

Meeting Space Begins to Reopen for Smaller Groups

In late August, the Prudential Committee approved the Bridging Team's recommendations to gradually begin to reopen our campus spaces to smaller community and church groups under very stringent guidelines that place the health and safety of everyone at the forefront.

Each group requesting a meeting space and date must submit an application. Nancy Forsstrom, our church administrator, will review the applications and use a metric created by the four physicians on the Bridging Team to assess the risk involved, based on such criteria as the number of people, the duration of the event, and the activity of the group.

If the health risk is acceptable, group leaders and members must agree to all the terms in the building use policy and follow the guidelines set forth by the church, which are based on the regulations from the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control along with the recent guidance of the Rhode Island National Guard.

Group leaders must have an orientation with Nancy, create a list of attendees for contact tracing, get signed waivers from all group attendees, and designate attendees to oversee compliance with First Unitarian guidelines, such as mask wearing and physical distancing at all times.

Returning community groups

The support and self-help groups who have successfully used First Unitarian spaces for many years will be the first to undergo the rigorous process of securing a space and date to meet. These group leaders are familiar with our buildings and have expressed their intention to strictly comply with the guidelines we have set forth.

A small concert

For many years, the Museum Concert series has held small concerts in our Meeting House. Once again, they have asked for space to hold an afternoon concert for which about 50 people attend. This request is under consideration. If granted, a limited number of tickets will be issued, and guideline compliance will be essential.

Logistics for Meeting House rentals present many more complex challenges than Parish House meetings. Its five entrances must each be designated as either an entrance or an exit with appropriate signage. All of the 800 seats in the Meeting House must be taped off to allow for appropriate physical distancing, even if only as few as 50 people attend. Tickets must be shown. People waiting to enter must be physically spaced, as well as when exiting. A thorough cleaning after the event is necessary.

For these reasons and more, the Bridging Team determined that larger groups will not be granted access to the Meeting House at this point, until more work is done to prepare and to minimize the health and safety risks of all involved.

Church groups

Any small church group or committee that would rather meet in person than virtually are welcome to apply for a space and date, go through a risk assessment, agree to the policies, sign waivers, and strictly adhere to all guidelines.

Bridging Team to continue

At what was scheduled to be its final meeting this week, the Bridging Team determined that they would continue to meet monthly as needed, as pandemic conditions change, and CDC guidelines are updated. The Team will provide ongoing assessment of the initial smaller group meetings and make any adjustments needed to the policies and procedures currently in place. They will continue working on the many complex issues involved with reopening our Meeting House to larger groups.

A special thanks to Dr. Jim Cowan who has led the effort of the four physicians on the Bridging Team to produce the documents that have guided the work. Jim also shot and produced two videos to help orient group leaders to logistics in building use. Thank you to Nancy Forsstrom for working with Jim on this project and assuming the starring role. Thanks to Nancy as well for assuming the leadership role in working with those who request meeting space.

Thank you to all Bridging Team members: David Anthony MD MPH, Cheryl Bartholomew, Jim Cowan MD MPH, Nancy Forsstrom – church administrator, Bev Koteff, Bill Koteff, Steven McCloy MD, Rev. Liz Lerner Maclay, Odile Mattiauda, Ted Martin, Jonathan Niles, Martha Rice Sanders, Cynthia Rosengard, Norma Rossi Mead, Jack Rusley MD, Cathy Seggel - DRE, and Bill Twaddell.