To: All Employees, All Students - Undergraduate, All On-Campus Graduate Students

Dear Students and Colleagues,

Effective 6 a.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 24, 2021, Messiah University will be requiring indoor masking in all university buildings for all individuals regardless of their vaccination status.

The only exceptions to this requirement are as follows:

- Masking is strongly encouraged but not required in campus residence halls and apartments.
- Masking is strongly encouraged in campus dining facilities when not eating or drinking.
- Masking is not required when actively competing or working out in indoor campus recreational facilities (including the Falcon Fitness Center).
- **For employees:** masking is not required in team spaces for fully vaccinated employees who have uploaded confirmation of vaccination to the Engle Center and shown the confirmation email to their supervisor. Note: Team spaces are individual offices or other common spaces that are occupied by individuals who regularly work together and where vaccination status of those present can be known and confirmed to the employee supervisor. Unvaccinated individuals must mask in team spaces but may still work unmasked when by themselves in an office space with the door closed.
- **Speakers and presenters, including teaching faculty:** may remove their mask when speaking if able to maintain a distance from others of at least six feet.
- Masking is not required outdoors.

**Why this change? Why now?**

As referenced in previous communications, the University reserves the right to adapt its masking protocols as needed to respond to changing health and safety needs of the community. So, what has changed since Messiah originally announced its masking protocols in late June? The University’s decision was impacted primarily by:

- Most significantly, Messiah has already confirmed 3 positive student cases of COVID-19 during Welcome Week—resulting in 20+ contact-traced individuals.
- **Cumberland County, and the surrounding region, have been categorized as areas of high transmission** since Aug. 9, 2021. This puts our campus within the CDC guidelines for indoor masking for all individuals regardless of vaccination status.
- Fueled by the rise of the more transmissible Delta variant, our region has experienced a 37 percent increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the last seven days.
- It is relevant as well that Messiah’s undergraduate student body did not meet our vaccination goal as we had hoped and encouraged. (You may view current vaccination rates on our online dashboard, accessible Aug. 24 by 5 p.m.) We continue to encourage vaccination and offer it free of charge through the Engle Center, as the data show that higher rates of vaccination significantly decrease the spread of COVID-19.

Given the above factors, the University is making this change to prevent a spread that can quickly overwhelm our campus health systems—particularly for contact tracing, testing, quarantine and isolation. For example, each positive case typically has a range of at least 10-20 close contacts who must be notified and cared for through the Engle Center and related personnel. Just a few positive cases begin to create a significant exponential campus spread.

**Students:** If you did not bring a mask with you to campus, there will be a supply available for you at chapel, and in your residence hall/apartment. **Employees:** Starting tomorrow, you are expected to have a mask with you at all times while you are on campus until further notice.

**How long do we anticipate needing to mask indoors?**

As we’ve experienced in the last two months, conditions during a pandemic can change very quickly.
The key criterion for updates to this revised masking policy will be the extent of spread within our campus community. IRT will continue to carefully monitor weekly the following factors to determine when we may need to update or be able to return to a less restrictive indoor campus masking protocol:

- A consistently low number of positive cases and contact-traced individuals on campus over the first several weeks of classes.
- Increased vaccination rates in the undergraduate student body to assist in containing the spread of COVID-19.
- A change in related CDC masking guidelines.
- A decrease in our county/region transmission rate and a decrease in new cases of COVID-19.
- The receding of the Delta variant in our region.

The University did not make this decision lightly. We recognize the hindrance and personal inconvenience of masking—but we also balance this with our responsibility to protect the health of our students, employees and guests. A return to masking is not what we wanted to begin our academic year. But in current conditions, masking provides our best chance to sustain the positive aspects of campus life that we did not have last year such as full, in-person classes, restored and robust cocurricular activities, normal dining operations, and the ability to open our campus to off-campus travel and visitors.

We appreciate your cooperation with this new protocol as we begin our new academic year. As a reminder, the Engle Center continues to offer students and employees the opportunity to be vaccinated against COVID-19 free of charge. (Email LJWeaver@messiah.edu to schedule an appointment.) Please continue to watch your Messiah email, refer to the Together at Messiah website (www.messiah.edu/together) and subscribe to the emergency blog to be kept up to date as the semester unfolds.

—The Messiah University Integration and Response Team

Issued in compliance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, a federal law originally known as the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, which mandates timely notices and emergency notifications to the campus community. The Clery Act is enforced by the U.S. Department of Education. For additional information, contact the Department of Safety at (717) 691-6005.