

First Unitarian Church
of Omaha
COVID & Reopening
Update
May 16, 2021

Ministry Team Council (MTC)
Multichannel Church Task Force
Reopening Task Force



Values Guiding Our Decisions

- **SAFETY:** protecting lives (of our members, visitors, staff, and the wider community of which we are a part), being especially mindful of those who are most vulnerable
- **INCLUSION:** offering our programs as inclusively as we can, for all ages and health statuses
- **SCIENCE:** following the science to help contain the pandemic
- **INPUT:** welcoming input from everyone
- **NIMBLENESS:** remaining flexible as we learn what works and respond to evolving circumstances

Our Values Lead Us To...

- At a minimum, follow CDC and local public health guidance
- Be open to more stringent guidelines in order to protect and include more people
- Offer programs as inclusively as we can -- for example, we won't return to in-person worship as a weekly occurrence until we can also do so online
- Respect individual privacy -- hence we will not ask who among our members or visitors are vaccinated or make different rules for different people (note that children under 12 do not yet have access to the vaccine)

Milestones of Pandemic Operations

Spring-Summer 2020

- Building closed promptly; Zoom worship starting 3-12-20
- Support to members & small groups to move to Zoom
- In-reach to members
- Last May, we called a new settled minister!
- Continued full operations over summer thru minister gap

Milestones of Pandemic Operations

Fall-Winter

- Continued worship and small groups support on Zoom
- Started quarterly CommUUnity Caravans in parking lot (Sept.)
- Protocols established for volunteers in the building (Sept.)
- Held successful supplemental stewardship campaign
- Protocols established for rentals; resumed booking weddings
- Another round of in-reach plus buddy system (Dec-Jan)

Milestones of Pandemic Operations

Winter-Spring 2021

- Another round of caring in-reach is underway
- Most successful stewardship campaign in 5 years, raising over 25k more than previous year without need of a supplemental campaign
- Multichannel Church Task Force
 - Matthew Dewell, Gary Emenitove, Stephanie Rodriguez, Kate Wiig
 - Assessment of current technology underway
- Reopening Task Force formed
 - Beth Conover, Patricia Soto, Diane Withem, Christina Strong, & Jennifer Larsen

What the Reopening Task Force is working on:

- Reopening Task Force has developed guidelines for the following groups that have been approved or being considered by the MTC:
 - Outdoor youth activities- approved
 - Indoor small groups (committees or interest groups)- under consideration
 - Outdoor worship activities- under consideration
 - Ministry visits to homes- being finalized
 - Indoor worship services- in development
- We have surveyed the congregation to prepare for next steps
- And to date, everyone has stayed safe!

Survey Says...

Reopening for Worship

- Your expectations for reopening are similar to what most UU churches are doing: planning for fall return to sanctuary.
- Less than one-fifth of respondents think it is safe to return to worship in the sanctuary right now.
- 55% think it will be safe by fall.
- Others are holding out for herd immunity or children's access to vaccination, whenever those might happen.

Survey Says...

Priorities & Volunteers

- The most prioritized activity currently is online worship.
- Many other forms of connection - online, outdoors, and indoors - are valued and desired.
- Quite a few are willing to volunteer in person.
- **But** it's not clear yet whether we would have enough volunteers in various areas for full functioning in the building. Likely by fall.

Survey Says...

Families

- Most families with children who responded are likely to bring their kids to in-person activities with precautions like masking.
- But to include families with infants, we will need nursery personnel and increased sanitizing.

Survey Says...

Readiness to Adapt

- For in-person activities, most expect masking, social distancing, no physical contact, both in worship and in RE.
- Many understand that transmission risk is very low through surfaces.
- Most people will come (when ready) even if we aren't singing.
- Most people would be willing to pre-register for worship.
- Broad support for adaptations to the sanctuary that respect its historic status and support multi-channel and AV-rich church.

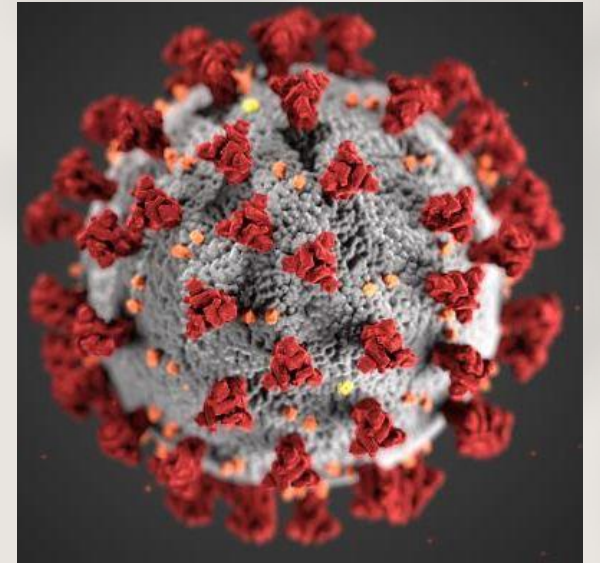
What we know about spread of SARS-CoV-2 that causes COVID-19

- **Virus is spread primarily by droplets** from one to another
- **Large droplets travel 3 feet with talking, 6 feet with coughing**
- **Smaller droplets (aerosols) travel more than 6 feet and remain longer**
- **Masking required to block aerosols for inside activities in particular**



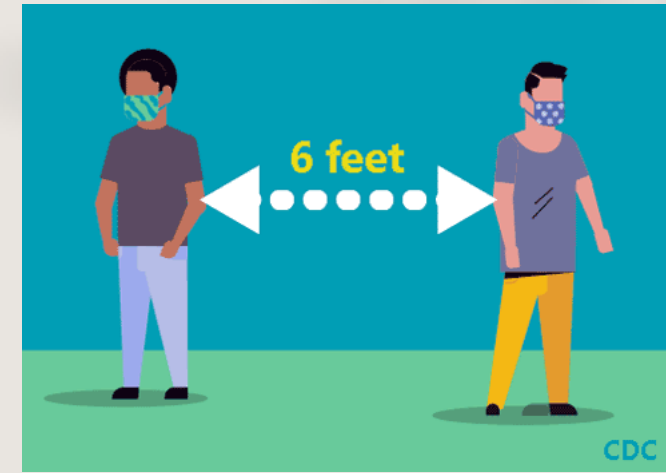
Current status of COVID-19 pandemic

- **Cases are lowest in Nebraska** since start of pandemic
- **Vaccinations increasing**
- **Vaccinations less effective against variants**, which are now common in Nebraska and Iowa
- **Infection after vaccine is** already reported
- **Boosters in development**
- **Again, masking still important**



How does this inform our policies?

- Masking, social distancing, & hand washing proven effective before the vaccine
- We strongly recommend vaccination
- Vaccines do not completely protect us
- Some people cannot yet get vaccinated
- Vaccine status will not be a requirement for participation because of our principle of inclusiveness
- Masking will remain important whether vaccinated or not



Current Data

- COVID-19 cases lowest since the start of the pandemic (see below)
- % Vaccination depends on whether counting all persons or just those 18 and up
- % positive data varies based on when CDC receives data (not weekends) and availability/how many getting tested in the state
- Trend in cases and test positivity also important

Metric (5/11/21)	Cases/100,000	% Vaccination 18 & up (full/1 dose)
US	12 (and going down)	34%/46%
Nebraska	11 (and going down)	45%/39%
Douglas County	12 (and going down)	49% (fully)
Sarpy County	10 (and going down)	
Iowa	9 (and going down)	46%/38%
Pottawattamie County	12 (and going down)	

Reopening Task Force Next Steps

- The reopening committee will finalize metrics to help guide our decisions and changes
- The Reopening Committee will also monitor science, data, and policies from national, reliable sources

What's Next?

Now & Coming Right Up

- Rides+ are available to help members get vaccinated (rides@firstuomaha.org or call the church office)
- Small groups can continue to gather outdoors
- Indoor Small Group Gathering Guidelines - by end of May
- Sanctuary Pilgrimage (households/pods) - new this week
- CommUUnity Caravan OUT of cars - June 6
- Outdoor worship service on June 12 (anticipate streaming)

What's Next?

Planning Continues...

- Multichannel Church Task Force - evaluating tech needs & options as well as skilled support for combined live/online church (**target: by end of June**) - recommendations will go to MTC & board [suggestions, help etc. welcome to techies@firstuomaha.org]
- Reopening Task Force is completing a stepwise reopening plan (**target: early June**) - will go to board for policy action [suggestions, help etc. welcome to reopening@firstuomaha.org]
- MTC tracks total picture - tech readiness, people power available, when thresholds are met for next stage per stepwise plan

What's Next? Summer

- Like most UU churches, our activities will continue
 - online
 - outdoors (within guidelines)
 - for small groups, may take place indoors (within guidelines) so long as COVID rates hold at lower level
- Our staff and volunteers need time for earned rest
- We also need time to prepare for full reopening and the shift to multi-channel church

What's Next?

Reality Check

Reopening will require

- acquiring needed technology (for our value of inclusion)
- likely hiring a new tech staff member and/or new training for tech volunteers
- planning RE programs, recruiting and training teachers, hiring nursery staff, updating protocols
- reorganizing hospitality teams, replenishing and preparing the worship team, adapting music program to current conditions and science on safety

What's Next? Reality Check

Zoom fatigue is real!

Please care for yourself;
participate in the ways that are
available and that feed you.



What's Next?

Looking to Fall

- Outdoor worship service in Turner Parker on Sept. 12
- Then hope to start multi-channel worship – reopening the sanctuary (with precautions), while continuing to offer some form of online participation
- Stepwise plan will tell us indicators to track and what levels would trigger stepping up and back at each stage
- Depending on course of pandemic, it could go back and forth