

University Lutheran Church of Hope COVID 19 Preparedness Plan September 6, 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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September 2022 Policy Update:

As the pandemic began, ULCH was on the leading edge of change, pivoting to zoom for worship and meetings. As the nation has edged toward a "new normal" ULCH has chosen 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 congregation.

In this September policy update, we are making a shift. Aligning with the CDC (August 11, 2022), MDH guidelines, and community level indicators for COVID - 19 in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, we are moving toward individuals making the choice to determine their own mask use indoors. We are moving from *masks required* to *masks recommended*. We continue to adhere to the principles of prevention:

- Expectation that ALL are vaccinated
- If you are ill or have an exposure, follow CDC guidelines for isolation.
- Honor distance, ask permission to be in close proximity
- Keep indoor areas ventilated with outdoor air. We will do this in our building as best we can with the constraints of an old building and mechanical systems.

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.

- This policy aligns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) county level guidelines (February 25, 2022). The community level for each county in the United States is

determined weekly. It includes specific behaviors for each level: Low (green), Medium (yellow), or High (Red) Risk. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>)

- Hennepin County and Ramsey County have tended to be in the green and yellow levels. We will follow the CDC green, yellow, red guidelines regarding preventive measures and mandatory masks in the red level. **In the green and yellow levels, at ULCH we will recommend masks. In the red level, at ULCH we will require masks.**

- **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/diseases/covid19/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 respect those who choose to wear a mask outdoors and we recognize there are many reasons to choose this option.
 - **Indoors** for worship, meetings and gatherings masks are **recommended** for all (vaccinated or unvaccinated) except children under two years old and those with health reasons.
 - **We will honor distance**, ask permission to be in close proximity.
 - **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.
 - **The staff and leaders are ready to support you** with scheduling needs (e.g. Zoom, Facetime, etc) for meeting, 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 though 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 recommended when indoors. Please feel free to wear a mask at anytime whether indoors or outdoors. **(Please note: If the CDC community level were to move to red, masks would be required indoors.)**

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 are Recommended*</i> <small>(*At ULCH: Masks are Recommended when the CDC indicates green or yellow levels for Hennepin County and Ramsey County. If CDC levels are red, masks would be Required.)</small>	Outside – Expectations <i>Masks are not Required</i>
Worship Gatherings (Sundays, Midweek) We follow the current guidance of the ACDA, American Choral Directors Association.	Sanctuary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are recommended ● Follow seating indicators in the pews/chairs ● Open doors and windows when possible for increased air circulation 	Parking lot, Courtyard, Patio: <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

<p>*The link below includes some of the science about the risks of singing. https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/72/10/e639/5908276</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Singing* - you are welcome to sing! Masks are recommended but not required. ● Seek alternate ways to share the peace from a distance ● When serving Holy Communion, take care to wash hands or use sanitizer. ● When coming forward to receive Holy Communion, please use hand sanitizer and honor distance. ● Children’s tables will be available for each family (rather than kids massed together). ● Sanitizer is available. ● A Zoom and YouTube option is available. ● We are currently considering use of the chapel, but are cautious because of its small size and lack of airflow ● The chapel is suitable for pastoral care and small rituals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Zoom and YouTube option is available
<p>Meetings, Faith Formation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are recommended ● Honor distance ● Schedule our larger spaces where greater distance and circulation is possible (consider Room 206, the Lounge, Fellowship Hall, Heritage Hall, the Youth Room, or meet outdoors) ● Open doors and windows when possible for increased air circulation ● Zoom is available for a hybrid option. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Honor distance ● Masks are not required. ● Zoom is available for a hybrid option ● If desired, have a mask available for building access
<p>Activities with Children Beginning this fall, Sunday School will be in-person, sometimes outdoors and sometimes indoors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are recommended generally, BUT will be required for children during Sunday School when indoors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are not required. ● Honor distance ● If desired, have a mask available for building access

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Honor distance, especially when engaging children and infants. ● We recognize that these issues are particularly complex for families—we encourage families to make their own decisions and we will support your efforts. 	
<p>Occasional Worship Services* Weddings, Funerals, Special Services and Rituals *See notes in the Worship Gatherings section above</p>	<p>Sanctuary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● See the Worship Gathering section above for specific guidance ● A Zoom and YouTube livestream option is available. ● Over these years, we have had some very meaningful Zoom memorial services. Zoom services are possible for those who desire. 	<p>Parking lot, Courtyard, Patio, Graveside, Park, Backyard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● See the Worship Gathering section above for specific guidance ● A Zoom and YouTube option is available
<p>Music Making Choir leadership in worship, choir rehearsal, other music We also follow the current guidance of the ACDA, American Choral Directors Association. *The link below includes some of the science about the risks of singing. https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/72/10/e639/5908276</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks recommended for rehearsals and choir leadership in worship ● Honor distance and spacing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are not required.
<p>Fellowship Time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are recommended ● Honor distance ● “Finger” foods and drinks may be served. ● We are not resuming “sit down” meals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are not required ● Honor distance ● “Finger” foods and drinks may be served.

<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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks recommended ● 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 are not possible at this time ● Limited receptions for funerals may be possible, in consultation with church leadership. ● Small groups of volunteers or staff may elect to eat indoors when distance is kept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masks are not required. ● Honor distance ● "Finger" foods and drinks may be served.
<p>Nursery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Nursery area may be used by a parent and child/ren. ● We are not currently staffing our nursery during worship. ● Family friendly areas in the sanctuary are available during worship services and children are very welcome in worship. ● Families are encouraged to make their own decisions about safe practices for their family 	<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>Staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All staff will be fully vaccinated for COVID – 19 prior to employment. ● Staff are strongly encouraged to keep up with current booster recommendations. 	
<p>Visitation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wear masks when visiting indoors as appropriate. ● Honor distance as able and appropriate ● When fully vaccinated, and if comfortable, staff and volunteers may visit in 	<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

	<p>hospitals, nursing homes, and other locations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider larger spaces with airflow that still offer privacy, for instance the sanctuary, chapel, or lounge 	
Restrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaning occurs according to MDH recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We 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 when available are strongly encouraged for the sake of the whole community and necessary for those providing hospitality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaccinations when available 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. • Schedule through the Church Administrator
<p>P.E.A.S.E. Academy (Peers Enjoying a Sober Education) PEASE is part of Minnesota Transitions Charter School (MTCS). PEASE is a recovery high school with whom we share our building.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of MTCS, PEASE Academy including “masks optional”. • PEASE staff are encouraging students to move thru the entry way rather than congregating • As MTCS policies evolve, PEASE will consult with ULCH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of MTCS, PEASE Academy including “masks optional”
<p>Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of LCM and ULCH. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the policies of LCM and ULCH.

- **Facility related notes:**
 - **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 warmer seasons, 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.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.
 - **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)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Considerations for Community-Based Organizations and Faith-based Organizations (12/09/21)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control: Covid Tracker

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

Centers for Disease Control: Covid Tracker (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>