

University Lutheran Church of Hope COVID 19 Preparedness Plan March 17, 2022

Earlier versions of this document are available in the church office.

“What else is the epidemic but a fire which instead of consuming wood and straw devours life and body? You ought to think this way: ‘...the enemy has sent us poison and toxins. Therefore, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated, and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence.’”

-Martin Luther (translation by Rev. Bill Russell), in “Whether One Should Flee from the Plague” (1527), Luther’s Works, vol. 43

“We entered the time of pandemic saying that our desire to love the neighbor would guide us; that we would respect the best thinking of our elected and healthcare officials. This understanding and commitment has not changed.”

-Bp Ann Svennungsen, Minneapolis Area Synod, in a Message About In-Person Worship, May 21, 2020

“As a community of faith we aspire to these goals:

- *Cultivate deep roots in our neighborhood and the University community, by actively making our walls porous....*
- *Embrace all persons throughout their life journey in a community of love, respect, and acceptance....*
- *Fuel authentic worship and deepen spirituality....”*

-University Lutheran Church of Hope, A Vision for the Coming Years: Opening Our Life Together, Spring 2021

“This outbreak is exposing the deep structural inequities that make communities pushed to the margins more vulnerable to health crises in good times and in bad...These structural inequities in our health care system do not ignore racial and gender disparities — and neither should our response to this pandemic.”

-Dorianne Mason, Director of Health Equity, National Women’s Law Center, as quoted in the Washington Post, April 7, 2020

“Some congregations are starting to come back together for in-person worship services after a year together online. While Covid persists, the in-person experience needs to be modified pretty dramatically. Folks miss singing together, sharing a meal, and physically embracing one another. But coming back together doesn’t mean we get to do those things anytime soon. How do we prepare the space and the people for a very different experience, one that will continue to be shared with those who gather online? It’s a short-term responsibility and longer-term opportunity. Let’s design and communicate an experience that has a Covid-safe social contract and honors the grief and trauma people carry with them. Let’s practice personal responsibility and mutual accountability so that the most vulnerable, traumatized, hesitant, or unfamiliar person there can say, ‘When I was ready to show up, this community kept its word and their behavior valued me.’”

-Rev. Meta Herrick Carlson, Pastor and Writer, <https://www.metaherrickcarlson.com/blog/im-going-in>, 2021

“The question here is not whether our faith and faith communities are ‘essential’ to our lives as people of faith; we know they are! The question is whether [opening] our church building doors is ‘essential’ to practicing our faith and advancing the recovery of our communities.”

-Rev. Shari Prestemon, Conference Minister, Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ (an ecumenical partner with the ELCA), May 20, 2020

Policy: University Lutheran Church of Hope (ULCH) abides by state and local guidelines, ordinances, and directives related to the prevention of COVID-19 for all who use our building and grounds.

Purpose: This policy, with the following procedures, provides direction for those making decisions regarding health and safety practices in compliance with the Minnesota Department of Health in the prevention of COVID-19.

Procedural Plans: Procedures reflect best practices based on science, community needs, and ULCH's principle of equity that underpins the ministry of this congregation. Procedures will be evaluated, updated, and communicated on a regular basis to employees, congregants, building users and renters. These procedures and plans have been developed in dialogue with the Vision and Governance Board and the staff, and are based on CDC and MDH guidelines (referenced at the end of this document).

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REFLECTIONS IN CONTEXT

As a community we are thankful and elated that the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be subsiding. We are excited to think about pre-pandemic practices and behaviors. Yet, there may be a "new normal" that the pandemic has taught us and we move forward with caution and care.

ULCH was on the leading edge of change, choosing to move to Zoom for worship and meetings due to COVID-19 early on in the pandemic. In this iteration of the policy, we are choosing to lag a bit behind the leading-edge guidance from CDC. In both cases we have been aware of the larger community guidance and practices **and** also keenly aware of our ULCH community and best practices specific to this community (which align with science and specific ULCH community need/desire).

There are times when it is good to be on the leading edge of change or adoption of something new and there are times when it is ok to lag a bit behind the desire to adopt a new behavior or change in practice. The following policy update reflects a cautious approach in this next phase of the pandemic.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

This plan has been developed to minimize the risk of infection related to COVID-19 for all in our community. The principle of prevention and risk minimization guides this plan. This plan provides procedures that reflect how we live in community with COVID-19, caring for the most vulnerable among us.

- As of February 25, 2022 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began assigning a weekly community level for each county in the United States; Low (green) Medium (yellow) or High (Red) Risk. This policy update is based a "green" level as defined by CDC. **If, Hennepin County moves into a "yellow" or "red" level, we will revert back to more restrictive measures for prevention. See notes below; these changes will be communicated to the congregation as needed.**
- As of March 11, 2022 Hennepin and Ramsey counties in Minnesota lifted their mask mandates.

- Although these data are encouraging at this phase of the pandemic, ULCH will continue the prevention strategies listed below. **ULCH will continue to require wearing masks indoors regardless of CDC assigned community level.**
 - **Rationale for continued use of masks:**
 - We are a community with open doors that welcomes our neighbors. We do not assume all are or can be vaccinated (although/even though we do strongly encourage vaccination).
 - We are acutely aware that there some on in our community who are not eligible for vaccination or are in close relationship with those who are immunocompromised or are considered high risk for COVID.
 - In worship, we like to sing. Singing is an activity where there is greater possibility for respiratory infection. Masking is a reasonable way to prevent the spread of respiratory infection.

- **Prevention Strategies**
 - **At all times:**
 - **If you believe you are sick** (COVID-19 related or any infectious illness), please do not attend events at ULCH or offsite at other venues. Contact a healthcare provider for consultation.
 - **We strongly encourage vaccination whenever it is possible.** We understand vaccination to be a social responsibility. It is done for the good of the many, and something that we can do to show respect and responsibility for those who cannot be vaccinated or still await vaccination, and those in high-risk categories, given age or underlying conditions. Any risk of exposure that one person takes on is a risk that the whole household is also taking on.
[About COVID-19 Vaccine - Minnesota Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/about/COVID-19/vaccine/)
 - **As you venture out, assess your individual risk** for yourself, your family and the community.
 - **Recommended preventive measures** will continue to be followed by ULCH as described by the Minnesota Department of Health.
 - **These policies relate to staff, volunteers and all who use Hope’s building and grounds.**
 - **Wearing Masks, Keeping Distance, and Washing Hands**
 - **Outdoors** masks are not required. We also respect those who choose to wear a mask outdoors, we recognize there are many reasons to choose this option.
 - **Indoors** for worship, meetings and gatherings masks are to be worn by all (vaccinated or unvaccinated) except children under two years old and those with health reasons.
 - **We will continue to encourage distance in worship spaces.** Musicians and leaders who are able to keep great distance or are vaccinated may remove masks for leading.
 - **Staff and volunteers working alone** in private office spaces do not need to wear masks.
 - **Bring your own mask if you are able.** A supply of disposable masks is available.
 - **Note regarding masks:** The purpose of the mask is to contain particles that the wearer might disperse to others. The mask does not prevent COVID-19, but may be a means of attempting to contain one’s own contaminants (cough, sneeze, etc) from others. N95, KN95, or KN94 are the preferred masks.

- **Wash hands** regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer (60% alcohol). Reminder signs are posted throughout the building.
- **Accessing the Building**
 - At the **designated main entrance (north door) of ULCH**, COVID-19 information, signage, the ULCH COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, masks, hand sanitizer, and supplies for wiping surfaces will be available.
 - A **COVID-19 Symptom checklist** will be posted at the entrance to the building as a reminder to staff, congregants, guests, renters, and service providers that entry to the building acknowledges the lack of any of the symptoms on the checklist.
- **Scheduling**
 - **Please schedule all events through the church administrator.**
 - **We strive to be stewards of the space**, clean thoroughly, be hospitable and follow prevention practices. Scheduling makes this possible.
 - **Staff and leaders are ready to support** the community with scheduling needs and options for gathering online or in a hybrid manner (e.g. Zoom, Facetime, etc.) for meetings, fellowship, worship, support and individual conversation and pastoral care.
 - **As groups discern where and how to meet**, please contact Pastor Jen Nagel (lead pastor) or Nathan Obrestad (church administrator) for additional consultation.
 - **When the weather is mild, enjoy gathering outdoors** whenever possible, and use outdoor space for socializing.
- **When gathering offsite, please use this COVID-19 Preparedness Plan as guidance for your event.**
 - **Provide to the group the link to this policy.** It can be found here: <http://www.ulch.org/ulch-response-to-covid-19>

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS FOR GATHERINGS, STAFF, AND ALL USERS

Moving through this pandemic, we will continue to honor the need and desire for distancing. We all have different comfort levels regarding distancing. We ask that you thoughtfully consider your needs and the needs of others as you are welcomed back into shared spaces. **Masks are always optional in outdoor areas, but not required.**

Please consider your own situation as you decide to participate in any activities at ULCH. Consider risks to your own health and those around you. We honor your decision to pass on an activity. We are committed to your well-being and the well-being of the entire community.

	Inside – Expectations <i>(Masks Required for CDC green/yellow/red levels)</i>	Outside – Expectations <i>(Masks not Required for CDC green/yellow. Masks required for red level)</i>
<p>Worship Gatherings (Sundays, Midweek) *https://acda.org/resources-for-choral-professionals-during-a-pandemic</p>	<p>Sanctuary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are required • Follow seating indicators in the pews/chairs • Singing* - congregational singing with a mask on • Open doors and windows when possible for increased air circulation • Seek alternate ways to share the peace from a distance • Share Holy Communion keeping greater distance • Children’s tables will be available for each family (rather than kids massed together) • Key leaders may remove masks when essential • Sanitizer is available. • A Zoom and YouTube option is available • We are not currently using the chapel for most services because of its small size and lack of airflow • The chapel is suitable for pastoral care and small rituals. 	<p>Parking lot, Courtyard, Patio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required. • Distance with mutual consent • Singing - may sing with or without masks • Seek alternate ways to share the peace from a distance • A Zoom and YouTube option is available
<p>Meetings, Faith Formation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are required • Honor distance • When indoors, schedule our larger spaces where greater distance and circulation is possible (consider Room 206, the Lounge, Fellowship Hall, Heritage Hall, the Youth Room) • Open doors and windows when possible for increased air circulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required. • Honor distance • In good weather, meeting outdoors is a wonderful option (consider the patio, the courtyard and around the grounds) • Zoom is available for a hybrid option • Have a mask available for building access

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoom is available for a hybrid option. 	
<p>Activities with Children (Sunday School is currently meeting on Zoom, with regular outdoor family activities.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are required • Honor distance • Limit in-person inside activities • Listen well to the needs, decisions, and yearnings of families and their particular experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required. • Honor distance • Lean into outdoor activities! • Zoom is available for a hybrid option • Have a mask available for building access
<p>Occasional Worship Services (Weddings, Funerals, Special Services and Rituals)</p>	<p>Sanctuary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are required • Follow seating indicators in the pews/chairs • Singing* - congregational singing with a mask on • Key leaders and participants may remove masks when essential • Open doors and windows when possible for increased air circulation • See the Worship Gathering section above for specific guidance • A Zoom and/or YouTube livestream option is available 	<p>Parking lot, Courtyard, Patio, Graveside, Park, Backyards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required. • Distance with mutual consent • Singing - may sing with or without masks • See the Worship Gathering section above for specific guidance • A Zoom and YouTube option is available
<p>Music Making (choir in worship, choir rehearsal, other music) https://acda.org/resources-for-choral-professionals-during-a-pandemic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks required for rehearsals and choir leadership in worship • Honor distance and spacing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required.
<p>Fellowship Time <i>NOTE: If the CDC Level is at yellow or red, food and drinks will not be served – INSIDE or OUTSIDE</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are required • Honor distance • “Finger” foods and drinks may be served. • We are not yet resuming “sit down” meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required • Honor distance • “Finger” foods and drinks may be served.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During March and April we will offer fellowship for special events • After Easter, we will schedule more regular fellowship opportunities (weekly after 10:30am service) • Use the lounge, patio, and courtyard, keeping doors open for optimal airflow • Encourage people to use the outdoor spaces as much as possible 	

<p>Food (It's the social nature of food that's the issue...being in close proximity while cooking or serving, removing masks to eat, leaning in to converse.) <i>NOTE: If the CDC Level is at yellow or red, food and drinks will not be served – INSIDE or OUTSIDE</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear masks • Honor distance • Small groups can prepare food in the main kitchen/fellowship hall to be distributed outside or offsite • Pizza or bread oven preparation can be done in the main kitchen/fellowship hall • Indoor Fellowship Meals and full meal funeral receptions are not possible at this time • Small groups of volunteers or staff may elect to eat indoors when distance is kept • Small groups: Masks may be removed for eating and drinking, then put back on. • For special occasions (a memorial service, celebrations, Easter, etc.) modified and simple receptions may be possible, including hot/cold drinks, "finger foods" or simple options, etc. (Easter Fellowship is planned for Easter Sunday: lounge, patio, courtyard, very simple offerings such as drinks, fruit, boiled eggs, rolls) • For these events, consider best practices for serving and encourage distance and airflow in the space • For kitchen use, schedule with the church administrator. This helps us monitor use and clean more effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required. • Honor distance • "Finger" foods and drinks may be served • For special occasions (a memorial service, Easter, celebrations, etc.) modified and simple receptions may be possible, including hot/cold drinks, "finger foods", dessert, etc. • For these events, consider best practices for serving
<p>Nursery/Child Care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nursery area is not available at this time. • Family friendly areas in the sanctuary are available during worship services. • Families are encouraged to make their own decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We encourage use of the outdoor play space in the courtyard (supplies are kept inside the storage cabinet within the fenced area)

	<p>about safe practices for their family</p>	
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff will be fully vaccinated for COVID – 19 prior to employment. • Masks may be removed if working alone in a space • Arrange with lead pastor to schedule working at church or offsite 	
Visitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear masks when visiting indoors and honor distance as able and appropriate • When fully vaccinated, and if comfortable, staff and volunteers may visit in hospitals, nursing homes, and other locations • Consider larger spaces with airflow that still offer privacy, for instance the sanctuary, chapel, or lounge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks are not required • Alternative visitation options can be sought: walks, sitting in the courtyard, window visits, etc. • Consider phone calls, Zoom and Facetime as alternates
Restrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The restroom in the nursery/child care space is currently closed • As needed, signage will be placed on the restroom doors indicating these guidelines • Cleaning occurs according to MDH recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When at church for outside events, wear a mask when you need to access the building to use the restroom • We continue to provide an outside port-a-potty in the parking lot. During COVID there have been less public facilities available in the city and this is one option for our unsheltered neighbors and others. This restroom is cleaned by the providers.
Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaccinations are strongly encouraged for the sake of the whole community and necessary for those providing hospitality • Masks may be removed if working alone in a space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaccinations are strongly encouraged for the sake of the whole community and necessary for those providing hospitality

<p>Use by Non-Church Groups (AA and support group, other rentals, etc.)</p>	<p>As scheduling allows, we welcome groups who abide by these procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See specific types of activity above. • Schedule through the Church Administrator 	<p>As scheduling allows, we welcome groups who abide by these procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See specific types of activity above.
<p>P.E.A.S.E. Academy (the Minnesota Transitions Charter School-MTCS-recovery high school with whom we share our building)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of MTCS, PEASE Academy, and ULCH, opting for the more restrictive of the three, or as agreed upon between ULCH and PEASE leadership • As MTCS policies evolve, PEASE will consult with ULCH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of MTCS, PEASE Academy, and ULCH, opting for the more restrictive of the three, or as agreed upon between ULCH and PEASE leadership
<p>Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of LCM and ULCH, opting for the more restrictive of the two, or as agreed upon between LCM and ULCH leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of LCM and ULCH, opting for the more restrictive of the two, or as agreed upon between LCM and ULCH leadership

- **Facility related notes:**
 - <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefaitH.pdf> (pp 7-8)
 - **We have an older facility with a very limited HVAC system.** Our system doesn't move around fresh air as some newer systems are able to do. Because of this, when possible, we will opt to be outdoors.
 - **Additionally, we have only a few spaces with air conditioning.** Given the heat of the summer (late spring, early fall), this is something considered in planning.
 - **Fans can be helpful but guidelines caution us to use them carefully,** taking care that fans move air, but not push potential virus from one person to the next. This means we will use fans to cool the sanctuary prior to worship, or to offer general air flow, but we won't point fans directly at those worshipping for this could more easily transmit the virus. These links offer further guidance related to fans:
 - <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/safefaitH.pdf> (pp. 6 - 7)
 - <https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/communities-of-faith>
 - www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/indoorair.html
 - **Whenever possible in worship and elsewhere,** we will open windows and doors to increase outdoor air flow.
 - Sanitizing wipes are available throughout the building for use as needed.
- **When someone becomes infected:**
 - **If it is determined that someone with a COVID-19 like illness or having tested positive for COVID-19** has been around the church building, they should notify the lead pastor or church administrator.

- **Church staff would contact the Minnesota Department of Health** to follow their guidance. Minnesota Department of Health, Infectious Disease, Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division: 651-201-5414 or 877-676-5414.
- **While we are no longer keeping a sign in sheet at the doors**, our building schedule, staff, and group leaders have a sense of who is in and around the building for various activities.
- **Individuals who learn of a possible exposure** should always contact their health care practitioner immediately and follow their guidance in regard to self-isolating, testing, and other steps.

Resources

Minnesota Department of Health - Home Page website:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/index.html>

Minnesota Department of Health website pages related to COVID-19. Click on Community and Faith-based organizations:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html> (4/15/21)

American Choral Directors Association Pandemic Resources:

<https://acda.org/resources-for-choral-professionals-during-a-pandemic>

Minnesota Department of Health resources for music activities and performances:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Considerations for Community-Based Organizations and Faith-based Organizations

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html> (12/09/21)

Centers for Disease Control: Covid Tracker

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

Centers for Disease Control: COVID Tracker by county (updated weekly on Thursday evenings).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>

City of Minneapolis - Coronavirus updates

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/coronavirus/index.htm>

Spanish language information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>

Varied resources collected and communicated by the Minneapolis Area Synod:

<http://mpls-synod.org/covid-19-resources/>

ELCA statement about returning to in-person worship (May 12, 2020):

<http://mpls-synod.org/files/Returning-to-In-person-Worship.pdf>

Additional information from Johns Hopkins about racial disparities:

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid19-racial-disparities>