Proposal for a *Virtual* Hospitality Booth at Annual Conference 2026

Just as the geographically-local Church of the Brethren district hosts a hospitality booth in the exhibit hall at Annual Conference—a place to relax, chat, ask questions, and meet others—I propose that the Pacific Northwest District and the Living Stream Church of the Brethren, (financial) hosts of the virtual attendees at Annual Conference this year, make available a virtual Zoom room where anyone joining virtually can drop in, chat with whomever is there, ask questions, and be welcomed virtually to Annual Conference. To be effective and welcoming, we will want to arrange a rotation for staffing the Zoom meeting, easily done by anyone who can log into Zoom from anywhere, so that there is always a hospitality host present during the times the hospitality room is "staffed" (meaning, typically, during those times outside of business and worship—core times would be 11:30am-2:00pm, 4:30pm-7:00pm, and 9:30pm-10:30pm Eastern Time Monday-Wednesday). *[Realistically, I'd open the room by 8:00am each morning, and just leave it open until 10:30pm each night.]*

I suggest we take this idea two steps further as well. First, Living Stream is paying for a booth in the exhibit hall this year, and we propose to set up a computer with large screen and camera at one side of our booth, where people in-person can also talk to those joining from a distance, bridging the gap between the two groups somewhat. (Indeed, we could even advertise that those attending conference might arrange times to say hello to friends and church members back home, by simply on agreeing on a mutual time to connect in the virtual hospitality room.) And second, drawing upon PNWD's practice of having a Zoom meeting for a recap of what is happening at Annual Conference, we could sponsor a roundtable discussion each evening of conference at, say, 9:30pm-10:30pm Eastern Time (6:30pm-7:30pm Pacific Time), and invite not just PNWD folks, but all virtual and in-person attendees to join on Zoom if they wish to discuss the day's events.

Technically, the idea is simple: open a Zoom meeting, let people come if they wish. Enten is willing to keep the meeting open with at least a welcome message, to monitor whether anyone has joined the meeting over various hours, and be available for tech if needed. Daniel Klayton has also volunteered to have his phone number visible in the meeting for someone to call in case there is no host from PNWD/LSCOB present to greet people (for instance, if someone comes in at an odd time), or other questions. If we then arrange a rotation schedule of volunteers from PNWD/LSCOB to simply hang out in the meeting during core times, we'd have it covered.

Another advantage of advertising this virtual hospitality room would be taking the opportunity to also promote the fact that virtual registrations are no charge this year, and encourage people to sign up!

Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, Annual Conference Director, has already given her support to the idea, and is willing to publicize it. The Living Stream pastors have discussed it as well. So… what say ye? Do you like the idea? Do you have suggestions or concerns? Are you willing to sponsor this effort, and willing to help recruit people to serve as virtual hosts (or be one yourself for an hour or two)?

Enten Eller
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