

How to Do a Backyard Hybrid Worship

By David Coletta, Beacon Hill (MA) Friends Meeting, 2020

The most challenging technical aspect of hybrid worship is audio. It might be possible to set up loudspeakers so that the in-person participants can hear the Zoom participants without getting echo, if Zoom's echo cancellation can handle that scenario. But really I can think of only two practical ways for the in-person folks to be picked up on the Zoom audio, and those are:

- 1) each in-person participant wears a headset and calls in or Zooms in on their phones; or
- 2) each in-person participant comes up to a mic on a mic stand to speak.

For scenario 1, it's probably better for them to call in than to Zoom in, because calling in eliminates the need for stable Wi-Fi and mobile data usage, and also helps people not need to look at or fiddle with their phones as much.

For scenario 2 to work, people would need to feel comfortable with the idea that the microphone was shared among all the speakers. They would be asked not to touch the microphone, but I doubt that much is known about COVID transmission via close proximity to a microphone, so it would be a risk people would be taking on.

These two scenarios can co-exist! So people could choose which way to speak based on their preference, their risk tolerance, etc.

For viewing the Zoom video screen, I would use a laptop, projector, and movie screen to project the Zoom window where the in-person participants could see it. It's not clear to me how to manage gallery view vs. speaker view. One option would be to borrow another projector and screen and simply have one screen on speaker view and one on gallery view, but that's a lot of video. Perhaps the tech host could switch back and forth depending on what was happening in the moment during worship. And I think it would need to be held at dusk, maybe 7:30 pm or so.

For picking up video from the meeting, I'm imagining aiming a device's camera at the whole group. We will have a lighting challenge, since it will need to be dark enough for the projector to be visible but light enough for the device camera to work too. I'm picturing that we get some luminaries or lanterns and ask people to bring them if they have them and then each person could hold one in their lap.

A whole separate question is how to communicate to both in-person and Zoom participants how this is all supposed to work. I think we'd need to write instructions and email them in advance AND also take meeting time to talk it through.

I should add that I have most of the equipment I have described. What I don't have is a bunch of spare headsets, so we'd have to expect people who needed them to bring their own.

Phew! It sounds like this could only barely work! But I think we would learn so much. And it could be the way that God is speaking to us in this moment, if we listen.

Explanation of Backyard Hybrid Worship to Participants

Dear Friend!

...non-technical portion of email, then...

How Will This Hybrid Meeting Work?

This meeting for worship is an experiment! We will learn a lot from trying it. As my housemate's zen practice group says:

There will be glitches! There will be internet issues. There will be sound issues. There will be lag issues. In short, there will be suffering, and we will discover all phenomena bear the dharma-seal of unsatisfactoriness.

Here are some of the principles we are using to guide this worship. We hope that:

- This worship will "have no center", specifically that it will be centered in neither the in-person space nor the virtual space
- Everyone offering a spoken message will experience it as having been available for all participants to hear
- Those present in the in-person space will have the opportunity to feel a physical connection to each other and their shared surroundings that is missing from virtual worship
- We will maintain those aspects of virtual worship -- such as improved audio -- that restore accessibility to those who have historically lacked it

If you are going to attend the in-person space:

- The number of participants will be limited for safety, so you'll need to register in advance and wait for a response confirming that there is space.
- Please bring a mask and wear it at all times. Hand sanitizer will be provided.
- Please bring a mobile phone (it doesn't need to be a smartphone) and a headset, so that you can telephone in to the Zoom meeting while you are sitting in the physical meeting. (Using the Zoom app on a smartphone with mobile data is fine too, as long as you keep your video off. Wi-Fi will not be available.)
- The meeting will be held outdoors at dusk, so please bring a candle, lantern, or luminary you can hold during the meeting.
- There will be a projector screen switching between gallery view and speaker view so that you can see the participants who are attending virtually.
- There will be one or two devices with cameras pointed at the in-person space. You will not need to worry about your own camera.
- If you are moved to speak, you may choose either a) to unmute your mic and speak through your phone, or b) to walk up to a mic we will provide on a mic stand and speak there. If you use the shared mic, please do not touch it. We will provide replaceable paper covers for the microphone which we will change after each speaker.

- You may need to temporarily turn down the volume on your phone while someone physically near you is speaking, in order to avoid hearing an echo through your headset.

If you are going to attend virtually:

- Please keep your camera turned on if possible. The in-person participants will see gallery view on a projector screen, but in order to reduce clutter, participants with no video will not be displayed.
- You will be able to see one or two camera angles of the in-person group as part of your gallery view, and while an in-person speaker is participating, you will see one of those in-person cameras in speaker view.
- If you are having any difficulty hearing anyone who is speaking from the in-person space, please send a chat message to the host, who will let the speaker know.