

The Unity North Spiritual Center Board of Trustees had hoped to return to in-person services on September 13, 2020 with an understanding that we would develop a robust program of processes and protocols to reopen our church building. However, we will not be opening Unity North Spiritual Center on September 13 for services. Please review the 4-Stage Reopening Plan for In-Person Gatherings that has been approved by our Board of Trustees.

A Message from Rev. Kathy McCall

Dear Unity Friends,

There is a collective and very personal longing for more connection as we traverse this pandemic. That has made the decision to delay in-person Sunday Services at Unity North Spiritual Center much more difficult. Yet, the Board and I are deeply committed to putting everyone's safety first!

The summarized version of our Re-Opening Plan was published in my letter of August 8, 2020. This shorter description and the more detailed version are now both available to read on here on our website. We are grateful that Rev Pat Williamson and the Unity Minneapolis Board of Trustees generously shared their Preparation Plan and allowed us to adapt it to our needs as a different size community. We concur with this excerpt from a May 11, 2020 article shared by Dr. Michael Osterholm, University of MN Director for Infectious Disease Research. Dr. Osterholm said,

“Churches should embrace virtual worship and be prepared to gather that way for the long haul. COVID-19 is transmitted through aerosols breathed in, so anytime multiple people are gathered in a single space, everyone present is at risk—particularly because symptoms of coronavirus typically don’t show up until several days after someone is infected. Virtual worship is as perfect as you can get right now for what we need. Additionally, all congregations should continue to suspend in-person worship beyond Gov. Walz’s order because COVID-19 will still be spreading—and any indoor gathering, no matter how many precautions we take, will still present a significant exposure risk.”

The fact remains that we miss each other! We long for the hugs and handshakes and conversations and connections that we experienced at Sunday Services, in classes, in prayer, and social gatherings. So now we have a great opportunity! We are called to be active participants in “virtual church.” We have full intention of re-opening as circumstances permit, and at the same time, we are taking a step into the future. We have all entered a new reality and a different way of connecting. We may not be able to touch physically, but we can now truly experience the meaning of a “church without walls.” We still have our core identity as Unity North Spiritual Center, and we also now truly welcome and accept all people wherever they are!

The last class I taught had people from five different states: Minnesota, California, Oklahoma, Ohio, and New York! That will also be true in Sunday Services, as we use a virtual platform or progress to live-stream. (We are exploring our best options for those, and in the meantime, you will still receive the Sunday videos being recorded.) Rather than focus on what we are missing, let us rejoice in the fact that we can still see each other in a virtual format!

If you do not have a computer or are unable to move freely in this virtual world, we will provide help or ways by which you can also feel included. Please let us know your needs. In addition, let us all make more effort to reach out to one another, not only through texts and emails, but through phone calls. It is important to stay connected through this time!

I also invite you to reach out to me personally. I was only with you for 3 ½ months before the pandemic arrived, and I was still in the process of getting to know all of you, and vice versa. I am happy to speak with you by phone or by a virtual platform to listen to your life stories, your concerns, and any questions you might have of me. It is a way by which we can take action to connect. Or if you would prefer that I call you, please send an email letting me know: kmccall12@gmail.com.

We continue forward prayerfully as we navigate the virtual world in this time of challenge. And we trust in Divine guidance for the right and perfect time to open once again.

Stay safe!

Love & blessings!

Rev. Kathy

Summary of the 4 Stage Reopening Plan for In-Person Gatherings at Unity North Spiritual Center:

1. We are in Stage 1 now with no gathering at the facility, inside or outside. Sunday worship is virtual. To move to Stage 2 requires a steady two-week reduction in the daily number of new statewide COVID-19 cases.
2. After a solid two-week decline in reported statewide cases, we move into Stage 2 with some outdoor gatherings. Small groups and meetings are encouraged to meet virtually and yet may meet outside at church (up to 10 people) with safety protocols in place. Worship services will continue to be virtual. If the number of new cases spikes upward again, we return to Stage 1. When we have a consistent declining trajectory for four weeks and accessible and available COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, and Personal Protective Equipment for healthcare providers, we will move to Stage 3.
3. After a consistent decline in the daily number of new statewide COVID-19 cases for four or more weeks, larger in-person groups may meet in the church with strict safety protocols in place. 25-30 people is the maximum capacity, in the largest rooms in the building, when using 6-foot physical distancing. This stage is when we may return to the sanctuary (with Minister/Board approval) in limited numbers with strict protocols in place for Sunday morning worship.
4. This final stage requires a COVID-19 cure, vaccine, or herd immunity with local/state health officials determining that the risk to vulnerable community members is low. When we have reached Stage 4, our church building will be fully available to everyone.

4 Stage Reopening Plan for In-Person Gatherings at Unity North Spiritual Center

Each benchmark must be satisfied before moving to the next stage. Increases in reported cases means a return to the previous level. These guidelines may be updated at the discretion of Unity leadership based on changing conditions.

Stage 1

Unity North Spiritual Center will operate in this stage under the following conditions:

1. There **has not** been a consistent two-week reduction in the number of reported state-wide COVID-19 cases.

Stage 1 Guidelines:

- The church building is closed to the public. If necessary, during the week delivery/drop-offs may be arranged by church staff. In the event of live streaming on Sunday morning, only Sunday service participants allowed in the church building.
- Staff work from home with minimal visits to the building. All staff meetings are virtual only. If it is necessary for staff to be in the office, cloth masks will be worn outside of offices and physical distancing protocols will be followed (remain at least 6 feet apart). Frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing will be followed. High-touch surfaces will continue to be cleaned/sanitized regularly.
- Maintain communication with local/state authorities, including Centers for Disease Control and Minnesota Department of Health, to determine and implement data-driven, medically recommended virus and disease mitigation strategies in our community.
- Maintain regular communication with congregants and members via mail, email, phone, social media, website; be transparent about how decisions are being made and the resources guiding decision.
- Leadership communicates with church insurance company regarding any decisions about building use and resuming in-person activities during the pandemic.
- Sunday service continues to be virtual. In the event of live streaming the Minister and live stream team will be the only people allowed in the building. Cloth masks to be worn by everyone entering the building and physical distancing protocols followed (remain at least 6 feet apart).
- Unity North Spiritual Center Minister manages pastoral needs by phone, virtually, or other electronic means.

- Board of Trustees, committee and team meetings, adult education classes and workshops, and other small church groups meet virtually.
- No outside community group meetings allowed in the building.
- Weddings, Celebration of Life Services, Christenings, and/or other special services of the church may be available via a virtual platform.
- Unity North Spiritual Center building, garden and grounds team members will wear cloth masks and follow physical distancing protocols (remain at least 6 feet apart) while maintaining the grounds and gardens.

Board of Trustees and Minister will continue to discuss alternate plans for Sunday services and ministry activities that do not involve in-person gatherings in the church building.

Stage 2

Unity North Spiritual Center will operate in this stage under the following conditions:

1. There **has** been a consistent two-week reduction in the number of reported state-wide COVID-19 cases.
2. Indoor gatherings of 10 individuals are allowed by the MN Department of Health.
3. In the greater local community schools, day cares, and other child-related gathering spaces allow in-person gatherings/operations **with** restrictions.
4. Available and accessible testing and contact tracing capabilities are reported by state and local health officials.
5. Healthcare facilities report adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE).

Stage 2 Guidelines:

- Children, Uniteens, and Y.O.U. may gather for outdoor activities in groups of 10 or less, but only if church staff, youth, and the youth's parents agree to participation.
- Small church groups of 10 or fewer adults are encouraged to meet virtually but may be permitted to gather. Board of Trustees, committee and team meetings, adult education classes and workshops, and others at the church building to meet outside the church building (in the parking lot or on the lawn areas of the church property, etc.).
 - Participants bring their own chair and all supplies needed for the meeting.
 - Participants follow physical distancing protocols and wear a mask.
 - Bathrooms can be available to meeting participants entering the building one at a time.
- Participants and organizers agree not to hold Unity North Spiritual Center liable for any illness (including contracting the novel coronavirus which causes COVID-19) that may incur as a result of participating in events on Unity North Spiritual Center property.
- Outside community group meetings are still not allowed in the building.
- Weddings, Celebration of Life Services, Christenings, and/or other special services of the church will follow the guidelines for in-person gatherings for church groups outlined above.

Board of Trustees and Minister continue to discuss alternate plans for Sunday services and other ministry activities that do not involve in-person gatherings in the church building. Discussion will also continue regarding realistic expectations for returning to in-person worship at Unity North Spiritual Center.

Stage 3

Unity North Spiritual Center will operate in this stage under the following conditions:

1. A clear downward trajectory in the number of reported state-wide COVID-19 cases for four or more consecutive weeks.
2. Indoor gatherings of 50 individuals are allowed by the MN Department of Health.
3. Available and accessible testing and contact tracing capabilities are reported by state and local health officials.
4. Healthcare facilities report adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE).

Stage 3 Guidelines:

- The church building is closed to the public. Church staff can return to work in the building and pre-approved visitors are allowed. Recommend that staff meetings remain virtual. The current MN Department of Health recommendations for masks and physical distancing will be followed in the building. Frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing will be followed. High-touch surfaces will continue to be cleaned/sanitized regularly.
- All indoor gatherings meet in an area with an outside air source or with an updated indoor air filtration HVAC system.
- In-person services with safety protocols and attendance limitations may be implemented by Unity North Spiritual Center leadership after all benchmarks in Stage 3 have been met.
- Children, Uniteens, and Y.O.U. may meet in the building but only if church staff, youth, and the youth's parents agree to participation. Outdoor activities are strongly encouraged. If activities take place indoors, attendance limitations per room will be in place. If physical distancing continues to be recommended by MN Department of Health, the indoor youth meetings must occur in a room with ample space for physical distancing. Masks to be worn by all participants according to recommendations of MN Department of Health.
- Unity North Spiritual Center Minister continues to manage pastoral needs by phone, virtually, or other electronic means. In-person visits may be made with the consent of all parties involved while wearing cloth masks and maintaining physical distancing protocols as recommended by the MN Department of Health.
- Board of Trustees, committee and team meetings, adult education classes and workshops, and other small church groups are encouraged to meet virtually, but may be permitted to gather at the church building under the following conditions:
 - NOTE: 25-30 people is the largest group Unity North Spiritual Center can accommodate in the building with physical distancing protocols followed.
 - Groups are still encouraged to meet outside the church building if possible (in the parking lot, on the lawn areas of the church property, etc.)
 - If it is not possible to meet outdoors:
 - ◆ Organizers will arrive at the church building ahead of meeting times to prop open building entrance and meeting room doors to minimize contact with doors/door handles.
 - ◆ Group meetings will be held in a space that allows all participants to follow physical distancing protocols as recommended by the MN Department of Health.
 - ◆ All participants wear cloth masks and follow physical distancing protocols as recommended by the MN Department of Health.
 - ◆ No singing allowed with the exception of a Sunday Service Musician on-stage in the Sanctuary, over 10-15 feet from nearest person.
 - Participants and organizers agree not to hold Unity North Spiritual Center liable for any illness (including contracting the novel coronavirus which causes COVID-19) that may incur as a result of participating in events on Unity North Spiritual Center property.
- Outside community groups may be allowed to meet at the church building ONLY if: Unity North Spiritual Center's insurance company has been notified of such use; AND the groups agree to the above conditions in writing.
- Weddings, Celebration of Life Services, Christenings, and/or other special services of the church will follow the guidelines for in-person and community group gatherings outlined above.

Board of Trustees and Minister discussions continue regarding realistic expectations for returning to in-person worship at Unity North Spiritual Center. In-person services with safety protocols could be implemented by Unity North Spiritual Center leadership after all benchmarks in Stage 3 have been met.

Stage 4

Unity North Spiritual Center will operate in this stage under the following conditions:

1. Schools, day cares, and other child-related gathering spaces within the greater local community allow in-person gatherings without restrictions.
2. One of the following criteria has been met to minimize community spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19:
 - a cure is found and widely available to the public;
 - a vaccine is developed and widely available to the public; or

- herd immunity is achieved to the extent that local/state health officials determine that the risk to vulnerable community members need not restrict in-person gatherings.
3. These guidelines may be updated at the discretion of Unity leadership based on changing conditions. Leadership will:
- Continue to re-evaluate Minnesota data, checking health recommendations from Minnesota Department of Health, about daily transmissions and adjust operations accordingly.
 - Continue to follow state guidelines if you are aware of someone infected with the coronavirus which causes COVID-19 and report information to proper authorities, maintaining confidentiality.

Stage 4 Guidelines:

- In-person church activities and Sunday services may resume including persons of all ages and in all populations (vulnerable and non-vulnerable) with minimal or no restrictions as determined by Unity leadership.
- Outside community groups may resume with minimal or no restrictions as determined by Unity leadership.
- Maintain sanitation/cleaning and hygiene measures at church, including propping open entrance, meeting room, and sanctuary doors as weather permits, and maximizing indoor airflow with the introduction of outside air and HVAC filtration systems.
- Physical distancing may be relaxed, and masks may become optional as determined by Unity leadership.
- In-person Sunday social time may resume depending on the local and state regulations.

During all stages:

If we become aware that staff, visitors, or congregants that have been in the building or an outdoor gathering test positive for COVID-19, notify local health officials and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality. Follow guidelines to care for the person and all who might have come into contact with that person. Follow direction of local/state health officials regarding a suspension of in-person gatherings on church property.

This 4 Stage Reopening Plan for In-Person Gatherings may be updated at the discretion of Unity North Spiritual Center leadership based on changing conditions.

Thank you to Rev. Pat Williamson and the Unity Minneapolis Board of Trustees for generously sharing their Preparation Plan and allowing Unity North Spiritual Center to adapt it to our needs.

Resources

- State of MN Case Overview can be reviewed at: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html#overview2>
- Centers for Disease Control Recommendations: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Minnesota Stay Safe Plan: <https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/stay-safe-mn/stay-safe-plan.jsp>
- Osterholm and Walz Talk COVID-19 and the Church: <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/newsdetail/osterholm-and-walz-talk-covid-19-and-churches-13993626>