

UCM Covid-19 Task Force Final Minutes
Twenty-seventh meeting 12/1/21

Present: Liza Earle-Centers, Vic Guadagno, Scott Hess (facilitating), Judith Hinds (recording), Rev. Joan, Jen Matthews, Leslie Parr, Gale Pekar, Donia Prince, Verdis Robinson, Peter Thoms.

Agenda:

- Changes to minutes of 11/17/21
- Changes to the agenda
- Comments/feedback from Board, ET, congregation
- Feedback from area institutions on their operations (Peter)
- Reopening guidelines (Jen and Cass)
- Other business
- Next meeting

1. Changes to Minutes

None.

2. Changes to the Agenda

(a) Scott introduced Gale, who is representing Membership and Hospitality Ctee. at this meeting.

(b) Added a review of the discussion guidelines we agreed to at our last meeting, as follows:

“We will:

- Be open-minded and try to understand where those with differing opinions are coming from.
- Allow one another the time and space to process information.
- Recognize that there is no “right” answer and no one has all the answers.
- Assume good intent.
- Hold central our Mission Statement.
- In the minutes and in subsequent conversations, share the summary of our discussions without identifying individual contributions.
- Hold confidentiality of personal details.
- Focus on the welfare of the whole congregation, not on our personal opinions/beliefs.”

3. Comments/Feedback from Board, ET, Congregation

The Board survey was sent out last week and is due back by 12/5. Approximately 100 have been filled out so far.

4. Feedback from Area Institutions on Their Operations (Peter)

(Refer to survey results Peter emailed us on 11/17.) One commonality among area churches that are holding in-person services is that their attendance is much lower than capacity. None have had any Covid outbreaks. The Old Meeting House has relied heavily on UUA Guidelines, as we have; they are the only congregation surveyed that is not holding in-person services yet. Liza spoke with the Catholic Diocese office in Burlington. Their churches are closer to full attendance than any of the others. They had one Covid outbreak this summer following a funeral where people were not masked.

5. Reopening Guidelines

(Cass could not attend this meeting because she has a new baby!)

We revisited the list of 5 major questions that stood out as a result of all the comments Cass and Jen received on their draft:

Q1. Are we OK with using CovidActNow as our reference point for Washington County data?

Q2. Do we want to consider any sort of vaccine mandate in any stage to attend in-person worship?

Q3. Under which scenarios are we OK with singing in the sanctuary? Is there a difference between the choir and the congregation singing?

Q4. Do we recommend returning to any version of in-person service while we're in the red/orange stage, which we are today?

Q5. In yellow and green stages can we drop some masking or social distancing requirements?

We discussed the first two points today without making any decisions.

Re Q1 – The only other source of data that was suggested was the VT Dept. of Health website. Their data are spread out over a variety of pages and would require extensive time and analysis on our part. The advantage of CovidActNow is that the analysis has already been done, synthesized in one place, and broken down into levels of risk. We agreed to keep CovidActNow as our reference point as we continue to discuss revising the Reopening Guidelines.

Re Q2 – Joan has distributed a survey to the staff to assess how they feel about vaccine requirements. Their feedback is due by 12/5, so we will have it before our next meeting. Neither Liza nor any others of us have heard of any spreader events besides the unmasked Catholic funeral referred to in agenda item #4 above. Donia pointed out that other choirs, choruses, concerts, etc. are requiring proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test. She has not formally surveyed the choir but their general feeling is in favor of requiring vaccination or a negative test. Perhaps we should require all attendees to be vaccinated if we hold services before the ventilation project is complete. Any such requirement (as well as all our guidelines) should define the point at which it will terminate, i.e. no longer be necessary.

Re Q3 – Some singing by the congregation might be feasible following other churches' practice of only singing the final hymn right before everyone leaves the sanctuary. Vacating the space would be a critical element of such an option. Our job is to define the conditions under which this could happen.

Re Q4 – We only touched on this question briefly. We have not even decided yet whether to use the color-coded phases referred to in the draft. We need time for a longer discussion.

6. Other Business

The worship team is discussing the possibility of an in-person Christmas Eve service with limited attendance. This would require making an exception to our current guidelines. Some drawbacks were pointed out – the current high case numbers in the community, the potential hurt feelings of those who would be excluded by limited attendance, and the question likely to arise over why just Christmas Eve and not Sundays. We did not make an actual recommendation about this issue. It's up to the ET to decide whether to make an exception.

7. Next Meeting: Tuesday, Dec. 14th from 5:00 to 7:00 (2 hours). The intent of having a longer meeting is to make more progress on revision of the Reopening Guidelines. BYO snack.