

2022 Hybrid Church Annual Report

A year ago we were 11 months into our exile from worshipping in the sanctuary and looking ahead to no clear, short path forward. We had mastered Zoom, and online worship was going well. For some of us, Zoom was the first time we had ever worshipped face-to-face. We liked the convenience, safety and intimacy of worshipping from our own homes. We didn't want to lose that.

Still, some of us longed for a return to the sanctuary. We visited other churches, took local and national workshops, and asked for advice. We began to learn about this new idea called hybrid, where there was one worship experience that united folks online and folks in the sanctuary as one worshipping congregation.

Session created the "Hybrid Church Committee" in May 2021 to figure out how to come back to church safely and begin this new thing. We asked two technology professionals to assess our building and give us estimates of the necessary equipment and cost. Supply chain issues and big demand among other churches for this technology slowed the process. By November, though, our church was ready to sign a contract and begin installation. We were fortunate to get help in a form of a grant from National Capital Presbytery that covered half our contract costs. And, the other half was covered by a significant contribution from the Deacons Fund. Thank you so much Deacons.

With funding in hand, we purchased all the required system components through the contractor, as well as the beautiful 86" TV/monitor mounted on the chancel. For us, it's the heart our hybrid system because it's what allows us to see and interact with each other be it in the Sanctuary or online anywhere in the world. And so, in mid-December, installation began.

We worked closely with the contractor during installation to include where to position the 2 cameras in the Sanctuary. They can pivot and zoom as needed. Cables were pulled, electrical hookups created, and computers programmed. And we hired a Worship Tech, Ahmed, who brings technology knowledge and experience, to operate this new system. There was lots of testing. All went well and last Saturday, we enthusiastically turned on our new hybrid system for the first time, and introduced it to the congregation the next day. Nothing could go wrong... right?

The devil is in the details. Sound issues of cutting out and then back in seemed to carry over from the "old" system used by zoom participants. Yet, in the Sanctuary, sound was better than ever. There were internet interrupts impacting the online folks. Then there is the learning curve of using a sophisticated new system with very little practice. All that being said, the problems dropped off as the service continued. That's a good thing because there is no going back to the old system. And, the new hybrid system shows a lot of potential. Those of us who have worked on bringing this project "to life" are quite pleased with where we are today.

Going forward, an instructional document needs to be developed. This customized system doesn't come with a manual. We must develop our own. It must be simple enough that even those who may be technically challenged can use the system without much stress or anxiety. This will be important on those days when someone may need to cover for Ahmed. Or, the preschool may wish to use it with their students putting on a show for remote family members.

We expect some potential "project creep". Internet broadband will need to be addressed which may call for a more robust plan for all the wireless equipment which can be in use during Sunday service. And, the soundboard that has served us so well for years is at full capacity with no potential for expansion. It is also hampered by its analog technology. We will evaluate the costs of a digital soundboard. But our first objective is to get our new system working as well as possible before introducing more variables.

Thank you for your patience and support. Your Hybrid Church Committee team:
Mary Ellen Absetz, Carolynn Baer, Bruce Henry, Nyambi Nyambi, and Max Onga Nana
with many thanks to Pastor Megan Klose and Ahmed Mohamed

Bruce Henry
Carolynn Baer
2/20/22