

Dear Members & Friends of UU Congregation of Fort Wayne,

With the news surrounding global and national cases of COVID-19, including at the time of writing this note a few cases confirmed in Indiana with the closest being in Noble County, it's natural for fears and questions to arise. It is also important to practice preparation and not panic. With that in mind, I am writing to you about how to care for yourselves, and how we will continue to nourish our spirits in spiritual community. My thanks to our board, Dee Koehl and Dodi Gunawardhana, and our staff, Kirsten Eckert-Smith, who helped me think through this situation. Please read the following, and if your anxiety about this is just feeling too much, you are not alone. Reach out to me or your board of trustees. We're happy to have conversations with you.

With Deep Peace & Love ~Rev. Misty-Dawn

*UU Fort Wayne Procedures for Virus Outbreak*

### **Maintaining Health Phase**

Right now, we are in a "maintaining health" phase.

During this time, we ask that you take precautions to keep yourself and any family members safe. This includes the following advice, drawn from guidelines from the CDC & the Allen County Health Department <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html> and <https://www.allencountyhealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Tips-to-Prepare-for-a-Pandemic-in-the-Faith-Community.pdf>

- Stay home if sick: All community members, including staff, should stay home (or seek medical attention) if they are sick or they have any flu or cold-like symptoms until at least 24 hours after fever and symptoms are gone. This includes attendance at all worship services and church activities.
- Avoid exposure: Avoid close contact with those who are sick. With members experiencing flu-like symptoms, our minister, and all members are encouraged to do pastoral care, visits, and meetings by phone or internet, and not risk exposure.
- Practice hygiene precautions:
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing (disposing of them frequently), or sneeze into your sleeve elbow.
  - Wash hands often or use hand sanitizer. We will be adding hand sanitizer in more locations in our church building for your use.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
  - According to the UK's health department, face masks have little evidence of widespread benefit of their use outside of clinical settings, as they must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly, and disposed of safely. The CDC does not recommend wearing a facemask to protect from the virus, but does recommend facemasks for people who are infected.

- Avoid sharing utensils, cups, towels, and other items, and wash these items thoroughly.
- In addition, get lots of sleep, manage stress, drink fluids and eat healthy foods, and maintain the physical and spiritual practices that keep you feeling healthy.

### **Maintaining Health Phase for Sunday Morning**

While taking care of yourself and your family with the above guidelines, we also have some guidelines about how we will be together on Sunday mornings. Even if you don't feel personally at risk of contracting the virus (or of its effects if you do contract it), as members of a community we are called to help support and protect each other, especially those for whom the disease could be life-threatening.

Toward that end, we are making the following changes to the way we "do church" on Sunday mornings for the foreseeable future:

**We will continue to refrain from shaking hands at the front door and during our welcome. Jazz hands and folded hands over heart are ways to greet one another.**

**No hymnals will be used in the service; lyrics for hymns will be included in the Order of Worship.**

**Monthly Worship Covers will not be reused. All Orders of Service, Worship Covers, any paper inserts you do not want to take home, should be placed directly in recycling bins, which will be placed outside the doors of the Sanctuary.**

**Ushers will not pass baskets to take the offering. We will have "collection boxes" placed on a pillar at the back of the Sanctuary for people to put their money in at the end of the service.**

**This Sunday, March 15, we will not serve snacks or food or beverages at coffee hour. Rev. Shelly will hold a conversation following worship about the ways we will move forward with coffee hour.**

In addition, to the above, I am working with our staff to have audio and text versions of my sermons made available within 3 days of their delivery for the foreseeable future so that those who are unable or who choose not to attend Sunday services may listen to or read them.

If you are the leader of a group, such as a Soul Matters group, or a committee in the church, we urge you to consider how the threat of COVID-19 may affect your group members and to plan accordingly. Some groups may choose to suspend their meetings or to meet remotely using the UUCFW Zoom account. With respect to Zoom, you do not need a computer to participate; you can connect by using a telephone. Please call the church office if you need help with instructions on how to use Zoom.

If you identify as a person “at-risk,” either according to the CDC’s definition or by your own self-knowledge, we urge you to let us know if you are feeling isolated, afraid, or anxious; we want to support you through this challenging time. The church also has financial resources available if you need help with the cost of obtaining prescriptions, food, or other supplies.

### **Disruption Phase**

If a widespread outbreak occurs in the U.S., particularly in our area, we will follow state and federal recommendations about shutting down programs at our campus, following the example of local schools and businesses. During this time, employees will telecommute, and we will try to provide services and programs electronically as much as possible, sending worship services, religious education, and other programming to your homes when possible, and doing board and committee work by Zoom or other electronic methods.

We will attempt to communicate this transition with all our members through our website, Facebook page, voicemail message, and Around the Meetinghouse, similar to our procedures for closing church during winter weather. This will continue as long as federal or state guidelines to avoid public places are in place. Families experiencing illness, hardship, and death are still encouraged to reach out to our minister, as well as to other community and government resources.

### **Rebuilding Community Phase**

When all restrictions are lifted, we will resume our regular church activities and work to rebuild our community.