

Worship Committee, March 27, 2020

Present: John Sampson, Linda Bogardus, Martha Gallagher, Anne Hurd, Susie Allen, Annie Scavo, Lorraine Duvall

The purpose of today's meeting is to talk about our experience with our first online worship, which was March 22.

A small group inside the church produced the service on March 22. But new state guidelines mean that the service for March 29 will truly be virtual: everyone involved will be broadcasting from different locations. Lynn and Rob will prerecord their music, and Martha will be producing from her house. Everyone logging on will be muted from the host, and at no time will anyone need to be unmuted.

Most of the issues were related to sound. Singing was distracting: because everyone has different internet speeds, we were not all singing at the same time. For March 29, participants will be anchored to Lynn and will be able to sing along to the music or not, because all will be muted. Participants will hear only Lynn singing, while a screen share will show the words.

For the next several weeks the mute will be off during the responsive reading and the unison prayers. A functionality in the chat room allows you to raise your hand. You then could unmute yourself, offer a prayer, and then mute again. But for now, as we get used to Zoom, that will not be allowed, because it takes discipline to follow through.

In the run-up to getting online, it was decided that we would replicate what we do in a normal service. However, Zoom has functions that give us different ways to gather and be more creative, allowing the experience to be deepened and enhanced.

There was a question concerning the offering. It is hoped that in the very near future it will be possible to donate online. And, the church can receive checks in the mail at any time.

It is easy to zone out when watching something digitally. A visual vacuum might occur after the setup, invitation, and music: what is happening on the screen might not be centering us in the moment. Images or videos could be projected on the screens to help change what we are experiencing. For example, during the time of silent meditation, a video, both visual and sound, of water running over rocks could be supportive. Also, a sermon that has been much talked about was the one on windows. During one of the quiet moments, might an image of a window be shown on the screen to serve as an icon of our church?

When we come back together physically into the church, hopefully we can continue to connect seasonal people through Zoom. They feel part of our church community, but eight months of the year aren't here. Some form of online presence on Sunday is the right thing to do.

This is a great opportunity for experimentation, so John is willing to try communion online. The way to do this is for the people to get their personal elements, whatever they might be, and have them before the screen. When we walk through the sacrament and the time comes to partake of the elements, everyone has all they need to participate. It could be a powerful opportunity to reimagine what forms communion can take—even extending out into our daily lives.

People have expressed missing a time of fellowship when normally we have coffee hour. This needs to be explored to see how it would work. Would it be the Zoom "breakout room" function? Or simply after (or before) the service, everyone could turn on their video (not the audio) for a minute or so, so that all could be seen.

Seeing so many faces that he had not seen in a while showed John that we might not have appreciated what our church means to the people who are not here year-round. They chose to be with us online when other opportunities are out there: going forward, let us be sure to remember this.

John continues to encourage feedback from the congregation.