Blest Be the Zoom that Binds

Presentation given at UCC ISU Day of Discipleship
1 May 2021
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Objectives of Presentation

* Discuss the pros and cons of using Zoom (and other like formats) for church services.
* Tell the stories of two UCC churches in the ISC relating to the use of Zoom Virtual format for church services and other church related activities.
* Have a Q/A with the participants.
Our Zoom Story

Rev. Christy Eckert
St. John UCC
Trenton IL
Pandemic reaches Southern Illinois

- **Closed the church building beginning Sunday, March 15th**
- **Chose Zoom for “short term closure coverage”**.
  - I was familiar with Zoom from Conference committee meetings.
  - I didn’t trust YouTube.
  - Facebook Live didn’t offer two-way, face-to-face communication.
  - **Zoom Pro – Billed monthly @ $14.99/host**
Bumpy Beginnings

- Began with only one host – me.
- Hard to coordinate because all staff was working from home.
- Internet issues
- No Video Equipment – Used laptop or Ipad
- Frequent Zoom updates on Saturday evenings.
- Steep learning curve for members.
- Fears of “Zoombombing”
- Due to sound lag, I lead hymns on ukulele.
Adapting to Challenges

- Added a second host - Our AV Tech.
- Upped our staff communication / Used Google Drive.
- Organist began recording her songs beforehand – sending to AV Tech.
- Choir Director shifted her work to recording videos of hymns w/ lyrics.
- Members helped one another learn on phone calls or front porches.
- A password was added to our Zoom meetings.
- We used Vimeo to save and send our worship recordings.
Unexpected Blessings

- Zoom allowed family/friends from other areas to join worship.
- Zoom gave power to members and friends with mobility concerns.
- Recorded worship videos allowed folks to experience worship anytime.
- Seeing and hearing one another each week helped combat loneliness and isolation.
- Used Zoom for Scout Meetings, prayer services, funerals, committee meetings, fellowship, pastoral care, and more.
Further Changes

- Purchased Video Equipment for Sanctuary
- AV Tech ran services from sound booth in church.
- Choir director lead hymns from sanctuary.
- Organist played live.
On February 28th, we began allowing folks to worship either in the sanctuary or at home.

Choir members received specialized “singing masks”, so that we could begin singing again.

Safety measures in place in the building – but the safety of home is still an option.
Our Zoom Story

Church of the Good Shepherd UCC
Carbondale IL
by Dale O. Ritzel
COGS’ Zoom Experiences

- 13 March 2020 – the decision
  - Zoom Pro – Why? $149.90/year
- 22 March 2020 – the start
  - Setting up invites, learning basic & advanced settings
- Getting members and friends involved and protecting the church
  - Changing ID and password each week for 2 months
COGS’ Zoom Experiences

- Recording, saving, editing, and making available videos of church services – Cloud vs. local computer, use of editing program (VideoPad Professional)
- Music during the Church Services - Pianist recorded (any smartphone voice recorder program) the music and passed the recording onto the music director to share on Zoom
COGS’ Zoom Experiences

- Choir singing – purchase of Audacity to merge piano and individual singers together.
- Hymns – the music director used Microsoft Video Editor to merge piano sound with words of the song with pictures provided by church members and friends.
- One member worked with persons who were not good with technology each Sunday to get them into the church services, sometimes over many weeks and months.
COGS’ Zoom Experiences

- Virtual church service setting – the atrium at our Pastor’s home while member had their own worship space at home
- Members reading Gospel and New Testament
- Virtual service were opened up 15 minutes and some 30 plus minutes after for interaction between everyone.
- The Pastor lead the worship while the music director and I were leading the service.
COGS’ Zoom Experiences

- 58 church services with 5 Hybrid since 22 March 2020
- 220 other church related Zoom events including church committee meetings, Pastor’s office time, church council meetings, choir meetings, Saturday Ladies’ Brunch, video viewing/discussion events, book review/discussion events, art journaling, presentations on environmental and global mission issues, memorial services, confirmation classes, and our Pastor being a settled Pastor, among others.
COGS’ benefits of using Zoom

- Have church services during Pandemic with jeopardize health/safety of church members and friends
- Having people attend church services from Florida, Indiana, Missouri, New Zealand, Tennessee, Texas, and other parts of Illinois.
- Having new people in the area who started attending Zoom church service who later became members.
COGS’ benefits of using Zoom

- Weekly attendance in church service increased over 80% during the Pandemic
- Our weekly/monthly donations increased by over 50% during 14 months since the Pandemic started.
- Our utility bills have gone down
- We have been able to continue paying our church staff
Pros of using Zoom for Church Services

• What made people choose Zoom over other similar apps? In one word – convenience.

• Zoom is a product made for user satisfaction – that’s the founding ground of the company. Their product is completely customer-driven and that’s why it can sell itself. They improved on the feedback they got from their customers.
Pros of using Zoom for Church Services

- Zoom has made it easier to conduct a virtual meeting without having to fumble with several other apps for different things. It does not only provide video conferencing or audio conferencing or screen-sharing. It has all of these features in one place which prevents a lot of hustle.
- Allows the Zoom host to have co-hosts to help run/control parts of the church service.
- About one year ago, Zoom, coded the each event’s link the ID and password to enter the event.
Pros of using Zoom for Church Services

* You can record your church services and other church events on your computer or in the cloud.

* It's reliable and provides good quality audio and video conferencing. We've had issues with other web conferencing formats, but not with Zoom.

* It's easy to use. Creating a meeting (takes less than a minute), joining a meeting, and using the enhancement tools are all intuitive. Zoom has clear directions to setup features.
Pros of using Zoom for Church Services

- Chat option, where you can chat with everyone or with a particular individual.
- Connection with multiple calendars.
- Zoom is highly password protected with high security on data. Every user has their personal participant IDs.
- Continuous security improvements.
Cons of using Zoom for Church Services

▸ Too Many Subscriptions and Add-Ons which can cost money.
▸ With free version of Zoom and Zoom Pro, only up to 100 participants can join at one time otherwise if you want more to join, you have to buy the premium version of Zoom.
▸ The users of the free version of Zoom can launch only 40 minutes events, even though those with Zoom Pro can have host events for up to 30 hours.
Cons of using Zoom for Church Services

- Lack of Chat/Comment Control.
- Zoombombing – This was a problem in the early days of 2020, but Zoom made it more difficult to do this by having event ID and Password hidden in the Zoom event link and by having waiting rooms.
- Zoom does not work without downloading an the program on your computer or portable device.
Cons of using Zoom for Church Services

- Many churches and other organizations have a lot of problems with their first events because members forget to actually download the Zoom program or app. This can delay or even force the meeting to be rescheduled as a result. Of course, with proper preparation and awareness, this can be avoided.
Thanks!

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