

*“So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.” (Galatians 6:9-10 MSG)*

If that New Testament passage sounds familiar to you, you might recall that it was highlighted as one of our two focus Scripture lessons this past Sunday, November 8, 2020 in conjunction with our worship series on “Stewardship - A Ministry of Service”.

You know, I've been reflecting upon this concept of 'working for the benefit of all' a little more deeply over the past 24 hours, most especially in regard to what has been asked of us over the last 9 months amidst the throes of a global pandemic.

“Let us work for the benefit of all” - what does that look like, especially now? As I sit here at my office desk, I glance out the window at the Red Cross Blood Drive crew as they take the temperatures of all the donors who have “shown up to give” in spite of the Covid restrictions. And of course, just 30 yards away from the blood drive van sits the LUMC Blessing Box, filled with food items available on a “self-serve” basis - yet another “safe” way to provide necessities for a community in need. As well, as I walk down the church hallway I pass numerous bags overflowing with “Mission Lexington Holiday Food Drive” donations - another “doable” way, even in the midst of a health crisis, to provide gracious meals for underserved families in our community. Indeed, I guess this is what “working for the benefit of all” now looks like in the face of Covid-19!

No question, this coronavirus pandemic has made it somewhat more challenging to “work for the benefit of all”. Members of our church family who are “shut in” and/or who live in retirement communities are no longer allowed to receive our Stephen Ministry leaders ... hospital visits to church members who are undergoing surgeries and other medical procedures are accompanied by strict guidelines for families to wear Personal Protective Equipment. And of course, even when we gather for Sunday worship, we have to sit socially distanced from one another and hide our joy-filled smiles ... through masks.

Yes ... those dreaded, mandated masks. This alone may be the single most frustrating challenge of our new “Covid reality”. After all, masks are hot! And masks are inconvenient! And masks make it difficult to communicate clearly! And masks make it really hard to recognize one another! And those are just the physical drawbacks! The ever-present public debate in our nation over the

wearing of masks has become so very heated, and often times less than civil. For some of us, the mandate to wear masks feels like a strike at the heart of our personal freedom! Shouldn't we be allowed to decide what we want to do ... what we feel we need to do ... to stay safe?

And yet, in spite of all of the personal inconveniences and the strongly voiced opinions, the Lexington UMC Coronavirus Task Force has made the decision to continue to follow the CDC guidelines of a mask mandate within all parts of the LUMC facility. Wait ... what ... but why?

Well, simply enough ... It's because wearing a mask is exactly how we can “work for the benefit of all”. Indeed, what “working for the benefit of all” means, most especially for Christian disciples, is that we care so much for “the other”, that we are willing to keep our distance and wear and mask to protect them. “working for the benefit of all” means that we seek out what's best for “the other”. “working for the benefit of all” affirms our desire for “that other” to still be sitting next to us in a pew a year from now! And “working for the benefit of all” says, loud and clear, that we love “the other” and we want them to stay safe and well.

As members of the body of Christ called the church, the question of wearing a mask and keeping socially distanced should not be a political question nor should it be considered a violation of personal freedom. Rather, wearing a mask is actually an “act of sacrificial love”. Hence, the all important question ... Are we willing to sacrifice our personal comfort and our preferred practices in order to “keep open” a “safe place for all” to gather?

As I pointed out in my message on “service” this past Sunday, the LUMC faith community most certainly knows all about how to “love sacrificially”. You've been doing it throughout your long history and you're continuing to do it still today! And so I look forward to seeing each and every one of you “masked up” this Sunday! And I look forward to seeing each and every one of you “smiling with your eyes” behind your masks, as you continue to give your time, your talents, your energy, and your hearts to the ongoing ministries of Lexington UMC. And I pray that those of you who are continuing to worship from home will keep our leadership in your prayers as we endeavor to make tough decisions ... “for the benefit of all”.

May God's love and grace continue to shine on us and through us as we love each other, sacrificially, amidst this ongoing global health crisis.

Joining with you in “working for the benefit of all” -

Pastor Kim