

## **“Walking in the Light of Screens”**

### **Notes from an online interest group at NPYM 2020**

On Friday, July 24, 2020, about a dozen Friends gathered in an interest group – sponsored by the 2020 Annual Session of North Pacific Yearly Meeting – to share our recent experiences with online Quaker meetings. Participants responded to the following queries:

#### **Queries**

In the shift from in-person to online Quaker gatherings, what have you experienced as problematic or beneficial to . . .

Worship and vocal ministry?

Spirit-led discernment in business and committee meetings?

Care of Friends in need?

#### **Participants’ Responses**

##### **Positive experiences with the shift from in-person meetings to online meetings**

- It takes me 2-3 hours to drive to the meeting that’s closest to me; these remote meeting opportunities have been wonderful for me
- It’s been great that meeting members who live overseas can join us now, as well as people with mobility issues
- I think zoom works very well for committee work; it makes committee meetings easy to attend; and they are easy to clerk because we know each other; I think committee work has actually improved by going online.
- I also find committee work to be improved over zoom; I’m on our library committee and when we meet in person, people tend to get distracted when a task gets mentioned and they get up and go over to the shelf or book or whatever it was that was mentioned; also, we are finding we need to be more explicit about checking whether we are in unity, we can’t just assume we are because there are no objections, this is a great improvement.
- Our meeting hosted a children’s program online for the kids in our quarter and it went really well (Olympia Meeting and PNQM).
- I like how well the transition to online meeting for business has gone for our meeting; we have just as many people attending as we did before, maybe more; it seems to offer us new opportunity for more ideas to come forth.
- We started holding our fourth-Sunday potlucks over zoom; the conversations actually seem to be more focused than before; we’ve had a lot of good, focused, personal sharing, which I don’t think we would have had during in-person potlucks.

- We have found the same with our after-worship social hour; we have started to randomly assign people into small groups for conversation and the experience is actually deeper than milling around the table
- Since we've eliminated the drive time to go to meetings, we can now schedule all sorts of discussions midweek on zoom, which we would not have scheduled when we met in person

#### **Mixed/neutral experiences with the shift from in-person meetings to online meetings**

- One of our community practices has changed completely in response to online worship. Traditionally, people expected to arrive at the meetinghouse already in somewhat of a state of worship; they would enter the building quietly and enter into worship in silence. We have found with online worship that it works better for us to have a time of talk and socializing before centering down into worship, to help build a sense of community among us.
- Pope Francis said God is not afraid of new things.
- I want to find out how other meetings are handling their children's programs. And how a family with only one computer manages to join meeting for worship and FDS.
- Our M&O Committee has called everyone in our directory who has not been attending worship since it went online. It's critical to do this.

#### **Negative experiences with the shift from in-person meetings to online meetings**

- People with have poor internet access or old computers, etc. are at a disadvantage in these online meetings; they may need to turn off their webcam to save bandwidth (or may not have a webcam), and the clerk may forget to call on them
- Because Zoom won't let the host un-mute other people, it's been a problem for one of our disabled members when he wants to share a message and isn't able to unmute himself.
- It's difficult to clerk a business meeting by zoom; I cannot read the body language and sense the subtleties among people that help me read whether we have unity on something. We can't make eye contact. The technology distorts peoples' tone of voice. It's hard to navigate these obstacles as a clerk.
- People are much more casual during worship online than in-person; they'll answer the door, drink coffee, etc. It's disconcerting.
- I find there is a palpable "something" that is missing in online worship, compared with in-person worship, where I sense everyone around me. It's also disconcerting to see everyone's faces there on the screen – I don't typically stare at other people's faces during worship – and this hinders me somewhat from a sense of getting deep.
- Our meeting has struggled terribly with using zoom for our children's program; parents are already stressed with having their children at home 24/7; they resort to using online entertainment as childcare while they work and kid's classes are online also; so on the weekend, parents are trying to limit their kids' screen time

- I am a complete newcomer to Friends; I only found Friends during this time of online meetings; I sense that there is a feeling of community and familiarity among the people in the groups that I visit, but I am not part of it. I wonder how I can get to know people in the meeting. I wonder how the meeting could draw people in.
- I have a Friend who telepathic and meeting over zoom doesn't work for him.

### **Going forward**

- Make sure to set up clerking protocols that check on people who have joined the gathering by phone or without a webcam
- Make sure to continue incorporating remote worship options in meetings, even when people resume in-person worship
- We are already thinking about how we will set up a hybrid meeting. We'll likely have a laptop set up with the people who are meeting in-person and have someone who is joining remotely serve as the zoom host.
- FWCC is conducting trainings for zoom hosting.
- We are thinking about setting up a hybrid meeting on Sunday and a zoom-only meeting midweek.
- This is a new environment. I always feel open to new opportunities. Maybe this is a time to experiment with a little bit more "programming" in our worship.
- This situation may go on for years. We need to address the digital divide among members of our meetings. We need to seek help from others in our quarterly or yearly meetings to help us enable individuals to join us, for example, by buying computers for people who need them. We need to visit some Friends and teach them how to use this technology.
- We're still making a transition to the new situation for meeting for business; we still need to get into the habit of sharing documents ahead of time.
- We'll need to make sure to deliver hard copies of advance documents to people who need that; some Friends don't have computers, but can join business meeting by phone.
- If you are clerking more than 25 people, it's good to have assistant clerks to watch other screens; FWCC recommends up to four assistants, each doing different things
- We need to learn more about what the limitations are with different devices and what devices would improve our experiences
- We have not held memorial meetings online yet, but I can imagine it could be wonderful to have them attended by people from all over the world.
- Some Friends refuse to use computers because they hold legitimate ethical concerns about the social and environmental costs of the computer industry. We need to respect that.