

Dear Friends --

I and many others in the Meeting have spent a great deal of time over the past several weeks considering when and how to begin the process of reintroducing an in-person, at-the-Meetinghouse component to our Sunday morning worship. There will be discussion of a proposal to start hybrid worship at this Sunday's Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. In preparation for that conversation, and with the hope that we can all take some time in advance of Sunday for seasoning of the issue, I wanted to share with the broader community some thoughts that have arisen from the discussions among those who are working closely on these questions.

First, I would ask that everyone take some time to review the [results of the survey](#) that we conducted last month to get a sense of where people are. There is much to learn from both the numerical summaries and the individual comments. Among other things, the survey results make clear that, for the foreseeable future, a substantial portion of our community will continue to attend via Zoom.

That said, it will be important for each of us to separate our own views on whether we are personally ready to return to in-person worship from the questions about when and how the community should begin that process. We need not wait until everyone is comfortable with in-person worship to begin opening the meetinghouse in some measure on Sunday morning. But we also have a responsibility to each other to ensure that our meetings for worship are safe and that we are not putting each other or others in our community at risk.

No matter how much preparation we do, there will not be some magic moment when we "reopen" the meetinghouse and return to normal. As both the health guidance and people's own comfort levels change, we will likely see a gradual increase in the number of people who attend in person on a given Sunday. But that change will be slow and will no doubt still feel unfamiliar. Some who have had the experience of hybrid worship have reported that, with the physical separation and safety precautions, the in-person component can actually feel less intimate and more isolated than online worship. And, just as it did when we first moved our worship to Zoom, it will take us some time to find our way to the most effective processes for hybrid worship.

As we move through this period of change, we need to take care that neither the in-person nor the online component of that worship becomes the "real" meeting for worship, to the exclusion of those who are attending by another means. And we need to be tender with each other as we each come to our own conclusions about how best to balance risk and the desire to return to the familiar ways we knew before the pandemic. Whether each of us chooses to worship in person, online, or some combination of the two, we are all responsible to support one another in our spiritual growth. Even after a more than a year of physical distancing, we remain bound together as a community.

Finally, it is important to remember that restarting an in-person component is not as simple as declaring that the meetinghouse is open on Sunday morning. As the report from the hybrid worship working group describes, there are many open questions that will need to be answered –

and then adjusted – as we move forward: how many people can attend on a given Sunday? What precautions (physical distancing, temperature checks, asking health questions, cleaning before and after) should we take? Do we require that people are vaccinated and, if so, how do we determine that? Who is responsible for maintaining records in the event that we need to do contact tracing? How do we handle visitors? We will need people to discern the answers to those questions and we will need people to be present to facilitate opening the meetinghouse, setting up technology, making sure that precautions are followed, sitting as elder, and so forth. The hybrid meeting working group has identified people to fill those roles as we get started, but we will need a critical mass of people to share those roles before we can commit to opening the meetinghouse on an ongoing basis.

If, after our discernment on Sunday, we conclude that we are not ready to commit to opening the meetinghouse every week, there are options for those who would like to worship with others in person. Over the past few weeks, several Friends have volunteered to host a small number of others to join the Zoom meeting for worship together. (There is a [Google sign-up](#) for those who would like to participate, either as hosts or attenders.) It is also possible under the current health guidance and our current rental policies for a self-organized group to gather at the meetinghouse – either indoors or outdoors – on a particular Sunday morning and connect to the Zoom meeting from there.

As more and more Friends get vaccinated and restrictions are loosened, and as Friends are more comfortable gathering, we will find our way back to in-person worship. That progress may be slower than some would like, but along the way, I would ask that we remain patient and tender with each other. And for those who would like to help that process along, there will be many opportunities to step up and take on the tasks that need to be done to help get us back. If you're looking for ways to be helpful – or if you have questions or concerns that you want to raise – you can reach out to me (clerk@chestnuthillquakers.org) or to Rebecca Heider as clerk of Worship & Ministry (worship@chestnuthillquakers.org).

Thank you all for your continued commitment to this community and to each other.

With gratitude and love,

Dylan