

Hope United Church of Christ Regathering Plan

Here, we pass the PEACE, not COVID-19

Phase **P** for Phased-in team regathering
 Phase **E** is for (holy) Experimentation
 Phase **A** is for Add the broader congregation
 Phase **C** is for Children + in-person fellowship
 Phase **E** is for Everyone, everywhere

Note: All > Nearly All > Most > Majority

| Phase | Shorthand + Est. Timeline | Description / Activities | Requirements / Limitations | Graduation Criteria* (to get into this stage) | What do we need that we don't already have in place? |
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| P | Phased-in team regathering APR-MAY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - P1: Staff-only streaming from sanctuary - Allow renters back in to stream with staff at designated times - Record worship for streaming - P2: Staff and worship leaders streaming from the sanctuary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Masks OR 6 feet of physical distancing required - Limit of no more than 10 in sanctuary or fellowship room - A trained Safety Volunteer (SV) must be present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All staff and worship leaders <i>present</i> vaccinated - No known presence of vaccine-resistant variants in the area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance around ventilation (doors open, cross-breeze, run kitchen fan, bathroom fans, etc.) - Policy for decontamination pre / post use - Policy for staff vaccination (required for in-person congregation?) - Technology needs for streaming |
| E | (holy) Experimentation MAY-JUN | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff, worship leaders, and a designated group such as Exec Council, Worship Team, Spiritual Formation team gather to test out what a hybrid regathering would be like, then discuss it later and make changes based on experiences and science | (Unless all are vaccinated): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Masks and 6 feet of physical distancing required - Limit of no more than 25 in sanctuary and 15 in fellowship room, 1 person in the kitchen - A trained Safety Volunteer (SV) must be present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most present vaccinated with at least one dose - No known presence of vaccine-resistant variants in the area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same as above - Research and purchase HEPA filtration units for high-traffic, low ventilation areas (like hallway/stairwell, Pastor's office) - Ensure HVAC units are tested for <i>Legionella</i> - Have ventilation fan in the kitchen fixed - Determine ventilation and filtration protocols for pre/post indoor event (opening doors, turning air on high for two hours prior to service, for ex) |
| A | Add the broader adult congregation JUN-AUG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First introduction of the broader congregation to services, in numbers limited by physical distancing capacity. - Signups for in-person worship similar to what we did on the lawn. Perhaps folks can come and listen to the sermon in their cars and then have fellowship together outside after. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Masks required; physical distancing required; vaccine recommended for indoor; 1-2 SVs must be present - Limit of no more than 40 in sanctuary and 15 in fellowship room (suggest that fellowship take place outside, weather permitting), 1 person in the kitchen - BYO communion, or communion packs - Baptism outside only, with masks - No Sunday School / childcare - Physically distant passing of the peace - No congregational singing, no hymnals, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most of the adult church population vaccinated with at least one dose - Majority of the Fairfax Co adult population vaccinated with at least one dose - No more than 3 percent positivity rate in Fairfax County - No known presence of vaccine-resistant variants in the area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same as above - Determine how many people we can fit in the sanctuary and fellowship room with 6 feet of distance - Research and purchase HEPA filtration units for fellowship room - Development of digital-only welcome and prayer cards - Development of microphone, candle, plate, and bulletin protocols - Development of post-service protocols |

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|----------|--|--|---|---|--|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 ft minimum distance between singers and audience No indoor food at fellowship hour | | (counting, entering, deposit slips, etc.) |
| C | <p>Children + In-person Fellowship</p> <p>JUL-SEP</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C1: Hybrid in-person and online worship to include Sunday school/childcare C2: Some kind of fellowship hour following worship. Begin expanding numbers if they were limited in earlier phases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks required (should revisit this) Vaccine recommended for indoor gathering 1-2 Safety Volunteers must be present Limit of no more than 60 in sanctuary and 20 in fellowship room (suggest that fellowship take place outside, weather permitting) BYO communion, or communion packs Physically distant passing of the peace No congregational singing, no hymnals, 20 ft min. distance between singers and audience No indoor food at fellowship hour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the adult church population vaccinated with at least one dose Most adults in the Fairfax Co population vaccinated with at least one dose No more than 3 percent positivity rate in Fairfax County Presence of a COVID vaccine for children No known presence of vaccine-resistant variants in the area Indication by survey or other qualitative input that suggests parents are willing / interested in bringing children before vaccination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as above Research and purchase HEPA filtration units for Sunday school/childcare rooms |
| E | <p>Everyone, Everywhere</p> <p>TBD</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everything above and including choral and/or congregational singing. Continued streaming on Zoom in perpetuity (builds health resilience for the congregation moving forward) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks recommended Vaccines recommended Possible Safety Volunteer requirement Revisit shared communion, shared hymnal use 20 ft minimum physical distance between singers and audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly all adults in the church population vaccinated with at least one dose Most children in the church population vaccinated No more than 2 percent positivity rate in Fairfax County No known presence of vaccine-resistant variants in the area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as above Research options for HEPA filtration for sanctuary (upgrade of existing HVAC? Addition of large individual units, etc.) |

***NOTE:** Criteria should be considered a rough guideline for graduation to the next stage - the indicators are estimates and do not determine safety or readiness on their own. We suggest that each phase trigger a conversation by church leadership to review the levers and indicators mentioned in this plan, and update the guidance as needed.

ROLLOUT:

1. **DONE** Draft the plan, incorporating recommendations from guidance documents and church leaders; review with indoor air experts (COVID Lead)
2. Internal review:
 - a. **DONE** Staff and team leads (Pastor)
 - b. **DONE** Renter discussion (internal with EC and then with renters) (EC Renter Lead)
 - c. **DONE** Adjudicate feedback and update plan (COVID Lead)
3. Develop a communication plan and roll out to the congregation (COVID Lead / COVID Support)
 - a. Messaging for standalone email to congregation, website, social media (COVID Lead)



Survey Notes / Questions (for graduating to Phase A or C):

- When do you anticipate wanting to return to in person worship? Only when vaccinated, before vaccination if precautions are taken, never, etc. (check data from survey from last fall)
- If you are a parent, would you bring your child in person before they are vaccinated? What is your highest priority in person worship or in-person sunday school/youth group?
- A question about programming priority for in-person planning. In person or virtual? If in person, plan for a fellowship event like a BYO grounds picnic? or a youth service activity? Mission & Justice organizing? Matching people into regional small groups? Or things that can be done hybrid like bible study and prayer?

HOPE UCC COVID PLANNING PRINCIPLES

#1: We respect the power of place:

We take an expansive view of our building and property as a site for connection, prayer, etc. Hope UCC grounds can be a sanctuary for body and spirit during this difficult time, and leadership supports the need to care for those who seek out in person connection in a safe, controlled setting. We balance that consideration with an acknowledgement of the weight of responsibility we feel – as lay leaders – to first care for the safety and welfare of our community.

#2: We consult emerging science / trusted guidelines:

We are guided by the latest available evidence on topics like transmission and protective measures, as well as the impact of isolation on mental health and social bonds. We will regularly consult, at a minimum, the latest guidelines and recommendations from the World Health Organization, the Center for Disease Control, the Virginia Dept of Public Health, and the United Church of Christ.


#3: We follow the precautionary principle:

We acknowledge that a lot is not yet known about this virus. We will err on the side of caution when considering evolving information. While “no evidence” does not necessarily indicate “no risk,” we will also seek to find grey areas where we may be able to offer creative ways to connect at lower risk levels. Also, we affirm that the availability of grounds or building should not be considered an endorsement of safety and recommend that individuals consider their own risk profile and risk tolerance in deciding whether to visit.

#4: We aim to simplify:

Where possible, we aim for simplicity and brevity to ensure policies are easily understood and followed, reducing the mental load and decision set for those attending events on the Hope UCC property.

#5: We protect our staff:



We affirm that staff experience different levels of vulnerability. We operate under the expectation that any in-person activities or policies must not require staff to attend and should take special care not to burden staff with expectations for enforcement or exposure.

#6: We promote accessibility:

We are guided by regard for the most vulnerable (health-wise) in our congregation. We will seek solutions that are as inclusive as possible, including exceptions to regular guidelines, when necessary, to promote accessibility.

#7: We will flex and use judgement:

We recognize that the pandemic will likely be with us long-term and will require policies and procedures that are flexible enough to adjust as new information comes in, incorporating a consideration of benefit as well as risk. We will regularly consider new information, research, guidelines, and best practices to revise and inform our approach. As needed, we will convene to consider exceptions or additions to these guidelines.

As a corollary to #7, please note that we expect these policies to change over time as:

(A) We collect congregational feedback on any in-person events Hope UCC conducts;

(B) We learn more about COVID-19 and its transmission;

(C) We receive additional guidance from sources including (but not limited to): Federal, state, and local governments, the United Church of Christ, and the UCC Insurance Board;

(D) Situations arise that we cannot predict.

It is important for the Executive Council to retain flexibility to address the changing nature of this season and other situations as they arise. We are striving to maintain consistency, flexibility, and good humor through it all.

BACKGROUND

- [Hope United Church of Christ](#) is located in Alexandria, VA. Membership is around 150, with many children and young families.
- Our building was constructed in the 1960s, and the sanctuary seats a max of **150**.
- Heating and air conditioning is provided by two independent HVAC systems - one for each floor.
- Windows do not open, but there is a door to the outside directly from the front of the sanctuary. The sanctuary ceiling is about **15** feet high.
- There are two exits from the downstairs Fellowship Hall, which has 10 ft ceilings and a max capacity of **85**.



- There is a small narthex and office leading from the entrance to the sanctuary. They have a max capacity of 15.
- The kitchen is a very small galley-style kitchen, with no windows and one ventilation fan that does not currently function.
- There are two small restrooms, with no windows and a ventilation fan each.