

DRAFT 5/27/24

**Centering Love Amidst the Ongoing Impact of COVID-19
UUA General Assembly 2024 Proposed Action of Immediate Witness**

Primary Proposer: Meghan Garvey of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester

Additional Proposers: CB Beal, Rev. AJ van Tine & Rev. Sarah Caine

Whereas, the emergency declaration for COVID-19 was terminated in 2023 without sufficient strategies in place to manage the persistent challenges of the virus, exacerbating its disproportionate impact on marginalized groups (i.e., disabled, BIPOC, transgender, uninsured and underinsured, incarcerated, older adults and youth, especially those of intersecting identities); and

Whereas, the current U.S. governmental approach to COVID-19 management still jeopardizes the lives of higher-risk individuals and leaves many unknowingly susceptible to the long-term impact of COVID 19 infections; and

Whereas, the aforementioned governmental approach is creating a continuously growing void in COVID-19 information and management, exemplified by the discontinuation of reliable data collection processes, research funding, and vital public health interventions (i.e., dependable testing, access to vaccines and treatment, prevention education); and

Whereas, the current political climate increasingly fosters disregard and even hostility towards individuals still exercising COVID caution, resulting in growing social and legal pressures to remove masks from public life and forcing higher-risk individuals to choose between essential participation in public life or avoiding COVID-19 infections; and

Whereas, our faith proclamations of love and justice call us to confront the ongoing disregard for those most vulnerable in our world and meet it with liberating counter-cultural norms in our communities; and

Whereas, in the current political, economic, and environmental climate, the importance of inclusion and living into communal interdependence is of the utmost life-saving importance; and

Whereas, in the absence of an appropriate governmental response to the ongoing risks of COVID-19, grassroots organizations and nonprofit organizations are leading efforts for the continuation of protective measures in the U.S.;

Therefore, be it resolved that the 2024 General Assembly calls for:

Congregational & Member Organization Action:

- To recommit to making our spaces a sanctuary for people disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 through:
 - Shifting away from an individual risk assessment approach and using instead a love-centered collective care model through re-normalizing high-quality masking (N95/KN95/KF94 quality) in

all congregational/member group activities and updating air filtration based on the science outlined in ASHRAE 241 Control of Infectious Aerosols. Exceptions to any masking requirements should be extended to people for whom mask-wearing is inaccessible.

- Implementing protocols to ensure that congregational/member group participants and staff are able to refrain from attending in-person events while they are experiencing symptoms of acute illness or have been recently ill, and that staff have ample time to recover from acute illness.
 - Committing to communally examine and process the impact of the pandemic on our communities, as well as any urgency we've had to relinquish COVID-19 protocols for the sake of returning to "normal." Unitarian Universalists hold a sacred tradition of questioning the status quo, and it is in that tradition that we must reflect on what "normal" we long to sustain. Given the lessons our communities learned living into the 2021 Action of Immediate Witness "The COVID-19 Pandemic: Justice. Healing. Courage", particularly how we learned to include those who were already experiencing isolation and exclusion from our communities in a 2019 version of "normal," we are called to reflect upon any barriers keeping us from holding onto the pandemic practices which so effectively countered isolation and fostered radical inclusion.
- To identify and work to form partnerships with local disability organizations working on COVID-19 justice, and community-organized "mask blocs" by:
 - Offering tangible support for local mask blocs. Support might include offering event space, plate offerings for supplies, storage for their supplies, or hosting their community stands.
 - Following the lead of local disability organizations and mask blocs to respond to local community and legislative challenges to COVID caution.

Unitarian Universalist Association Action:

- To create channels of support for congregations and member organizations implementing the above standards of community care while modeling them in UUA-sponsored events and meetings.
- To work to form active partnerships with organizations leading the way in COVID-19 policy advocacy so that Unitarian Universalists can get involved in this work with accountability to the most-directly-impacted populations. This advocacy may address, but not be limited to:
 - Contesting the criminalization of masking
 - Improving hospital-based and community-based data collection processes
 - Masking requirements in healthcare and carceral settings
 - Reinstating evidence-based infection isolation guidelines
 - Adequate funding for public health education, testing, and treatment programs

- Funding for installation of air purifiers and improved ventilation in public spaces consistent with ASHRAE 241 Control of Infectious Aerosols

- Funding for Long COVID research and resources