Going Virtual with God

How to bring the Word to the people
one Zoom window at a time

st. andrew's
episcopal church
(Arlington)

Want to use a virtual platform to hold services but aren't sure where to begin?
Here are our lessons learned from this week …

We'll cover:
Picking a location
Building a set
Choosing an online platform
Preparing for the service
Holding the service

Pick a Location for the Officiant (beauty versus reality)

- A careful balance of being where he/she is most comfortable and realities of relying on wifi or hard-wire internet connectivity
- We chose a spot in the Nave that had a nice background but that also had a strong signal from the router about 50 feet away through brick

Build a Set (key grips and gaffers not req'd)

- Think about lighting on the officiant -- a well-lit preacher goes a long way
  - We used a portrait light kit provided by a parishioner, but almost any light will do
  - It helps if you can put some kind of thin screen over a normal light to reduce the harshness
  - Whatever you decide, avoid shadows -- members want to see his/her face
- Pick a device
  - Smartphones are only getting better with streaming video, as this rector in San Diego shows
  - Laptops with a camera and microphone built in work well (which is what we used)
  - Tablets will do just fine as well
- Create a stand for the device to avoid camera shake
  - Smartphone/tablet tripod adapters are a great option
  - Two large stacks of hymnals on a table make for a great laptop stand
- Use a music stand for the officiant's notes/sermon
  - But make sure the two stands don't touch, or when one moves so will the other

Choose an Online Platform (spoiler: Zoom)

- Many popular online meeting tools out there: Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, etc.
- We found Zoom to be easiest to use for both rector and for parish members
  - It's free (but with an important caveat)**
  - Allows up to 100 participants to log in
  - Easy first-time setup; if someone doesn't have the app, when they click on the meeting link they'll be asked to download first
  - Also provides two viewing settings -- Speaker View (mostly the officiant) or Gallery View (all the members who dialed in plus the officiant)
  - Connection is stable -- we haven't dropped the rector yet <as I knock on wood>
  - If you go with a paid subscription you'll get additional features like Breakout Rooms (which we used for our younger family Liturgy of the Word) and greater host controls

** The free version of Zoom only gives you 40 minutes before the session closes

Prepare for the Service (who's doing what) (Part I)

- Get the word out to the parish
  - Send a specific note to members if you have an email listserv (see a sample on slide 10)
  - Use the Vestry and ministry leaders to activate their network to ensure wide coverage
- If possible have someone besides the officiant be the Zoom "host"
  - That person can Mute All, setup Breakout Rooms (if you have a paid account), and otherwise oversee the session while the officiant focuses on holding the service
- Choose how to use the group chat function -- to offer prayers, say Hi during the Peace, etc.
- Create a service bulletin -- a couple of options
  - With Zoom the host can share his/her screen -- decide if you want to have the bulletin displayed along with the officiant and/or participants
  - You can also email out or link to an Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) version and have members follow along if you would rather keep the officiant in the screen

Prepare for the Service (who's doing what) (Part II)

- Choose others to help with the service
  - Designate someone to be the "voice of the congregation," replying to the prompts of the officiant
  - Consider appointing a lay reader and reader for Prayers of the People; direct them or the host to unmute/re-mute when needed
  - Coordinate with the music director to see if he/she can play from wherever they are (ours played from his apartment in MD on an electric keyboard)
  - Whoever you choose make sure they have the bandwidth (literally) to support it -- dropped or frozen video while speaking makes for awkward silences
- DRY RUN! Definitely get as many of the participants together -- at least the officiant, congregation responder, and Zoom host -- prior to the service to iron out kinks like transitions, muting/unmuting, and more

Celebrate! (and bring Kleenex)

- As an officiant or other service leader remember you're talking to the camera not to the faces on the screen -- make eye contact via the camera as much as possible
- Be patient -- even if the host mutes all when they arrive, people find new and exciting ways to be unmuted; be ok with them whispering to each other, enjoying the sounds of pets, and singing along out of sync with the music while the Zoom host re-mutes
- Exchange of the Peace -- we went full unmute and let everyone talk on top of each other; it was amazing and cathartic
- Be ready for tears -- everyone, from the rector to her parents to all of us, was wiping away the dust in our eyes as we got to see each other from afar

Questions?

- Please don't hesitate to reach out to either of us and ask:
  - Mark Seip, Communications Director, seipjm@gmail.com or 757 289-6700
  - Joe Klem, Webmaster and Zoom Host Extraordinaire, jklem63@gmail.com

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

-- Matthew 18:20

From our Wednesday night Compline

Sample Email to Members

Subj: Virtual Service and How to Connect via Zoom

Body:

Participants with a video and/or audio-enabled computer or a smartphone can join us by following these steps:

1. A few minutes before the service begins, click the link here to join the service *[insert hyperlink to Zoom Meeting link]*
2. Once you click on the link, you will be asked to download and run Zoom.
3. When the file finishes downloading, open the file to install the launcher.
4. Once the host starts the meeting, the Zoom meeting window will appear, enabling you to join the meeting using your computer's audio and video. You will then be connected to our live two-way video so we can all see each other.

For a tutorial on how to join a Zoom meeting, please watch this short video. *[insert link to tutorial video about Zoom:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFhAEoCF7jg&feature=youtu.be*]*

Participants who do not have access to a computer or smartphone can join us by calling *[insert dial-in number]*. When asked for the meeting ID number, enter *[meeting ID]*. And we encourage you to follow along with prayers and songs by downloading the Prayer Guide. *[insert link to PDF of your prayer/song guide or attach to the email, if you have one.]*