

Dear DBCC Family,

During this coronavirus pandemic we have been forced to make hard decisions that affect people we care about emotionally and physically. Our aim has been to do what we can to preserve life and at the same time our ability to continue worshipping as the body of Christ. While closely following the national and local guidelines for minimizing the spread of the virus and, as you know, we closed the church for nine weeks. Arizona reopened, and we reopened the church implementing precautionary measures. With the recent summer dramatic virus resurgence, we debated over shutting the church down again or introducing additional precautionary measures. We decided to continue live worship services with the necessary added requirement of masks/face shields be worn by all participants at all times. This added preventative measure is in keeping with the government's guidance posted on the coronavirus.gov website and our desire and responsibility to protect the body of believers at DBCC. As a body we are doing our part to help turn around the spread of the virus.

The decision to mandate masks/face shields has been questioned by many church family members. Please be clear that there is no intent or precautionary standard that will keep people from hearing the gospel. In fact, every thought put into our decision has been to ensure people continue to hear the Gospel. We need everyone's help to ensure access to the gospel while maintaining the wellbeing of our congregation, while helping to stem the tide of this pandemic. COVID-19 is happening to all of us, not just any one individual.

It is a privilege to serve as the Elders of DBCC and we take our responsibility to shepherd and care for the flock at DBCC fearfully and seriously. We covet your trust as we seek the Lord's guidance on behalf of His church. Here is our response to the main concerns that have been raised.

The Effectiveness of Masks/Face Shields

There has been a great deal of information generated and opinion sharing on the effectiveness of masks. Confusion was created when our Surgeon General as well as Dr. Fauci both argued against the mask, even N95 respirators, creating the now prevalent debate that still rages today.

The masking position we have taken is supported now by both our Surgeon General, Dr. Fauci and hundreds of local Doctors in support of the city's mandate. Please be clear the masks are not or intended to be, by themselves, to be relied on for 100% protection. The national guidance found at coronavirus.gov makes clear that masks are just one element of a multi-faceted protection scheme. Masks, washing hands often, maintaining social distancing, health risk assessments, as well as disinfecting surfaces are ALL elements of multi-faceted protection. So, while masks/face shields are not solely effective in stopping the spread of the virus, when worn correctly, they are effective at reducing the likelihood of spreading it. In an atmosphere like church, where singing is part of our worship, the masks are especially beneficial at limiting the accelerated aspiration of water droplets.

Additionally, it is evident that people can have the virus and be asymptomatic (no visible symptoms). Such people can spread the virus unknowingly. The use of masks by ALL addresses those who are asymptomatic to HELP prevent the spread of the virus to others.

Inappropriate Submission to Authorities

Is the church inappropriately bowing to the authorities in this matter? No. The Elders have looked at the biblical passages on this subject with great care. While it would be nice to make everyone happy, there is only One we must honor and obey – our Lord and Savior. When we read the related verses, we take

great pause. The text is quite clear. Unless the government is asking us to deny our faith, we must be subject to the government. Not doing so violates scripture.

Most governments referred to in the Bible were evil and corrupt, yet it says we are to obey them as long as it does not violate God's commands. We do not believe that our governing authorities have been hostile to the cause of Christ. Our local government in Arizona is very aware of the first amendment rights of the faith-based community and has not imposed restrictive guidelines on the church as in other states. In Arizona we are recognized as a faith-based community with the right to live out our beliefs. For DBCC, those teachings come from the Bible. We have concluded from our study of scripture that wearing a mask to protect ourselves and others is not contrary to scripture. In fact, it is a loving and responsible act, however unpleasant. Every Christian is called to suffer for Christ and sacrifice for others. Therefore, it is our conclusion that following the guidelines that the government has developed is for our good, the good of our society, and our obedience honors the name of God.

Allowed Exceptions

Did we take into account the allowed medical and religious exemptions for wearing masks? Yes. We understand that masks can restrict breathing and some medical conditions would prohibit these restrictions. In such cases, we are allowing the use of the face shields in place of the masks, even though they are not as effective as masks at limiting aspiration. So, we prefer they only be used if a mask is prohibitive from a medical standpoint. The alternative is to participate in worship from home using either the live streaming option for the 9 AM Sunday service or the recordings of the sermon posted each week. This will be continued.

We do not find any religious exceptions for wearing a mask/face shield and wearing one does not cause us to violate the teachings of scripture. Neither are specifically addressed in scripture. Some who are concerned have stated that it violates one's conscience to wear a mask/face shield referring to the teachings about creating a stumbling block for other believers. This warning goes both ways. Not wearing a mask/face shield can also create a stumbling block for other believers. In the spirit of loving our neighbors, we concluded that taking the 'safer' of the two alternatives serves both the intended purpose of slowing the spread of the virus, showing love for our brothers and sisters, as well as for our community.

Conclusion

We appreciate the well thought out comments we have received, and we understand how very difficult this is for everyone. These arduous decisions have been made through much discussion, as well as seeking the input of professionals who are in the middle of fighting the pandemic. Our decisions are in keeping with the Bible and for the maximum benefit of our congregation. We understand that wearing masks/face shields may not be optimal, convenient, or pleasant, but it is in the best interests of our people and our community. In everything we have done our driving passion has been to minister to each one of you. We have tried to provide multiple options so that you can chose what works best for you. We ask for your continued support as we labor earnestly for your benefit. As the recommendations of the government change, we will continue to assess what is best for our community at DBCC. We will adjust accordingly as we get further guidance from local authorities.

Asking for your grace –

In Christ, The DBCC Board of Elders