



MEMORANDUM

Re: UUA COVID-19 Response

Date: April 22, 2020

To: UUA Board of Trustees

From: President Susan Frederick-Gray, Executive Vice President Carey McDonald

This memo gives a brief overview of the UUA's responses to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

Communications

- On March 12 The UUA issued a [strong recommendation for all congregations to stop meeting](#) in groups of 25 or more, including Sunday services and religious education, preceding similar orders from state and national authorities.
- That same week, teams from the UUA's five regions contacted leaders from every congregation to ask how the UUA could best support them in the growing pandemic; regional teams have continued to do regular outreach and provide virtual "office hours" for congregational staff and volunteer leaders.
- *UU World* magazine has been publishing articles on the [UU COVID-19 reponse](#), including stories on the UUA's operations, congregational stories and trends.
- President Susan Frederick-Gray has written a weekly message to UU congregational leaders including resources and recommendations for congregations starting March 6, distributed via email, social media, and posted on uua.org

Online Resources

- The [COVID-19 Pages](#), as part of the UUA's Safe Congregations program, has updated information on the pandemic and related UUA communications and resources.
- Leader Lab, the UUA's virtual portal for leadership resources, has been adding [content for addressing the challenges of this pandemic](#), including pastoral care with physical distancing, online worship, virtual meetings, stewardship, and more.
- Worship Web, the UUA's virtual library for worship materials, created a [COVID-19 Worship Collection](#) with timely, thematic worship content.

Direct Support

- The [COVID-19 Response Fund provides](#) financial support through the existing Disaster Relief Fund and Living Tradition Fund, and appeals and distributions are ongoing.
- Congregations can sign up for a [discount Zoom license](#) under the agreement negotiated by the UUA, and get over 50% through our Congregational Zoom Program.

- In UUA.org's Congregations as Employers section, there is [guidance for COVID-19 operations](#) in accessing federal stimulus funds, unemployment insurance, and more. The UUA has recommended congregations maintain staffing levels through June 30.
- Benefit expansions to the [UUA Health Plan](#) address testing, telemedicine, and more.

UUA Staff

- The UUA moved its staff to all-virtual operations starting March 9. Non-exempt hourly staff are being maintained at their same rate of pay.
- A ten-member COVID-19 Coordinating Team meets 2-3 times per week to coordinate the UUA's own internal response, convened by the Executive Vice President.
- Weekly all-staff Coronavirus Check-Ins and pastoral check-ins are held, in addition to adaptation of existing cross-staff meetings (chapel, learning communities, mission conversations, monthly all-staff meeting) to provide updates to staff and focus on adaptive needs in the time of pandemic.
- The UUA instituted a [Full Flex policy](#) for staff to create maximum flexibility for work schedules during the pandemic, and upgraded leave banks with COVID-19 sick and family leave.
- There is a ban on staff travel through June 30.

Events

- All UUA-sponsored in-person events have been canceled, postponed or moved online through August 30. Events that have already been hosted online include the meetings of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Religious Education Credentialing Committee, the Finding Our Way Home retreat for religious professionals of color, the UU Office at the United Nations' Spring Seminar, the MidAmerica Regional Assembly, and more.
- On April 16, the UUA announced that [General Assembly 2020 would be entirely virtual](#), and staff and volunteers are in active planning for this event.
- The UU the Vote initiative, which had previously planned for regional trainings and canvassing this Spring, has pivoted to focus on local mutual aid networks, expanding access to voting, phone banking, and advocacy during the pandemic, with ongoing webinars and virtual training. Regional events are postponed till the fall.

Equity Lens

- Decision-making, including the guidance to cease meetings to "flatten the curve", has been based on the needs of those who are most impacted by COVID-19.
- UUA messaging has consistently highlighted prophetic imperatives during the pandemic, recognizing that prophetic words are also essential pastoral and spiritual care in this time. This includes condemning xenophobia, naming the ways the pandemic reinforces existing race-based and ability-based oppression, and calling out the risk to incarcerated people.
- Regular outreach and communication has been a priority with impacted communities, including Black, Indigenous and People of Color Communities, and those in at-risk categories for infection.

- The UUA is committed to promoting and modeling ethical treatment of staff, including explicit expanded flexibility, maintaining hourly workers, avoiding layoffs, and expanding leave banks.
- Financial investment in mutual aid networks is being made through the Disaster Relief Fund, which promote accountable, cooperative and systemic solutions to addressing local inequity and need.
- Over the past two years, the UUA's intentional investment in culture change has allowed its staff and leaders to operate with a cohesion and flexibility that has allowed us to provide a meaningful response to our communities.

Conclusion

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new depth of relationship between the UUA and the leaders of its member congregations, highlighting our interdependence in a powerful way. It has required far more internal coordination and collaboration across UUA leaders and staff, breaking down silos with clear purpose and urgent needs. Echoing the importance of our investment in culture change, we recognize it would have been impossible to move so quickly into a deeper mode of collaboration, aligned resources and communication without previous staff group changes. The move to regional staff teams and national programs, rather than district staff, and the presence of collaborative teams spanning multiple staff groups which were already in place throughout the UUA staff allowed us to receive input from across the UUA ecosystem and be agile and responsive to those needs.

Virtual operations have been a big change for most congregations, demanding new skills and approaches from a range of staff. Moving to virtual operations has been a smoother transition for UUA staff because roughly half of UUA program staff were already working from home, though we are still exploring what is possible through virtual programs and events. With a strong early response, however, it remains to be seen what the long-term trajectory of this pandemic will be and how its impacts will unfold for years to come.