

Grace and peace!

For the past two years, the CDC Mask Guidelines have been our standard for offering healthy and effective ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before I offer thoughts regarding next steps, I would like to pause to offer my sincerest thanks to the members and staff of Baldwin Community UMC for your perseverance through every ministry challenge placed before us and to the devotion brought to mask-wearing that kept everyone safe and healthy. Not only did we manage to keep our church and community safe while in our building, but we learned new, creative ways of being in ministry that would have never been attained otherwise. Well done, everyone! You should be incredibly proud of yourselves; I thank you for your faithfulness.

Beginning Sunday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, masks are no longer mandatory for worship or gatherings in compliance with the new guidelines. However, if you have health concerns or are not ready to remove your mask in public gatherings, your choice to continue wearing a mask will be honored and respected. What remains unchanged is the reminder that if you are sick or not feeling well, please stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 or any other communicable virus. Also, if you are not fully vaccinated, you are encouraged to continue wearing your mask in the church building.

Perhaps on Sunday morning as we wind down our second annual “Love Your Neighbor” series we might bring a spirit of discernment to one another as we move into what feels like a new phase. During the past month we have considered scriptures sharing the good news that love matters more. How did we personally give witness Christ’s love for us over the past few years? What were the lessons that we learned about how loving our neighbor cannot be separated from the love of God? And how do we envision God’s love being extended into our community from Baldwin Community UMC moving forward? By the grace and love of God, exciting days are before us, let us bind ourselves deeper into God’s expansive love, and may a spirit of kindness and generosity define the people, the church we are becoming!

In certain and sure hopes of glorious things to come,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela S. Gardner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Pamela S. Gardner