

Bethel Covid Protocol Statement:

For most of the people in our country and world, the past year and a half has been difficult. And this includes church life. For some at Bethel, church does not feel safe because of the conviction that the effects of shut-downs, protocols, and masks are hurtful and, perhaps, evil or it hasn't felt safe because the ministry that is so valuable to them or their families is not going on or is different and they long for church to be a place where they can escape the pandemic. For others, church does not feel safe because of very real health considerations and the conviction that simple things, like wearing masks or other protocols, keep their family and loved ones and others safe. Some speak up about the lies they feel are being perpetrated, while others feel convicted to speak up for and defend those that are physically vulnerable to the virus. We have heard some being called fearful and others being called foolish or reckless. Whatever opinion and side you fall on, there is science to back up your view. Some people want to follow all that the government says to do (according to Romans 13 or for health reasons) and others that say the government has overreached and is not working within its scriptural allowances or boundaries. There are many other opinions and convictions and angles on all things Covid, and this statement does not aim to referee or reconcile these varied opinions or convictions. The Elders, like the congregation, each have varied opinions and convictions on these matters. Many of us at Bethel feel that that Covid and protocols have been divisive, but hopefully we can all recognize that each person and family have the responsibility to examine their own risk management assessment, their convictions before the Lord, and their responsibility to & relationship within the body of Christ, specifically at Bethel.

The communication and execution of Covid protocols has, like the pandemic itself has been complicated and messy. Much of the last year or so, the Elders have utilized a task force of people to examine information and make recommendation to the Elders and other ministry leaders so that the Elders could make decisions about Sunday services and ministries and ministry leaders could decide what Covid protocols work best for their ministry. This put the various ministry leaders in a tough and unfair situation. The Elders have now made a global Covid Protocol for the whole church within which the ministry leaders will operate their ministries.

Many scriptural principles apply to these matters ranging from submitting to authority to not neglecting meeting together, to having humility with each other. Some applicable passages are John 17:5, Romans 13, 1 Cor. 11-13, Eph 2-4, Heb 10:19-21, 2 Cor 8, Philp 2, Acts 20:28, ... This statement is not a comprehensive summary of all that was considered. Some of the considerations are represented by the following questions.

How does what we do as a church affect our witness to the community? It is less clear now than a year ago how our community looks at the church because of its protocols. It is possible that some people may think the church is being foolish or anti-science while others may think the church is standing for the truth. Our personal views tend to skew our opinion of what our community may think. It is not definitive as to how the community views us because of our protocols.

What are other church or organizations doing? This research and information can help inform us, but each place has their own unique circumstances and people. Interestingly, at different times some of the same churches have been noted by those in our congregation as being either "stricter" or "freer" than what Bethel is doing.

What does the science say? Unfortunately, the media, government, CDC, scientific community, etc. have not proven to be trustworthy. The science seems to be all over the place and the selective use of science to back up positions has become commonplace. The Elders consider the Bethel Covid protocols as laid out below to be reasonably safe.

Does scripture compel us to follow the recent government mandates? Romans 13 clearly indicates that we are to submit to rulers and authorities (governments). However, we know this doesn't apply if any mandate was asking us to sin or break God's moral law. How does it apply here? There is no clarity as to how binding the mandates are with churches because of their constitutional right to a free expression of religion. The governor's state mandate makes an exemption for churches on this basis. It also allows for any local government body to enact provisions that are stricter. The recent Cook County order specifically includes the exemption for churches. Chicago's recent order does not mention the exemption or lists churches anywhere in its description of businesses or organizations, making it unclear if the exemption legally applies. At Bethel, over the past year and a half we have followed much of the mandates while not adhering to all the details (such as a maximum 10 people at a gathering). We provide an option in the protocols for those that choose to follow the Chicago mandate.

How can Bethel best function as a body to honor and glorify Christ, assembling and ministering together? We want to endeavor to keep meeting together and building each other up and our protocols want to maximize this while being reasonably safe. If this makes you feel left out, please talk to us so that we can come alongside you.

Bethel Covid Protocol (as of 8/24/21):

- All services and ministries will be masked optional.
- All services will contain a mask required section.
- Ministries will be intentional to create as much spacing (up to six feet) as a room and participants allow.
- Ministry nights may be scheduled to allow ministries to use larger or multiple rooms to create as much spacing is practical and have space for those who require additional distancing.
- There may be some activities or games that occur during a ministry that by nature will not allow for social distancing.
- Anyone attending a service or ministry at Bethel should self-screen before coming (parents and guardians are responsible to screen children and youth) and should stay at home if you have a body temperature over 100 degrees, have a new cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat that you cannot attribute to another health condition or display signs of Covid, the Flu, or a cold.
- Contact tracing will be performed if anyone is found to have had Covid while at Bethel.
- There will not be pre-registration for regular ministry based on predetermined capacity limits. If capacity at a ministry gets high, then alternate overflow rooms may be utilized.
- Any Bethel attender who invites others to services or ministries is responsible to communicate the protocols to those they invite and make sure they follow them.
- The Elders will review periodically and adjust the protocols if needed.
- We expect our members and attenders to follow these protocols humbly and gracefully.