Dear friends,

As we begin our new year together, we are pleased to share with you our current COVID/Pandemic policy and protocols. I am grateful to Associate Dean David Watkins for his leadership in developing this document. I also want to express deep gratitude to all those who helped craft this document including, Dean Steed Davidson, Vice President Rev. Nannette Banks, Registrar Chandra Wade, HR Director Ashley Woodfaulk, Senior Director of Administration Natasha Gaines, and my assistant, Joyce Leachman. Lastly, we give thanks to our good friends and neighbors at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago ("LSTC") with whom we have coordinated our policies and COVID responses since the outset of the pandemic. In addition to the hard copy attached above, by the end of this week, our policy will also be accessible on our website and will be incorporated into our student, staff, and faculty handbooks. In the days ahead, we will ask that everyone in the McCormick community acknowledge that they have received and read the policy and will in good faith abide by it.

As we share our campus with LSTC and share both the JKM Library and the LRWC, we have attempted to mirror LSTC's current policies and protocols as much as possible to avoid confusion. Please note, however, that one area where McCormick's policy differs from LSTC's is our requirement of testing every 72 hours (3 days) for unvaccinated persons versus LSTC's requirement of testing once a week for unvaccinated persons.
As our policy exceeds the standard set by LSTC, our students will be able to access LRWC and JKM in accordance with LSTC’s protocols. When accessing either JKM or LRWC through LSTC, all McCormick students, staff, and faculty, will need to follow LSTC's protocols. Similarly, when accessing JKM or LRWC through McCormick, all McCormick students, staff, and faculty will need to follow McCormick's protocols (which, as noted above, will essentially mirror those of LSTC.)

In these days when so much seems uncertain, we can be certain of at least these two things:

1. There will be questions about this document; and
2. This document will evolve and change as developments, new data, new governmental directives, and our needs require.
In the law, we often refer to whether courts should establish "bright line tests" or rule on a case-by-case basis using what is sometimes referred to as a "balancing test." The Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute defines "bright line test" as follows:

An objective rule that resolves a legal issue in a straightforward, predictable manner. A bright-line rule is easy to administer and produces certain, though, arguably, not always equitable results.

A "balancing-test" is defined in this manner:

A subjective test with which a court weighs competing interests, e.g. between an inmate's liberty interest and the government's interest in public safety, to decide which interest prevails.

While bright line tests (or bright line rules and policies) have the benefit of clarity, they often are not flexible enough to meet changing circumstances or avoid inequitable or inconsistent results. Our policy attempts to give as much clarity as possible, while still retaining sufficient flexibility to address changing circumstances. Time will tell how well we have achieved that objective.

Please review and share your thoughts with either Dean Watkins or me. For any policy to be effective, it needs regular review and comment. Your input is essential to this ongoing process. We will make sure that there are opportunities to discuss, review, and, as necessary, recommend changes in future student council, town hall, staff, and faculty meetings.

We are grateful for all the grace and patience that this community has extended us and one another during challenging times.

Peace,

David