

We thank God for you, dear family in Christ!

Over the past few months during the pandemic, your church leaders have seen and heard of just some of the BIG things you've been willing to do for your loved ones, church family, and community here in Hastings; from staying connected in faithful on-line worship, keeping your children connected through on-line Sunday School, being faithful in prayer for your church and nation. You've also continued giving your generous, thank-filled offerings to Jesus on-line or by mail and gathering for midweek on-line bible studies for refreshment and encouragement. Not only that, but many of you have been calling and texting your friends and church family just to see how they are or to offer picking up groceries or making masks for health care workers. It's been amazing to see. We praise God for the way His love is living in all of you!

After all of the BIG things you've been willing to do, now we want to encourage you to do something small – *to wear a mask when you come to worship at St. John's*. We realize that for some, masks can cause health issues in and of themselves. If that's you, please understand we're not asking you to put yourself in harm's way. And we certainly won't turn anyone away for not wearing one. We're simply asking each of you to consider wearing one. We've set up the church and sanctuary for worship in a socially distanced way. We're following all the recommendations and precautions from the CDC and health officials. And wearing masks is one of them.

It's a strange thing that wearing masks is starting to get symbolic or divisive in our country. What's it really all about? Is it about your commitment to following directions or your right to not have to wear one? Your political stance or commentary on whether you think the response to the pandemic is serious or overblown? People around you might think that way. Brothers and sisters in Christ we encourage you not to. Because the mask isn't really there to protect you, it's there to protect the people around you.

One of the things we're so grateful for is this big, wonderful, diverse family called church. And your family at church has little babies in it as well as grandmas and grandpas. It has people who are recovering from illness who have weakened immune systems. It has strong healthy people who don't have any of those issues but sometimes have to go home to take care of people in their family who aren't as strong as they are. So if slipping on a mask for church is something we can do to protect them, that *small* thing we do might actually be really *big* in protecting them. It might be a little uncomfortable or irritating...but love often is.

Again, if you have any reason for why it would be uncomfortable and unhealthy for you to wear a mask, your church family completely understands that as well. But for the rest of God's family – thank you for considering this act of love for others. Jesus promises that **“whatever you do for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me.(Matt 25:40)”** What greater motivation and privilege is there than to serve the one who with his life and death served us so beautifully. Thanks for considering. And we pray we see and rejoice with you in God's house very soon!