

Revised COVID-Safety Guidelines for Faith United

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June 5, 2021

Dear Faith United Members and Friends,

Please read the following COVID-Safety Guidelines for Faith United updated on June 5, 2021. These updates are the result of research, prayer and conversations with staff and the New Beginnings Team. Members of the New Beginnings Team are listed below as are the resources utilized in our research. The Congregational Survey that was offered May 31 – June 2 provided helpful input from the congregation. A summary of the survey's results is provided below. Thank you for all who completed the survey.

I also want to thank you, the congregation, for your patience, understanding and faithfulness throughout this pandemic. I know that it has been challenging for all of us to adjust to new practices such as wearing masks, attending meetings by zoom, participating in worship online and so much more. But we have carried on, learned new things, stepped outside of our comfort zones, adapted, and found that above all, God is faithful. Even with so much change, the church has continued to provide vital ministries, mission, and outreach. Thank you and praise God!

Finally, please note that these guidelines are subject to change at any time based on conditions and updates published from the sources listed below.

The New Beginnings Team

1. Roger Baker, MD, Obstetrics and Gynecology, grandfather of teenagers
2. Molly Meister, Middle School Teacher, mother of 14 and 16-yr olds
3. Missy Jones, Crisis Mental Health Therapist at Akron Children's, Mother of an 11 and 15-yr old
4. Cindy Wilcox, PHD, Psychologist, Co-Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), grandmother of children under 12
5. Jessica Stroia, Member of North Canton Board of Education, Lay Leader, mother of 10-yr old
6. Teresa Purses, PHD, Executive Director Stark Education Partnership, Inc., Stephen's Minister
7. Kathy Schmucker, Spiritual Formation Director, caring for vulnerable parent in her home
8. Jake Heskett, Associate Pastor, Father of two children under age 3 and one teenager
9. Steve Stultz Costello, Senior Pastor, Father of a 16 and 18-yr old

Resources, Sources, Links and Decision Process

1. CDC - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>
2. WHO - <https://www.paho.org/en>
3. Governor Dewine - <https://governor.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/governor/>
4. Coronavirus.Ohio.Gov - <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/home>
5. Bishop's Letter with new guidelines <https://www.eocumc.com/bishop/importantcovid19message-7.html>
6. Staff at Faith United
7. Faith Friends Learning Center Practices
8. Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS)
9. Congregational Survey in March, 2021
10. Congregational Survey May 31 – June 2, 2021

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Congregational Survey May 31 – June 2, 2021 – Summary of Results

- Survey emailed to 495 people
- 172 people completed the survey
- **Question 1 – optional – “In Terms of the Vaccine, I am...”**
 - Fully Vaccinated – 161 people, 93.6%
 - Waiting for second vaccine shot – 4 people, 2.3%
 - Waiting for my first shot – 1 person, 0.6%
 - Not planning on getting vaccinated – 3 people, 1.7%
 - Other – Write in responses – 3 people – 1.7%
- **Question 2 – Required – “I am in the following age bracket...”**
 - 61-75 years of age – 74 people, 43%
 - Over 75 years of age – 43 people, 25%
 - 18-50 years of age – 33 people, 19.2%
 - 51-60 years of age – 21 people, 12.2%
 - Under 18 years of age – 1 person, 0.6%
- **Question 3 – Required – “I/We have children...”**
 - None of the Above (meaning adult children or no children) – 126 people, 73.3%
 - Under 12 years of age – 17 people, 9.9%
 - 12 to 18 years of age – 13 people, 7.6%
 - All the Above (meaning having children under 12 and 12-18) – 7 people, 4.1%
 - Other or write in – 9 people, 5.2%
 - Two wrote in that they bring grandchildren to worship
 - 7 wrote in that they have adult children
- **Question 4 – Required – “I would feel safe if we allowed fully vaccinated persons the option to not wear a mask...”**
 - Starting June 6 – 124 people, 72.1%
 - Starting July 4 – 19 people, 11%
 - After August 1 – 9 people, 5.2%
 - Not until children under 12 are able to be fully vaccinated (likely after Dec.) – 7 people, 4.1%
 - Other or write in – 13 people, 7.6%
 - Six comments were variations of “I feel safe around others masked or not now” other comments varied from “keep social distancing” to “I’m not sure yet.”
- **Question 5 – Required – “I would feel safe in worship if we allowed the congregation to sing...”**
 - Starting June 6, masks required only if not fully vaccinated – 96 people, 55.8%
 - Starting June 6, masks required for everyone except worship leaders – 27 people, 15.7%
 - Starting July 4, masks required only if not fully vaccinated – 16 people, 9.3%
 - After August 1 – 8 people, 4.7%
 - Starting July 4, masks required for everyone except worship leaders – 5 people, 2.9%
 - Other or write in – 20 people, 11.6%
 - About half the comments were some variation of “Sing now, no masks required for anyone” and about half the comments were some variation of “Not until CDC says singing is safe” or “I am concerned about the little ones.”

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At All Times, for Worship and All Events or Gatherings

- Please continue to practice frequent hand washing and sanitizing. Hand sanitizer will be available through the church building.
- If you have any of the common symptoms of COVID-19 or other spreadable illnesses, please stay home. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:
 - Sore throat
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Diarrhea
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Fatigue
 - Headache
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Congestion or runny nose

Online Worship Livestream

- Both the 8:30 traditional and the 11:00 Modern Services will be livestreamed every week and archived for On Demand viewing at any time via YouTube or the church website.
- Online worship is considered a valued alternative to in-person worship for a variety of reasons including travel, illness, medical conditions, caring for family members, and even preference. We value our online worshippers as part of our growing faith community.
- It is our intention to always provide an online option for worship.
- Anyone who does not feel comfortable or safe coming to in-person worship under the revised COVID-safety Guidelines provided below is encouraged to participate in worship online.

Masks – Effective June 6

- Masks are optional for adults who are fully vaccinated in worship and gatherings of any kind (small groups, ministry team meetings, etc.).
 - Adults who are not fully vaccinated, for their safety and the safety of others, are asked to please wear a mask
 - Fully vaccinated is defined as at least two weeks after a person's final vaccine shot
- Youth and children – masks may be worn or not, parental choice, for worship and gatherings of any kind. This applies to youth who are vaccinated or not.
- Nursery Care and Children's Ministry staff and volunteers will be required to wear a mask at all times indoors regardless of their vaccination status.
 - This is following the updated guidelines provided by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) that our Faith Friends Learning Center is following.
- No one will be asked to verify if they have been fully vaccinated

Plexiglass Shield in the Sanctuary Removed – Effective June 6

- The plexiglass that has been used in the chancel area of the sanctuary to create a barrier between worship leaders and the congregation will no longer be present

Singing – Effective June 13

- All persons in worship will be welcome to sing beginning June 13

Printed Bulletins – Effective June 13

- Printed Bulletins for the 8:30 Traditional Worship service will be available beginning June 13
- The Modern Worship has not provided a printed bulletin for more than ten years. We will not start to provide a printed bulletin now.
- QR codes with access to a digital copy of the bulletin will be available for both the 8:30 and 11:00 services. For those who don't mind using the QR code, this option helps us to be better stewards of time, resources, and the environment

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Hymnals and Faith We Sing in Pews – Effective June 13

- Hymnals and The Faith We Sing will be returned to the pews beginning June 13

Fellowship Pads / Attendance Books In Pews – Effective June 13

- The books placed in the pews used for people in worship to register their attendance will be provided in the pews beginning June 13
- The QR Code will also provide access to registering attendance digitally

Social Distanced Seating – Effective June 13

- Beginning June 13, two sections of pews will be open for full seating capacity and two sections of pews will have ribbons to mark every other pew closed to provide social distanced seating for those who feel more comfortable with more social distancing

Worship Engagement Items / Worship Manipulatives Provided – Effective June 13

- Worship manipulatives such as clip boards and finger labyrinths will be available beginning June 13.
- Some worship manipulatives that are more difficult to disinfect such as a stuffed animal will not be available until a later date
- Persons with particular needs such as noise canceling headphones or other sensory assistance resources are encouraged to go to the Welcome Center in the Gathering Area or contact Kathy Schmucker, Director of Spiritual Formation. Faith United is committed to help people get what they need to enhance their worship experience while minimizing the risks of harm.

Sunday School

- Sunday School for all ages will be provided at 9:45 Sunday mornings beginning in September

Communion

- For June 6, Communion will be taken in the pews using self-contained communion elements of grape juice and a wafer.
- Other options are being considered and may be introduced as early as July 4

Offering – Passing the Plates

- Passing the offering plates will be practiced again at a later date yet to be determined
- For now, tithes and offerings, checks and/or cash may be placed in the offering box in the Narthex, dropped off in the office during the week M-F 9:00-4:00 or mailed in
- Giving electronically or giving by text will continue to be available and is encouraged

Children's Sermon – Children Coming Forward

- We will still be offering a Children's Sermon with children remaining in their pews with their families.
- We will begin inviting children to come forward for the Children's Sermon at a future date to be determined.

Social Distancing

- All are encouraged to be mindful of the comfort level of others when engaging in fellowship.
- It is encouraged to fellowship outside if possible.
- Maintaining 3-6 feet of distance is also recommended.
- When sitting next to someone, please ask them if they are comfortable with your distancing or simply sit more than 6 feet apart.

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Methods of Personal Greeting

- All are encouraged to communicate their own level of comfort regarding personal greetings. Even pre-pandemic, people have different comfort levels related to hugs, handshaking, etc. It is especially important, at this time while the pandemic is not yet over, to honor one another's comfort level for personal greetings. The best way to know is simply to ask.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- The sanctuary will be sprayed with an anti-viral disinfecting mist between the 8:30 and 11:00 services
- We will not be wiping down, disinfecting, or sterilizing surfaces

Welcome Center

- Volunteers will be present at our Welcome Center in the Gathering Area to assist with needs including
 - Help with accessing worship resources online using the QR code
 - Providing masks for anyone who wants one
 - Providing Kulture City Sensory items
 - Assisting with directions
 - Answering questions

Other Important Considerations

- In the same way that the safety of our elders has been honored throughout this global crisis let us demonstrate the same concern for our children who have yet to be vaccinated as well as persons who are immunocompromised.
- Please honor the safety and preference of those persons who, for personal reasons, choose to continue to wear face masks.
- All groups and teams who plan to meet by Zoom or in-person whether at the church or another need to coordinate with Sharyl Syler in the church office. In addition, Study Groups and Fellowship Groups who plan to meet in-person or by Zoom, please also contact Kathy Schmucker to help with coordinating your group plans.

I hope these guidelines make sense and that whether you agree with all of them or not, I pray that the caring spirit and best intentions with which they were discerned and drafted is sensed. Again, thank you for your patience, understanding and support. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



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Sr. Pastor, Faith United

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