

Asbury United Methodist Church Council

Covid Protocol Working Group

Minutes***August 19, 2021

A small working group was convened to devise new Covid protocols for our Church and its ministries based on the latest CDC recommendations and in light of the prevalence of the Delta variant. Our goal was to anticipate different scenarios that have a high probability of materializing so that we can pre-plan protocols that can be quickly implemented without convening a Council meeting. We also want to level set for our different ministry groups (including ACCPC) so they can anticipate the church's response to the changing Covid environment. We are also attempting to plan for Pastor's absence during her sabbatical.

Meeting called to order at 7:35 pm

Attending: Elizabeth Tawil, Dan Haas, Jackie Britton and Natasha Flanagan and Pastor Jen Karsner

Opened in Prayer by Elizabeth

Background: When Council made decisions around in-person gatherings in the past, we used the Maryland State Department of Health statistics for positivity rate. This web site reports case rates as % positivity on a running 7 day average per 100,000. Our current policies as reflected in the Feb 15, 2021 minutes has us use the CDC charts to inform our tolerance levels for indoor gatherings. If you look at the chart below, you will see that the CDC uses a different method to calculate case rates. Instead of a 7 day average, they use "total new cases per 100,000 in the past 7 days." We have not been comparing apples to apples. The metric reported on Maryland's website are 1/7th of the numbers reported in the CDC metric.

Table 1. CDC Indicators and Thresholds for Community Transmission of COVID-19¹

Indicator	Low Transmission Blue	Moderate Transmission Yellow	Substantial Transmission Orange	High Transmission Red
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days ²	0-9	10-49	50-99	≥100
Percentage of NAATs that are positive during the past 7 days ³	<5.0%	5.0%-7.9%	8.0%-9.9%	≥10.0%

This working group proposes we use the CDC website when determining the community transmission rate level of our county. This will ensure we are comparing apples to apples.

Our current policies as reflected in the Feb 15, 2021 minutes states:

For K-12 schools, blue and yellow levels are open for full in-person instruction. For orange and red levels, elementary schools are open in hybrid mode with 6 ft. distancing required. (Since our preschool cannot meet the 6 ft. distancing requirement, under current CDC guidelines, we would close at the orange level. And, closing for the least vulnerable (children) would mean closing for all.)

Per the CDC page, our county is in the high substantial (orange) range at about 94. By this measure, we should be closed right now!

As CDC has learned more, they have changed their guidance. Our February policy is out of date and needs revision. Some of the key changes are:

1. **In-person learning is being given highest priority:** CDC now recommends that children resume in person learning, even when transmission is high.¹ American Academy of Pediatrics has weighed in saying the same, as not attending school is causing serious detriment to our children.²
2. **Social distancing decrease:** CDC is saying that if masked, social distancing of 3 feet, not 6 feet is acceptable. CDC also says, if social distancing is not possible, full return to in-person learning should still take place with layered mitigation strategies.³
3. **Masking:** CDC is also recommending universal masking for everyone in a school or child care facility, regardless of vaccination status. American Academy of Pediatrics also emphasized the importance of masking and layered mitigation strategies to preserve in-person learning.⁴ Additionally, CDC recommends even fully vaccinated individuals resume masking indoors in public places in areas of substantial or high community transmission.⁵
4. **Cleaning:** CDC suggests that in most circumstances cleaning a facility once a day is sufficient. However, in areas of high community transmission, more frequent cleaning is recommended.⁶

Also worth noting is that Anne Arundel County Public Schools plans to reopen for full in-person instruction for all grades. The County health officer, Dr. Kalyanarama has recommended universal masking for all individuals in schools, regardless of vaccination status. The School Superintendent, Dr. Arlotto sent a letter to parents indicating that all individuals will be required to mask in school. However,

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

² <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-updates-recommendations-for-opening-schools-in-fall-2021/>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html#physical-distancing>

⁴ <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-updates-recommendations-for-opening-schools-in-fall-2021/>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

the Anne Arundel County Board of Education is divided on this topic and will not officially vote on universal masking in schools until Sept 1, 2021.

Our working group is making the following recommendations to Council for immediate adoption.

1. Asbury Community Preschool and Clubhouse opens as planned in Sept 2021. Masks must be worn by everyone in the building during ACCPC's operating hours regardless of vaccination status. Once Anne Arundel County crosses into the High (red) category, enhanced cleaning measures must be performed, but we will keep the building open for all groups based on space availability and our previously agreed upon priority list. (Cleaning measures and enhanced precautions will be discussed below.)

Rationale: This keeps our policy in line with the priority given for in-person learning and as well as CDC's guidance regarding masking and cleaning measures. If we can remain open for preschool and elementary aged children, all of whom are not yet old enough to be vaccinated, then it stands to reason we can remain open for fully vaccinated groups and groups with mixed vaccination status.

2. If AA County enters into the High (red) category of community transmission, cleaning must take place between each group using a room. This needs to happen between morning and afternoon pre-school classes. If groups other than preschool are using rooms in the church building during periods of high transmission, then they must comply with enhanced cleaning. A designated group leader must be trained on procedures, and attest that it was completed. This means the trained group leader must be present in order for the group to meet. As groups are scheduled by our presumed administrative assistant, the guidelines and training procedures will be explained. Pastor Jen will ask our custodial service to inform the protocol and help with training.

Rationale: This keeps us in accordance with CDC guidelines regarding enhanced cleaning. One of the challenges with volunteer led groups is accountability and adherence to proper cleaning protocols. Having trained individuals present for the group meeting and cleaning is the best solution we could come up with, without placing undo burden on our staff and/or budget.

3. Require indoor masking for everyone when CDC levels are orange (substantial) or red (high).

Rationale: This is in accordance with CDC's guidance.

4. If AACPS shuts down the schools because of Covid transmission rates, Asbury UMC would follow suit and shut down our building to everyone. Preschool would be suspended; community groups would not be permitted to use the building; worship would be virtual only.

Rationale: Given the heavy emphasis placed on universal masking by CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, and our County Health Official coupled with the Board of Education's reluctance to require universal masking it is likely that the COVID situation will be dire before the public schools will shut down. In this eventuality, we believe it is in the best interest of the community for us to suspend all in-person gatherings.

5. If AACPS closes in-person school for children under age 12, then we would suspend preschool. We would also shut down the building to unvaccinated people. Groups could meet only if all members are vaccinated, masked, and observe 3 ft social distancing. Groups with both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals would have to determine the best way for their group to implement this protocol.

Rationale: If public schools close for those under the age of 12, they are essentially making a distinction between those eligible for vaccination and those who are not. Again, given the Board of Education's reticence to implement even the most agreed upon mitigation measures, the situation would have to be severe for them to take this step. In that eventuality, we would close our building for all those unvaccinated to protect the community and preserve health care resources.

6. Purchase HEPA air purifiers for each pre-school classroom plus other rooms frequently used by groups. Our church was recently blessed with an unrestricted donation from a will of \$5000. Council is charged with deciding how this money should be used. This working group recommends that air purifiers be purchased with it.

Rationale: When community transmission rates are in the substantial and high ranges, the CDC recommends layered mitigation strategies to minimize community spread while still preserving in-person learning. Of those mitigation strategies we have not already implemented, increased ventilation/air purification is the only one that makes sense to do. This is a reasonably easy and affordable step we can take to mitigate the impact of COVID in our programs and groups.

7. If we have to shut down, when would we re-open? We will follow what the AACo Board of Education does. If they re-open schools for students under 12, we will too.

Rationale: The Board of Education will be eager to reopen in-person learning for all students as soon as possible. If they assess that the community metrics make it safe to reopen public schools, keeping our facilities closed will not significantly increase protection for the community.

Jackie Britton has agreed to monitor the CDC website daily for changes in Covid transmission levels for our county. She will also stay abreast of AACPS and the Board of Education positions.

When the transmission rates rise or fall as outlined above, the Council will implement the procedures as outlined above.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm. Closed in prayer by Pastor Jen.