

**Church Re-Opening Task Force
Report to the Congregation
May 2021**

A Church Re-Opening Task Force was authorized by the Board at its March 4, meeting. The Task Force was assigned the following charge, subject to congregational review and discussion at our Annual Meeting in May:

Draft a framework and protocols to guide UUFM, as a covenantal community, to assess and measure the safe, compassionate, and inclusive use of our building and outdoor spaces for meetings, children's faith development, and worship.

Penny Herickhoff and John Knox serve as Task Force co-chairs. They attended Mid-America Webinars on this topic, reviewed materials provided by the CDC and Minnesota Dept. of Health, and examined use of space policies developed by other congregations, of differing sizes, in our region. At its May 6 meeting, the Board reviewed the initial draft policy language, developed by the Task Force, and identified several additional topics the draft policy should include.

To invite further comment on the draft policy, prior to our May 23 business meeting, the Board asked the Task Force to name and convene a focus group made up of a modest cross section of the congregation. A ten-household cross-section was identified. This past week, the Safe Spaces draft language was e-mailed to congregants in those households, inviting their review and comment. Comments could be shared in one of three ways; by e-mail to either of the co-chairs, by attending an in-person outdoor meeting with the co-chairs at UUFM on May 14, or by attending a May 14 Zoom meeting to comment on the draft policy.

Below is the SAFE USE OF SPACE DRAFT POLICY in its current form. It identifies core principles and a sliding scale of permissible space use reflecting current safety data. Small group discussion and comment on the Draft Policy by congregants, using Zoom break out rooms, is the final item on the agenda of our May 23 Business Meeting. We look forward to your feedback as our church strives to adapt to a changing world. Under the draft policy, UUFM is currently functioning at **Level 2 status**.

Please send questions, comments or concerns to one of our co-chairs:

John Knox: johnmacknox@gmail.com

Penny Herickhoff: phcanoe@gmail.com

UUFM's Safe Use of Space Plan

May, 2021

Congregational Goals: In March, 2020, UUFM's Board closed our building to protect the community from virus spread. Our abiding goal is to care for one another. We prioritize the health and safety of our members and our broader communities; especially care for the most vulnerable, within and beyond our congregations. We respect the advice of health officials working to mitigate the potential transmission of COVID-19 and to create herd immunity. Increased availability of vaccines to protect against virus spread elevates our hope that small groups will be able to safely gather in-person. As a community, we deeply desire to safely return to robust in-person worship and fellowship. We are attentive to continuing spread of the deadly virus and its variants and commit to honor recommended limits to physical contact with one another. To honor the human dignity of all, we faithfully commit to individual and collective action to control virus spread to ensure public safety. We expect full cooperation among all users of our indoor and outdoor spaces. We are grateful for technological advances. We have adapted our worship, business affairs and ministries to use on-line formats to limit virus spread. We explore and embrace new ways to express love and support for one another. We use these tools to continue our searches for truth and meaning as well as our justice work with partners.

Summer 2021: In March, 2021, our Board established an Opening Task-Force to consult with our staff, UUA and representatives of the congregation to develop a draft Plan to Open, which shall include specific guidelines concerning acceptable degrees of physical contact and precautions to limit spread of the virus to congregants and visitors. During May, 2021, the Board will invite congregational discussion, reaction and comment.

PATHWAYS TO OPEN - CORE PRINCIPLES

- **Inclusivity and justice:** We will not exclude people and will take special care that equity and anti-oppression are centered in our decision making. We will not seek to gather in person until vaccinations are available to all adults.
- **Safety:** We will be an active partner in maintaining safe communities. We will provide a safe and healthy workplace for our minister and staff, congregants, volunteers, guests and visitors. To do so, we have adopted a COVID-19 Safety Awareness Plan, in consultation with our staff. The Plan is administered by _____. All employees, congregants, volunteers, guests and visitors must implement and honor its guidelines. Managers and supervisors are authorized to enforce plan provisions.
- **Community matters:** We value our community and being together. As soon as it is safe to gather in an inclusive way, we will.
- **Pro-science:** We support vaccination for those who are able as a scientific, reasonable, and loving decision that protects yourself and others. We believe that vaccines are effective and trust the scientists who have worked on them.
- **Transparency, and periodic adaptation:** We commit to on-going adaptation of our planning and practice. We will be transparent and responsive in adoption and use of recommended sanitation practices and Minnesota State Department of Health data

measurements of virus transmission. This plan will be revised when medical authorities offer new information and recommend new disease prevention protocols and products. When approved, this plan, and subsequent revisions, will be posted on the UUFM Web.

- **Two-directional movement between risk levels.** This plan will move up and down five levels of building and grounds use, based upon risk as measured by local transmission data posted and maintained by the MN Dept of Health. Beginning June 15, 2021, on Friday of each week our open level will be posted on our Website.

PATHWAYS TO OPEN - ESSENTIAL FACTS:

1. **Vaccinations.** Vaccinations are a critical component for us to gather in-person because they prevent severe disease and death and dramatically reduce infections and transmission. To limit virus spread and increase public safety, members and friends are encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Rapid COVID testing, vaccination availability and low testing positivity in our region all reduce the risk of virus spread.
2. **Masks.** Masks are effective in preventing virus spread. Please wear a mask in public and in crowds. We will require masks until we reach 80% immunization in Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties, and will welcome their use after that.
3. **Ventilation.** COVID is airborne. Keeping the air clean and moving reduces transmission. UUFM's Board authorized Building and Grounds to hire a local firm to improve the air circulation to pull air upward and out through a roof vent. This action aligns with recommendations of the MN Department of Health to prevent virus spread. We anticipate ventilation work will be complete by June 30, 2021, allowing the installation of streaming technology in our sanctuary to begin. No decision has been made regarding the need or desirability of air filtration systems in our building.
4. **Sanitation and Cleaning.** Proper sanitation and cleaning protocols will be used to limit virus spread. Each of the 4 risk levels identify required cleaning and sanitation practices, as recommended by the MN. Dept. of Health.

Level 1: COVID and Variant Mutations are spreading unchecked by comprehensive testing or national vaccination regimen.

- Indoor spaces:
 - closed to all but building inspections and emergency use by staff.
 - Hand sanitation stations in place and bleach wipes in 1st floor bathrooms.
- Outdoor spaces:
 - May be used by small groups (10 or less) if masked and socially distanced.
 - No bathroom facilities are available.

Level 2: COVID & variant transmission continues, cases in southern MN are in decline, COVID testing is readily available, a state-administered vaccination regimen is in place and is readily available to persons age 16 and over by appointment or walk in.

- Indoor spaces:
 - closed to all but vaccinated staff - for daily use Monday through Thursday, vaccinated library volunteer, and periodic building safety inspections.
- Outdoor spaces:
 - May be used by small groups (10 or less) if masked and socially distanced.

Level 2 Protocols:

- Worship and CFD gatherings remain online:
 - no one in the building on Sundays
 - no in-person meetings of Teams, Committees, or other Fellowship groups.
- Staff is fully vaccinated and per CDC regulations can be in the same physical space together without masking.
- Staff will be in the building Monday through Thursday. (no others should be present except for drop offs or pre-arranged needs to work in building)
- No Staff in the building on Fridays. (this way John can do a building check and what he needs to do as Treasurer)
- Staff must remain at home if they do not feel well (PTO is available to them)
- Staff must work from home or take PTO if a family member becomes ill.
- Building will remain locked while Staff are in the building.
- When others come into the building, masks should be worn and staff will don masks.
- Bleach wipes are available in each office and rest rooms on first floor.
- Hand sanitizing stations are available.

Level 3: COVID & variant transmission continues, the Governor has announced that herd immunity has been achieved in Minnesota, COVID testing is readily available, a state-administered vaccination regimen is in place and is readily available to persons age 12 and over by appointment or walk in.

- Indoor spaces:
 - **Daily use M - R:** closed to all but vaccinated staff - for daily use, vaccinated library volunteer, and periodic building safety inspections.
 - **Friday use:** Church lower level may be used by small groups (10 or less), by advance appointment, if masked and socially distanced, provided that:
 - the individual making the appointment commits to e-mail a written attendance record for every meeting to the UUFM office, within 24 hours of the meeting. Please use **COVID attendance record** in the subject line. This required record keeping will assist in contact tracing to provide notice of exposure.
 - All groups and participants using indoor space must covenant to immediately **notify the UUFM office and minister, by e-mail**, if they or a member of their household has tested positive for COVID.
 - **Our sanctuary will be unavailable** for use during summer months, due to planned ventilation improvements and installation and testing of added technology required for Multi-platform worship.
- Outdoor spaces:

- May be used by groups if group members are socially distanced.

Level 3 Protocols:

- Worship and CFD gatherings remain online:
 - no one in the building on Sundays, to permit cleaning
- Staff is fully vaccinated and per CDC regulations can be in the same physical space together without masking.
- Staff will be in the building Monday through Thursday. (no others should be present except for drop offs or pre-arranged needs to work in building)
- No Staff in the building on Fridays.
- Staff must remain at home if they do not feel well (PTO is available to them)
- Staff must work from home or take PTO if a family member becomes ill.
- Building will remain locked while Staff are in the building to limit exposure.
- When others come into the building, masks should be worn and staff will don masks.
- Bleach wipes are available in each office and all rest rooms in the building
- Hand sanitizing stations are available.

Level 4: Level 3 conditions have been met, UUFM sanctuary ventilation improvements and new technology installation and testing are complete and the UUFM Board has notified the congregation of a specific date Multi-platform worship will commence, which will include in-person worship.

- Indoor spaces

Board notice to the congregation that Multi-platform Worship will begin, shall be accompanied by Board notice of **UUFM's Approved Multi-platform Worship Protocols** which have been adopted. These protocols are currently under development by the Opening Task Force.

- Outdoor spaces:

- May be used by groups if all group members are fully vaccinated. Social distancing is required in all cases where one or more group members is/are not vaccinated.

This is a LIVING Document which will be amended and adapted by the Board as scientific knowledge expands and facts and conditions change.