



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ELECTRONIC CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

Advice for Congregational Meetings via Zoom

1. Make sure the app you're using can include people calling in on phone and that those who will need to call in on the phone have clear instructions to do so.
2. Spend time up-front verifying the names of people and how many voting members are represented by each screen/caller – renaming people as needed – especially for people calling in on phone.
3. Use the Yes/No buttons in the participant section (if using Zoom) or type in the comments (for all meeting apps) for all “voice” votes since it is impossible to hear group consensus over virtual platforms, asking for verbal votes only from people who are unable to use one of those two features (such as people on the phone). Verify all people voted (or knowingly abstained) before calling the results.
4. If there's anything you think will need discussion (unless there is only one item on the agenda), provide a discussion forum at an earlier date prior to the meeting. The meeting itself cannot preclude discussion, but encourage all discussion to take place at the earlier meeting.
 - a. At Mt Zion, we spent a whole hour a week in advance discussing one topic, but it was worth it because we still ran overtime on the meeting even though that item only took 5 minutes at the actual meeting.

Credit: Rev. Tyler Rasmussen, Pastor at Mt Zion Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa (contact pastor@mtzionlutheran.org or 414-258-0456 with questions).

Tips on holding a virtual congregational meeting via Zoom

While remote congregational meetings on Zoom aren't ideal, you can hold a successful congregational meeting! Below are some tips for you to consider.

- ✓ Plan, plan, plan. Even more than in-person meetings, remote congregational meetings require careful, detailed organization in advance in order to run smoothly.

- Understand and follow what your church constitution requires for holding a legal meeting. Pay particular attention to any requirements for who is a voting member, and what threshold is required for passing particular motions (for example, selling property or calling a pastor.)
- Plan your agenda carefully. Limit the number of items needing extensive discussion or decision. Zoom doesn't lend itself to complicated parliamentary debate, with multiple motions and amendments. If your agenda must include a potentially contentious item, hold virtual forums on a different day in advance of the meeting, in order to allow open discussion then.
- If your meeting will follow Zoom worship, streamline your worship service, so that the combined screen time (worship + meeting) is manageable. Allow a short break between the end of worship and the beginning of the meeting so that worship leaders can stretch, use the restroom, etc.
- Decide whether you will adopt special parliamentary rules for online discussion (see below for an example.) These are intended to allow the meeting to run smoothly and to address unique issues (like connection breakdowns or the submission of amendments to motions) that may occur. Your council will need to officially adopt special rules if you want to use them and you will need to mail them to congregants in your meeting packet so all are aware of them.
- Send instructions for accessing the meeting with your meeting packet to congregants. Include contact information for leaders who can help any members with access questions or problems in advance of the meeting. Make sure people know that Zoom permits access via laptop and telephone. Consider workarounds for members who lack access or have physical challenges that complicate access. For example, members who have only local phone service could call a member with video access and participate through their "buddy's" microphone.
- Determine who will fill specific roles for running the meeting. One person (not the council president or main person chairing the meeting itself) should be designated as the Zoom administrator. This person renames people as they enter, if necessary, monitors the "room" for questions during debate, screen shares documents, as needed, and generally troubleshoots any technical issues that arise.

If at all possible, all meeting leaders should connect to Zoom using a hard-wired Internet connection rather than wi-fi. A hard connection is less susceptible to connection issues.

- Write a detailed meeting script for running the meeting, with parts identified for specific people. PRACTICE the script with the identified people ahead of the actual meeting and revise, as needed. This may seem like overkill, but it is invaluable for keeping meeting leaders calm and on-track.
- ✓ If you will be voting on special matters (like a capital campaign), ask an experienced parliamentarian to be present to adjudicate any rules issues. Zoom adds a level of complexity that makes a parliamentarian invaluable. The Synod can recommend people to you. Your parliamentarian also can review and/or help you write any motions for important matters, so that they are drafted and introduced at the meeting correctly.
- ✓ In order to determine who is present (this is like a sign-in sheet in a normal meeting), the Zoom administrator will need to go down the Zoom participant list at the beginning of the meeting and have those present indicate by voice their presence and whether they are a member. If people are calling in by telephone, they can be renamed on the participant list by the zoom administrator so that they are identified. Be sure to identify all voters present on a particular connection. The secretary will then check off on a membership roll who is present, so that this list can be used to determine a quorum and take a vote. This means having an accurate voting membership roll is very helpful.
- ✓ If at all possible, use voice votes. Zoom has a poll feature, but not all people present will have access to it, which will mean doing both the poll vote and a voice vote for others. This is very cumbersome and time-consuming! Notify people at the beginning of the meeting that you will use a voice vote and explain why. You can conduct a voice vote either by roll call (the secretary calls out the name of each voter present and each responds with their vote) or by a general vote (“All those in favor, say ‘aye’ . . . ‘nay’”). If your motion must pass by a certain percentage of voters present, you will need to use a roll call vote.
- ✓ Zoom has a chat feature that allows meeting leaders to communicate during the meeting about vote outcomes, amendments made, etc. Members also can use the chat feature to submit amendments.
- ✓ You can video/audio-record the meeting as an extra record of the meeting. The meeting administrator turns the recording on and off.

Credit: Rev. Wendy Wirth-Brock, Interim Pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Milwaukee (contact wwirthbrock@wi.rr.com with questions).

Special Rules of Order for Electronic Meetings with note edited for July 12

Dear Members,

Below are special rules of order for conducting electronic meetings adopted by the Council last week. These rules will govern our discussion, voting and other matters for our special congregational meeting. Please review them carefully. Thank you. Our Savior's Congregational Council.

**Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI
Special Rules of Order for Conducting Electronic Meetings**

1. **Login information.** The Corresponding Secretary shall send by e-mail to every member of the Congregation, at least 24 hours before each meeting, the time of the meeting, the URL and codes necessary to connect to the Internet meeting service, and, as an alternative and backup to the audio connection included within the Internet service, the phone number and access code(s) the member needs to participate aurally by telephone. The Corresponding Secretary shall also include a copy of, or a link to, these rules.
2. **Login time.** The Meeting Facilitator shall schedule Internet meeting service availability to begin at least 15 minutes before the start of each meeting.
3. **Signing in and out.** Members shall identify themselves as required to sign in to the Internet meeting service, and shall maintain Internet and audio access throughout the meeting whenever present, but shall sign out upon any departure before adjournment.
4. **Quorum calls.** The presence of a quorum shall be established by audible roll call at the beginning of the meeting. Thereafter, the continued presence of a quorum shall be determined by the online list of participating members, unless any member demands a quorum count by audible roll call. Such a demand may be made following any vote for which the announced totals add to less than a quorum.
5. **Technical requirements and malfunctions.** Each member is responsible for his or her audio and Internet connections; no action shall be invalidated on the grounds that the loss of, or poor quality of, a member's individual connection prevented participation in the meeting.
6. **Forced disconnections.** The chair may cause or direct the disconnection or muting of a member's connection if it is causing undue interference with the meeting. The chair's decision to do so, which is subject to an undebatable appeal that can be made by any member, shall be announced during the meeting and recorded in the minutes.
7. **Assignment of the floor.** To seek recognition by the chair, a member shall use the Raise Hand feature, where applicable, or announce that they would like to be recognized, for audio callers. Upon assigning the floor to a member, the speaker monitor shall keep track of the people in the

speaker queue, so that others may be recognized in turn.

8. Interrupting a member. A member who intends to make a motion or request that under the rules may interrupt a speaker shall use the Raise Hand feature, where applicable, or announce that they would like to be recognized, for audio callers for so indicating, and shall thereafter wait a reasonable time for the chair's instructions before attempting to interrupt the speaker by voice.

9. Motions submitted in writing. Proposed amendments to resolutions on the agenda shall be written and submitted to the meeting chair via email, text, or through the platform chat feature.

10. Display of motions. The Meeting Facilitator shall Screen Share the resolution and any offered amendments being voted on, and shall read the resolution and any offered amendments out loud for the benefit of those not having video access.

11. Voting. Votes may be taken by the anonymous poll voting feature of the Zoom meeting service for those with access through the zoom application. When using the poll voting feature, votes for those with audio access only or for additional members sharing one access address shall be taken by an audio roll call. When required, ordered, or deemed necessary, other permissible methods of voting may be by electronic roll call or by audible roll call. The meeting facilitator's announcement of the voting result shall include the number of members voting on each side of the question, along with the percentage necessary to pass the motion. Business may also be conducted by unanimous consent.

12. Video display. [For groups using video, but in which the number of participants is too large for all to be displayed simultaneously:] The chair, the Recording Secretary, or their assistants shall cause a video of the chair to be displayed throughout the meeting, and shall also cause display of the video of the member currently recognized to speak or report.

Credit: Rev. Wendy Wirth-Brock, Interim Pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Milwaukee (contact wwirthbrock@wi.rr.com with questions).