

At the Congregational Meeting on October 24th some members expressed frustration with the current pace of reopening for in-person worship. The COVID-19 protocols and procedures approved by council were shared, including that vaccines will be required for attending in-person worship. Virtual worship will remain an option for all. It was shared that the plan has been that worship in-person would resume after children age 5-11 became eligible for the vaccine and time allotted for them to be considered fully vaccinated. Based on available information at the time, it appeared this would allow for re-opening in December 2021 or January 2022.

A survey was sent out to determine if the congregation was supportive of the plan to wait until children age 5-11 had the opportunity to be vaccinated. A yes/no poll was sent. Yes indicated a belief that we should wait until the children have an opportunity to be vaccinated, no indicates you believe we should move to hybrid as soon as possible. Feedback to the phasing-in group and council was solicited and can still be sent to the moderator (moderator@ainsworthucc.org) and Pastor Lynne (Pastor@ainsworthucc.org).

Survey results: There were 55 respondents to the survey with 45 indicating agreement (82%) and 10 indicating disagreement and that we should open for in-person worship as quickly as possible.

Themes of comments and questions that came up and preliminary responses (subject to change as Phasing-In workgroup and Council have further discussion):

Will children under 5 be able to attend worship if they are not eligible to be vaccinated?
Yes. Children and those with approved medical exemptions will be allowed to attend worship. The ultimate choice is up to the individual and parent(s).

Will masks still be required? It is not listed in the policies.
The policy/procedures document indicates the more restrictive guidance from CDC, state, or [local health department](#) will apply. All are recommending or requiring masks and masks will be required until further notice. Likewise, physical distancing to the degree possible and no open serve food (i.e., no buffet style) will be allowed for fellowship.

How will proof of vaccination be completed?
We are examining options being used by other groups, churches, and organizations. We are strongly considering some form of one-time verification via email or in-person check and having a list of those who have been verified for quick reference/access. Also under consideration are name tags with stickers of some sort. All options are still on the table as of this writing. We want

to continue to be a welcoming and inclusive community while also maintaining everyone's health and safety.

Are we rushing to try to meet some arbitrary deadline such as having worship in person by Christmas rather than following safety data?

No firm date has been set as we continue to have safety as a top priority. Virtual worship will remain an option even after phasing-in begins for anyone concerned about in-person worship.

Will booster shots be required?

At this time there is no requirement for booster shots. If CDC or other guidance changes to require this, relevant working groups and council will consider steps that are necessary which may include setting up a verification system.

Why are we requiring vaccines for worship and not for all people entering the church building? In particular, why are we not requiring Day Center guests to be vaccinated? *Council discussed this issue. There was concern about ramifications if we tried to require any contractor, delivery person, person seeking Pastoral Care, etc be vaccinated. The reason for requiring vaccination for those attending worship services is lack of available space in the sanctuary. We do not want to have to have a system that requires reservations in advance to attend in person or a system where first to arrive are allowed in and others are turned away. Vaccines and masks are the only way around this at this time. Our policy strongly recommends vaccination for anyone entering our building in general. The Day Center and any other group using our building is required to follow protocols put out by the county and are able to engage in social distancing practices.*

To be clear, the vaccine requirement is for attending worship, not entering the building at other times. Those concerned about the Day Center not requiring vaccination of their guests/clients should avoid the downstairs level (which they rent from us) Monday-Friday 8-5. Day Center staff and volunteers are vaccinated.

Do we know if parents will actually be vaccinating their children age 5-11 or are we waiting for something that is unlikely to happen?

While we have not spoken with every family, those that we have are indicating they will be having their children vaccinated. Regardless, we will continue to have a virtual options for families who choose not to vaccinate their children or who do not wish to attend in person.

What will fellowship after service be like?

This is still under consideration. Some would like to see a return to coffee and light refreshments, others would prefer no food or beverages be served at this time. Masks will be required during worship and fellowship.

What will Sunday School be like?

This is under discussion and depends on number of families coming for in-person worship versus staying virtual.

Several commenters raised support for the phasing-in work group for thoughtfully considering the safety and logistics, including that once we get started it will be hard to reverse course and we need to ensure there is a good system in place when we decide to start phasing-in. Concerns were also raised about the risk of increase in cases as we enter the rainy/cool season when more people spend time indoors in close contact.

We thank everyone for submitting their feedback. The above is summary. Full comments (de-identified) were shared with the Phasing-In working group and Church Council members for review and consideration. The FAQs will be updated as we have more information.

Cody Bartow-Tomalia

AUCC Moderator