Old Ship Policy for Gathering

First Parish in Hingham, Unitarian Universalist, expects to resume in-person activities when the church season resumes on September 12. To protect the safety of all members, friends, staff, and visitors, this policy for gathering has been developed.

Recent guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last revised on July 16, 2021, refers to individuals. As congregations, our decisions about gathering with masks and without masks need to be about community.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are in covenant with one another to act as a collection of individuals and as a body that works for the good of all. Because our faith is grounded in values that call us to care about one another, we must continue to make decisions that accommodate the needs of the most vulnerable among us.

Our community is made up of individuals, who have rights to their own privacy. We must respect that privacy.

The Unitarian Universalist Association strongly recommends, as of last notification on August 20, 2021, that congregations maintain a culture of gathering with masks when they come together in person. This is because of who we are, as congregations, at our best:

- We are all-ages communities, and not all ages have been able to get vaccinated yet.
- We are all-abilities communities, and some of us have immune systems that do not mount a strong protective response after the COVID-19 vaccination and can suffer severe consequences upon infection.
- We are all-inclusive communities, and we want to express our Unitarian Universalist values by being able to include all, regardless of vaccination status.

As part of our covenantal commitment to care for all, First Parish, Hingham, Unitarian Universalist, encourages all who are able and willing to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

First Parish, Hingham, as of Aug. 1, 2021, will for now maintain a culture of gathering with masks and practicing social distancing while indoors, and outdoors, regardless of vaccination status. Doing so allows us to not question vaccination status and to stay safe. The Board of Trustees intends to revisit this policy in the future as conditions and recommendations may change.

This policy applies to gatherings in and around both the Meeting House and the Parish House. It envisions, for example, masks being worn by all for Sunday services and coffee hours, and for youth gatherings and child-care, until health conditions suggest an easing of this policy.
Old Ship will support this policy through providing masks as needed, and employing electronic equipment to facilitate communication. Such support will include a continued “multiplatform” or “hybrid” approach where possible—combining in-person and distance-based gatherings through such techniques as Zoom, where practicable.

Additionally, this policy applies to

• Childcare workers in the nursery
• RE class teachers
• Children aged two years and older (masks are discouraged for children under two)

Exceptions are allowed for gatherings, including in the Meeting House and the Parish House:

• Individuals who work in Parish House offices.
• Groups of 10 or fewer persons who gather indoors, or outdoors, have been vaccinated, and agree among themselves that unmasking is acceptable.

As a faith community, we root our decisions in the values of inclusion and consent. Consequently, we will:

• Follow the science.
• Go slow and be flexible.
• Be humane and realistic with expectations of ourselves and others.

Information about current COVID statistics in our neighborhood is available at the U.S. COVID Risk & Vaccine Tracker website:

https://covidactnow.org/us/massachusetts-ma/county/plymouth_county/