In spite of the many challenges of the past year, we know that there have been surprising gifts as well, many of which came out of virtual means of connecting. As we begin to open up and gather in person again, many faith communities in ECMN intend to hold on to the gifts of virtual connection, either through Zoom services and meetings, by live-streaming, or through other imaginative means. Other communities seek to move into meeting in person as fully as possible, but with the ongoing uncertainty of the pandemic, may need to continue to rely on virtual gathering for the time being.

If you take nothing else away from this guide, we hope you'll take away that **there is no one right answer**, no one-size-fits-all solution. There are, instead, *many* good solutions. Ultimately, **the one that works best for your faith community's budget, space, and most importantly for your congregation is the right answer for you.**

This guide contains two parts:

1. What Kind of Event Should We Have?
2. Hybrid Technology Recommendations

What Kind of Event Should We Have?

While the virus continues to evolve, our planning for gathering will need to as well. Planning these gatherings will depend on:

1. the current reality of the pandemic in your community
2. the context of the event, and
3. the needs of your target audience.

Once you determine these pieces, you can determine the best plan for the event – virtual, in person, or a combination of the two, which we call *hybrid.*

The following recommendations are to help you discern the answers to these questions and then to create a plan for gathering that is safe for and best meets the needs of all involved. Determining how best to conduct your event truly is a process of discernment.

Current Pandemic Reality
- The current level of disease in the community is likely the most important planning factor.

  - Case Context Questions:
    - Is the current number of cases below 25 per 100,000?
    - Are cases trending up, down, or staying the same?
    - What is the current vaccination rate for your faith community?

- ▪ What is the current vaccination rate for your City/County?
- ▪ Do you have a significant population that is unable to be vaccinated?
- ▪ What are the current MN Department of Health or CDC recommendations for holding events in your area?

  - - Discernment Questions:
    - ▪ Does this data make you feel more or less comfortable in having an in-person event?
    - ▪ Do you feel this data provides an accurate understanding of the current disease in your area? (For example: is the data up to date, or have things changed in the last few days?)

- ● It is important to know if there are folks who are interested in participating in your events or gatherings who do not feel comfortable to participate in person. This leaves the discernment of *how and if* you shift your event to a hybrid or a virtual offering.

  - - Discernment Questions:
    - ▪ How many are not comfortable to come in person?
    - ▪ Can we record the event and share it after?
    - ▪ Does the time and energy required to create a hybrid event make sense for the number of people requesting it?

    - ▪ Example: Fall Formation Session:
    Our current case rate is 12 per 100,000, so we are still allowing in person offerings. However, we are trending upwards in cases and are now requiring masks. With this trend, we are concerned that the start of the event is in six weeks, so we do not know where people's comfort level will be to participate in person. If it is online, we could record it.

Context of Event
- ● What is the purpose of the event?
  Knowing the true answer to this question will help you to determine if holding your event virtually would support or obscure the purpose.
  - - Example: Fall Formation session
    The purpose of the event is to educate our congregants on a topic and for people to get to know each other.
- ● Next, determine if you can achieve those goals in-person, in a virtual session, or through a hybrid event.
  - - Discernment Questions:
    - ▪ Can our goals be achieved using a virtual platform?
    - ▪ Can our goal be achieved in a hybrid fashion, with some folks attending in person and others online? How does this change the dynamics of conversation?

▪ Can you facilitate social time online?
- Example: Fall Formation session
This could be done in-person or online. Online socializing may need to be more structured, but it is possible. Education can be done online or in person.

Target Audience
● Determine who the primary audience is for this event. Then consider the following:
- Discernment Questions:
▪ What is your primary audience's comfort level with using technology and/or attending in person?
▪ Does the time or location of the event hinder participation?
▪ Do you have the capacity to support folks who may experience technological challenges?

- Example: Fall Formation Session:
75% of our congregation regularly usew Zoom for worship and some events. We could assign an Event Partner or a Zoom Verger for folks who struggle with technology or for folks who are not comfortable coming into the building for the in-person event.

Planning
● Take the answers to your discernment process and, utilizing your planning team, vestry, or COVID team, make a plan.
● It may be helpful to have a Plan A and Plan B
● Experiment! Try something, evaluate how it went, and adapt for next time.
● **Ask your faith community.** It is always good to base decisions on data. Ask your faith community what they are comfortable with and how they want to engage each other. This could be done via a survey, solicited responses, or one-on-one conversations.

ECMN Hybrid Technology Recommendations

If you've decided to host an online or hybrid event, here are some things to consider to help you find the right livestreaming solutions for your space and for your community.

● **Who are your livestreaming congregants?**
We've heard from most of you that one of the significant benefits of virtual connection is that you're able to engage—or reengage—with members of your community who, for one reason or another, are not able to attend services in person. In our persistent call to include and serve all of God's children, it's important to take into consideration the needs of those worshipping virtually. Are

some of them hard of hearing? Make sure the sound is clear and/or consider adding captions to your video. Are some of your virtual congregants homebound, or far away? What can you and your congregation do to ensure that those folks still feel welcomed and connected, even as you move from, perhaps, Zoom services to hybrid services? Are some of your congregants non-native English speakers? What acknowledgements or changes might they need or appreciate in a live-stream setting?

- **Who will be responsible for the livestream?**
Will you have a designated volunteer or staff member who will be responsible for starting and ending the livestream each week? Will you want someone to monitor the stream during the service, interact with virtual viewers, and perhaps change camera angles or audio input? Or do you prefer to simply "set it and forget it"? Any of these options is possible, but it's important to understand your staffing and volunteer capacity before making any technological decisions.

- **What livestream platform will you use?**
YouTube and Facebook are two free and simple options, but if for some reason neither of those works for you, you'll need to find another platform. You can read more about livestreaming options here:
    - [The 12 Best Livestreaming Platforms](#)
    - [Top 20 Livestreaming Platforms](#)

- **How do you pick a camera?**
Before you even choose a camera, there are several things to consider when setting up your livestream.

    - **Light:** Is there enough light in your sanctuary? Most cameras aren't as light-sensitive as human eyes. If your sanctuary is dim, it might be helpful to add some more lights on your chancel. If that's not an option, look for a camera that works well in low light.

    - **Sound:** Lots of our buildings have beautiful, resonant acoustics. However, without the appropriate sound equipment, those acoustics might just sound like a muddle on a livestream. A microphone placed close to a speaker's mouth will go a long way to improving audio quality, even if you're just using the camera's built-in mic.

    Any camera that you use, even an iPhone, should also accept audio input from your sound system (just like plugging a microphone into a speaker), *if*

your sound system is new enough to be compatible with your camera. Even if it is, you'll need to figure out which audio cables to use and how to get them from your sound system to your camera, or if it can be connected over wifi. Something else to consider is that, if you input the sound from your system, your attendees at home may not be able to hear any sound that's not amplified – like the congregation saying the Lord's Prayer, or acoustic music. One solution to this is to have someone managing the livestream so that they can switch audio input at different points in the service.

Another solution would be to purchase a dedicated microphone that feeds into your camera, which can be placed close to those speaking.

- **Internet quality:** It is preferable to hardwire your internet if you plan on livestreaming—that is, use an ethernet cable instead of wifi. This is because, as we all know, wifi isn't always reliable. However, most of our sanctuaries aren't wired for internet. No big deal if that's the case—you'll just want to make sure you've got fairly reliable wifi. A good way to check your internet's reliability is by doing a speed test, checking your upload and download speed on sites like fast.com and speedtest.net. It's best to do these tests on the same day, and at the same time, that you'll be livestreaming (i.e. Sunday morning), as the number of devices using a network at one time can significantly impact its performance. If your upload speed is weak or unreliable, talk to your internet service provider about upgrading your plan.

You can read more about upload speeds needed for livestreaming here:
- [What is a Good Upload Speed for Streaming?](#)
- [What Upload Speed Do I Need to Stream?](#)

 Got it. But I really want to know, what camera should we buy?
So, you've considered
1. the needs of your virtual congregants
2. the staffing/volunteer capacity of your congregation
3. the technological particularities of your space

...and now you're ready to buy some equipment. See **Appendix A** for a list of equipment.

 – or –

We'd really like a comprehensive system, and we've got money in the budget to pay for it.

What follows in **Appendix B** is a non-exhaustive list of consultants who can help you and your congregation answer your context-specific questions, and who may be able to help you purchase and install a system that will work for you.

APPENDIX A: Equipment List

Not every camera is designed to connect to a computer out of the box. Some cameras will need to be routed through a USB-capture or an HDMI-capture device, which will allow them to function as a webcam.

Please check here for a list of cameras, USB-capture devices, and microphones at different price points, as well as their strengths and limitations.

We recommend purchasing any of these items from B&H Photo Video Audio.

Some More Information
If you'd like to learn more, this is a good general overview, though don't feel constrained by the conclusions this person reaches:

- Cheapest Livestream Setup for Churches
- (If you prefer to read than watch a video, you can find the transcript of that video here.)

APPENDIX B: Audio-Visual Consultants

Audio Video Resources
Based in Duluth, MN, but willing to travel.
Website: www.avrduluth.com/
Contact: Brita Edgerton
Email: brita@avrduluth.com
Office phone: 218.722.6219
Cell phone: 218.213.5030
Rates: varoes

We've worked with AVR for many of our events around the state, and highly recommend them! They're good humans and good professionals.

Audio Logic Systems
Based in Eden Prairie, but they work all over the country.
Contact: Ed Coutu
Email: ed@audiologicsystems.com
Website: www.audiologicsystems.com
Rate: varies

ALS installed and staffs St. Mark's Cathedral's livestreaming system. They're awesome!

JJ Miller
Based in Apple Valley. Serves the Metro and the Southeast and South Central parts of the state. JJ is also happy to consult remotely!
Email: jjmiller0083@gmail.com
Phone: 952-210-2728
Rate: $250/project or $25/hour. **Negotiable.**

JJ works with churches regularly, and views this work as a part of his ministry. He's very happy to try to adapt to your budget and work with you to meet your needs.

Sapphire Butterfly Productions
https://www.sapphirebutterflypro.com/
Based in Chanhassen, but can serve the whole state.
Email: jarod@sapphirebutterflypro.com
Rate: $25-$30/hour.

Sapphire Butterfly is a small professional production company that can consult and install.

Isaac Dean
Based in Blaine, but happy to travel.
Rate: $25/hour. **Flexible.**
Email: isaacdeanquick@gmail.com
Phone: 763-350-6020

Monkey Wrench Productions
Based in Golden Valley, but happy to travel!

Rate: Quotes are free. $100/hour for on-site installation.
Email: seth@monkeywrenchpro.com
Office phone: 612-208-0497
Website: www.monkeywrenchpro.com
Rate: varies

Monkey Wrench is another professional production company that can help with consulting and installation.

Mike Slawin
Based in the metro; travel a bit outside of it.
Email: mjsproductions@comcast.net
Phone: 847-987-8557
Website: www.mjsproductions.tv
Rates: $500-$800/service, including 2-3 site visits and training on the new system.

Mike and his team have worked with a couple of our faith communities to install livestream technology.

For more assistance in planning for an event in this new reality, please feel free to connect with your
Missioner for Communications, Emilia Seay Allen (emilia.a@episcopalmn.org)
or your
Missioner for Community Engagement, Rachel Babbitt (rachel.b@episcopalmn.org)