

Health and Safety Policy for In Person Worship and Ministry*

*as of 10/26/21, subject to revision***

Kent United Church of Christ

1400 E. Main Street, Kent, Ohio 44240

The global coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021 forced our congregation to reinvent ways to be in community. We adapted, learned and grew. We formed a COVID Advisory Team. We heard the call to care for one another as part of our mission to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with God. Even though the new Delta variant continues to pose an enormous risk, the majority of our congregation has been vaccinated and thus it is time to move into a new phase of in person gatherings. We do not have all the answers to this next phase, but as when the pandemic began, by the grace and guidance of God we will find our way together.

These policies and guidelines are based on science and government recommendations, UCC conference and association guidance, collaboration with other local congregations, and a desire to be as inclusive as possible, keeping in mind the most vulnerable among us. While we are all eager to be back together physically, we are going to go slowly, be flexible, prayerful, and realistic in our process. Our goal is to keep ourselves and our community safe and healthy and continue to practice the care for one another that is one of the deepest values of our congregation. As we begin to gather in person again, please be gentle with one another, recognizing that we are fragile; there is anxiety, frustration, and exhaustion. We are all feeling unsettled. Please think of each person's inherent worth and dignity and follow these policies with care, kindness, and compassion, knowing that there are vulnerable persons and children among us who depend on us to make choices to protect all of us.

POLICY

Effective with this policy, Kent UCC will resume in person Sunday worship, memorial services and funerals, youth groups, support groups, and office hours, observing the following guidelines and restrictions (based upon CDC and Ohio Health Department guidance):

1. Stay Home when Appropriate

1. If you are sick, please stay home. Staff, congregants and guests should [stay home](#) if you have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#), or *any* symptoms of illness.
2. If you have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with symptoms of or diagnosed with COVID-19. Staff, congregants, and guests should also [stay home and monitor your health](#).
3. Staff, congregants, and guests should follow CDC guidelines for isolating and quarantining when sick or tested positive for COVID-19.
4. KUCC leadership (staff, moderator team, chairs of ministries, committees and teams, Stephen Ministry leaders, and convenors of fellowship groups) agree to meet virtually, whenever possible, so that those who are not feeling well or don't feel safe being in person can still participate in the life of our congregation, e.g. Sunday worship, faith formation classes, committee meetings, fellowship groups, team meetings, and other gatherings. Groups are also encouraged, weather permitting, to meet outdoors if virtual meetings are not possible. When it is necessary for a church group to meet in the church building in person, the meeting must be scheduled through the office administrator. The group will be responsible for sanitizing the space afterward, following instructions and using supplies provided.
5. The church office will be open during the week for staff and by appointment for members. Please contact the church office to set up an appointment.

2. Masking

1. All staff, congregants and guests will wear a mask that covers the nose, mouth and chin:
 1. When inside the church building.
 2. Outdoors, when it is not possible to consistently maintain a distance of 6 feet or more between people who live in different homes/households.
2. Exempted from the requirement is anyone who is:
 1. 2 years of age or younger.

2. Living with a medical condition that makes it unsafe to wear a mask. This includes respiratory conditions that restrict breathing, mental health conditions, or disabilities.
3. Communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired or has a disability that makes it difficult to communicate if the mouth is covered.
4. Alone in an enclosed space, such as an office.
5. Vaccinated individuals who are leading a worship service (officiant, liturgists, other speakers).
When not speaking they will wear a mask.

3. Due to health concerns, there will be *no* food or beverages consumed where masks are mandated. No water fountains inside the building will be in use. No coffee hours, pot-lucks, or any other luncheons/meals will be allowed until further notice.

3. Hygiene

1. KUCC will strive to protect staff, congregants, and guests by:
 1. Routinely disinfecting high-contact surfaces, desk workstations, restrooms, and equipment per CDC guidelines.
 2. Making hand sanitizer and sanitizing products readily available throughout the church.
 3. Where possible, post clearly visible signage at all entrances indicating masks are required and encouraging social distancing at all times on the premises.
 4. Maximizing ventilation, including opening doors and windows and incorporating air filtration to the extent possible, including during worship.
 5. Encouraging alternate forms of greeting besides handshakes, hugs, and kissing, including during the passing of the peace of Christ. There will be no greeting line after worship services.

6. When unable to meet virtually or outside, choosing meeting space in accordance with ventilation and capacity guidelines.

4. Social Distancing

1. Designating with signage, tape, placement of furniture and equipment, or other means, 6-foot spacing for seating and occupancy limits for rooms.
2. Every other pew will be used during worship; people will be seated and dismissed by ushers. Families will be seated together. There will be no physical movement during the passing of the peace, no greeting line after worship, and no plates passed for Communion or the offering.
3. At indoor events with fixed seating, KUCC will limit the number of participants to capacity of the facility based upon current science for ventilation, filtration and air quality. The current capacity is approximately 25% per room (this means the maximum capacity in our sanctuary is approximately 100 people). Thus, for Sunday worship and funerals or memorial services, the maximum number of people allowed to attend in person is approximately 100. (There are no capacity limitations for outdoor facilities.)

5. Music

1. In person singing should employ at least 3 of the following rules:
 1. Excellent ventilation, i.e., you are singing outdoors
 2. High quality masks, if possible: High-filtering, low-leak masks (such as KN95) or well-fitting double masks worn by all participants.
 3. Distance of at least six feet between participants who are not in the same household.
 4. Duration of no more than 30 minutes at a time.
2. What Kinds of Singing and Musical Instruments Are Possible? While chancel choir and children's worship team rehearsals will have to wait, it may be possible for groups to sing and/or play by:

1. Featuring a fully-vaccinated soloist or quartet performing at a distance at an outdoor or excellently-ventilated indoor service.
2. Making video recordings of small fully-vaccinated singing groups, recorded outdoors or in excellent ventilation, to share in the Sunday service or a funeral/memorial service.
3. Holding outdoor masked and distanced singing.
4. Wind instruments will not be played indoors. Bagpipe rehearsals are allowed outdoors.
5. The Handbell Choir is encouraged to rehearse and lead us in worship.

6. Faith Formation

1. The church nursery will not offer childcare until further notice. The lounge will be available during worship for any parent or guardian and children in need of a quiet space.
2. Children's Sunday School classes will be suspended until further notice. Children's sermons (Snapchat) will be offered during worship with proper distancing, and activity boxes will be available for children to take with them to their pews.
3. The middle school (J-Walkers), high school (UYF), and Confirmation ministries will be permitted to meet indoors, provided they follow the guidelines outlined in this document. This also includes ministry partnerships Kent UCC maintains with youth and young adult groups such as the Scouts and United Christian Ministries.

7. Other Groups and Ministry Activities

1. The monthly Community Outreach Meal will continue to package and serve meals to go.
2. Support groups such as AA, PFLAG, and grief groups may meet in person when virtual or outdoor meetings are not possible.
3. As approved by the Council, the Portage County NAACP office will be set up this fall for occupancy in mid-October. There will be one or two persons staffing the office and all the guidelines outlined in this document will be followed.

8. Concerns about Health and Safety

1. All staff, congregants, friends, and guests that choose to be in person on the KUCC campus agree to follow the above guidelines.
2. If staff, congregants, friends or guests have any concerns about their health and safety within these guidelines or restrictions, they can reach out to the moderator team or Council for assistance. As a covenantal community of faith, it is up to each of us to support this policy.

9. Governance

1. Rental agreements for use of KUCC facilities shall be amended to include a copy of this policy and an acknowledgement and agreement to abide by the policy.
2. The COVID Team, staff, and Council will review this policy as needed to update guidance, following science and the vision of inclusivity within our community.

10. The Church Building Would Close:

1. In the event of a new strain that is more transmissible (or more lethal) than existing strains, or for which current vaccines are less effective.
2. In the event of a known or suspected exposure that occurred at church within the past 10 days and affected a significant or unknown number of people. ***

References:

[Responsible RestartOhio Social Distancing, Masking, and Congregating Revised 5/18/2021](#)

[CDC Considerations for Community Based Organizations Updated April 19, 2021](#)

[UUA Guidance for Singing Together as COVID-19 Subsides](#) (as of 6/7/2021)

*This policy is based on the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, Ohio, used with permission.

**Policy Recommendations from COVID Team implemented for the first in-person service on 9/12/21

Approved by Council with revisions on 9/28/2021

***[Science Brief: Options to Reduce Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing](#) Approved by Council with revisions 10/26/2021