
UCF Guidelines for Gathering during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Description: This policy sets forth guidelines for gathering for the purposes of worship and community in the buildings and on the grounds of the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the changes in guidelines from both health agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and from government entities, the Board of Trustees will review and revise the policy as needed at least every 2 months.

Effective: January 2023

Approved by: Board of Trustees

Responsible Church staff: Minister, RE Administrator, Music Director, Office Assistant

Approval Authority: Board of Trustees

Supersedes: November 2022

Last Reviewed/Updated: March, 2023

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Gathering in person is integral to the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship mission and is essential to nurturing, building, and engaging community. We also understand that this activity must be balanced with ensuring the physical safety of UCF members, staff, and the surrounding community. This policy intends to strike this balance, reflecting Unitarian Universalist values and those of our community.

Guiding Principles

UU Principles guide this policy. We prioritize the safety and health of people over our desire to engage in worship and social activities. Both online and in person, members of the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship strive to inspire one another, to care for each other and the world around us, and to act in accordance with the principles of our faith while continually working to create a more just and equitable world.

1. We are committed to full inclusion. Therefore, we will make every effort to provide a way for everyone to be included in worship services and other whole-church events, moving forward with in-person events only when there is a plan for how those who cannot physically attend can participate remotely.
2. We seek to protect the health of all who use the building, recognizing that viral spread is a threat to community health. Therefore, we require all people using UCF facilities, and who are eligible for vaccination, to be fully vaccinated, but we do not require people to show proof of vaccination. Requests for religious or medical exemptions must be approved by the Board of Trustees. Signage outside and inside UCF buildings will clearly state the Fellowship's vaccination policy. The signage will be respectful and positive, and will mention the Zoom alternative for those wishing to attend services without having vaccination.
3. Decisions will be based upon vetted, up-to-date medical and public health information available for Carteret County at covidactnow.org. Any change will be announced as updates to this policy.
4. We will obey the laws and guidelines set by the State of North Carolina, Carteret County, and Morehead City, but we may exceed them in accordance with our religious principles.

5. We will be transparent with the congregation and consider their input.
6. We will apply recommendations consistently, not making exceptions (other than those explicitly covered in this policy) for individual desires, renters, status in the church, or financial impact.
7. Anyone attending an event at UCF who then tests positive for COVID-19 within 3 days of the event at the Fellowship will be asked to notify the UCF Office Assistant by email. This request will be published widely.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Persons/family unit - A group that shares a household and therefore exists in a state of shared risk and shared germs is considered one “family unit” and members of a family unit do not have to socially distance from one another while on the grounds or in buildings of the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship.
- B. Masks - Masks must fit securely to the face, and they must fully cover both mouth and nose at all times. N95, KN95, or a more protective medical grade masks are preferred. Fabric masks are also acceptable; however, lace, crochet, or other open weave options are not sufficient unless paired with a medical or tight-weave fabric mask. Face shields alone are not acceptable.
- C. Essential worker - Any UCF staff member whose physical presence is required to do their work, e.g. a minister who must be present in person to lead a worship service, a choir director who must be present in person in order to lead the choir, or nursery/childcare workers.
- D. Risk Levels - UCF decisions will be based upon the Carteret County risk level data from the Covid Act Now webpage. Community risk levels are defined on the covidactnow.org web site. There are three Community Risk Levels: Orange = high, Yellow = medium, and Green = Low. The minister or the minister’s designee will check the risk level weekly on Thursday so that decisions about activities and worship can be made and communicated in the weekly email and other communications. Definitions and derivations of these levels can be found [here](#).¹ However, to facilitate planning and to maintain clarity, we have developed what we believe is a sound general policy that is independent of the specific risk level at any particular moment.
- E. Small Group Meetings - Any meeting, on or off the UCF Bridges Street Campus, involving fewer than 20 persons.
- F. Large Group Meeting - Any meeting, on or off the UCF Bridges Street Campus, involving 20 or more persons.

III. STAFF

¹ Covid Act Now uses three key metrics to assess Community Risk Levels across U.S. states, metros, and counties. These three metrics—[daily new cases](#) (incidence), COVID admissions to hospitals, and the percentage of inpatient beds filled with COVID patients—assess a location's overall risk level.

Available at <https://covidactnow.org/covid-risk-levels-metrics>

All staff, including temporary and contract staff, are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Requests for medical or religious exemptions may be discussed with their supervisor and must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

No staff member will be required to organize, enable, or attend an event if the procedures and planning are not adequate for that staff member's health and safety. Decisions will be made by the staff member's supervisor.

IV. POLICY STATEMENT

Our policies apply to all UCF members and friends participating in UCF-sponsored events on and off the 2900 Bridges Street campus. These policies also apply to guests and renters of UCF facilities.

Outdoor and indoor gatherings are allowed. Public health professionals have agreed that outdoor gatherings are significantly less likely to transmit COVID-19 than indoor gatherings when basic guidelines are met. All indoor and outdoor events will include a plan for distancing, masking, contact tracing, and an option (if feasible) to attend remotely.

All attendees of events will be expected to be vaccinated if vaccines are available for them (if above the age of 2 years old), and to stay home or expect to be asked to go home if visibly ill. Individuals who have COVID-like symptoms must self-test or seek testing from a health provider. Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 must not participate in UCF-sponsored events until they have tested negative and have completed CDC-recommended isolation procedures. These isolation procedures may last for 5-10 days, depending on the severity of illness. Detailed information about CDC-recommended isolation procedures may be found at:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html?s_cid=11759:cdc%20covid%20guidelines:sem.ga:p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY22

The **Board of Trustees may make a decision to close** the UCF campus buildings based on local metrics, the number of cases, and exposures in the buildings, and any recommendations by public health officials. This decision will be communicated promptly and widely.

If the buildings are **closed**, no one shall enter the building during such an order except to carry out essential functions, such as fire and safety inspections or other essential functions as needed, such as urgent and necessary maintenance of the physical building, and cleaning to keep the building free of vermin, mold, or dust. Every attempt should be made to limit the building occupancy to one person. When this is not feasible, social distancing should be maintained at all times except for the very rare exception of safety

issues during maintenance. All persons over the age of 2 entering the building shall remain masked while in the building to minimize aerosol droplets.

The **Board of Trustees may also make a decision to open** the UCF campus buildings based on local metrics, the number of cases, and exposures in the buildings, and any recommendations by public health officials. If the buildings are **open**, recommendations and restrictions relating to COVID, influenza, and other highly communicable diseases will be communicated promptly and widely. General guidelines for these recommendations and restrictions are outlined below.

GUIDELINES FOR UCF-SPONSORED EVENTS:

In-person meetings will be allowed at the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship. Masking may be **recommended but not required** for worship services, choir rehearsals, singing, small group meetings, and large group meetings for designated COVID risk levels as discussed below. Speakers in large group meetings will be allowed (but will not be required) to remove masks when speaking. A virtual option will be offered.

If COVID community risk level is green, masks will not be recommended or required. Individuals wishing to mask because of personal health concerns are encouraged to do so. Group gatherings of all sizes may consume food and beverages indoors and outdoors. Positive COVID results within 3 days of a meeting will be reported to the UCF Office Assistant at ucfofficeassistant@gmail.com.

If COVID community risk levels are yellow or orange, masking will be recommended. Leaders of small group meetings will be requested to use Covenantal Conversations about masking. Food and beverages may be consumed in small group meetings only if all in attendance are comfortable with removing masks and with consuming food/beverages. Virtual attendance options are recommended for all such meetings. Positive COVID results within 3 days of a meeting without masks will be reported to the UCF Office Assistant at ucfofficeassistant@gmail.com.

Large group meetings require special considerations. **If COVID community risk levels are yellow or orange, masking will be recommended.** For UCF events, if COVID community risk level is **orange, no food or beverages should be consumed.** If the level is **yellow**, the decision about Worship Service Coffee Hour will be made by the Board of Trustees based on specific Carteret County metrics. For other large UCF group meetings, if the level is **yellow**, food and beverages should be consumed outdoors. If outdoor consumption is impossible due to weather considerations, UCF leadership recommends that the event not include food or beverage service. Positive COVID results within 3 days of a meeting will be reported to the UCF Office Assistant at ucfofficeassistant@gmail.com.

GUIDELINES FOR EVENTS SPONSORED BY NON-UCF GROUPS:

UCF recommends that **non-UCF groups** follow the policies for masking and consumption of food and/or beverages stated above for UCF-sponsored events. Leaders of **non-UCF groups** may instead choose to adopt other policies for safe gathering with respect to COVID community risk levels. In either case, non-UCF groups using UCF facilities do so with the understanding that they do so “at their own risk” with respect to COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

V. RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES, FORMS, GUIDELINES, AND OTHER RESOURCES

Current Procedures

Procedures shall be created by the Minister and by the Leadership Council, to be empowered by the Board upon the approval of this policy. The Board will review and revise the policy as needed at least every 2 months.

Resources

[UUA’s Guidance for Gathering page](#) and links found therein

Masking and Covenantal Consent <https://www.uua.org/leaderlab/pandemics/masking-comics>

[Guidance on Gathering as the Pandemic Evolves](#)

[UUA COVID-19 Delta Variant Gathering Guidance](#)

[Vision, Mission and Covenant of the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship](#)

www.covidactnow.org for Carteret County daily updates of the metrics

The most ardent thanks to Rev. Elizabeth Mount of the UU Church of Indiana, PA, for sharing their well-crafted and thoroughly researched policy with us. Rev. Mount in turn thanks the UU Church in Reston, VA, the Greenville UU Fellowship, SC, and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Duluth, IA.

VI. HISTORY

This policy was created in February 2022 and revised in May, July, and November 2022, and in January 2023 to give guidance for reopening UCF not only during a pandemic, but in the midst of a physical transition to a new building. It has been a long two years of online-only worship and class offerings, made longer by the absence of a building to gather in. We thank everyone for their patience and hope they can be patient with us.