

Worship Committee, July 23, 2021

Present: John Sampson, Linda Bogardus, Annie Scavo, Anne Hurd, Bernie Webb

On July 23, the Worship Committee as a whole met for the first time since March 12, 2021. In the meantime, the church reopening sub-group, which focused on planning how to resume safe in-person worship, had taken precedence. The July 23 meeting was the committee's first to discuss the hybrid worship that the church has held since July 4.

When John asked for feedback on the hybrid experience, Annie remarked that Zoom participants had trouble hearing the prayers offered into the microphone by sanctuary participants. John noted that an earlier idea had been to pass a microphone to people in the pews when they spoke. But sanitary considerations related to Covid made that idea undesirable. Annie also noticed that people in the pews seem to watch the screen rather than the people, including John, in the church. Perhaps David Craig will address this by having a generic picture on the screen when no one on Zoom is talking.

John noted that, to make it more visible, the screen has now been mounted on the wall. A video delay will always occur, which will create a seeming disconnect between what is happening on the screen and what is happening in the sanctuary.

Annie noted that the children's message seems to have evolved into a first reflection. We discussed the children's message, with John calling it a work in progress. For now, John, Henri, and others will rotate giving the message. Another work in progress is the offertory, which because of negative feedback has been eliminated. When worship was only on Zoom, no offering was possible. Now, even though in-person worship has resumed, Covid concerns over multiple people's handling a plate mean that passing the plates remains undesirable. The committee discussed how we should remind and otherwise encourage people to donate to the church.

David Craig's position is paid and was budgeted for about eight hours a week. He and John have worked many, many hours on infrastructure to get the system for hybrid worship wired and working. Dave's week is about 15 hours now. Although his hours will lessen as we go forward with the set-up infrastructure, we cannot sustain the cost of a full hybrid service that allows members on Zoom to participate. This will have to be addressed. If other groups, such as Vespers or people holding a memorial service, want both Zoom and in-person services, they will have to negotiate with Dave themselves. Meanwhile, in Dave's absence, Chris Blaicher has volunteered to be trained to run the service.

As the basics of Zoom are being worked out, John is exploring what technology can do to enrich the worship experience. He is considering using videos or films of relevant topics to enhance visual learning, complementing the verbal sermons and readings. John has been watching videos of Japanese culture and was struck by the ritual intentionality of moving through space: the tea ceremony, for example, can have an almost Zen-like quality. He wondered whether our Communion ceremony could be an opportunity for such intentionality. For example, to make the ritual more visual, the juice could be poured from clear glass rather than pottery.

John will be going on a vacation for the first time this year, and depending on the exact dates, he will be back the first Sunday of Advent. So, it is not too early to discuss Christmas, which John wants to be extra special this year, considering the rough times that we have been through. Many people will be disappointed if we decide that we are not able safely to sing. When we light our candles on Christmas Eve, possibly only Lynn will sing. John charged the committee to think of ways that we can make Advent and Christmas nourishing and a time of reconnecting with traditions, even if some of those traditions will be modified or absent this year.

Submitted by Linda Bogardus