

Dear GracePoint Family,

In a short number of weeks, we will begin our worship services inside the worship center. Moving indoors brings new challenges, additional guidelines to follow and opportunities to show Christian love to one another. Following this cover letter, we have listed the protocols necessary to move inside comfortably and safely. One guideline we must implement to protect each other is wearing a mask.

I confess I don't like wearing a face mask. Physically, they fog up my glasses and make my beard itch. It is hard to talk intelligibly through them and I can't read facial expressions when I talk to others. Even the transparent face shields make me feel overheated. Every time I put my mask on or see them on others, it is a rather depressing reminder that COVID-19 is still around, even though February is long gone. But I am also disappointed that wearing a mask has become such a divisive political symbol even among believers. But a natural divisiveness is understandable because there are, after all, so many constantly changing and conflicting voices claiming expertise that it is easier, then, to just fall in line with one group or another based on our own feelings.

For Christians, though, it is important that we rise above our immediate personal opinions and think through what our faith in Christ might call us to consider in this regard, especially as we consider moving indoors with our worship. Shouldn't our view on masks be shaped more by our Christian identity than our American political identity? Here is my humble opinion as the lead pastor in a church family representing a vast army of opinions on the matter. My Christian faith will lead me and my staff to wear masks when we go inside for worship. I admit that there is no specific scripture that gives a mandate about masks, but in general, there are some Biblical invitations to consider that lead me to my opinion.

### **1. I see an invitation to love my neighbor. (Matthew 22:39)**

We probably all are a little frustrated that the science on masks has been inconsistent and everyone from the U.S. Surgeon General to the CDC have flip-flopped on their mask guidance. However, consensus is emerging that wearing masks could slow the virus's spread and, thus, save lives. For Christians who are commanded by Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves, wearing a mask, particularly indoors where social distancing cannot be guaranteed, seems like an easy way to practice neighborly love. Even if I find it annoying to wear one, and even if I am not convinced by the science behind it, why not wear one anyway? Should not believers 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. I see an invitation to respect authorities (Romans 13:1-7)**

I realize it easy to blame leaders these days who are certainly making lots of mistakes, both intentional and unintentional. However, I am commanded to give them respect and show them grace. Instead of rushing to criticize our leaders, I should pray for them twice as much as I criticize them and give them the benefit of the doubt. It seems clear from Romans 13 (*and in similar passages such as Titus 3:1 or 1 Peter 2:13-14*) that Christians ought to respect the human governments to which they are subject, as long as that submission doesn't contradict our submission to the lordship of Christ and His ultimate authority. Likewise, when our church leaders ask us to wear masks as we begin to meet inside, isn't it an opportunity for believers to embrace Hebrews 13:17 which declares: *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account"*?

### **3. I see an invitation to come together under the name of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1)**

Mask-wearing has sadly become divisive in our communities and churches, where each group will be tempted to assume the worst about each other. As believers, however, there are eternal foundational truths that supersede our opinions about temporary issues, and chief among them is our loyalty to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Early in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, who had divided readers on several topics, he appeals to their return to unity based on Christ's name. *"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment". (1 Corinthians 1:10)*. Similarly, all believers should apply extra portions of grace to one another because of Christ's example to sacrifice His own comfort and life for the greater sake of salvation.

#### **4. I see an invitation to use my freedom for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)**

American Christians often tend to understand freedom in a way more shaped by our U.S. Constitution than by the Bible. But the legitimacy of our wonderful American freedoms are not cancelled by the suggestion that Scripture calls believers to willingly give up their freedoms for the sake of the gospel. Paul, for example, 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.” (1 Corinthians 9:19).* In 1 Corinthians 9:22–23 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”.* Few things are more beautiful to our Christian witness than believers willingly sacrificing their personal rights for the sake of another. ***There would never have been any effective Christian missionary service without personal sacrifice!*** There are believers all over the world who are forced to endure much greater inconveniences than wearing masks and even risk danger to meet together as the body of Christ. Wearing a mask may feel intrusive, but it is a relatively small issue compared to the greater benefit of gathering to affirm the Lordship of Christ.

We will continue to have a weekly sermon posted on-line and are making plans to “live-stream” our services for those who prefer to connect in that manner during this time. But wearing masks is a reasonable price to pay for the privilege of getting together physically. There’s a lot at stake for our Christian witness during COVID-19. I do not want the non-believing world to look at us Christians as reckless people who put their own freedoms (to not wear masks) ahead of the health of their larger community. Instead, I want them to look at Christians as “servants to all,” willing to temporarily forego our freedoms out of Christ-like neighborly love. If the relatively small annoyance of wearing masks could help, not only save physical lives, but also souls, isn’t it worth it?

For these reasons, I suggest we begin with a willing, sacrificial, mask-wearing guideline. We can always dial it back as safer tiers are reached, but it would be difficult to begin with a lax policy and be pressured later to make it stricter.

From a Shepherd’s heart,  
Pastor Perry Kallis

## Worship Center Move-In Protocols for Indoor Worship under the “Red” Tier

We are pleased to inform you that we will be moving inside soon for indoor worship and Sunday School classes on Sunday mornings. The exact date is forthcoming. With San Joaquin County being in the “red tier” for COVID-19 guidelines, there will be some restrictions on how we can accommodate everyone for worship and Sunday School. We believe it is vitally important to provide a healthy environment to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone who attends. In order to prepare for this transition, these guidelines must be followed when we transition inside.

- We will hold two (2) worship services on Sunday morning. The start times are 9:00am and 10:45am. The later start time for the second service is due to the cleaning protocols we must adhere to following the first service.
- Worship Center sanctuary seating is restricted to 100 people. These seats will be on a first-come, first served basis. Doors will open for sanctuary seating at 8:30am and 10:30am. Please refrain from sitting in seats that are marked as no seat. Please be understanding if there is no room for you to be seated in the sanctuary.
- Overflow seating after the sanctuary has reached its capacity of 100 will occur in the classrooms surrounding the sanctuary. All rooms have a large-screen monitor to see and hear the worship service. You will be directed to the various rooms as you enter the worship center. Chairs will be set up for social-distancing. Families may pull their chairs together and sit together while maintaining social distancing from non-family members.
- Social-distancing must be followed as much as possible. Please maintain a 6-foot distance from non-family members while seated or standing inside the worship center. As the weather allows, please use outside covered-areas around the worship center for social gatherings.
- To comply with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and San Joaquin county health protocols, masks must be worn by all individuals entering the worship center and for the duration of time in the worship center sanctuary, classrooms and over-flow areas. We understand this is a sacrifice, but it is intended for your protection and for those around you. We believe it can be an example of Christian love for one another, so we humbly appeal to you in Christ’s name in this matter. Masks should remain on while singing. Worship team members and preaching pastor will be exempt from wearing a mask only while on stage, socially-distanced from attendees.
- You may use any of the (3) three primary entrances to enter the worship center. Each entrance will have a table with bulletins, hand sanitizer, masks, water bottles, offering basket and other literature that is pertinent to various ministries in the church. On communion Sunday mornings, a pre-filled communion cup will be available for pick-up when you enter. There will be no food or coffee offered. Please follow the guidance and instructions provided when it is time to exit the building following the services.
- A children’s program only at the 9:00am worship service will be offered for preschool through Grade 5 IF enough volunteers are secured. There will be no nursery for infants or toddlers. Follow the check-in instructions and mask protocols as you enter the children’s center. Children will not be required to wear a mask in the children’s center unless a parent requires it.
- Youth, young adult and adult Sunday School classes will be held in their regular or designated classrooms or building at 10:45am. In the event a room is needed for overflow for the 10:45am service, an adult Sunday School class will be directed to meet in another location on campus.
- A limited number of people can use the restrooms at the same time. Please adhere to the posted instructions. Floor markings are provided to assist in social distancing while you wait. You are encouraged to use your restroom at home prior to coming to the church campus.
- If you do not feel well, if you feel uncomfortable being in close proximity to others or you have been in contact with a COVID-19 positive individual within the last 48 hours, please stay home. The Sunday sermon is broadcast online at [www.gracepointlodi.com](http://www.gracepointlodi.com).