

Greetings, siblings in Christ.

Thank you for your continued patience and prayers as the Session attempts to navigate the ongoing pandemic. As much as we would like for the COVID-19 pandemic to be over, new variants continue to emerge, and the virus continues to be spread in high numbers in our part of the state. Thanks to all those who were able to participate in the “Westminster COVID Precautions” survey. Your responses and comments have helped us as we continually assess the real dangers of COVID-19 to us all, but especially those who are more vulnerable.

From the beginning, the Session’s main goal has been to keep our congregation healthy and safe. We may never all agree on the best way to do that. As we have experienced for almost two years now, there are no easy, one-size-fits all answers. The survey showed us that we all have different comfort levels when it comes to the virus. To our knowledge, there have not been any cases of community spread linked to someone participating in worship or any other event at our church, and for this we give thanks! We continue to be in prayer for members, friends, and family, who have been sick with COVID, and mourn with those who have lost loved ones.

The Session’s decisions have always been in consultation with the number of positive COVID cases, the percentage of positive test results in our immediate area, and recommendations from health officials at the CDC and the Bay County Health Department. We believe that this data and guidance gives us the best possible information for how COVID is being spread in Bay City, and the best way to keep one another safe. Moving forward, we will continue to use these numbers and recommendations to guide any changes to the precautions we may take as a congregation.

Beginning in January 2022, we will use the following system to determine what precautions are in place based on the **percentage of positive COVID test results** in Bay County as published on COVIDactnow.org (https://covidactnow.org/us/metro/bay-city_mi/?s=26491553):

- Greater than 20% of tests are positive (red)- Masks are required; pre-recorded choirs or instrumental music will be used in indoor worship services.
- Between 15 and 19% of tests positive- Masks are required; masked choirs or soloists, and wind/brass instruments may be used during in person worship services.
- Between 10 and 14% of tests are positive- Masks are required; masked choirs or soloists, instrumental music will be used during worship along with some masked congregational singing.
- Between 5 and 9% of tests are positive- Masks are required; masked congregational singing permitted for those who feel comfortable.
- Below 5% positive tests- Masks will become optional.

You may notice that these numbers may change quickly from week to week, or even day to day. To help our staff and musicians prepare for each service, a determination will be made by

Thursday of each week and posted to the website, and any changes will be updated on our Facebook page. You may also contact the office if you have any questions. This will also help you as you determine your comfort level with the precautions in place for the coming Sunday.

We thought it would be helpful to explain the reasoning behind some of the precautions that we will continue to utilize. The virus that spreads COVID-19 is an airborne virus which is transmitted via droplets expelled when someone who has COVID breathes, speaks, sings, etc. We have also come to understand that a person can have and spread COVID even if they are asymptomatic, vaccinated, or unvaccinated.

Participating in a worship service is different than going to the store or even eating in a restaurant. In the church sanctuary, we are sitting in the same room with 100+ people for an hour. As we breathe, talk, and sing, droplets are expelled and can remain in the air for some time. Some research suggests that singing may produce more of these droplets. (For more information, see the links below on air circulation and singing). The ventilation system that heats and cools our sanctuary is not designed to purify the air, so even though it is a large space, the possibility of COVID transmission remains high. Every precaution we take, such as wearing a mask and opening our windows, helps to lessen this risk so that we can continue to meet together safely. We also continue to sanitize commonly used spaces often and provide hand cleaning stations and wipes for those who wish to use them.

If you have been in worship with us recently, you may have noticed that many previous precautions are no longer in place. Being an airborne virus, things like passing the offering plate and handling bulletins are not as high-risk activities as once thought. While maintaining a safe distance while in large gatherings is still recommended, worshipers are free to sit wherever they feel most comfortable. We have not been taking temperatures upon entry for several months but do still ask that folks sign in as they arrive. This allows us to know who is worshipping with us in the same way that the friendship pads used to and helps us to identify any visitors who may be worshipping with us.

We believe that taking these precautions has enabled us and will continue to allow us to worship and meet together safely. It also allows us to welcome those who are more vulnerable or in high-risk categories into our spaces of worship, study, and fellowship. Thank you for your continued prayers and support. Please reach out to one of your Session members if you have any questions.

With Christ's love,

The Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church

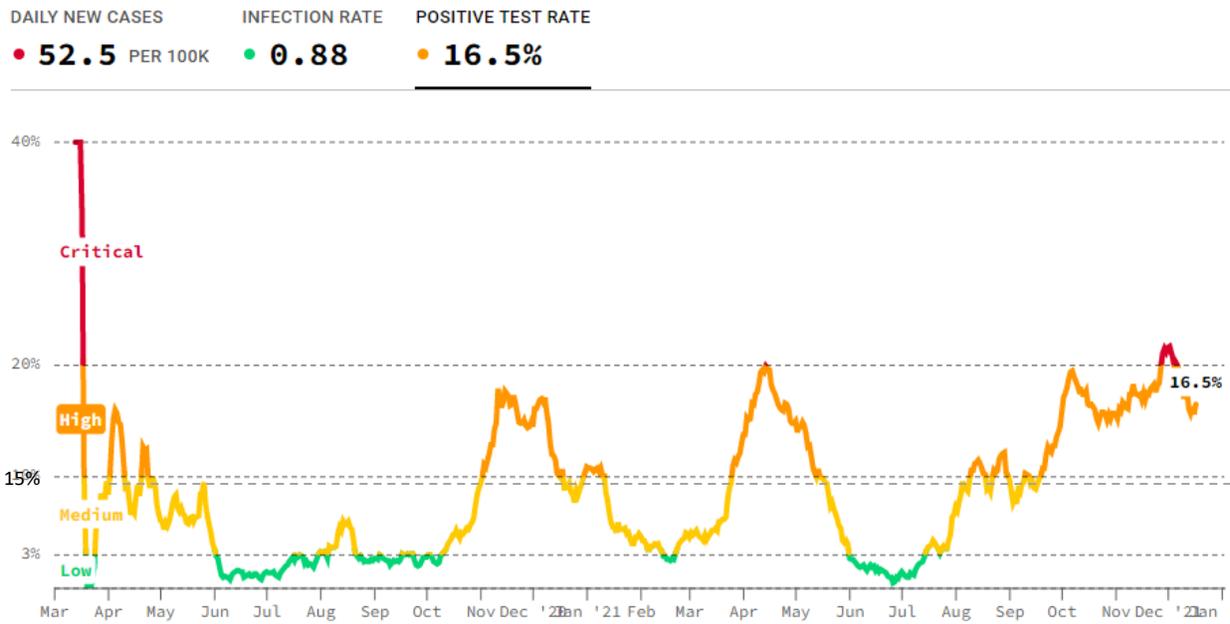
Rev. Jamie Milton	Brandi Higgins	Judy Randall	John Tapley
Pam Binder	Julie Kelly	Dawn Reszke	Melissa Woodward
David Fenske	Bonnie Marsh	Karen Schoeppach	
Jack Gustafson	Aaron Morse	Phil Reagh	

Website used to track local COVID numbers: https://covidactnow.org/us/metro/bay-city_mi/?s=26491553

Article on COVID and air circulation: <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-and-coronavirus-covid-19>

Article on singing with masks: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41370-021-00385-7>

Graph includes "Positive Test Rate" data as accessed on 12/22/21



A relatively high percentage (16.5%) of COVID tests were positive, which indicates that testing in Bay County, Michigan is limited and that most cases may go undetected. [About this data](#)

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METRIC: Positive test rate (dropdown)
PAST # OF DAYS: 180 (dropdown)
LOCATIONS: Bay County, MI (dropdown)

