



“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand;
and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.
And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,
and hope does not disappoint us,
because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”
~Romans 5:1-5

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

I wish it weren’t so, but here we are again. Covid case numbers are rising and now that we’ve had a taste of going maskless, it is all the more difficult to pull back.

And yet, our own disappointment does not change the reality of our challenges. As scientists and epidemiologists learn new things about this virus, we would be wise to pay attention to their findings.

1. The vaccine is effective in reducing the risk of hospitalization and death.
2. The Delta variant is more contagious than the original COVID-19 strain.
3. Masks are effective in reducing the risk of transmission. The better quality the mask, the greater the protection offered.
4. Distancing and being outside are still helpful in reducing virus spread.

As always, what is true of one county or community in our synod may not be true for another. This puts the burden of decision making where it has been this whole pandemic, on congregational leadership; pastoral leaders and their councils, to decide when and how to pivot.

My recommendations are the following:

1. Pay attention to what is happening in your community. Make the effort to consult with local health care professionals. Find out what’s happening in your local hospital. Be aware of the health of your congregation members and the vaccination/Covid case rate in your community.
2. Consider requiring masks again for in person gatherings
3. Continue to distance. Gather outside if possible.

4. Get vaccinated, if possible. Wear a mask around children and grandchildren who are too young to be vaccinated.

People of God, we can do this! I know we are weary and wish this would all go away. I encourage you to take a deep breath and strengthen your resolve for more of the same. We are still in the wilderness. We had a nice oasis break, but now we are back in the desert, relying on the Spirit of Christ to guide us, discern our next steps, and when the time is right, bring us out of the wilderness to the place that God will show us.

And I encourage you to do your best to give witness to the fruits of the Spirit that are in you: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan