

Update on Options for Participation in BFM Meeting for Worship on First Days

As the school year has ended and local public health restrictions have been relaxed, Bethesda Friends Meeting is again able to conduct Meeting for Worship in the meeting house at the Sidwell Friends Lower School campus. The purpose of this message is to provide updated information about where and how BFM will conduct worship.

Overall, our goal is to provide Friends with renewed opportunities to worship together in person, while continuing to minimize any health risks to participants and to enable friends located at a distance to participate by videoconference.

We greatly appreciate the support provided by Sidwell Friends School in allowing us to meet for worship outside on the Lower School campus beginning in the fall of 2020, in making space in the meeting house available to us again, and in working with us to explore the best technology options going forward.

A condition of the school's permission to use the meeting house and the campus is that attendees must be masked, whether or not they are vaccinated.

In Person Meeting for Worship in the Meeting House

Beginning on July 11, BFM will resume meeting for worship at 11 am each First Day in the meeting room at the Lower School.

Masks Required. The school has required that each attendee wear a mask and maintain social distancing from all other attendees (except for immediate family). These requirements apply whether or not you are vaccinated.

COVID Screening. You may not attend in-person Meeting for Worship if you have a fever, have COVID symptoms, have tested positive for COVID, or have recently been exposed to an individual testing positive for, or displaying symptoms of, COVID. Any friends who cannot participate in person due to these restrictions are welcome to participate by Zoom.

Sign In. We will ask everyone attending in person to sign in on a simple sign in sheet.

Connection to "Zoomers." The meeting room will be connected to the Zoom participants. The final technology approach has not been decided upon. For the near future, we expect to have a laptop, with microphone, camera, and speaker, in the meeting room so that there will be a connection between the in-room attendees and the Zoom participants.

No Coffee Hour, for Now. For the time being, we will not have refreshments or coffee after meeting for worship. Fellowship and Hospitality will continue to host unprogrammed discussions after announcements via Zoom.

Outdoor Meeting for Worship at the Lower School

Outdoor Meeting for Worship will continue in the breezeway. Friends have been meeting outside on the Lower School grounds since fall of 2020. We will continue to offer this option for now. We recognize that some friends may not yet feel comfortable with meeting indoors, and that others may prefer the outdoor experience. The large tents have now been removed, so we will plan to meet on the breezeway between the Groome Building and the Manor House.

Connection to Zoomers. The outdoor worshippers will continue to have a connection, via a laptop, to the Zoom group and via Zoom to those meeting in the meeting room.

Masks required; self-screening continues. As with indoor Meeting for Worship, friends participating in the outdoor Meeting for Worship must wear masks and maintain social distancing of at least 3 feet. You may not attend in-person Meeting for Worship if you have a fever, have COVID symptoms, have tested positive for COVID, or have recently been exposed to an individual testing positive for, or displaying symptoms of, COVID. Any friends who cannot participate in person due to these requirements are welcome to participate by Zoom.

No pre-registration required. Local government requirements limiting the number of participants in worship services have been lifted, so we will not cap the number of participants in the outdoor or indoor Meeting for Worship. There is no longer a requirement to pre-register to participate in the outdoor Meeting for Worship. We will ask everyone attending in person to sign in on a simple sign in sheet.

Zoom Meeting for Worship

Zoom option continues. BFM will continue to offer the option to participate in Meeting for Worship via Zoom. The link to participate by computer or telephone will continue to be shared in the weekly Bulletin.

Technology. We plan to have friends in the meeting room, friends meeting outdoors, and the Zoom participants all connected via Zoom. In practice, based on experience with the outdoor meeting, this arrangement provides a good audio connection. For now, however, we don't have the large screens or camera equipment that would allow those on Zoom to see close ups of a speaker in the meeting room, or allow all those in the meeting room to see a speaker participating by Zoom. The Ministry and Worship Committee is exploring the technology options and coordinating with the school.

Children – Supervised Play

Summer playground supervision is available for children ages 3 years and up during Meeting for Worship on Sundays at 11:00 a.m. Two paid childcare providers supervise play at the lower or upper playgrounds. Children should wear masks and bring their own water bottles.

Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business.

Meeting for Worship with a concern for Business will be held on July 18th. That meeting will be conducted entirely on Zoom. Similarly, the Coordinating Gathering on July 11 will be conducted entirely on Zoom.

We Will Learn, and Adjust, As We Go.

The arrangements described above reflect best judgments made based on information available in early July 2021. We will continue to work on evaluating, and then implementing, technology upgrades for the meeting room. We will consider feedback from friends about how the revised arrangements are working to support our spiritual sharing and community building. And we will factor in any changes in government or school requirements that may require adjustments.

This update focuses on Meeting for Worship. Questions on when and how to move to in-person approaches for other BFM activities – such as potlucks, first-day school, adult religious education sessions, and committee meetings – will be separately considered.

Questions. Any questions can be addressed to Doug Smith (ministry-worship@bethesdafriends.org) or other members of the Ministry and Worship Committee.