

Report of the Reopening Task Force

Prepared by Linda Topp, November 19, 2021

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In July we had a draft report ready to go with recommendations for opening in September. Things changed. Now, we have just met again on November 17 and have agreed upon the recommendations below.

CONSIDERATIONS

As our guide, we used key principles from the UUA...

- Root decisions in the values of inclusion and consent,
- follow the science,
- go slow and be flexible,
- be realistic with expectations of ourselves and others.

...and the last line of our UU Asheville Covenant:

- Our life together declares that the future of each depends on the good of all and the future of all depends on the good of each.

UNCERTAINTY

We feel comfortable that conditions through December will allow us to proceed with our recommendations. We plan to meet again in mid-January, after seeing how things go in December both congregationally and COVID-wise, to determine next steps. However, our number one caveat to these recommendations is: UNLESS SOMETHING CHANGES.

IF/WHEN SOMETHING DOES CHANGE

Rather than use volunteer time to plan for a variety of scenarios “just in case,” the Task Force agrees that UU Asheville staff will be charged with adjusting these recommendations if things shift dramatically.

THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY

These recommendations are based on what we are experiencing today and decisions we have already made about gatherings:

- Infection rates in Buncombe County are still high (over 100 per 100,000) but all other measurements are less than “high.”
- Vaccines are now available for everyone 5 and older.
- The vaccines are still effective against the current variants and boosters are now available for those 18 and older.
- New air-handling equipment is installed in all three buildings with UV-C virus-killing lights and double-size filters for improving air quality
- Masks and hand sanitizers will be available

- All worship services are being livestreamed and recorded for delayed viewing
- Some adult faith development classes will either be offered in a hybrid format or be completely virtual (hybrid in this case means a class or two in person to start and the rest online)
- RE classes for children pre-K and up will be conducted on Zoom or outside as much as possible

Recommendations – Unless Something Changes

Limited Seating and “Easy” Distancing

Beginning December 5, 50 people will be allowed to attend Sunday worship. We will use a sign-up system that allows for the following: 1) limited attendance, 2) a waitlist so we see if we have demand beyond the limit, 3) names and email addresses in case we need to contact trace.

Distancing will be accomplished by seating people in every other pew row. That means that there will be no distancing side-to-side, but there won't be anyone breathing behind you either.

Vaccinations

UU Asheville will require that all eligible people be vaccinated but proof will not be required. We believe UUs are a highly vaccinated population and that unvaccinated folks are unlikely to lie about it. In any case, vaccinated people are protected from the virus. ALL RE teachers must show proof of vaccination as part of UU Asheville's vetting procedures for teachers. Signs will be posted on the doors noting that vaccinations are required for all eligible people.

Masks

Masks will be required for now, certainly at least as long as Buncombe County has a masking requirement.

Religious Exploration

At the present time, classes are being held on either Zoom or in person for children preK and above, with some classes meeting every other week. As we open further, classes will move to more in-person classes at the request of parents with children registered in our programs. At this time, we offer no childcare for those younger than preK. These youngest ones are welcome in the Sanctuary for worship. We expect to have a video feed of the service available in Sandburg Hall to help this situation.

Holding Hands and other person-to-person contact (e.g., hugging)

Worship leaders will announce to the congregation that we will NOT hold hands anymore during the Closing Song (Longtime Sun) but will provide an alternative. Since handholding is a recognized way to pass along cold and flu viruses, this will be a permanent change. Other contact will be by consent. (e.g., “Shake hands?” or “May I hug you?”)

In every Our Whole Lives (OWL) course, we teach the concept of consent, especially bodily autonomy. This means that everyone is in charge of their own bodies and gets to decide what to do with their bodies. It has always been true that some people were not comfortable with

being touched. That's why we recommend that from now on we all ask consent before touching. It may feel awkward at first, but it will lead to a better environment for all and serve as an example to our children and youth who have already been schooled in this.

Singing

For now, we recommend that no singing by congregants occur during worship services. We may use soloists during worship, and the choir can prerecord their work, and we can use other prerecorded music. Hymns will not be sung by congregants, nor will we sing "Long Time Sun." You'll just get to hum along with Les.

Coffee Hour

As long as masking is required, we will not serve anything after the service. People may certainly hang out in Sandburg Hall after the service if they are masked.

Meetings and Gatherings

Where or how people meet will be up to the individual group. Groups may meet in person, on Zoom, or even both at the same time if they have the skill to do that. Groups below 15 may make their own rules for meeting (e.g., no masks while indoors) as long as everyone in the group agrees. If using the building, the meeting space needs to be reserved.