

Report from the Ad-Hoc Committee on Reopening

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Overview

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Reopening the Meetinghouse was charged with proposing a plan or plans for reopening that met as many as possible of the 9 objectives approved at the May Business Meeting.¹ We collected suggestions from local Friends and from Meetings around the country, and we considered several of these over five meetings between May 27th and July 1st. We also distributed a survey to 78 members and attenders who had participated in Meeting life during the last two-to-three years. Thirty-five responded.

Friends' comments and the survey results² both made it clear that Friends wish to return to in-person Meetings for Worship as soon as it is safe to do so. It was also clear that almost everyone wished to make it possible for those who cannot attend Meeting in person to be able to attend by other means. Many Friends, however, also wished to have minimally intrusive technology in the in-person Meetings, and a few wished to have none at all. The committee considered holding two Meetings for Worship: one in-person and the other on Zoom, but decided that this would divide the Meeting and would meet too few of the Meeting's objectives.

After much reflection, we came to unity around two proposals, described below. Our first choice is to hold two Meetings for Worship in the Meeting Room on Sunday, one from 8:30-9:30am without Zoom and one from 10-11am with Zoom using a 50" screen. Our second choice is to hold a blended Meeting for Worship from 10-11am with a no-tech quiet period starting at 9:30 and the main Meeting alternating weekly between Zoom with a screen and Zoom using audio only.

1. Some advantages of the first choice are avoiding crowding, giving the 10am tech clerks and the Friends serving the children's program a chance to attend worship, and being able to meet all Friends' expressed needs.
2. Two advantages of the second choice are making it easier for those who attended the early worship to stay for 11:30 potlucks, forums, and business meeting and having a settling-in quiet period before 10am Meeting for Worship, which some Friends have long desired.

¹ See Appendix 1.

² See Appendix 2.

Both plans involve installing better tech in the Meetinghouse — as would any plan that seeks to include those who cannot attend in-person worship. This will take time to implement; the tech will be more intrusive during the installation period than it will be after the installation is complete.

The Committee does not, however, think that we need to wait until the tech is installed before returning to in-person Meeting for Worship in the Meeting Room. Having a known goal lets us be patient while we are working to reach it. We could move back into the Meetinghouse rather quickly using our current or moderately upgraded technology while the new systems are being installed.

The Committee recommends deciding on a plan and pursuing it long enough to see if it meets Friends' needs. We can then tweak the plan, switch plans, or develop new ones as we are led.

The Committee recommends that the Religious Education committee handle deciding how to reopen the children's program (which they are already doing). Committee members are happy to share what we have learned, if asked.

In the following pages, we summarize the two choices, describe our recommended public health protocols, and describe how the Zoom portion of the blended meetings would work. The list of objectives and a summary of the survey results follow. The full survey results are attached as a separate document.

Choice #1

FMSA will hold **two** Meetings for Worship in our Meeting Room on Sundays.

- a. The first will run from 8:30-9:30am. It will be in-person only, conducted as all Meetings for Worship were before the pandemic.
- b. The second will run from 10-11am. It will be a blended meeting, combining those attending in person and those attending on Zoom.
- c. Potlucks, forums, business meetings, and other activities will be held starting at 11:15 or 11:30, as was the case in the pre-pandemic era.

Choice #2

FMSA will hold **one** Meeting for Worship in our Meeting Room on Sundays from 10-11am.

- a. Beginning at 9:30am, the Meeting Room will be a quiet place for reflection. The tech will be set up but will be covered and silenced so that it does not intrude on Friends' pre-Meeting centering.

- b. The 10-11am Meeting will be a blended meeting, combining those attending in person and those attending on Zoom. (See Zoom protocols below.)
 - a. On 1st and 3rd (or 2nd and 4th) Sundays, Zoom will be audio only, used without a screen. Both in-person and Zoom attenders can hear each other and Zoom attenders can see the Meeting Room, but those in the Meeting Room cannot see those on Zoom.
 - b. On 2nd and 4th (or 1st and 3rd) Sundays, Zoom will be both audio and visual. Those attending in person and on Zoom can see and hear each other.
 - c. If there is no in-person tech clerk available³, the in-person Meeting will be live-streamed to the Zoom participants. They will be able to see and hear those in the Meeting Room but not *vice versa*.
 - d. 5th Sundays can be audio-only, audio and visual, or live-streamed.
- c. Potlucks, forums, business meetings, and other activities will be held starting at 11:15 or 11:30, as was the case in the pre-pandemic era.

Public Health Protocols

Both Meetings for Worship will do the following to maintain public health:

1. We will plug in and run our two HEPA air filters starting at either 8am or 9am, depending on which plan is approved. These will scrub the air effectively yet will be quiet enough not to disturb Meeting for Worship. We will unplug them and return them to their corner after the day's activities.
2. We will rearrange the benches to make distancing possible for as long as this is needed for public health. This means pushing the back row of benches up against the wall and expanding the space between the rows. We will add chairs as needed to make more (distanced) space for those who wish to attend.
 - a. Household members are welcome to sit together.
3. If we reach our attendance limit, we will ask volunteers to leave the meeting so that newcomers can join us. (This was the second-most popular approach in the survey.)
4. Mask use:
 - a. Until the highly transmissible COVID variants are no longer active in San Antonio, we will recommend that everyone wear masks. Unvaccinated and immunocompromised individuals should definitely wear masks.

³ See the Zoom Protocols, below.

- b. Once the highly transmissible variants have declined, masks are optional for vaccinated people, only.
- c. Once COVID is largely eliminated in San Antonio, masks are optional for everyone.

Zoom Protocols

1. We will install the following additional tech in the Meeting Room:
 - a. Ethernet ports in the northwest and southwest corners of the Meeting Room. This allows a hard-wired connection to the Internet: stable and fast.
 - b. A discreet, dual-purpose microphone and speaker system. It will be built-in, so that it picks up people's voices from wherever they sit. This system will enhance Friends' ability to hear others' ministry in the meeting room. It will also allow people on Zoom to hear people in the Meeting Room and vice versa, both during Meetings for Worship and at other events.
 - i. Current microphone technology is much better than it was a few years ago, but it is not perfect. The microphone arrays will not be invisible. The word "discreet" is key. We can minimize their visual impact.
 - ii. In-person Friends who are hard-of-hearing may use either headsets or a smartphone app to pick up transmitted Bluetooth signals. The exact installation depends on the sound-system bids we receive.
 - c. We will install hidden cables and connectors for a removeable, discreet video camera that can capture about 2/3 of the Meeting Room's seating. This leaves lots of space for those who do not wish to appear on camera. The camera will be taken down and stored when not in use.
 - d. We will purchase a 50" (diagonal)⁴ monitor on a rolling stand. We can roll it from the furnace room to the Meeting Room and hook it up to pre-set cabling.
2. The Zoom setup will be run by a tech clerk from a laptop on a table or cart in the corner of the Meeting Room.
 - a. Zoom will run in webinar style. Participants can be seen on the tech clerk's laptop but will be kept muted.
 - b. A Zoom participant who wishes to speak clicks the icon to raise a hand. The tech clerk then stands as if giving ministry and allows that person to unmute. The tech clerk sits and mutes the speaker when ministry is finished.

⁴ 43.6" wide, 24.6" high

- c. Zoom participants can be seen by those in the Meeting Room on weeks when there is a screen. They can be heard but not seen on weeks when there is not.
 - d. If there is no tech clerk available on a Sunday, then Zoom attendees will see a livestream of the in-person Meeting but will be able to give ministry only to other Zoomers, not to those in the Meetinghouse.
3. The monitor will have two uses.
- a. In Meeting for Worship, it can be positioned along one of the side walls, in line with the against-the-wall back row of benches. It will have benches in front of it. It should be sized and positioned so that it looks as if (in gallery view) it were a row or two of people on a back bench.
 - i. This placement will leave plenty of places to sit for those who do not wish to see it.
 - b. The placement is not so important for Meeting for Business. The monitor does, however, need to be large enough for the Clerk to keep track of the people on it while keeping track of the in-person attenders. We will need to balance the size for these two uses.
 - c. In either case, the monitor will be in gallery view unless someone is speaking.
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Appendix 1: List of Objectives

1. Restore in-person Meeting for Worship and activities at the Meetinghouse to the center of FMSA life.
2. Minimize health risks to participants and visitors.
3. Minimize disruption to the Meetinghouse and to Meeting for Worship.
4. Make it possible for everyone in the Quaker community to attend.
5. Make it possible for everyone to give and receive ministry.
6. Facilitate everyone's full participation in worship.
7. Facilitate everyone's full participation in forums and business meetings.
8. Make it possible to clerk the above activities.
9. Restart the children's program.

Appendix 2: Survey Results

As of noon on July 1st, we have had 35 responses to our survey (a 45% response rate). Some clear patterns have emerged. For example:

1. Two-thirds of those who responded have been attending Zoom or hybrid meetings.
2. Two-thirds say they are ready to return to the Meetinghouse “now”.
 - These are not the same two-thirds, though they overlap considerably. Some of those saying “now” also say “when the COVID variants are under control”.
 - Clearly, there is a wish to return to in-person Meeting for Worship in the Meeting Room soon, with some cautions.
3. Over a third of our respondents are not able to join us in the Meetinghouse, either because of health, distance, or both. This is higher than the (average) 25% of those who have been attending our recent Zoom/hybrid events. It is a significant part of the Meeting community.
4. A bit fewer than two-thirds would be willing to have compulsory masks, and a bit more than two-thirds would be willing to have us impose distanced seating for the sake of people’s health.
 - Three are not willing to have any restrictions, even to protect others’ health, but two of these are willing to have two meetings on Sunday to maintain distance.
 - Large majorities said they would support having two meetings or a voluntary seat exchange; a smaller majority would support reservations.
5. Significantly more people are concerned about accommodating those who cannot attend for reasons of health, transportation, or distance than are concerned about accommodating those who feel that technology would disturb their worship experience.
6. Friends are overwhelmingly concerned with providing a means for people to participate in forums, business meetings, etc. remotely.
7. Two-thirds of respondents want to feel as if the people on Zoom and in the Meetinghouse are attending the same Meeting for Worship. Two-thirds want to be able to hear ministry from the people on Zoom clearly; almost the same number want to be able to hear ministry in the Meeting Room. Only one-third say that they want to be able to see the faces of those attending by Zoom.
 - Clearly, we will need a good, though unobtrusive, sound system.
 - A Zoom screen is not as crucial, though it is favored by more than oppose one.
8. A total of 7 different people say they would be disturbed by having a screen in the Meeting Room, even if they could not see it.

9. Six people would find having to walk up to a microphone to give ministry would disturb their ability to worship.
10. That figure is a third of the number of people who would be disturbed by knowing that our design for worship would prevent people from attending. The bulk of the people who answered the question were primarily concerned about inclusion.
 - The one person who would be disturbed by any tech would also be disturbed by knowing that our design would prevent people from attending. This person also says that “Most of my answers are irrelevant, as we cannot attend in person regularly.”
11. Parents wish to bring their children back to Meeting, so long as it is safe, people are vaccinated, and the program is outdoors whenever possible.
 - This will mean we should expect some kid noise during Meeting for Worship.

To summarize the survey:

- There is a strong wish for us to return to the Meetinghouse as soon as possible.
- A significant part of the active Meeting community is currently not able to attend in person.
- The bulk of respondents wish to include those who cannot attend in-person worship, forums, and business meetings.
 - Doing this requires well-designed technology.
- Friends want to be able to hear ministry from those attending by Zoom and from those in the Meeting Room. This should not require anyone to walk up to a microphone.
- A significant minority of Friends wish to be able to see those who are attending Meeting for Worship remotely. This outnumbers those who say they would be disturbed by having a screen in Meeting for Worship, even if they could not see it.
- We need to plan how to revive the children’s program, something that is beyond this committee’s purview – though not beyond our ability to craft general recommendations.