray that God will continue to help all of us be the church in the world as we love and serve those around us.

Pastor Dave

PS – Christy and I found it interesting that we read Romans 13 (it is worth reading again) this past week in our NT90 reading. This week we'll be reading 1 Corinthians 13. Today, as I write this, we are reading 1 Corinthians 1-3 where it speaks about handling divisions in the church. God's timing is perfect and amazing. I've always been one that has been very concerned about governmental overreach into the affairs of the church. This issue is personally quite challenging and difficult for me. As I've listened to the pain of our doctors and frontline medical people, I'm convinced that while our course of action may not be perfect, it is the wisest step forward in the midst of a brutal reality. Pray for those on the frontlines. They are hurting. Only Jesus can fully heal this mess.