Helpful Hints for Planning Annual Meetings during a Pandemic

First and foremost – follow pandemic protocols to keep members of the congregation safe. If it is not safe to meet in-person, don't meet in person. There are other options.

Check your constitution to see if electronic/remote meetings are explicitly allowed. If not, you can make arrangements for that to happen.
- C10.08 explicitly states that electronic meetings are allowed. You're all set; plan your meeting.
- If your constitution does *not* have this provision, a work around is to have your Congregation Council pass a Continuing Resolution that states electronic meetings are acceptable. You need a 2/3-majority of the FULL council, not just those present at the meeting. A sample wording of a Continuing Resolution is as follows:
  - C18.02.A.20 In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, and in our continued care for one another, the annual Congregation Meeting for 2021 may be held by remote communication, including electronically and by telephone conference, via Zoom or similar, so as to provide an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication. An annual report will be generated and distributed in both hardcopy and electronic forms. Notice of this meeting will comply with C10.03 of this constitution. Electronic recording of the meeting will take place and be made available upon request. Enacted by the Congregation Council at its regular monthly meeting, Tuesday, October 13, 2020 in compliance with C18.02 of this constitution.
- Another possibility – if you are able to have a SMALL in-person gathering – is to check what your quorum requires. Have that many people *and no more* sign up to come to the meeting; wear masks and spread out in the sanctuary or fellowship hall.

Helpful hints in preparation for electronic/remote meetings
- If you have multiple worship formats (online, in-person, mailed worship packets, etc.), make sure that the announcement of the meeting is made in **all** those contexts.
- Make sure that a quorum is present.
- Make sure that **all who attend the meeting are able to speak** *(if they choose to do so)* **and to hear what other folks are saying**.

Electronic Meeting Formats
- ZOOM … A paid ZOOM account includes computer/device access and allows for call-in via a normal phone line for those who cannot do an internet connection.
- Google Groups … However, I don't think people can phone in, so it is limited to those who have computers.
- Facebook has developed live chat groups … I have not used these, so I cannot speak to their effectiveness or lack thereof.

Hybrid Electronic & Face-to-Face Meetings
- Small group "nodes" could be established in homes where a computer interface is available. The church building could also be one of the "nodes". This would accommodate folks who want to participate more fully than a phone line and who do not have internet access.

Small Face-to-Face Meetings
- Quorum Only – Would the Fellowship Hall or Sanctuary allow for proper distancing with just a quorum present? Have people sign up to participate on behalf of the congregation as a whole.
- Parking Lot Meeting – a short-range FM broadcasting unit or a good set of speakers will be needed. Those speaking will have to come to the microphone so that they will be heard by all.

Voting – if paper ballots are required *(designated vote collectors must keep the voters' names confidential)*

- ZOOM – use the chat feature with votes sent ***privately*** to one individual.

- Phone Voting – a designated person (or a few designated persons) receive texts or individual phone calls for votes.

- Mail-in Ballots – this is a bit more complicated, but it is do-able:
  o Ballots would have to be ***numbered and printed*** – perhaps on a "special" paper of some sort (a whacky color or card stock or something) to make them easily verifiable as genuine ballots. Numbered so that each voting member receives a specific number (Peter #1, Mary #2, Martha #3, etc.).
  o If there is more than one vote taking place, the ballots would need to be clearly identified. (Vote for 1 person for President; Vote Yes or No to approve the budget; Vote for 3 individuals to serve as Council members; etc.) The *set of ballots* would all have the same number for the individual member who is receiving that set and would have the information for each vote. (#1 Vote for Council; #1 Vote on the Budget; etc. would be sent to Peter. #2 Vote for Council; #2 Vote on the Budget; etc. would be sent to Mary. #3 Vote for Council; #3 Vote on the Budget; etc. would be sent to Martha. And so on …)
  o You would need to conduct a meeting by one of the electronic/remote means described above and ***to mail the printed, numbered ballots ONLY to those who attended the meeting***. If 15 people attend the meeting, then ballot sets numbered 1 through 15 get sent out to those individuals. The voting members would have to return the ballots by a set deadline. If a list of who gets what number is kept, it must be kept with complete confidentiality.
  o An elections committee would then gather on a specific day to verify the ballots and count the votes. The results would be announced after that gathering. This could mean a 2-3 week delay in the results of the elections, depending upon the deadline that is set for ballots to be returned.

For more information on the rules governing electronic/remote meetings, the following documents may also be helpful:

- **Remote Meeting FAQs (from ELCA)** https://jwwmedia.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/ngls/pdf2020/Remote%20Meeting%20FAQ%20for%20Congregations.pdf

- **Remote Meetings FAQs for Wisconsin:** https://jwwmedia.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/ngls/pdf2020/Remote%20Meetings%20FAQs%20for%20Wisconsin.pdf

- **Remote Meeting Laws Michigan:** https://jwwmedia.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/ngls/pdf2020/Remote%20Meetings%20Laws%20Michigan.pdf