How to Have Virtual Meetings

A Guide for Willows Members

Introduction

Having just come out of a series on community, here is a way we can maintain and build our community while remaining physically isolated — physical distancing, social cohesion!

We recommend using a free app by Zoom, a company specialising in remote meetings for even thousands of participants at a time. Their free plan allows up to 100 connections to be in a virtual meeting (a room full of people would use just one connection) and limits the meeting to 40 minutes, though nothing stops you from having more than one 40-minute meeting back-to-back. The section **Some suggestions** has ideas on how to use Zoom in our context of Life Groups.

The rest of this document outlines the following:

- **Getting and installing Zoom:** Phones, tablets, and PCs running Windows, MacOS, or Linux.
- **Joining a meeting:** I will explain it for a mobile device. You can read up on PC use.
- **Some suggestions:** Ways in which we can use Zoom as Willows members. This includes Sunday sermons, Life Group meetings, and how we can engage in corporate worship over Zoom.
- **Creating and hosting a meeting:** I will explain it for a mobile device, including how to hear what you are playing on your PC to the meeting — you can read up on general PC use. It also covers using WhatsApp Web on your PC.

Only the meeting *host* needs to *sign up* to Zoom — everyone else can simply install the app on a mobile device or PC and attend the meeting via the meeting ID. If you don't want to install any software at all, you can join via a web browser, but you will have less functionality. You can find out more about this at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/214629443-Zoom-Web-Client.

Why are we not *live* streaming our main services? The SA Internet infrastructure is easily overloaded, which has terrible consequences for *live* streaming. When streaming *pre-recorded* content, your video player will buffer the content, allowing many network slow-downs to go unnoticed, as it will play what's in the buffer while waiting for more content. With *live* that is impossible, as what is to come has not yet happened. In that case every single little slow-down leads to freezes, pops, drop-outs, etc. Simulated live is still pre-recorded, and then you hope that the provider has enough infrastructure in SA. YouTube does, which is why we are doing it this way.

Lastly, if you are techno enough, feel free to skip the sections on joining and hosting meetings, but do look at **Some suggestions**, particularly the part on **Corporate worship**. Just one point: sharing sound requires the host to run on a PC — sharing screen can be done from both PC and mobile app.

Getting and installing Zoom

- **Phones & tablets:** Install the **ZOOM Cloud Meetings** app. That exact name, published by zoom.us.
- **Computers:** download it from https://zoom.us/pricing, where you would sign up for the free plan.

First make sure about the following settings (all under Settings > Meeting):

- Always Turn Off My Video: Enabled (Video increases your latency — see **Corporate Worship**.)
- Show Name when Participants Join: Enabled
- Show My Connected Time: Enabled (Remember the 40 minute limit.)
- Safe Driving Mode: Disabled

If you are interested in details, Zoom created a page (https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/covid19.html) where they explain using Zoom, particularly in the context of suddenly having to use on-line meetings because of COVID-19. You can also see https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us for other help.

Joining a meeting

I wrote this based on using my wife's Android phone to connect to a meeting I created on mine. Things might be slightly different for other mobile devices and will be different on a PC: see Zoom's help.

1. Your host would have sent you the meeting link. Click on that and choose to continue in Zoom or in a browser.
2. After a few seconds, a little window will pop up at the bottom which says "Call via Device Audio". Click on that window so that others can hear you.
3. If you want to do things like (un)mute your microphone or even leave the meeting, tap your screen and choose the relevant action (Leave is at the top).

Some suggestions

The following can help you use Zoom better in our context.

Sunday sermons

Your Life Group can decide on a time convenient to all to attend the service virtually. Let's say you choose 08h45, then this is how you could do it.

1. The Zoom host will schedule a meeting at 08h45 which everyone will join.
2. Once everyone has joined you could have a time of prayer and worship. See **Corporate worship** on how best to do this.
3. Everyone then leaves the meeting (remember the 40 minute limit) to watch the sermon either directly via the YouTube link received on WhatsApp and email. You can also find it via the our web site's Resources menu (https://willows.org.za/resources/sermon-recordings-new), where you would choose the current year under "Years" if you don't know the series name.
4. After the sermon the host creates and shares a new meeting which everyone joins via the meeting ID the host sent on WhatsApp, and you can have a time of discussion, fellowship, and prayer.

Life Group meetings

Either you can just have meetings over Zoom, or you could follow a similar format to above. In our Life Group we are going through a series on the Bible, so after initial sharing and worship (see below) we will leave the meeting, watch the week's video, then meet up again afterwards for discussion and prayer.

Corporate worship

While corporate worship is entirely possible over something like Zoom, you need to do it correctly to avoid a complete mess. There are two ways: recorded and live. Though we may prefer live, God can work just as well through recorded, so please read on.

The key to getting it to work is to understand the impact of *latency* (it just means delay). Because every connection is reached via a different path on the network, everyone experiences different amounts of latency. So if we all sing over Zoom and everyone can hear everyone else, we will all be out of time with each other, which will definitely not enhance corporate worship!

The solution is simple:

1. The person leading the worship (even if recorded) must be the Zoom host, because...
2. During worship you need to mute everyone except the worship leader.

The host will first mute everyone else because of latency issues, as explained above. What happens then depends on whether the host is a musician or not. If a musician s/he simply sings and plays and Zoom gets it to everyone, who sing along.

Using recorded music is a bit different, because you cannot play directly from your mobile device into the Zoom meeting, but you can do that from a PC. The easiest is to press play on some *other* device which is then picked up by your mobile device microphone. This is essentially the same as above, so make sure of your singing voice! How to play from a PC directly into the meeting is explained in the section on hosting a meeting.

Creating and hosting a meeting

I wrote this based on using my Android phone to create a meeting. Things might be slightly different for other mobiles and will be different on a PC: use Zoom's help and tutorials if you get stuck.

Note: Zoom allows you to create meetings via unique (random) meeting IDs, or to start a meeting ad hoc by using your personal Zoom ID. The latter is quick and easy, but then anyone can contact you at any time, and spam can become an issue. Rather create unique meetings; it's a bit more work, but you will not have other issues down the line. The rest of the instructions are for unique meetings. Please also set up Waiting Rooms (https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/02/14/secure-your-meetings-zoom-waiting-rooms/), which will increase security even when using your personal Zoom ID.

Furthermore, I assume you have a WhatsApp group for your Life Group or other participants, because that is by far the easiest way for people to join any meeting. Other methods are explained in Zoom's help.

Inviting attendees

Except for the first step, the actions are the same for mobile or PC. Note that this is for ad hoc meetings — read Zoom help for how to schedule meetings.

1. [Mobile only] Click on "Participants"
2. Click on "Invite"
3. Click on "Copy URL"
4. Paste this URL in the desired WhatsApp group. See below for **WhatsApp Web** on your PC.
5. Switch back to Zoom.

To end the meeting, tap your mobile screen and choose End; if on PC close any of the Zoom windows.

WhatsApp Web

Not many people know, but you can access most of WhatsApp via a web page on your PC. Just make sure your PC and your WhatsApp device are both on the same WiFi, otherwise it eats your mobile data.

1. Point your browser at https://web.whatsapp.com, where you will see a QR code on the screen.
2. In WhatsApp, go to the top level in your chats interface. This is where you see your contacts and the first line of each chat.
3. Press the hamburger menu at the top right (the three little dots), then choose WhatsApp Web.
4. Point your phone at the QR code on your PC screen. Once it has been scanned, your browser will communicate with your phone. Then you can use your PC to interact with others on WhatsApp.

Sound from PC

If you want to everyone to hear a recording which is on your Zoom device, then you need to be running it on a PC. My computer's interface is probably unlike yours so scratch around a bit, but I did the following *once I was in the meeting:*

1. Click on the up arrow next to "Share" and choose "Advanced Sharing options..."
2. Choose "One participant can share at a time" as well as "Only Host" under "Who can share?"
3. Click on "Share", then on the "Advanced" tab. Make sure "Computer Sound Only" is chosen.

Now whatever you play on your PC will be sent to the Zoom meeting in addition to *everything your PC microphone picks up,* so make sure of your singing voice (or mute your microphone)!