

AN EXPANDED AND GENEROUS TABLE:

IS HYBRID WORSHIP IN YOUR FUTURE?

There are no silver linings from the COVID19 Pandemic. Too many people have died, too many people are now struggling with day-to-day survival, and too many people's futures have been left in turmoil and doubt. This season in the life of humanity has been simply put, awful. At the same time, during this time, churches have stepped into spaces that many would have never imagined they could. Congregations have answered the call to fight for social justice and institutional accountability; they have given resources of time, space, and prayer; and they have served, fed, and clothed those in need. In a time when all of our actions have been magnified through the lens of the pandemic, many churches have adapted in amazing and faithful ways.

This shift may not be more evident in any other area than worship. Communities have adapted to online spaces for worship, meetings, pastoral care, conferences, and more. It has not always been easy and not everyone thrives in this setting, but congregations have, across denominations, risen to the challenge in diverse and creative ways.

While there is no single, best way for people to gather for worship, as the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel begins to shine and the conversation about "going back" begins in earnest, the question for many congregations is this, "Once online worship is no longer the only option for you and your congregation, will you all have the willingness, energy, and capacity to birth, curate, nurture, and sustain a long-term digital space?" or more succinctly put, "What now?"

The decisions that are made about worship in the coming months must not be taken lightly but must be approached with communal discernment, reflective honesty, and faithful practicality. For those with inklings and dreams about hybrid worship, it is my hope that the questions I offer will help you and your leadership to understand different options, assess congregational willingness, energy, and capacity, and make faithful choices that will best equip you for the future.

Assumptions made by Bruce...

- "Church" is more than worship, but worship is still central to most congregations.
- Context matters and every leader must assess and translate for their particular spaces.
- How congregations meet for committee meetings and other small gatherings will be forever changed, but the desire for worship to return to "what it was before" is strong.

THE BIG QUESTION

"Once online worship is no longer the only option for you and your congregation, will you all have the willingness, energy, and capacity to birth, curate, nurture, and sustain a long-term digital space?" or more succinctly put, "What now?"

@BREYESCHOW

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- “Hybrid Worship” requires much more energy and resources than many congregations have, so there may be more effective options than hybrid worship for these congregations.
- Worship is not a competition, numbers are only a measurement, and engagement will be evaluated differently in every space.



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WORSHIP OPTIONS DESCRIPTIONS

WORSHIP OPTIONS	General Description	Opportunities	Limitations	Capacities
In-Person Only	What most churches did before the pandemic, only meeting in person at a geographic location.	“We get to see one another face-to-face again!”	“Because I do not live in the area, I won’t be able to worship with you anymore.”	What we used to do and we already do this well. Some staff adjustments for COVID19 precautions.
Zoom/Remote Only	Worship on Zoom, Meet, etc.: a remote, interactive, and in-the-moment online worship experience.	“Yes, my kids, my mother, and I can still worship together.”	“It’s been hard not to see people every Sunday and I will miss that.”	A few upgrades for sound and cameras, but we already do this well.
Streaming	Sanctuary centered where remote participants watch others worship. Some online interaction.	“Wow, so many more people are watching.” and “I get to watch worship whenever I want to.”	“I miss being able to interact with everyone else at worship.”	Cameras, sound, and technical staff for streaming.
Hybrid	In-person or remote, a service where people have essentially the same worship experience.	“We are all still around the same table!”	“Whoa, this is a ton of work.” “How will we create a space where everyone has essentially the same experience?”	Cameras, screens, sounds, the configuration of space, staff for technological support. Could use https://www.altarlive.com/



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In-Person and Zoom	Two completely separate services, each able to focus on and leverage its own unique setting.	“We already do both services really well, so this will give us a chance to reach more people.”	“But I want to be able to get to know everyone.”	See “In-Person Only” and “Zoom Only above.
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WORSHIP OPTIONS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

FUTURE WORSHIP OPTIONS	Initial Reactions and Questions	Why Yes? Benefits and Opportunities	Why Not? Limitations and Losses	Staff/ Volunteer Willingness, and Capacity	Staffing and Logistic Adjustments	Space and Technology Upgrades
In-Person Only						
Zoom/Remote Only						
Streaming						



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Hybrid						
In-Person and Zoom						

FIVE WAYS TO CREATE HYBRID SPACE

WAYS TO CREATE HYBRID WORSHIP	VISION, DREAMS, AND HOPES	CONGREGATION OBSTACLES	STAFFING OBSTACLES	DIRECTIONS AND STRATEGIES
<p align="center">REIMAGINE</p> <p>Resist simple replicating what has always been done: ritual, proclamation, children, music, guests, etc.</p>				
<p align="center">DECENTER</p> <p>In language, content, and structure resist making geographic proximity the ideal experience of worship.</p>				



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<p style="text-align: center;">INVITE</p> <p>Invite remote participants into leadership in order for systems to be changed by those who it benefits.</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">ASSESS</p> <p>Evaluating the willingness, energy, and expertise of staff and volunteers. Adjust and add as needed.</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">ENGAGE</p> <p>Create a community where remote folks will be missed if they are no longer able to regularly participate.</p>				

HYBRID TECHNOLOGY CHECKLIST

HYBRID WORSHIP TECHNOLOGY	CURRENT SETUP	NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS	STAFFING CAPACITY	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
<p style="text-align: center;">SOUND</p> <p>How will you make sure that all participants receive quality and comparable sound quality?</p>				



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<p style="text-align: center;">VISUAL</p> <p>How will you avoid “watching worship” and create a space where all feel present in the space.</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">INTERNET</p> <p>How will you broadcast, interact, and manage the technologies of hybrid worship? www.altarlive.com</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">SPACE</p> <p>What physical changes need to be made to the physical space in order to create common space?</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">POST</p> <p>How will you edit and share video and audio recordings in a way that draws folks back to the community?</p>				



ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

SAMPLE CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Survey Page 1:

Dear Church —

On behalf of the Session, we are carefully beginning to think about our future worship plans.

There has been much suffering and strife during this time of pandemic, but First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto has stepped into the online space with grace and flexibility. It has not always been easy, and not everyone thrives in this setting, yet we have risen to the past year's challenges with a deep faith and an ongoing commitment to crafting a meaningful worship experience.

As Session makes plans for an eventual re-opening of our campus and the beginning of in-person gatherings, the Worship and Music Ministry Team has been tasked with making plans for our future worship experience.

While we will be guided by local regulations as well as our assessment of safety for our community and staff, this survey will help to determine the most faithful path forward as First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto strives to offer a unique theological voice to the community.

This survey should not take more than 15 minutes to complete.

The deadline for submissions is April 7th, 2021.

Let's begin.

— The Music and Worship Ministry Team

Survey Page 2: THE FIRST THINGS

Before you offer your opinions about service options, please tell us a little bit about yourself and your connections to our current worship experience.

How long have you been connected with FPCPA?



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- Less than a year
- 1-5
- 6-20
- 20+

On average how many times a month have you attended services since the beginning of the pandemic?

- Every Sunday
- 3 times a month
- 2 times a month
- Once a month
- Once every few months

If we cease to offer any Zoom/Remote services how would that affect your future attendance and participation in Sunday services? My attendance would...

- Decrease
- Stay the same
- Increase

Survey Page 3: COVID IMPLICATIONS

Assuming compliance with county safety guidelines, and knowing that there are many variables, we would like to know how comfortable, in general, you would be with returning to in-person gatherings under the following considerations. Don't think too hard.

For each, mark Uncomfortable, Neutral, Comfortable

- Staff are vaccinated
- Staff are not vaccinated
- We gather inside
- We gather outside

Have you received a COVID-19 vaccination(s)? *This is being asked to estimate what percentage of our community may be vaccinated.*

- Yes,
- No, but I plan to
- No, and I do not plan to.



Survey Page 4: DESCRIPTIONS OF POSSIBLE OPTIONS

Below are brief descriptions of five possible worship formats. These brief narratives will help you to respond to the rest of the survey questions.

Description of In-Person Only

This is what we offered pre-pandemic. This would mean that the only general worship experience we offer would be an in-person service with no online component.

The benefits would be that we get to see one another again with the future possibility of physical interaction. A downside would be no longer being connected to those who worship with us only online and would lessen attendance by those not living close by. Immediate implications/requirements for meeting in-person could entail the following requirements: masking, social distancing, limited capacity, pre-registering, temperature checks, no singing, no refreshments, and adherence to other safety protocols. There would be minimal impact on our audio/visual needs, while some sanctuary reconfiguration might be required. Staff knows how to lead in-person worship, but staff may need to shift responsibility to take into account set-up requirements and other safety measures.

Description of Zoom/Remote Only

This is what we are doing now. This would mean that we do not offer a general in-person worship gathering.

The most significant benefit is that we stay connected to online-only participants, while the downsides would be not seeing one another in person. We would also continue to offer our unique theological perspective to those who may not be geographically close. There would be no immediate changes to how staff currently prepares for and leads worship, though eventual technological training and equipment upgrades should be assumed.

Description of Streaming

Streaming worship would mean that people would gather in-person for worship under the same conditions as "In-Person Only." At the same time, we would simultaneously broadcast the service to Facebook, Youtube, or our website. While less interactive than Zoom and centered on the in-person space, there could be some interaction with those joining remotely via the chatroom.

The benefit to streaming is that we could still provide an online option with a moderate amount of training and equipment upgrades. Albeit less interactive than Zoom, streaming to YouTube, Facebook, or our website makes our service more accessible to more people while still giving our



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current participants an online option. The downsides of streaming are that the online interactivity would significantly decrease from what we currently offer on Zoom. Staff would need to be sure to lead in a way that did not make it feel remote participants were "watching worship" and were included in the experience. There might be a minimal/moderate amount of impact on the sanctuary with staff roles being the same as in-person.

Description of Two Services

This option would have us offer two separate and distinct services: one in-person and one on Zoom with similar content.

The most significant benefit of this option is that we already know how these services operate, both in planning and leading. Two services could provide an opportunity for numerical growth, continued connection to those outside our area, and the ability to take advantage of creative opportunities that each option offers. The downside is that our currently small congregation could feel like it is split, requiring more focus on building connections between all involved. Implications could mean a change in worship times as well as all other adjustments as noted above for in-person gathering. While staff would lead two services requiring more time, this could be offset by the lack of time devoted to developing and troubleshooting a Streamed or Hybrid service.

Description of Hybrid

A hybrid service is one in which in-person and remote participants have essentially the same worship experience.

Worship would not be centered on the physical location; rather, we would reimagine our congregational "gathering space." Benefits would be an ongoing connection to and interaction with remote participants while providing an in-person option and the ongoing opportunity to reach new people searching for our unique theological perspective. Hybrid worship would attempt to merge the best of both online and in-person gatherings to find ways to do both well.

The hybrid option would certainly push on our ability to think creatively about how we gather together. While some interactions will be limited by the platform, a hybrid service would strive to create as much visual, text, and verbal interaction as possible. This option would have the most significant impact on the physical location with the possible addition of screens, multiple cameras, and other audio improvements. This option would require the most assessment and increase in staffing expertise.

There are only a few churches that offer pure hybrid worship, so we would be venturing into new waters. To create a hybrid experience, here are a few things that may be needed to reimagine a hybrid worship space: worship leadership may lead in-person or online at any time, sanctuary



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seating may need to be reconfigured, and there will be much trial and error. A small benefit is that FPCPA would continue to be a leader and laboratory for online worship in our denomination.

RANKING THE OPTIONS

Below are three key areas of our congregational life that are impacted by our worship experience. With the above descriptions in mind:

- A. Please rank the five types of services in order from 1-5 with 1 being the most effective and 5 being the least effective.
- B. You may not select the same number for more than one option.
- C. Each option must be ranked in order to proceed.
- D. Note that each area the options are listed in a randomized order.
- E. If you are on a phone, you may need to scroll left/right to see 1-5.

FAITH FORMATION: Which worship option would most help you to grow in your spirituality and Christian faith? *(Please rank 1-5 with 1 being the MOST helpful.)*

Insert multiple choice grid with all five options and 1-5 scale.

INWARD CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY: Which form of worship would most help our community to strengthen personal relationships, increase program interactions, and integrate new people into the life of the church? *(Please rank 1-5 with 1 being the MOST helpful.)*

Insert multiple choice grid with all five options and 1-5 scale.

OUTWARD IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT: Which form of worship would most help us engage with the broader community, increase opportunities to connect with new people, and impact the world? *(Please rank 1-5 with 1 being the MOST helpful.)*

Insert multiple choice grid with all five options and 1-5 scale.

Survey Page 5 (Last Page): FINAL RANKING

After thinking a bit about each option, please rank options in the order that you believe would be the most faithful path forward for First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto.

Insert multiple choice grid with all five options and 1-5 scale.

