



## Plan to Gather Update *September 1, 2021*

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Dear people of Saint Andrew,

I write to you on a Wednesday. Wednesdays are our Covid vigil. Not in terms of a formal service, but in terms of waiting and watching. It is when I pull up the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services website](#) and hold an online vigil for the latest Burden number to be posted. We have been watching what epidemiologists call the Burden since July 2020. There are other numbers you hear: daily new cases, positive test rates, intensive care capacity, ventilators in use, etc. The Burden number helps us understand how active Covid-19 has been in each county for the past 2 weeks. Because the Burden number is adjusted to population, it allows us to compare Marathon county to the surrounding counties. We have kept this weekly vigil; waiting and watching for the day when we could throw open the doors and welcome everyone in. We have not reached this point. Not yet.

If you don't want to delve into the prose that this letter is shaping up to be, let me give you the highlights:

**We are still gathering but ask that all wear masks while inside the building.** This is based on the [CDC](#) and [Marathon County Health Department](#) guidelines because the [Delta variant is more contagious](#).

**We continue to be open** to gathering even as these numbers are rising because Marathon county is approaching [50% full vaccination](#), the [full FDA authorization of a Covid-19 vaccine](#), and all of the dear people at Saint Andrew who are showing Christian love by taking private actions that contribute to public health.

**We are trying to communicate** the updates and the current safety guidelines via the Network, the [SALC website's Covid Page](#), Council's Communication Corner, letters like these, and any other way that we can.

If you want to hear more about what we are doing and have been doing, please read on.

We are at the point where we can gather with some precautions. The CDC is recommending masks for all because of the Covid-19 Delta Variant, which is more than twice as contagious as the previous strain of Covid-19. It also causes more severe illness in unvaccinated populations. This is the language that we are using. The [Plan to Gather](#) says we will follow the "Universal Mask Rule" which means that, following the CDC guidelines, **we recommend masks for all people regardless of vaccination status**, when you are in the building. This cautious stance has also been echoed by the [Marathon County Health Department](#).

**We encourage you, if you have not yet, to make an [appointment](#) to receive a Covid-19 vaccine.** While there are many [misconceptions about the mRNA vaccine](#), the technology was being researched for at least a decade before becoming the method of inoculating us against Covid-19. The [Pfizer Covid-19](#) vaccine has been fully approved by the FDA for anyone 16 years of age and older. The other vaccines are still under emergency FDA approval for adults and for children 12-17. This also means that the unvaccinated population does not just include adults who are hesitant, skeptical, or are medically unable to be vaccinated, but every child, elementary school age and younger, in our congregation.

Our [Plan to Gather](#) lists guidelines for gathering in the building. I encourage you to read it because **there are ways to participate as long as masks are worn - gathering spaces are available without overcrowding**. These are the guidelines that we are following for Sunday school and confirmation this year. Following the guidelines of the plan, we trust that the risks of viral transmission will be low.

**Our worship schedule will stay the same** for Thursdays and Sundays. The hymnals in the pews yet. We are not singing loudly; there continues to be a cantor to lead us in

song. We invite you to hum along, sing softly behind your mask, or just reflect on the words of the hymn.

We have tried to keep you up to date in regards to gathering. When the Weekly Wave was being published, there was a graphic at the top of the page related to the Burden number. It is now at the top of our [Covid page](#). We have talked about Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3; these are categories in our [Plan to Gather](#), which can be confusing. Phase 1 was our first response to the pandemic. Gatherings were heavily restricted because our understanding of Covid-19 was limited. As our knowledge has grown, we have come to see there ways to gather safely. As the vaccines have been approved, some restrictions have relaxed. The Plan to Gather document has been a living document that has been updated throughout the pandemic. If you have an old copy, please check out our [Covid page](#) for the latest version. Our latest adjustment was to raise the threshold to entering Phase 1 again to holding a Burden number of 1,000 for 2 weeks. The conversation in the Plan to Gather, Executive Committee, and Congregational Council focused on having a sense of stability as we enter the fall season with educational programs, limited ability for outdoor worship, and Advent.

I want to thank you, again, for everything that you have been doing to protect your health, the health of your family, children, neighbors, and community. When we first encountered the pandemic in the Spring of 2020, there were many knowledgeable voices saying that this was going to last 18-24 months. I cannot believe that it has lasted this long, but I know that together, with grace, we can navigate the next months and get to the point where the precautions are no longer necessary.

This, dear people, is the vigil that we all hold. Waiting, watching, praying:

So teach us to count our days  
that we may gain a wise heart.  
Turn, O LORD! How long?  
Have compassion on your servants!  
Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,  
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.  
Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,  
and as many years as we have seen evil.

Psalms 90:12-15

*Pr. Justin*

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