

**Update to Council and Congregation from the COVID Advisory Committee
April 13, 2021**

Themes from Zoom “coffee hour”

The COVID Advisory Committee hosted a Zoom “coffee hour” after worship on Sunday, April 11, to listen to the concerns and questions of congregation members. The Committee then met on April 13 to review what we heard and begin planning how we might respond. Here are some themes that emerged, and some of the COVID Committee’s responses so far:

- People are eager to resume contact that is safe, and some groups where most or all members have been vaccinated would like to meet in person.

RESPONSE: *We will bring a proposal to the April Council meeting that Council immediately support small groups of up to 10 people meeting outdoors in person.*

- People would like their ministries to be able to return to normal sharing of responsibilities and work, especially Fresh Start, where one couple has been managing all of the physical work so that other members can avoid having in-person contact with members outside their household.

RESPONSE: *We will bring a proposal to the April Council meeting that 2 people from different households may work together in person on tasks for essential ministries that must happen in the church building (such as Fresh Start and Arts in Worship)*

- People are worried about the mental health effects of isolation, especially for those who have had the least access to technology. People are asking how we might increase outreach and support to people who are isolated, and it was suggested that we prioritize access to in-person activities for those least able to connect remotely.

RESPONSE: *Our part time Congregational Chaplain, Stevi, has begun to contact congregation members for exactly this reason. So far she is hearing that more people are more connected than we knew, which is great! Stevi will be with us through July. Congregation members and friends can contact her at: chaplain@fccb.net*

Vaccines!

- Our Faith Community Nurses are available to help schedule appointments for vaccination!

RESPONSE: *Thank you!!*

- The church could make a public statement supporting vaccination as an act of community protection (love, responsibility, care).

RESPONSE: *We think this is a great idea!*

- People are concerned that church activities continue to “welcome all” without regard to vaccination status.

RESPONSE: *We are recommending that church activities continue to “welcome all” without regard to vaccination status.*

- Several people asked if the church will keep track of which members have been vaccinated.
RESPONSE: *The COVID Committee recommends against tracking vaccination status of individuals, for privacy and HIPAA concerns, and because we think there are better ways to help protect each other. Reaching our goal of decreasing community transmission will require our broader population to be fully vaccinated – the rate of vaccination just within our church community will not give us useful public health information. We are hopeful and grateful that people are getting vaccinated! We just don't think there is a public health value to keeping track of the vaccination status of congregation members.*

- We need to have hope – can we think about “what CAN we do?” since it may be a while yet before it will be safe to do all that we want to do or used to do.

RESPONSE: *YES! As a first step, see proposal for immediate approval of outdoor small groups of up to 10 people. We are hoping this would provide most boards and other groups with an opportunity to meet safely (outdoors, masked, etc) in person if they would like to do so. The spring weather is also bringing hope and making outdoor options more appealing.*

- People are interested in having groups meet at the church, and there is also concern to protect staff in their workplace, especially until all staff have been fully vaccinated.

RESPONSE: *we recommend waiting to even consider meetings or social gatherings inside the church building until all our staff have been fully vaccinated. Several staff are only now becoming eligible for vaccination and given the wait time for appointments and the fact that the Moderna vaccine is a 6 week process, it looks like it will be at least 2 months (and likely longer) before all staff are fully vaccinated.*

- There are large outdoor spaces at people’s homes that could potentially be used for outdoor church gatherings.

RESPONSE: *this is great to know as conditions and opportunities evolve, thank you!*

The COVID Committee will bring three formal proposals to the April 26 Council meeting:

- 1.) that Council immediately allow **in-person outdoor** gatherings of up to **10** people for FCCB activities and ministries, following the steps and protocols approved by Council in November 2020. (an increase from the original plan for small groups of up to 5 people).
- 2.) that Council allow 2 people from different households to work on tasks together in-person for church mission and ministry activities that must happen in the church building (such as Fresh Start, and Arts in Worship Board’s preparation of the sanctuary), as long as this work:
 - a. Is scheduled through the church office,
 - b. Is planned to avoid in-person interaction with staff, and
 - c. Follows all current COVID protocols.
- 3.) That Council make a public statement on behalf of the church that we encourage all who are eligible to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a way to protect and care for our greater community. And that we continue to let congregation members and friends know that our Faith Community Nurses can help people set up appointments for vaccination.

Other recommendations from the COVID Committee include:

- That we update the COVID information on our church website to include a direct link to CDC guidance for people who have been fully vaccinated
- That FCCB **not** attempt to compile personal vaccination information for individuals (out of concern for privacy and HIPAA, and because this would be of limited value in protecting congregation members)
- That FCCB continue to “welcome all” to all church activities and ministries, without regard to vaccination status
- That we wait to consider requests for groups to hold in-person meetings or social activities in the church building until all staff are fully vaccinated, in order to provide the safest possible workplace for staff (aside from proposal to Council #2 above).
- That we continue to ask that organized or official ministries of FCCB refrain from inviting people to sing together in person at this time, due to COVID safety concerns. We recognize this is hard -- our souls long to sing together, and not being able to sing together has caused deep grief and loss this past year.

Further Discussion

The COVID committee has been staying informed about local, national, and international health information. There is hope, as vaccination rates increase, and there is also still significant concern, as infection rates are rising rapidly again in some areas, and it is still unknown how well the vaccines will protect against new variants.

For a sobering view from the CEO of UW Medicine, see:

https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/were-in-a-critical-stage-in-the-race-to-end-deadly-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2mzbTlo7WM_Dm0jpfYFlhwtbP0mTOJc7yEoQD0prKkj_Beg35cEfqkGPU

Our greatest protection will be when most people are vaccinated population wide. The rate of vaccination within specific groups, such as within our church, does not really matter – stopping virus transmission will require our broader community to be vaccinated.

Being fully vaccinated does not guarantee we won't get sick, and it is still unknown how easily fully vaccinated people can transmit the virus to others. Vaccinated people gathering with unvaccinated people is likely safe for the *vaccinated* people, but not necessarily for the *unvaccinated* people. Vaccines are not 100% effective for individuals.

Some information from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (4/12/21)

CDC still recommends avoiding events and even visiting people

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

COVID-19 Cases are Extremely High. Avoid Events and Gatherings.

COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths [are extremely high across the United States](#). To decrease your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19, CDC recommends that you [do not visit with people who do not live with you](#) at this time. **Attending events and gatherings increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. Stay home to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.**

Guidance for people who are fully vaccinated can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

For now, if you've been fully vaccinated:

- You should still take steps to [protect yourself and others](#) in many situations, like wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces. Take these precautions whenever you are:
 - In public
 - Gathering with unvaccinated people from more than one other household
 - Visiting with an unvaccinated person who is at [increased risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19](#) or who lives with a person at increased risk
- You should still avoid [medium or large-sized gatherings](#).
- You should still watch out for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), especially if you've been around someone who is sick. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get [tested](#) and [stay home](#) and away from others.

What We Know and What We're Still Learning

- **We know** that COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing COVID-19 disease, especially severe illness and death.
 - **We're still learning** how effective the vaccines are against variants of the virus that causes COVID-19. Early data show the vaccines may work against some variants but could be less effective against others.
- **We know** that other [prevention steps](#) help stop the spread of COVID-19, and that these steps are still important, even as vaccines are being distributed.
 - **We're still learning** how well COVID-19 vaccines keep people from spreading the disease.

- Early data show that the vaccines may help keep people from spreading COVID-19, but we are learning more as more people get vaccinated.
- We're still learning **how long** COVID-19 vaccines can protect people.
- As we know more, CDC will continue to update our recommendations for both vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

Until we know more about those questions, everyone—even people who've had their vaccines—should continue taking [steps to protect themselves and others](#) when recommended.