

## **COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for In-Person Gatherings Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ**

Following are the COVID-19 safety guidelines for all in-person gatherings sponsored by the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ (“the Conference”) beginning August 11, 2021 and until further notice. This document also contains guidelines and policy for the Conference office and Conference staff engagement in the Conference during this same period. The health and safety of our staff, volunteers, and program participants remain our top priorities. We will continue to examine and may modify these guidelines to reflect any updates to public health recommendations and guidance from the CDC, Minnesota Department of Health, and the American Camping Association.

The Conference is taking all reasonable precautions to provide for the health and safety of our staff, volunteers, and program participants. Participation in activities such as those offered by the Conference nevertheless pose some level of risk to COVID-19 transmission. Participants choosing to engage in Conference activities assume that risk.

*In the interest of public health & as a sign of the Gospel mandate to love our neighbor, the Minnesota Conference UCC strongly urges all members eligible for vaccination to be vaccinated unless their doctor advises otherwise.*

### **In-Person Gatherings/Meetings with No Overnight Stay**

- Vaccination against COVID-19 is strongly encouraged, but not required, for participants in Conference-sponsored meetings or gatherings with no overnight stay.
- All participants will be required to wear a facemask and maintain physical distancing\* at all indoor gatherings.
- Food and beverages will not be served at Conference-sponsored indoor gatherings of less than 4 hours in duration. When food and beverages are served, participants are urged to wear facemasks and maintain physical distancing\* while in service lines and to maintain physical distancing\* while eating/drinking.
- Most Conference sponsored meetings and indoor gatherings will be offered in a hybrid format, allowing participants to join in-person or online (via Zoom or livestream). When possible and reasonable, online meeting platforms such as Zoom may be utilized to convene meetings of Conference committees, teams, and work groups.

### **Overnight Events (retreats, youth events, and other programs)**

- Only individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 will be eligible to attend overnight events.
- To be considered fully vaccinated, an individual’s vaccination series must be completed at least 14 days prior to the start date of the event they will attend. Proof of vaccination must be received in the Conference office at least 7 days before the event start date.

\*The CDC and MDH recommend maintaining a physical distance of at least 6-feet between individuals to help reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. While some spaces and activities pose challenges to the implementation of this recommendation, the Minnesota Conference urges all participants to adhere to this guideline whenever possible.

- Participants will be required to wear a facemask in particular spaces or during particular activities. These details will be clearly communicated in advance and posted at the host site.
- Conference staff will follow strict quarantine and assessment protocols (as outlined by the CDC, MDH, and ACA) for any participant exhibiting symptoms of illness, and a participant exhibiting symptoms may be required to leave the event early.
- The Conference will only utilize host sites where all employees have been vaccinated.
- Conference staff will closely monitor vaccination rates and community transmission rates in counties where host sites are located and may cancel events where high or extremely high risk is present.
- In the event of the postponement or cancellation of an event due to COVID-19 concerns or other issues, a full refund of registrations fees paid will be issued to participants.
- Individuals interested in registering for Conference-sponsored overnight events who have not been vaccinated due to medical conditions that contraindicate vaccination or religious objections are asked to notify Conference staff of these legally-recognized exceptions to request accommodations.

We realize these protocols may prevent many people around the Minnesota Conference from participating in programs, particularly those individuals younger than 12 years of age who are not yet eligible to receive the vaccine. Our decision is motivated by the hard reality that at this time we cannot create safe lodging, bathroom and other shared spaces for unvaccinated individuals and by recent data suggesting vaccinated individuals may also transmit COVID-19 to others. Please know that this is not an easy decision. We will continuously monitor scientific data and guidance of CDC and MDH and reevaluate frequently to determine when less stringent guidelines are possible.

### **Conference Office & Staff Engagement Protocols**

The Minnesota Conference UCC is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and volunteers. To ensure we have a safe and healthy workplace, we have developed the following COVID-19 Preparedness Plan in response to ongoing concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal is to mitigate the potential for transmission of COVID-19 in our office and among our Conference members, which requires full cooperation among our staff, volunteers, & members.

#### **Office Protocol**

- **All employees of the Minnesota Conference UCC will be vaccinated. The Conference will make every effort to accommodate employees with either medical conditions or religious objections that cause them not to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.**
- **The following procedures will be utilized in the Conference Office:**
  - Handwashing & sanitization: staff are instructed to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water frequently throughout the day. Hand sanitizer will also be available in the office for each employee's use.
  - Respiratory etiquette: Staff will cover their mouth and nose with their sleeve or a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Tissues should be disposed of in trash receptacles provided and hands immediately washed or sanitized after coughing or sneezing.

- When no visitors are present in the office, and provided all employees are vaccinated, no mask-wearing will be required within the office.
- **In instances when an employee has been exposed to COVID-19, the following protocols will be followed:** (Contact is defined as spending a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more within 6 feet of an infectious person, unless there was a physical barrier between them, such as a cubicle wall or full Plexiglas screen, or all people were using a face covering and face shield.)
  - The employee should contact their health care provider and get tested for COVID-19. The employee should then stay isolated at home and away from others until test results are available.
  - The employee who tests negative may return to work when symptoms improve. Proof of a negative test result will be provided to the employee's supervisor & the Conference Minister.
  - The employee who tests positive for COVID-19 will provide proof of that test result to their supervisor and Conference Minister. They can return when return-to-work (RTW) criteria are met:
    - Symptomatic employees should stay isolated at home and away from others until all three of these are true: 1) Symptoms have improved; AND 2) It has been 10 days since symptoms started; AND 3) They have been fever-free for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medications)
    - Asymptomatic employees who test positive after travel, an exposure, or routine surveillance testing should isolate at home for 10 days from their test date. Asymptomatic employees should consult with their supervisor and may be requested to work remotely during the quarantine period.
    - No medical exam or additional testing is necessary to clear employees for work once they meet the RTW criteria.
- **Visitors to Office**
  - All visits to the Conference office will be by appointment only until further notice. Visitors to the Conference office will be required to wear a facemask during their visit unless they offer proof of vaccination to the person they are visiting, in which case other staff in the office will be also notified. Staff will also wear a mask during the visits of others to the office unless they have a private office and can close their office door and remain isolated during the visitor's time in the office suite.
  - Visitors will be asked to sanitize their hands upon entry to the office using hand sanitizer provided by the Minnesota Conference UCC.
- **Appointments outside the office**
  - Staff may choose to hold meetings in person outside the office. When doing so, staff are required to wear masks when meeting indoors except when drinking or eating.
- **Visits of staff to member churches**
  - Staff members are permitted to engage in activities of our member churches in person. Staff members are encouraged to inquire before their visit about the church's COVID-19 protocols and may decline to visit if those protocols are

deemed insufficient or uncomfortable for the staff member. Staff members should consult with their supervisor about any concerns related to an in-person visit to member churches.

- Staff members will wear masks during their visit except when formally speaking (e.g., preaching or otherwise leading in worship).
- **Zoom Technology:**
  - Zoom technology or phone calls may be utilized by staff for meetings with Conference members and others when it is deemed most convenient or safe, while still allowing for work productivity.