

Adapting to a Hybrid Future at UUCMC

May 27, 2020

Having studied various incarnations of “three-phased re-openings” (*Roadmap to Recovery: Maryland Strong*), with special foci on religious organizations of more than 50 members (*Returning to Church: Wisconsin Council of Churches*; *Returning to Church Options: UU First Parish of Stow and Acton, MA*), we see basic outlines emerging that can inform our assumptions going forward.

Importantly, *for all three phases of reopening*, persons over 60, along with anyone with underlying vulnerabilities (and including those whose lives include the former), the imperative is for continued physical distancing at home.

Also, for all three phases, online services would continue in some fashion, and, for those who *can* assemble: masks, some distancing, and no coffee hours.

1. Phase One would be contingent on at least two weeks of: a decline in hospitalizations (fewer than 15/day); b. a declining virus-related hospital death count (fewer than 5/day); c. a declining new hospitalization rate (below 2/100,000 pop./day); d. a 30% hospital bed vacancy; e. a 30% availability of intensive care unit beds; f. a 90-day stockpile of PPE; g. widespread testing (30/1,000 pop./month); and h. rigorous contact tracing (30 working tracers/100,000 pop.).

Online services only (possibly filmed in the Earth Room), and any rites of passage or renters or staff presence would be *limited to 10 persons* (with distancing protocols and masks, along with disinfection protocols). No in-person meetings or pastoral care.

2. Phase Two would assume several weeks of the declining counts following implementation of Phase One.

Services, either outdoors or in the building (and any rites of passage or renters) *would be limited to 50 persons* with concurrent online services. Mandatory would be face masks, distancing [every other pew], no singing, and using no-touch protocols (screens only for Orders of Service and hymns; drop-off plate collection). No coffee hour. No off-site pastoral care.

3. Phase Three would assume several more weeks of the declining counts following implementation of Phase Two.

Resumption of gatherings with concurrent online services. Services, along with any rites of passage or renters would require masks and some distancing (possibly relaxing pew restrictions for services, along with reassessing health recommendations regarding singing), and continuation of no-touch protocols. No coffee hour. Possible off-site pastoral care with extreme hygiene practices.

Given these realities, especially given the fact that persons over 60 would still be physically-distancing at home, any of these phases would require care regarding the potential bifurcation of the congregation (between those able to congregate and those not). It is therefore likely that our congregation will, perforce, be one of the very *last* organizations in our area to return to anything resembling previous-to-the-virus realities. The likelihood, in fact, is that full operations will not be possible until widespread vaccination is achieved. Instead, varying models of hybridity will obtain for the foreseeable future. The ensuing document begins to imagine what that hybrid world might look like.

On an optimistic note, it is important to keep in mind the “glass half full” nature of what has been, and will continue to be, true for us. We are reaching a larger number of persons through our online offerings than we had done previously. And this new world gives all of us—all of our committees, our ministries, our volunteering—new avenues for reimagining our work, many of which will remain in place, even following a fully physical, on-site UUCMC. Let us look at the opportunities we have been given, while acknowledging the sobering truths of what lies ahead.

Important Links:

A Message from the Rev. Susan Frederick Gray May 14, 2020:

www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/message-uua-president-updated-guidance-gathering

Church in VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) Times (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uAKQXagwms&t=1s>

Announcement of New Jersey's 6 Step Plan:

newyork.cbslocal.com/2020/04/27/tri-state-coronavirus-reopening-plan

The Road Back: Moving Forward Deliberately

	Maximum restrictions	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	New normal
Description	Most staying at home Activity largely limited to crucial activities	Restrictions relaxed on low-risk activities if appropriately safeguarded	Additional activities permitted that can be easily safeguarded	Most activities allowed with significant safeguarding	Economic and social activity back to normal with a new resilience
Example of phased-in activities *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency health care Essential construction Manufacturing Essential retail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grocery stores Pharmacies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State and county parks Non-essential construction Curbside retail Drive-in activities Beaches Elective surgeries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded retail Outdoor dining Indoor dining at significantly reduced capacity Limited personal care Museums Libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded dining Critical in-office work Limited entertainment Expanded personal care Bars with limited capacity 	

*Subject to change based on what we learn in New Jersey and globally



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The Road Back: Considerations for Restarting

% of NJ workers	Work environments	Example occupations	Implications
25%	Able to work from home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrative staff Computer programmers 	Continue to work from home
35%	Low-to-moderate contact with co-workers, customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction workers Landscapers Factory workers 	Adopt safeguarding practices (e.g., masks, disinfecting surfaces, hand washing)
40%	Frequent contact with co-workers & customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bartenders Most restaurant workers 	Adopt safeguarding practices Restrict capacity, reduce density Re-train displaced workforces



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UUCMC's Hybrid Future

Assumptions:

- UUCMC will need to function virtually until the CDC, NJ, and Monmouth County officials approve in-person gatherings of small or large numbers.
- It will not be safe to gather in large groups in close quarters until a vaccine is widely available—possibly fall, 2021.
- Small, less vulnerable groups can meet sooner using distancing precautions—possibly summer/fall, 2020.
- With a large population that is vulnerable, we will need to function virtually even as some groups begin to gather in person—thus the “hybrid” designation.
- Distancing and disinfecting procedures need to continue at the Meeting House until the virus is no longer a threat.

Recommended 2020 Summer Worship Plans:

- Remain in virtual mode through August while staff rotates vacation time, and prepares for a Fall opening.
- September may be in hybrid mode if CDC and NJ approves. It is also possible that restrictions will be tightened again if the virus returns. In that case, we will return to virtual-only mode. Most likely we will need to be flexible in the year ahead.
- For us, virtual mode means recorded services and zoom coffee hour. Covenant Circles and other meetings continue on Zoom as well.
- Some NJ congregations will be sharing video services, or parts of them (such as musical selections and homilies) that we can use this summer.
- Louise and the music committee will pre-record hymns and other music for summer services.

Other Program Ideas for a hybrid congregation:

- Fall picnic at a park (with distancing precautions in place).
- Fall Covenant circles go all virtual.
- Staff work from home and record worship at the meetinghouse.
- Instrumental music ensembles and small numbers of singers can use the Earth Room for rehearsals and recording.
- Try virtual singing ensemble (technologically very difficult)
- Outdoor classrooms established for Family Ministry groups so long as the weather allows.
- Occasional outdoor worship services, drive-ins, beach or parks, utilize UUCMC outdoor areas, playground, picnic area, woods, and firepit.
- Start a virtual Path to Membership class May 2020. (done)
- Encourage lay-led zoom small group possibilities: craft hour, playing cards or board games together, book groups, writing groups, additional Adult RE offerings.

Training and resources needed for hybrid functioning:

- Tech assistance: volunteers or staff to support zoom coffee hour, service recordings, and video editing.
 - Offer zoom facilitation and video editing training in May (Michelle will organize this).
 - Rethink staff responsibilities to accommodate functioning virtually.
 - Schedule summer coffee hour facilitators, rotate welcome and chalice lighting among board and council members.
- Outdoor mic system (we have this) and a sound person to run it.
- Additional Zoom capacity may be needed.
- Computers and WiFi sufficient for our needs. Laptops able to handle video editing.
- Music editing and merging software for virtual singing ensembles.

- Purchase copyright license. (done)
- Assess the meetinghouse's capacity for in person worship with proper social distancing and streaming of services for those who cannot attend.