

East Smethport United Christian Church  
**RESPONSE TO PA COVID-19 MASK ORDER**

Pastor Young  
July 5, 2020

On May 23, 2020, the Federal CDC finally issued in their words, "suggestions" for churches and congregants to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Following is an excerpt from their announcement to "communities of faith".

"CDC offers these suggestions for faith communities to consider and accept, reject, or modify, consistent with their own faith traditions, in the course of preparing to reconvene for in-person gatherings while still working to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This guidance is not intended to infringe on rights protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution or any other federal law, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). The federal government may not prescribe standards for interactions of faith communities in houses of worship, and in accordance with the First Amendment, no faith community should be asked to adopt any mitigation strategies that are more stringent than the mitigation strategies asked of similarly situated entities or activities. In addition, we note that while many types of gatherings are important for civic and economic well-being, religious worship has particularly profound significance to communities and individuals, including as a right protected by the First Amendment. State and local authorities are reminded to take this vital right into account when establishing their own re-opening plans."

Out of a spirit of caution for the well-being of our congregants and community, our church has and will continue to comply with the CDC suggestions, including weekly cleaning and sanitizing surfaces, providing hand sanitizer and masks, and providing additional worship space for safe-distancing, especially for the vulnerable.

To cooperate with new concerns of COVID spread, we ask that families sitting together would distance themselves from other families by six feet. If space for distancing in the sanctuary is too limited, we have provided audio of the service in the fellowship hall. Thank you.