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OF GRASSIE

Niagara Regional Council
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way
Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

August 21, 2020

Re: Mandatory Mask Bylaw

Dear Honourable Members of Regional Council,

As Council of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, we wrote to you prior to your July 23rd meeting, regarding the proposed mandatory mask bylaw. Below is a summary of that letter:

"In Stage 2, we were once again able to meet for public worship (although it looks very different than prior to the pandemic starting) and have followed the Ontario government's guidelines when it came to restricting the building capacity to 30%, as well as ensuring that physical distancing is in place during the worship services. To that end, we have done the following:

- *Divided the church membership roughly into thirds to be under the 30% building capacity*
- *Ensured that members from other households sit at a minimum 6 feet from each other (that includes to the sides, front, and back of each family unit)*
- *Keep attendance records to aid in contact tracing should the need arise*
- *Have made it a requirement that any member who may have been or has been exposed to the virus to withhold themselves from worship.*

We are happy to say that with those measures, we have returned to some sense of normalcy in worship and have not had any reported cases of the virus. Provided that we continue to physical distance, we do not believe that a mandatory mask bylaw is necessary.

Regarding the proposed bylaw (reference page 76 – 78 of your agenda from your July 8th meeting), we noted that Section 1.6.c. includes churches and other places of worship as one such "enclosed public place", and not in Section 1.8 (the places that are not included as an enclosed public place). Section 1.8 includes schools, post-secondary institutions, hospitals, government offices etc...

We respectfully ask that you:

- 1. Do not vote yes to a mandatory mask bylaw.*
- 2. If Council votes yes, to include churches & other places of worship in section 1.8 of the bylaw, and not section 1.6."*

Regional Council proceeded to vote on the mandatory mask bylaw on July 23rd, and the bylaw passed, going into effect on July 31, 2020. Our church council met for a special meeting on July 28th, to deliberate and discuss our response to the mandatory mask bylaw. The appropriateness of the bylaw is a matter on which there is divided opinion, and that includes those in the church as well. We came to the following decision, and communicated that decision to our congregation, prior to our August 2nd worship services:

- "The Region of Niagara requires that all those in an enclosed public place wear a mask and that this includes churches. As such, Council would expect this be followed by all members in so far as they are able according to the guidelines."

We have utilized the following principles as informing our decision-making as it relates to worshipping in a pandemic context:

- Our duty to obey God and His call to gather in corporate worship is first and foremost (the 10 Commandments are structured the way they are to teach us that God's law is overarching).
- Our duty to love our neighbour requires that we take all responsible action to protect the health and safety of all who gather with us as well as the community at large as best we can.
- We recognize and show deference to the legitimate authority of civic government as it regards matters of public health.

We also committed to send a letter to the authorities asking for consideration and understanding in the enforcement of this bylaw. As stated above in our decision, we expect that members will respect the law while moving about public spaces (in the process of coming to and leaving their pews). However, once they are seated in their pews, since there is no movement during our services and they are fully socially distant for the typical 90 minutes or so that when they are seated, some may choose to remove their masks while seated in their pews, and that some will not wear face coverings in accordance with the conditions and exemptions of the by-law. We ask that understanding be shown for those who for various reasons may make these choices.

We now also request:

- *That you reconsider your decision, and that you include churches & other places of worship in section 1.8 of the bylaw, and not section 1.6.*

In the meantime, know that we will be taking all reasonable precautions for the health and safety of our parishioners as this is the charge that God gave His church. It is under Jesus Christ's Authority that both the Niagara Region and the Church operates, as we read in Matthew 28:18, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'."

Finally, we will continue to uphold you in our prayers, asking God to grant wisdom to you and all those in authority over us. We also recognize the limit of that authority as Given by God and protected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We are pleased to submit insofar as measures do not restrict what God calls us to in Holy Worship and we do so as this is in keeping with God's command in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and in Act 5:29 where we learn that we must Obey God rather than Man.

We thank you for your service and leadership. The Lord be with you!

On behalf of the Council of Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, ON



Reverend Rolf. J. den Hollander – chairman



Mark VanAndel - clerk