

October 19, 2021

Dear United Members and Friends,

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and Connector!

After 19 months of either virtual or outdoor worship, the United Church of Santa Fe resumes indoor worship at 10:00 A.M. beginning Reformation Sunday, October 31.

As with all decisions during the pandemic, resuming indoor services has required much planning, research, and organization, as well as multiple meetings and many prayers. Given the new variants of Covid19 and taking into consideration the easily transmissible Delta variant of Covid19 and the significant number of infections and deaths our region continues to experience, the Council adopted the following updated “Safe Community Gathering Policies,” primarily focused on indoor gatherings:

- **Require for all indoor gatherings (worship, small groups, etc.) that participants be fully vaccinated (except if excluded by age or medical condition) and have their vaccination confirmation on file with the church or show it at check-in.**
- Continue previously adopted policies (masks, social distance, advance registration, stay home if not feeling well or if exposed to Covid19).
- Set initial worship capacity at 120 (85 persons in Sanctuary; 35 in Community Room for overflow).
- Upgrade the church’s Heating, Ventilation, and Air Purification systems.

We know there are differing opinions about safe practices during the pandemic. We believe these policies enable us to continue to “love our neighbor” as we gather indoors. Requiring vaccination verification helps us be good neighbors to participants who can’t be vaccinated, due to age or medical condition. We intend to help prevent breakthrough infections, in the church and wider community, and to support those on the front lines, such as medical workers, grocery clerks, teachers and others.

For those who may not choose or be able to participate in indoors worship or other gatherings, United will continue to provide the virtual service as we have for the past 19 months. We also plan to develop other ways to stay connected in this ever-changing landscape of corona-time.

Blessings,

Kim Zeilik, Moderator

Rev. Talitha Arnold, Senior Pastor

# Safe Community Gathering Policies and Practices The United Church of Santa Fe

## FAQs

### WHEN WILL WE RESUME WORSHIP IN THE SANCTUARY?

The target date is Reformation Sunday, October 31, 10:00 am.

### HOW MANY PEOPLE CAN PARTICIPATE IN INDOOR WORSHIP?

Initially, a total of 120 each service (85 in Sanctuary; 35 in Community Room). As we upgrade our heating and ventilation systems, that number may increase.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE POLICIES AND PRACTICES?

The same purpose United has had throughout the pandemic—to keep the congregation:

- Safe across generations (from infants through elders).
- Welcoming.
- Faithful to the call to “Love God, Love Neighbor, Love Creation.”

### HOW DID THE COUNCIL COME TO ITS DECISIONS?

- **We prayed** – individually and as a Council—for guidance in making good decisions.
- **We reviewed United’s previous policies** (primarily developed for gathering safely outdoors).
- **We researched “best pandemic practices”** from groups as diverse as the CDC, Yale University Medical School, Johns Hopkins Medical School, and the U.S. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Association.
- **We surveyed current indoor requirements and practices** of seven other Santa Fe and Albuquerque faith communities (both Christian and Jewish) and event organizations (e.g., Lensic, SF Community Convention Center, St. Francis Auditorium, etc.).

### WHAT ARE THE PLANNED UPGRADES TO THE HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Purification) SYSTEMS?

1. Installing new furnaces for Sanctuary and Office, with air purification systems.  
(Until installed, windows and doors kept open, and congregation encouraged to channel their inner Sea Otter 😊. Portable purifiers and fans used for air flow.)
2. Installing either air purification or MERV 13 filters for new Education Wing furnaces and those servicing Community Room, Learning Center, and Nurture Center. Until determined best system, any occupied room will use portable purifiers and fans and keep windows and doors open.
3. Assessing need for new furnaces/HVAC systems for rooms listed above.

### DIDN’T THE COUNCIL ALREADY ADOPT “GATHERING POLICIES” EARLIER THIS YEAR. WHY DO WE NEED NEW ONES?

Great question! Yes, we did create policies when we started in-person worship **outdoors** last spring. We updated those policies when the Delta variant appeared and the infection rates rose again this past summer. Moving inside is yet a new variable and changes the safety needs to stop the virus spread. Hence the need to develop “indoor” safety policies.

## SO WHAT ARE THE NEW “SAFE COMMUNITY INDOOR GATHERING POLICIES?”

So glad you asked!! Here they are:

- **Masks** are required for all in-person indoor events (only exception are solo speakers or singers who are a minimum of 8 feet from others). This also precludes any indoor events involving eating or drinking.
- **Social distancing** is required for all in-person events.
- All participants **must register in advance**. This confirms the number of participants and facilitates check-in (which is needed for contact tracing).
- Anyone not feeling well must not attend.
- Anyone who has been in close contact with someone having COVID-19 must not attend until after the self-isolation period has ended.
- **All participants** in any indoor gathering (e.g., worship, study groups, choir, service projects, meetings, etc.) **must be fully vaccinated** (except if excluded by age or medical condition) **and provide proof of vaccination**, either by having it on file with the church or presenting their card at check-in.

## THE CHURCH HASN'T REQUIRED VACCINATIONS IN THE PAST, MUCH LESS PROOF OF VACCINATION. WHY THE CHANGE?

Because Covid19 is an airborne virus, gathering indoors significantly increases the risk of contagion. Requiring participants to be vaccinated helps decrease that risk. Moreover, since mid-summer, United has required all staff, volunteer leaders (e.g., Council and Congregational Care Team), and Outdoor Choir members to be vaccinated. Requiring proof of vaccination of all participants creates a safer community, especially for our neighbors who can't be vaccinated.

## NOT ALL SANTA FE CHURCHES REQUIRE VACCINATION, WHY SHOULD UNITED?

United's Sanctuary is significantly smaller than those of many other faith communities. We also don't have a designated chancel, choir loft, balcony, or cathedral-height ceiling—all of which help with social distance and airflow (but we do have windows and doors, so make sure to channel your inner sea otter).

## I'M NOT VACCINATED – HOW CAN I STAY CONNECTED TO MY FAITH COMMUNITY?

The virtual pre-recorded services will continue to be offered to accommodate persons who can't participate, for whatever reason, in the indoor services. We also continue to encourage everyone who can to get vaccinated. It's safe, free, and accessible. (How many things in life can we say that about!)

## MY VACCINATION STATUS IS MEDICAL INFORMATION. WILL IT BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes. All vaccination information will be kept confidential and only shared with designated persons on an “as-needed” basis. We are also consulting with the Temple Beth Shalom congregation for their best practices as they have required vaccination confirmation since they started indoors several months ago.

## I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS. HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

Contact the church office ([unitedchurchsf@gmail.com](mailto:unitedchurchsf@gmail.com); 505-988-3295). If the Office Administrator cannot answer your questions, he will forward them to either the Moderator Kim Zeilik or the Senior Pastor Talitha Arnold.

**THANK YOU!**