

From: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, UUA President <info@uua.org>
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2020 2:31 PM
To: Mike McDonald
Subject: Essential and Virtual: Updated Guidance for Gathering



Special Announcement Unitarian Universalist Association

May 2020

Dear Mike,

As states around the country begin to loosen guidelines and take actions to reopen, even as COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to climb, we have received many questions from congregations about returning to in-person gatherings.

Over the past several weeks, the UUA has consulted with multiple public health officials in order to update the guidance we provided on March 12 recommending congregations stop gathering in person.

Based on advice from experts, we continue to recommend that congregations not gather in person. We also recommend that congregations begin planning for virtual operations for the next year (through May 2021).

Take a moment to breathe. I know this is significant.

While there is much public conversation about “reopening,” the reality is public health officials consistently predict a long trajectory for this pandemic. A majority of our congregational members, leaders, and staff members are in high-risk categories. Our care for the well-being and safety of our members and staff must be a priority in this pandemic.

*This pandemic teaches us that our actions directly impact the health
and well-being of our neighbors.*

Additionally, religious gatherings are considered highly contagious events. The acts of singing, the familiarity of people across households, the multigenerational community of children, youth, adults, and seniors—the things that make our congregations so special—also create more risk for spreading the virus.

Given that so much uncertainty and risk remain, anticipating a year of virtual operations allows for more creative long-term planning, while still being flexible if conditions change significantly. We recognize that with time, and depending on the specific conditions and recommendations of local public health officials, small in-person groups of people and limited staff activities onsite may become possible while wearing masks, observing social distancing guidelines, and following diligent cleaning practices.

In making our recommendations, we are guided by science and our deepest held values. This pandemic teaches us that our actions directly impact the health and well-being of our neighbors and so it is imperative that we make choices that keep our congregations and larger community safer. As COVID-19 disproportionately impacts people with disabilities, Black people, Indigenous communities, Latinx people, the elderly, and essential workers, a majority of whom are women and women of color, religious communities have a moral responsibility to do all we can to reduce risks for those already at such high risk.

Public health officials are clear. There will need to be multiple weeks of reduction in infections, adequate testing, sufficient personal protective equipment available, contact tracing programs, and perhaps a vaccine before it will be safe for many of our congregations to fully gather in person again.

All this said, **our ministries are essential services**. I am moved by congregations who are increasing their services and generosity to the larger community during this pandemic. I am inspired by those who are keeping their “virtual” doors open. Many congregations have committed to keeping their services widely accessible and available to new people and visitors, while also creating more opportunities for virtual small groups to tend to the social,

spiritual, emotional, and material needs of their members.

We hope that a vaccine or an effective treatment will be found soon to change this timeline. In the meantime, being able to plan the longer horizon of virtual services offers an opportunity to be creative in planning for life-giving, essential ministry across physical distance.

Our detailed [UUA Guidelines on Gathering In Person as COVID-19 Subsides](#) include specific questions for congregations to ask to determine risk assessment and readiness plans before beginning any moves to gather in person. We will continue to update them as more information becomes available. As always, we encourage you to reach out to [UUA regional staff](#) if you need support in your planning.

I continue to hold you, your community, and all of our people in my heart and in my prayers. I know adjusting to this new reality is heartbreaking. I also believe congregations who continue to lean into their mission and life-saving ministry will find ways to thrive in this time. Ministry is so deeply needed. As is moral leadership rooted in community care and in science. May we keep offering this to our communities.

Yours in love and gratitude,

Susan

Care for our Congregations

Recognizing the increasing need for pastoral care (including for leaders!) and trained pastoral care leaders, here is a new course from the UUA Leadership Institute: [Spiritual Care Training for Congregational Leaders](#).

Care for our Communities

Register to [join UUs in rallying with the Poor People's Campaign](#) at the online June 20 Mass Poor People's Assembly and Moral March on Washington! Gather with thousands of people of faith in demanding officials enact a platform

for ALL the people, and learn how to organize for systemic changes in your community.

Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray spends her days strengthening the thriving mission of this faith. In her spare time, she enjoys being with her family and playing with their dog, Hercules.



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