

Pre-Virtual Experience Preparation

Look at the Timeline and make adjustments as deemed appropriate

- We started Friday night at 7pm -- that is when we ask people to gather at a hotel or [Retreat](#) Center. We allowed for 15 min of small talk and 'getting to know you' that would typically happen in the Foyer of the conference room on Friday as people gather.
- The Experience team all logged on at 6:30pm on Friday for prayer and to make sure we were ready. We had a Rookie-Rookie presenting so it helped them to gain comfort. We prayed together which put us in the mood and space to begin the Experience with a unified heart and mind. Perhaps to celebrate Mass or do another form of prayer as the presenting team might be useful as well.
- We began both Saturday and Sunday morning at 8am, celebrating the Liturgy of the Word together on Saturday and beginning with MAS on Sunday. There is opportunity for small talk as people log on, but we kept ourselves to the schedule that we reworked and will include with these documents.
- There is minimal need for travel time. We included none and were maybe off by 10 minutes at most at one point during the entire Experience. We allowed for a longer break on Saturday afternoon and encouraged people to get out for a walk or tend to the needs of children, do any final prep on dinner together, etc. We wrapped up Saturday at 8:40 pm and concluded the weekend with Mass on Sunday starting at 2 pm, celebrated by the Team Priest in the same room from which he shared his presentations.
- We did allow for a little social time immediately after Mass -- there were a lot of spontaneous comments and conversation about the Experience. It could have gone on longer, but we also knew we needed to have a post-Experience team meeting. When the team logged off, the Attendees followed suit and we were able to log back in and have our meeting.

Pre-Experience Preparation meetings

- **Initial Team Meeting:** We had a Zoom meeting once we decided to move forward with the Virtual Experience to check on technical issues and to experiment with the power point. We also met on Zoom to work out the details of the Timeline. We created a contingency plan for technical issues by designating a co-host in Zoom who could pick up and keep the meeting going if the host's system went down. We also designated GoToMeeting as our backup platform if we had issues with Zoom.
- **The pre-Weekend team meeting** was conducted on Zoom on the Saturday before the Weekend. Yes, it made that Saturday indeed Holy (it was Holy Saturday) to do our final prep work for the Experience. In Region 9 we typically hold pre-Weekend meetings electronically due to the restrictions our geography provides. During this meeting we made sure that our lighting and sound was effective.
- In our **pre-Experience phone calls** we assessed the comfort level of the Attendees with computer skills, electronic meeting formats and specifically Zoom which was the platform we were using. We were fortunate in that we had only one older couple with minimal computer skills. Julie set up a time to work with them from a distance, to go online, download Zoom and helped them to begin to navigate it with ease. She was incredibly successful because this couple had no difficulty throughout the entire weekend.
- **Practice session with attendees:** We asked all of the Attendees to log onto Zoom at 7:00pm on Thursday (the day before the Experience) and Julie walked through logging in, logging out, breakout rooms, muting and the different view formats available. Six of the 8 attending sacraments took advantage of this meeting that lasted less than 20 minutes.

Pre-Experience Communication with Attendees

- **Issues to cover on the pre-Experience phone calls** in addition to welcoming the couples and priests:
 1. The intensity of the Virtual Experience is the same as a Face-to- Face Experience. Even though they are in their own home, it is not a 'Check-in/Check-out opportunity
 2. Computer skills -- i.e. having a functioning camera and speaker on their computer, facility with electronic meetings, etc.
 3. Providing for Privacy -- providing a quality experience for themselves as well as for other attendees. This was the trickiest issue, wanting to be inclusive and family friendly, but wanting to provide a quality experience for all.

- **Notes from this Virtual Experience**
 - We had one couple cancel on the pre-Experience phone call because she had hearing impairment and he was concerned with the ability to stay focused even with the non-Residential format which was the pre-COVID19 format for this Experience.
 - We had 2 couples cancel after the pre-Experience phone call because of young children (6yr. and younger)
 - On the positive side -- we had a couple with a 6th grader and her 10th grade brother who did just fine as well as 2 couples with HS and College age kids at home. Another couple hung out in their RV and let the kids have the run of the house. With all 4 of these couples we may have gotten a glimpse of kids at mealtime to wave to their parish priest and to join us for the closing Mass.

Handouts, Workbooks and other Supplies

1. Friday Night Handout -- was modified to include information to allow the couples to better prepare for the Experience. This was emailed on Tuesday the week of the Experience
 - Start times for each day were given and if asked we mentioned meal and stop times for each day. Some couples need to know to facilitate naps and sitters. We did not automatically give the time line to everyone, because we did not want them focused on time.
 - Attendees were asked to plan meals in advance and to have snacks and beverages handy
 - Couples were asked to prepare a separate space for their private reflection time in their home. This is not as necessary for priests.
2. Zoom Handout and email with Log in Links -- An email was sent to all the Attendees with a link to the Thursday Zoom meeting on Tuesday with the Friday Night Handout. It included an attachment detailing Zoom and was Cc'd to the Team. An email with a link to Zoom for each day of the Experience was emailed Friday afternoon, so as to not get buried in someone's in-box. (A Zoom link is good for 24 hours)
3. Workbooks, WEDS Manuals with Take Home handouts, trifolds, etc. were mailed to each couple. We put the handouts, including Team contact info, tri-folds, inside the WEDS Manual, wrapped it with ribbon with a gift tag that said, "No peeking until after the Experience". You may need to use FedEx or USPS to get documents there in time if you have last minute registrations. This was a major expense of the Experience (\$10-\$20/address).
4. Extended Dialogue Handouts were folded and placed inside separate envelopes with the name of each person on the outside and marked "Extended Dialogue". We sealed the envelopes with ME stickers and placed them in the envelope with the Workbooks

5. *Financial Donation Envelope*: We included a self-addressed and stamped envelope as well as our financial donation sheet that we typically hand out at the end of LOS VII along with the envelope for their donation. These were folded and put in an outer envelope marked 'Financial Donation' and were also mailed in the envelope with the Workbooks, Take Home packet, and Extended Dialogue Handouts. We specifically did not include the IRS donation amount because none of their donation went toward 'room and board' as that is what the IRS stipulates as non-tax-deductible.

Prayer Couples

- We had all of the Prayer Couples email their prayer letters to us. We did not have inked signatures, but many Prayer Couples went out of their way to be creative in designing their own stationery.
- Before the Experience began we attached each prayer letter to the respective email address of the recipient. We wrote "Prayer Letter" in the subject line and left them in our Draft file and sent them at the end of the Extended verbal Dialogue.
- When the Sacraments returned after the Extended dialogue, we asked them to check out their email and read their Prayer letter as they were putting the final touches on their lunch.
- During Sunday lunch we scrolled through the WWME Facebook page sharing with the attendees the prayers for the Experience from around the world.
- We did not invite the Prayer Couples to join us for the Closing Liturgy. If a sing-off/greet off is important to your Encounter, you can certainly admit prayer couples to the Zoom 'room', at the conclusion of the Liturgy. Remember that you cannot sing our song 'together' and hear each other, so it may not have the same impact. It could also be a distraction as the Prayer Couples enter.

Modifications to the Talks

General comments:

- With the exception of the Nuts and Bolts of Part 1 of the Friday night presentation, minimal modifications are needed. It is important to read through each Talk.
- Since the priest and presenting couple will be social distancing it is important to work out a gesture, hand signal, a pause or a comment "your turn Father," to signal it is the other's turn.
- You will need to provide the Attendees with specific start times and any additional instructions at the end of both the Friday and Saturday night talks. We also told them the actual time we wanted them to be back for the start of the next presentation. (Be mindful if you're working across time zones to be extra clear on this point)
- Make sure that the instructions for the dialogue after each talk are clear -- get a "thumbs-up" from the attendees. It is easier to ask a question of the presenter in the room than it is to pick up a phone and call with a question

Friday Night Part 1: Nuts and Bolts, Facility, Weekend etiquette, even the section on writing names on the WB need minor to extensive changes. Instead of Room numbers we gave them the cell number of our Tech savvy couple for Tech Q and that of the Admin for all other Q. Ask the couples to sit together and use only one computer to avoid feedback. Put their names on the WB so as to not accidentally pick up their spouses and start doodling in it. Ask them to keep their videos on to simulate an in-person Weekend, to mute the microphone and avoid using the chat box. They might be in the mood for a cute comment, but it could be an inappropriate distraction for others. Lots of minor adjustments, so be sure to read each talk carefully.

Impact of Dialogue: We returned to the Zoom platform/conference room as we typically do and at the given time two couples showed up with additional questions about dialogue. Using Zoom, you have control as to when you let people in, so it actually worked well.

Marriage As Sacrament: Before you begin this talk be sure each person has an envelope from their mailed packet with Extended Dialogue written on it.

Living Our Sacrament: Make sure the Attendees have the envelope marked "Financial Donation." (This is not as crucial as having the Extended Dialogue Handout with them, but it saves the chaos of having to look for it.) As with any non-Residential Experience we give the Sacraments the actual cost of the Virtual Experience as well as the actual cost of an in-person Experience. We asked them to consider a donation of twice the cost for one Sacrament to make the next Experience. We left it intentionally vague knowing that our unemployment is currently so high. We mentioned the unemployment in our talk as well as deleting the statement that "Room and Board are not deemed Tax Deductible by the IRS". We changed the verbiage concerning practicing our Song –A New World Somewhere - intentionally only talked about our song, then played an excerpt. We did not practice it or sing it at the end of the Weekend.