

Find Your Place When the Time is Right for You

Now that we are several weeks into what would traditionally be our program year, I wanted to offer an overview of our current approach to living with Covid-19. I hope this message will answer some frequently asked questions and help you make informed decisions about how to participate in the life of the church.

Our church returned to in-person worship on August 15, doing so with some of the strictest community health practices we know of among churches in Chapel Hill. Masking is required in public spaces in our building, including in worship. Worship is followed by an outdoor time of fellowship, where masking is optional. Our experience has been that those who attend services in person feel comfortable in our space, so we are making further adjustments toward more normal worship practices. We had organized for Communion to take place outdoors following the service, but beginning this week Communion will be taken indoors during each worship service. Our intention this fall has been to start small and take incremental steps toward more regular activity, so we are making adjustments as we go.

The reason we continue to take such a cautious approach to programming is that we have been monitoring the course of the Delta variant. We're also aware that families with unvaccinated children are especially mindful of elective community gatherings because of the risks they face with school attendance. So the current policy of the church is to invite our community to indoor worship services, including funerals and memorial services, and encourage outdoor alternatives for non-worship programs. As our program year has gotten underway, many ministries around the church have convened themselves with a preference for outdoor and digital gatherings. Our staff is organizing activity outdoors and online because our programs are often directed toward families with children who have a preference for those options.

Our building is available for small group activities, but we aren't convening larger assemblies outside of our regular worship experiences. We aren't able to offer an indoor Adult Forum right now, but small groups, Sunday school classes, and other gatherings can take place indoors at the request of the group organizers. Groups wishing to meet indoors or outdoors at the church should contact Church Administrator Kati Ruark to make those arrangements.

Children and Children's Ministry Activities

Childcare is available on Sunday mornings downstairs in the lower level of the

Narthex. Our childcare workers organize their time outdoors on the playground, with our indoor classrooms as a weather contingency. While we aren't sponsoring a regular Sunday School program for children this fall, Anitra Grove has developed a schedule of events with the needs of families with children in mind. She is in regular communication with UCCH families.

Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Pastor Ian and the Board of Youth and Young Adult Ministry have developed plans for Confirmation, youth group, and the Hub. Much of their activity will be outdoors in the coming weeks. We're especially excited that some of these programs will be supported by Alan Potter, a Duke Divinity School student conducting a field education placement with us.

Membership and Community Groups

Pastor Mary Elizabeth is convening two special gatherings in the Library this fall for those who wish to join the church in membership. She has also met recently with the leaders of our Community Groups to envision the best ways to gather at home and in small groups in the year ahead. For the past year, Mary Elizabeth has taken a storytelling approach to our ministry to empower us to share our stories, build community across difference, and invite others into the life of our church. We hope to celebrate the completion of her Story Project sometime in the year ahead.

Music

After several weeks of worship with Pickup Choirs beginning August 15, Jenny Anderson has recently resumed a regular schedule of choir rehearsals for youth and adults. Jenny is organizing some rehearsals outdoors and others in large indoor spaces. She has been working with music directors in nearby churches to develop choral practices that are safe and welcoming for the months ahead.

La Mesa

Pastor David has been leading worship in La Mesa in person since August 15, and he is leading the way in developing a livestream setup for our services to share digital content in real time. La Mesa and the sanctuary service join together for a time of fellowship after worship on Sunday mornings.

Digital Access

Our hope is to make worship accessible to everyone in the church regardless of their ability to be present on Sunday mornings. [All of our online worship services are available on YouTube.](#) Returning to indoor worship has meant that we have scaled back our pre-taped worship videos. The Church Council has appointed a new IT

Infrastructure Task Force that is moving aggressively to install livestream technology so that we can share our worship online in real time. Bill Siddall, Vicki Gardner, Peter Schay, and Mary McMillan have been exploring options for us and I feel confident that we will soon have plans for significant technology upgrades to keep our church connected with worship in the sanctuary and La Mesa.

I hope these updates will help you find your place in returning to worship and programming at United Church. When the time is right for you and your family, we will be here for you and ready to welcome you to worship with open hearts.

Sincerely,

Rev. Cameron Barr

(919) 942-3540 | 1321 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd, Chapel Hill, NC 27514 | www.unitedchurch.org

