

Unity of Columbia, MO

Reopening Update

Update issued on May 1, 2020

Executive Summary

Unity will remain closed to Sunday services, church activities and renter activities past our original proposed reopening date of May 17. We have set a new tentative date of Sunday, June 21, for limited reopening to renters and small Unity activities. We will probably not resume in-person Sunday services until sometime in July. These dates are subject to change based on the guidance issued by the State of Missouri and the Boone/Columbia Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Considerations for Reopening Unity

The Board of Trustees of Unity of Columbia MO met in a special session on the evening of Thursday, April 30, to review the recent new orders from the State of Missouri and the Boone/Columbia Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the [Columbia/Boone County Plan for Response and a Road Map to Reopening](#).

The road map to reopening sets forth the following plan:

- Phase 1: Slow the Spread
- Phase 2: Reopen, State by State [Community by Community] disease surveillance.
 - Step 1: Reopen business and organizations with occupancy limitations, no mass gatherings
 - Step 2: Reduce limitations for businesses and organizations, reintroduce limited mass gatherings
 - Step 3: Remove limitations for business, maintain limited mass gatherings, reopen schools
 - Step 4: Expand mass gatherings
- Phase 3: Establish Protection, Then Lift All Restrictions
 - Assumes the availability of a vaccine, widespread availability of effective treatment, and/or minimal active cases
- Phase 4: Rebuild Our Readiness for the Next Pandemic

On April 30, the DHHS announced Phase 1 is complete in Columbia/Boone County. The new order issued on April 30 implements **Phase 2, Step 1** of the plan. This new order goes into effect on May 4, 2020. The state order expires May 31 and the county/city order does not specify an end date, but will be reviewed in 4 weeks. The state order sets the minimum guidelines and the county/city order adds further restrictions which take precedence. The DHHS reserves the right to move back to an earlier phase or step as the situation unfolds.

In essence, the Board of Trustees feels that it is not appropriate to open our building while we are still in Phase 2, Step 1 of the DHHS plan. The following sections detail the factors we considered in making our decision.

Unity Church

Sunday Service

According to the DHHS order, churches may re-open for Sunday services after May 4, subject to occupancy limits and social distancing requirements. If we were to begin in-person Sunday services after May 4, we would need to comply with the following restrictions and guidelines:

- High risk individuals should not attend. A large portion of our congregation fall within this category.
- People with fever, cough, or any symptoms of illness may not attend.
- Maximum of 50 people in our Sanctuary (25% of our 200 occupancy maximum)
 - Our normal average attendance is between 100 and 110, occasionally going as high as 140.
 - We could have multiple services, but that would require setting up a reservation system to ensure each service stayed below the occupancy limit.
- Set up chairs in a grid, allowing 6 feet between each seat in a row and 6 feet between each row.
 - We could adjust the grid to allow people from the same household to sit together. This would require us to move chair placement on the fly depending on who attended.
- Set up a system outside of entrance doors and in hallways to ensure people maintain 6 feet of distance as they enter the building.
- Set up a system to dismiss congregants by row after the service to maintain 6 feet of distance as they leave the building.
- Greeters would have to count the number of people entering the building to ensure we did not exceed the occupancy limit.
- Greeters would open doors for congregants to limit how many touch door handles.
 - Greeters would wear masks and gloves, keeping as far back as possible to maintain 6 feet distance from those entering the door.
- No bulletins.
- No hugging or hand-holding.
- No gathering for fellowship after the service.
 - No coffee stations.
 - No self-service food.
 - If we want to offer food, we have to follow restaurant guidelines.
 - Maximum 10 people allowed to gather for fellowship.
- No passing of the bags for the Love Offering.
 - We can set up a box at the entrance to the Sanctuary for no-touch offerings.
 - Encourage people to continue online and mail-in donations.
- No sharing of microphones.
- Remove all items from chair back pockets.

- Clean and disinfect after each service: seats, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, microphones, A/V booth equipment, offering station, musical instruments, lecterns, and any surfaces touched during the service

The board determined that, given these restrictions and guidelines, our spiritual community will not be served by resuming in-person services.

Our online Sunday services via Zoom are serving us well.

- The average attendance for April was actually higher than the average attendance for January or February.
- New people have been attending our online services.
- Homebound members have been able to attend.
- Our Love Offerings have remained right on target with what we expect from in-person services.
- New people are giving and regular givers are increasing their offerings as they are able.

Youth Education

The guidance from the county/city is to not resume Youth Ed classes while schools remain closed. The Columbia Public School system is not looking at opening to in-person classes until the fall, and even then, there will be restrictions.

Further, if we were to re-open in-person Youth Ed classes, we would be required to follow the guidelines for Child Care facilities which are much more stringent than for church gatherings. So, even if we started in-person Sunday services, we would not restart our Youth Ed classes.

We are working with parents to determine options for our children. On the one hand, our attendance at our Youth Ed zoom classes has fallen off sharply from the first few weeks. On the other hand, the kids who *are* still attending have voiced appreciation for the opportunity to connect with each other. We may begin emailing weekly activities for our kids to do at home. And we may simply suspend Youth Ed entirely for the summer. We are seeking feedback from parents regarding their wishes.

Unity Classes and Small Groups

Most of our regular groups and ministry teams are meeting via Zoom meeting, and this seems to be working well. If we were to resume meetings at the church, we would be subject to the following restrictions:

- Gatherings would be limited to 10 people
- Attendees would be required to maintain 6 feet of distance.
- We would have all the same requirements for cleaning the building on any day a group met.
- We would also be required to maintain a daily log of people who come into the building with contact information to assist in contact tracing in the event anyone was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Therefore, we will not open the building to Unity classes or small groups yet.

Unity Renters

If we were to open the building to renters during Phase 2, Step 1, we would be subject to the following requirements and restrictions.

- Renters' activities would be subject to the maximum gathering size of 10 people, with the exception of the Show Me Dharma Sunday morning gathering, which would be subject to the occupancy limits of 25% of the capacity of their meditation room (which calculates to about 10 people).
- Attendees would be required to maintain 6 feet of distance.
- We would have all the same requirements for cleaning the building, 7 days a week, since we have renters every day.
- We would be required to place hand sanitizer stations around the building for our renters to use.
- It is recommended that everyone who enters the building wear masks.
- It is required that building employees wear masks.
- We would be required to maintain a daily contact tracing log of every who entered the building.
- It is recommended that people only be allowed in during hours when the building is staffed. Currently, our office hours are Monday - Thursday, 9:00am - 3:30pm. Most of our rental activity happens outside this window, which would require hiring multiple staff people.

What Next?

The Board of Trustees will continue to closely monitor the guidance issued by the DHHS.

We are open to considering a limited reopening to some renters and to some Unity activities when the DHHS recommends moving to Step 2.

- This will depend largely on whether we are able to meet the monitoring and cleaning requirements for opening the building.
- One proposal is that we open only the Founders Wing, to help keep cleaning costs lower.
- We could also open the Day Care facilities at that time, since they do their own cleaning.

We do not plan to resume in-person Sunday services or Youth Ed classes until the DHHS recommends moving to Step 3.

- Even then, we will be facing a number of restrictions, which will not be fully lifted until the DHHS recommends moving to Phase 3.
- Regardless of when we reopen to in-person services, we plan to continue offering the service online to meet the needs of people who cannot attend in person. This represents the manifestation of a long-held desire to expand our ministry.

In the meantime, we continue to affirm that God is in the midst of this situation. We acknowledge with awe the amazing creativity, compassion and integrity shown by all people as we move through this experience together.

Blessings,

Rev. Lauri

Rev. Lauri Boyd and the Board of Trustees