

## **FCU Reopening Plan 2021-22**

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Revision Date	Who	Changes
Aug. 31, 2021	Tucker-Barisano	Original document
Sept. 10, 2021	Kaylor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Message from Lara Hoke: Change to note the speaker in pulpit will be masked instead of unmasked.</li> <li>• In Traffic Light System: Corrections to yellow status section regarding “After a lockdown in Red status...” and remove sentence about “designating wishes on name tag”</li> <li>• In Spiritual Life and Services: Remove paragraph about color-coded yarn for nametag lanyards; add correction that speaker in pulpit will be masked.</li> </ul>

## Overview and Message from Reverend Lara Hoke

### Dear Members and Friends of FCU:

The 2021-2022 “church year” is about to begin, and I have so much joy about that! Unfortunately, because of the Delta variant of Covid-19, the picture is more complicated than we had hoped it would be as the 2020-2021 church year came to a close in June.

I cannot tell you how hard the Executive Team (Standing Committee and Deacons, with wonderful assistance from our Clerk) has been working on finding what we feel is the best approach for FCU at this time. The work of our Re-Opening Task Force has been invaluable too. I have watched with admiration and awe. The level of caring for our community, and the level of thoughtfulness, has been inspirational.

What we are offering is a dynamic approach that enables us to be relatively nimble during the year as the picture changes, as it inevitably will, probably more than once. No approach is perfect, but this approach has been thought through carefully from many angles.

**To start the year on September 12<sup>th</sup>, we hope to offer “hybrid worship” with the option of attending in person in the sanctuary or watching a livestream online. This will require some changes from what we would have in “ordinary times” in person. Some of the changes are due to the hybrid nature of the service, and some of the changes will be due to the mitigation strategies for Covid-19.** Some of these changes will feel difficult; they might feel awkward, and some of them might feel painful. I know that we are a caring community, and we are all in this together. There *will* be joy in coming together, and I know that we can help each other with the parts that feel challenging.

First, a few notes about some of the mitigation strategies.

**As you will see in our Executive Team communication, we are planning to open in what we are calling “yellow light” conditions.** The most basic mitigation strategies are that we will try to **keep our services shorter**; we will not have a greeting line at the end of the service with me and the Lay Pastoral Minister of the day; and we **will not have refreshments** during fellowship time for those who choose to remain for it. Another basic part of keeping us safer is asking that you **remain home if you are feeling sick**.

An important mitigation strategy is that **for those attending in person, we will require that everyone is masked (aside from very young children)**. The person speaking from the pulpit will be masked. When we have Candles of Caring in person, the speakers in the pews will remain masked. In “yellow light” conditions, we will not have in-person singing; there will be piano and organ music and perhaps other non-wind instruments at times. These are among some of the hardest parts of “yellow light” conditions, but we feel that these changes are necessary currently.

We will offer some **physical distancing** in the sanctuary, asking “pandemic pods” (family and friends who spend time in person elsewhere) to sit together and providing some space in between pods. We have purchased **air purifiers** for all church spaces except for the sanctuary, where they would not be effective. We will open some windows in the sanctuary if weather allows.

Another challenge at this time is that for their safety, **children’s Religious Education will be outside at the start of this year, as weather allows**. The children will wear masks. In inclement weather, the children can be in a larger room downstairs with air purifiers. Our new Director of Religious Education, Thea Shapiro, has been vaccinated, as have I, and any adult working with the children must be vaccinated as well.

**We know that no one under twelve years old has been eligible to be vaccinated, and we know that there are those with health conditions that preclude vaccinations. With those exceptions, we request and expect that those who are eligible to be vaccinated will be vaccinated.** Vaccinations are an important part of how we care for ourselves and our community in this time. We will not ask for proof of vaccination in the form of presenting a card; instead, we will operate on the honor system. If anyone needs help in getting a vaccination, we will offer assistance. You can reach out to me personally for assistance if you wish.

You might wonder why we will not ask for proof of vaccination. There are a few reasons. One reason is, it would force those who are medically unable to get a vaccination to “out” themselves, which feels like a violation of privacy. Practically speaking, it would present many other challenges. If we check cards at the door, it will create lines and delays. We could ask people to register to worship in the sanctuary in advance and provide proof of vaccination at that time; that would create an administrative burden for us. The other reality is, as I look at my own card, it would be incredibly easy to forge. In the end, we have to rely on this: we are a covenanted spiritual community. Lying about vaccination status (or forging a card) would be unacceptably out of right relations and out of covenant.

These are among the most important of our mitigation strategies. We will also have good signage, masks, and hand sanitizer available, and more.

**Everyone will have to decide for themselves whether they feel safe attending services in person.** The Delta variant is very difficult as it is possible to be a carrier even when asymptomatic and vaccinated. As of the time of this writing, most public places do not require vaccinations or even masks, so we feel that we are making FCU a safer space than most. But there are always risks.

**We are committed to offering hybrid worship**, and as I see it this is a permanent change and in keeping with us moving further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (even if we didn't have Covid-19). So, the good news is that you can participate in worship from home if you choose to for any reason. We have been hard at work in planning this piece as well, though to get our hybrid worship into its ideal form, it will require further funding which requires discussion at a warranted meeting. In the meantime, we ask for your understanding and patience (both in-person worshippers and virtual worshippers) as we experiment, learn, adjust, and improve. To start the year, we will have simple live streaming of the in-person service, and we will make accommodations to try to make the experience more participatory for those worshipping from a distance. Eventually, we will hope to add more technology, but that will not be available on September 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Again, I thank you for your patience, cooperation, and understanding in this challenging time. I cherish the FCU community, and I am so glad to be together in this with all of you.**

In faith,

Lara

Rev. Lara Hoke

## **Foundational Preamble and FCU COVID 19 Covenant**

### Foundational Preamble

These are the times that try our souls.

As members of First Church Unitarian, we have been challenged during the past year and a half both personally and as a faith community. We have adapted to the loss of in-person connection creatively and effectively through our commitment to our foundational covenants as expressed in the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism.

Love is the spirit of this church. As we move toward our long-awaited reunion it is important to recognize that it is the responsibility of every member to create and maintain a safe and welcoming environment that supports the well-being of everyone in the congregation. To this end our policies will be based on science, official guidelines, and common sense.

### FCU Covid 19 Covenant

In the uncertain times of the Covid 19 pandemic, with LOVE being the spirit of our congregation, we recognize that:

The virus and the science preventing transmission are changeable;  
Congregants will have varying comfort levels for meeting in person;  
We wish to protect the health of us all.

As best as we are able, we covenant:

To follow our current masking guidelines;  
To stay home if we experience Covid symptoms or have had contact with someone who is Covid positive;  
To respect the boundaries of our fellow congregants;  
To follow any additional guidelines asked of us by our leadership;  
To speak with our leadership when we have concerns.

We make this covenant in love and hope that when we are able to fully be together, no one will be missing.

## ET Letter to the Congregation

Dear FCU Members and Friends,

The Executive Team (Standing Committee and Deacons) has passionately taken on the delicate balance of navigating the business and spiritual life at FCU during the Covid19 pandemic. It has been an experience that has certainly tried our souls but also enriched our relationships with each other and our beloved church.

With a team of nine, and the support of so many more groups and individuals, we set out to reimagine life at FCU in “real pandemic time”. At the same time, we held out hope; working toward a new normal and a church more representative of the 21st century.

From the onset of our work that began last spring, we had our sights set on bringing everyone back to in-person services on Sunday, September 12th. Based on the overwhelming positive response of our membership being vaccinated, we found comfort in our plan. But, with the arrival of the Delta variant, reality demanded that we stay responsive and flexible. Clearly the arrival of the new variant showed us that we would need to “pivot” at a moment’s notice with our communications and our decisions as to whether our church services would be in person or virtual.

To do so, we developed a plan to communicate the status of our church services using the “iconic” visual of a traffic light. Nothing describes “pivot” better than the ways in which a traffic light changes. The colors of a traffic light will be our shared symbols to communicate how we will worship on a Sunday morning.

For obvious reasons, and not a surprise, the Executive Team has made the decision that our first service on the 12th will be in a yellow light status. As many have said, Yellow could look different at different times. For now, we say “Slow with a whole lot of caution.”.

A detailed list of what a green, yellow, and red light entails and what protocols will be implemented are detailed within this document.

Every aspect of our church services and our church experiences has been reviewed and adjusted so that we can provide safety for those attending our services whether in person or remotely.

Plans are underway for offering a multi-platform service simultaneously with our in-person service. Like our first “Zoom” services, this will be a work in progress, and we fully expect that it will evolve and improve each week. Of course, we will all need to talk about some expenditures associated with this at our October Warranted Meeting.

We realize, like the diversity of our beliefs, we will have many different feelings, concerns, and comfort levels about coming back together for in-person services. To this end, we ask that you be patient with us and with each other and fully embody the covenant that we have shared with you in this document.

In service,

Your Leadership Team

Karen Tucker-Barisano, Laura Semple, Cindy Malley, Chairs

Martha Childs, Sara Cope, Bill Duston, Jen Jaksa, Larry Kaylor, Monica Pilman

## Traffic Light System and Levels

The Green-Yellow-Red system describes the basic three levels we will use to manage and communicate our church status in the 2021-2022 church year. As a visual tool, we are using the Red-Yellow-Green Stoplight image to communicate the level in which the church will operate at any given time. We expect that we will be opening our church on September 12, 2021 at the Yellow level. The current level will be posted on the website and should be checked regularly and on Sunday morning prior to leaving for church services.

It is abundantly clear that with the variants and the uptick in cases, each status level will need to be fluid and adapt to the data, the science, our congregational wisdom, and the guidance from all the sources we have stated. Given this changing landscape, we created this document to convey our general intentions for each level, understanding that details are likely to change with time and as our experience grows.

**Important:** If you test positive for COVID-19 and have recently attended in-person services or other events at FCU, please notify a member of the church staff immediately. If you are experiencing the symptoms of *any* illness, please do not attend in-person events at FCU. You can attend online church and use internet tools to attend meetings online as well.

### **Green**

This is FCU in normal mode for the 2021-2022 church year. All services will be hybrid\*\*.

FCU requests and expects that every eligible person (by health and age) will be vaccinated.

FCU will operate on the honor system and not ask any congregant to declare their vaccination status in order to attend in-person services.

If you are fully vaccinated\* and without symptoms, you may attend in-person services unmasked and without social distancing.

All unvaccinated persons, including children, must wear masks at all times when at FCU. Anyone wanting extra protection for any reason may also choose to wear masks.

Ushers will seat masked individuals and groups in a designated part of the sanctuary to provide for safe social distancing. Unmasked individuals and groups may choose their own seating as usual.

There may be a coffee hour where food and drink may be shared. There will certainly be a social hour. These possible events might happen outdoors, weather permitting.

Personal greetings involving touching are allowed by mutual consent. Individuals may indicate their preferences and expect to have them respected.

Live singing by the choirs and the congregation will be allowed.

All the above recommendations may be modified based on the scientific data, CDC and US Government guidance at the time that the decision is made to move to Green.

## **Yellow**

Yellow status will be triggered by:

- 1) A “Wear masks indoors” alert from the UUA, or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), or the Town of Littleton, MA.
- 2) After a lockdown in Red status has ended, we automatically proceed for a minimum of 14 days in Yellow.

FCU is open for in-person Sunday services, with the following restrictions:

- 1) Everyone must wear a mask at all times except for children under 2 years old
- 2) Windows will be opened to increase air circulation, weather permitting;
- 3) Some parts of church services may be held outdoors, weather permitting.

Church services will be hybrid.\*\*

Social distancing must be maintained. Ushers will seat everyone to maintain safe spacing between “pods”, family groups and individuals and to prevent congestion in aisles and doorways. Congregants shall graciously accept whatever seats they are given.

Socially distanced lines may form outdoors at both front doors, office side door and the handicap entrance for those waiting to be seated. Congregants should plan to arrive earlier and dress appropriately for the weather.

When services end, ushers will direct your exit path to provide for social distancing and no congestion in aisles and doorways. There will be no greeting line for the minister after services.

A Social Hour will be held but without food or drink served. This may sometimes happen outside, weather permitting.

Only pre-recorded singing will be allowed. Choirs and congregants will not sing live in church. Live piano, organ, stringed instruments or percussion music that is instrumental-only is allowed at the discretion of the Music Director, but live wind instrument music is not allowed.

## Red

What triggers a Red status?

1. A pandemic lockdown issued by any of the following authorities: the UUA, or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, or the CDC, or the Town of Littleton, MA. The church will remain in Red status until such time as the UUA, State of Massachusetts, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the town of Littleton, MA eases their restrictions.
2. Someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and recently attended one or more in-person events at FCU. FCU will remain at Red status until a minimum of 14 days have passed without further positive COVID-19 tests or infections among us.

Church services will be online only. FCU is fully closed to all in-person activities. All *previously scheduled* in-person events and meetings are cancelled for the duration of the Red Alert and may be rescheduled as virtual meetings or events if possible. Staff will work from home. Staff may enter the building, masked, no more than two at a time, as necessary.

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\*Fully vaccinated means that you have had both shots of the two-shot vaccines, or the one single shot vaccine **AND** you have waited 14 days after that without exhibiting symptoms or testing positive for COVID-19. It may also come to mean that you have received a booster shot(s) as well.

\*\* A hybrid service allows for both in-person and online viewing at the same time. **Please be aware with hybrid services that if you attend church in person, you may be filmed, and you may appear live online.**

## **Protocols for Entering and Being in our Church Building**

### Whole building

- Post guidelines at all entrances
- Hand sanitizers and masks available at all entrances
- Mask all regardless of vaccination status
- Maintain physical distance whenever possible

### Sanctuary

- Ventilation: open windows 1 hour before services, during service and 1 hour after service (weather permitting)
- Consider shortening length of service to reduce risk of transmission.
- Section off pews to allow for physical distancing as well as pod seating

### Other spaces

- Air filtration/purifiers to be purchased and available for offices, vestry, classrooms, and downstairs dining rooms
- Open windows for ventilation wherever possible

### Cleaning Protocols - See Cleaning protocol recommendations

- Church building - all occupied spaces must be cleaned on the regular weekly basis
- Bathrooms - clean as needed, with hospital grade disinfectant
- Kitchen areas - clean as needed; those using the facilities should be responsible for cleaning after use.
- Air purifiers - clean as directed by manufacturer

### Requesting use of space by FCU members and staff (when allowed)

- Fill out Building Use request
- Be responsible for setting up, breaking down and cleaning area used

### Status for requesting meeting space at the church

- Until 12/1/21 we will not be granting approval for either a member or an outside organization to request a meeting space within the church
- We will revisit this on 12/1

### **Additional Covid Cleaning Protocol Recommendations for Sexton**

Purchase Covered toilet seats in all bathrooms

Hospital quality disinfectant spray in all bathrooms

Hand sanitizers made available at several locations:

- Bathroom
- Entrances
- Offices
- Kitchen

Clorox Or Lysol Disinfectant spray, Paper towels, room disinfectant spray, and Clorox disinfectant wipes in all meeting rooms. Everyone is encouraged after exiting or using a space to wipe down surfaces, doorknobs, and spray the room.

Church should be cleaned on Saturday before services and Monday morning after services.

## **Spiritual Life and Services In-Person Service Considerations**

**This document articulates what a Yellow Level Sunday Service might look like. Please refer to the “Traffic Light System and Levels” document for details on the Green and Red protocols.**

### 1. Entering the church

On Sunday Mornings, you may use both front doors, the side door near the admin office or the handicap accessible entrance. While waiting to enter, please watch for signage indicating the current stoplight level and other requirements. An order of service will be handed out by Membership. We are also working on a system of QR codes for the Order of Service, signs and all the documents we are sharing with you.

### 2. Entering the church and seating

Based on congregant response to how many will be attending live and in person services, we have created several seating plans that will accommodate pods/families and social distancing (which may need to be 3 feet rather than 6 feet depending on attendance). The Ushers will seat you ensuring that we are not crowding the aisles. Please be understanding of these considerations. There will be a side for entering rows and a side for leaving the rows. Please follow all signage should you need to leave the sanctuary prior to the end of the service. There will not be a receiving line at the end of the service.

### 3. From the Pulpit

There will only be one speaker at the pulpit at a time. Speakers will be masked.

Share the Plate will not have guest speakers. If they choose, they may offer a pre-recorded talk for members to view in their own time.

### 4. The In- Person Experience

All services will be hybrid no matter what color status we are in.

We will continue the candles of caring in the sanctuary. Speakers will remain masked.

Only pre-recorded singing will be allowed. Choirs and congregants will not sing live in church. Live piano, organ, stringed instruments, or percussion music that is instrumental-only is allowed at the discretion of the Music Director, but live wind instrument music is not allowed.

For the closing circle we will raise our hands and feel the energy of others nearby.

We expect that the service will be shorter than prior to our closing.

When leaving the sanctuary please follow exit signs from your row.

We encourage sharing/discussion/reaching out to our minister or lay ministers via email, phone, or speaking with them during the Social Hour.

## 5. Hybrid Services

We are committed to offering hybrid worship moving forward even if we have moved away from COVID considerations. The good news is that you can participate in worship from home if you choose to for any reason.

We have been hard at work in planning this piece as well, though to get our hybrid worship into its ideal form, it will require further funding which requires discussion at a warranted meeting.

In the meantime, we ask for your understanding and patience (both in-person worshippers and virtual worshippers) as we experiment, learn, adjust, and improve.

To start the year, we will have simple live streaming of the in-person service, and we will make accommodations to try to make the experience more participatory for those worshipping from a distance. Eventually, we will hope to add more technology, but that will not be available on September 12<sup>th</sup>.

## 6. Religious Education

Upon arrival, the children will meet our Director of Religious Education, Thea Shapiro, in the driveway by the side door to check in for class.

The children will not be joining us in the sanctuary but will gather either outside, weather permitting, or in a classroom downstairs. Air purifiers have been purchased for all indoor classrooms. All children above the age of 2 will wear masks.

## 7. Coffee Hour – Now Social Hour

During the Yellow phase, coffee and refreshments will not be served. Congregants may gather, weather permitting outside, masks required. Otherwise, we will meet in the Vestry.

## **Link to Reference Documents**

Reopening Task Force Recommendations

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1piBAXNpu42uXTxEfOR-xgUGnfBEzd50/view?usp=sharing>