



The LCMS Kansas District

Rev. Justin A. Panzer, District President

1000 SW 10th Avenue | Topeka, KS 66604-1104 | (785) 357-4441

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A Pastoral Statement on Masking

Dear Friends in Christ,

For almost one-half of an entire year, our lives have been completely changed. As congregations begin to reopen, there's still the struggle to get people back to worship. What do we do and how should we act?

We're being tested right now. How are we responding? The Christian response coming out of this pandemic is two-fold. First, it must be finding ways to care for and support those among us who are most vulnerable and isolated due to chronic health conditions. We must be serving them and contacting them in ways that protect their health. They are really missing the fellowship of believers! Second, it must be a return to Jesus and His Word. Christ is calling us to repentance and faith; to receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament in the fellowship of believers at your local congregation. He is calling us to reach out to our neighbor in love who desperately needs the peace of the forgiveness of sins that we possess. Return to the Lord your God. He is faithful. He is loving. He is forgiving. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

Unfortunately, "whether or not to mask" is the new one Satan is using right now to divide the church. I don't like wearing face masks. For one, I "talk a lot" with my facial expressions. Second, masking has become highly politicized. Third, by writing this piece, I fully realize that some of you may or may not like it. Everything that happens and is written these days is highly charged. May it not be!

Brett McCracken, senior editor of *The Gospel Coalition* writes, "For Christians, though, it's important to rise above the political partisanship and think through what our *faith* would call us to with regard to wearing or not wearing masks. What if our view on masks were shaped more by our Christian identity than our American political identity?"

I invite you to think through these five things:

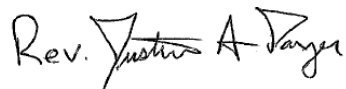
1. **Christians are called to gather together in public worship (Hebrews 10:24-25).** Yes, you can still hear God's Word proclaimed through virtual worship, but the Holy Scriptures are very clear that we need to fellowship with one another as the body of believers. In public worship, you will also receive the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith. These means of grace are desperately needed to fight the attack of Satan.
2. **Masking can be a means to "show love to your neighbor" (Matthew 22:39).** I get it—the studies have been inconsistent, and there is still much inconsistency. How about this? As we live across different spectrums and areas of the state, I encourage our congregations, where applicable (*What*

do your local county health department orders say?), to have a “recommended mask service” and a “required mask service.” (Again, some counties require masking at all services.) If you haven’t done it in a while, maybe even hold a separate service outside. Yes, this will make more work for your pastor and other church workers. But let’s think of the benefits—people in church and gathering together to hear the Word of God and receive the body and blood of Christ in a safe and sanitary manner. Many of our members have not received the Sacrament since March!

3. **We do it to respect authority (Romans 13:1-7).** Leaders make mistakes. They’re sinners. You know what? We’re sinners too, redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Christians are called to forgive. Christians respect authority inside and outside of the church. We submit as long as it doesn’t contradict our submission to the lordship of Christ and His ultimate authority.
4. **We want to honor the weak in our midst (Romans 14 & 1 Corinthians 8).** Read these chapters. Think in terms of peer pressure. Paul argues that in matters of freedom, it’s important that Christians don’t flaunt their freedom in ways that become stumbling blocks to the weak. Are you “strong” or “weak” if you wear a mask? Absolutely not.
5. **We bear witness to a hurting and dying world in need of the Savior (1 Peter 2:8-10).** As the baptized, we joyfully give witness to our Lord’s death and resurrection to all. Again, God is calling us to repentance—personally and collectively. He’s not calling us to make fun of or look down on others. We have a beautiful message to share. Don’t let Satan keep winning. He already knows that he’s lost. The empty tomb proves it. He’s doing his best to gain an army of his own believers while he still has the chance until Christ comes again. His time is short. So is ours.

Are we completely through COVID-19? No. Should we take COVID-19 lightly? No. Can we have gratitude that COVID-19 has not been as bad as originally predicted? Absolutely.

In the service of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Justin A. Panzer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

President Panzer