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Suggested Guidelines for Planning and Leading Interactive Worship through Zoom and Live Stream
(because worship is not a spectator activity)

Spiritual preparations and commitments needed

- A spirit of *imagination*, *adaptability, and generosity* expressed by all worship leaders and worshipers.
- Worship leaders and worshipers who are *courageous* enough to try something new, *humble* enough to accept that somethings will fail, *patient* enough to keep learning along the way, and *grateful* enough that you are all in this together.
- A *heart for hospitality* expressed by all worship leaders, preachers, and musicians and who are risking new ways of leading.
- *Confident leaders* who have thought through the logistics of worship services, *set the expectations* of hospitality, and *inspired* everyone's patience and generosity of spirit to adapt in the moment.

Commitments and responsibilities of all worship leaders and preachers

- Think of everyone in the Zoom or livestream experience as worshipers*, sisters and brothers in your church family,* and not as spectators or observers.
- *Envision hospitality*. There are many aspects of meeting worshipers, moving between worship actions, and keeping worshipers' attention that are nonverbal and taken for granted. Now, these aspects of being together as a congregation must be explicitly considered. Commit yourself to being a servant of graciousness and welcome.
- *Practice envisioning the community of worshipers*, who may not be able to see, but who will be present online and in spirit. Repeat this envisioning practice throughout your planning process so that you remember *your role is as a host* in the worship event. This is especially important for those doing livestreamed services.
- Practice putting your attention and your energy out to worshipers, *opening your heart and spirit to encompass their hearts and spirits*.
- Plan your worship activities from *the vantage point of the worshipers*, especially if these brothers and sisters do not have specific leadership roles. This is particularly important in livestream services. What will they see? What will they hear? How are you inviting them to respond during the service?

- *Include the technology person or group* into your planning, especially if you are live streaming. Let them help you shape what can be possible in the service.
- **Plan ahead** and create a clear outline for your service **a minimum** *of two days* before the actual service and send it to everyone who will have a leadership responsibility, including the technology group.
- *Communicate* the worshipers *a minimum of one day and ideally two days* before the service and set up a time to practice.
- Practice orienting yourself to your computer camera or an external camera if you are live streaming*. Look at the camera* and trust that worshipers are feeling welcomed by your confidence, energy, and your desire to connect with them.

Commitments and responsibilities of worshipers

- *Practice the spiritual gifts* of patience, generosity, and peace (Galatians 5:22-23) as the congregation learns together how to worship online.
- *Commit to staying attentive, engaged, and focused* on what is happening in the worship service and not distracted by what is in the home environment (e.g., no reading the Sunday news or email, texting, FaceTiming with friends and family, catching up on Facebook, eating breakfast or lunch, playing games, … etc.)
- *Participate in the actions* worshipers are specifically invited to do (e.g., speak responses, sing along with a leader, talk in breakout groups, use the Chat function to seek technology help, offering prayer request, etc.)
- *Mind the microphone mute* function in Zoom – keeping microphone muted except when providing leadership.
- *Provide feedback with gentleness* to worship leaders and pastors following the service so that the worship experience can be improved for everyone.

Rules of hospitality and etiquette for Zoom and Livestream services

- *Invite participants* who will help to lead the service *several days in advance* so that there is time to practice using the chosen video platform before the service. Send them needed information so they can lead comfortably with confidence.
- **Communicate** needed information about an upcoming service to the worshipers at least one day (and ideally more) in advance and include a list of resources they will need to fully participate in the service. Such information could include
    o Zoom or livestream links

- o Encouragement to use strong wifi or Ethernet connections and computers or devices that are fully charged or plugged in
  - o Instructions for using Zoom (enabling or muting microphones or cameras, controlling volume, using chat function, how breakout groups work, etc.) or the livestream.
  - o The outline of the service with spoken parts for the worshipers.
  - o List of any items needed for participating fully in the service (candles, bread, grape juice, songbooks, materials for children's time, etc.).
  - o Encouragement to stop live video if worshiper carries laptop or other devices to another location
  - o Plans for what to do if: 1) worshipers' internet connect fails or becomes unstable and/or 2) the Zoom or Livestream transmission fails.
- Look at the camera *directly and consistently*.
- *Speak more slowly* than normal, enunciating clearly, but not uncomfortably so. This helps with different qualities of device speakers, delays in internet transmission, or periods of internet disruption.
- *Acknowledge and welcome* the presence of all worshipers who are participating through electronic means at the start of the service.
- *Use hand gestures* for those times when worshipers are invited to speak a phrase, sing, or do something at the same time.
- For Zoom users, cup *hand to the ear* if the speaker cannot be heard.
- *Provide a Zoom monitor or host* (who is not the worship leader, preacher, or musicians) to monitor what is happening with the worshipers and free those leading the service from needing to address worshipers' issues. (See below)
- *Acknowledge* the contributions of those working with the Zoom or livestream technology with *words of gratitude and appreciation* for the contributions they are offering each week to take the congregation's worship online.
- *Thank all worship planners and leaders* for sharing their time, gifts, and energies to keep the worshiping community connected and strong.

Technology preparations and commitments

- G*ood enough technology* for stable internet connections, powerful enough microphones, adequate cameras, and good lighting are minimum requirements.
- Have a person who *is well-versed in Zoom* and technology in general serve as *"host" or "moderator"* of the Zoom connection. This person can keep track of activity in the Chat function, watch for worshipers' hand signals if they are having difficulties hearing speakers, remind worship leaders or other speakers to mute or unmute their microphones, create

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breakout groups, etc. "Zoombombing" is becoming a disruption for Zoom meetings, which the host or moderator and address if it appears. (See [How to stop Zoombombing trolls](#))

- *Test* the technology *before* each worship service begins.
- *Practice* with leaders who will carry specific parts of the worship service (e.g., individual speakers, song leaders, the preacher if there is a sermon, etc.) *before* the service, ideally the day before.
- Use the *Gallery and the Speaker options* in Zoom to focus attention on specific leaders as needed.
- *Invite adaptability* on everyone's part and *welcome* constructive suggestions for what did not work well for the sake of the whole community.
- For more information on technology questions see [Streaming and Recording for Your Congregation: A Living Document](#), edited and compiled by Jonathan L. Luginbill, Ft. Collins, CO, March 26, 2020, available through MCUSA

Several idea prompts for imagining ways to enrich the online experience

- Engage as many of the worshipers' senses a possible visually and aurally – let your imaginations roam within the realm of reason.
- Create a visually rich environment that can support and highlight actions of the service, e.g., colorful (not cluttered or busy) backgrounds, centering displays, candles, taking time to spread a communion table, etc.
- Plan strong gathering and sending activities that will help worshipers feel connected in the Spirit's presence and blessed at the end of the service to minister to others during the upcoming week.
- Use simple responses for worshipers to speak during the gathering time, prayers, and other opportunities to use a form of call and response.
- Plan moments of silence in the service and fight the urge to rush from one action to the next.
- Use the "Breakout" feature in Zoom to facilitate small group interactions before the service begins or during the service for small group sharing and/or prayer.
- Invite specific worshipers to create simple videos to share during the service (greetings, responses to a scripture text, musical offerings, children's times, etc.)
- Plan shorter sermons since the home environment can be distracting, especially if there are young children present. Use the time for breakout groups or other interactive activities.
- When using Zoom, sing with a leader while microphone is muted – or occasionally create a soundscape of singing or speech.

Your imaginings, thoughts, and questions….