**Together Apart - Our Pandemic Year**

**Sunday Nov. 15**

Rebecca Phillips, Martha McGovern & Kat Hawbaker, and others.

Members of the FUUSM Women’s Group reflect on our search for

diverse solutions to address our common need for authentic community.

**Why are you doing this anyway? Get clear first.**

This pandemic is an enormous societal interruption. With Passover and Easter upon us, many of us can’t gather in the way we’ve always gathered. So we need to ask:

**Why** do you in particular do this in the first place?

What is the central need to come together around this holiday as a community this year? What is it that we want to preserve, or focus on, or remember?

Is it mostly a religious observance? Is this about family togetherness? Is it about continuity?

Is it a marking of a specific time of year? Your gathering can incorporate church services, or can incorporate hiding eggs around the house. (Or both.)

**Decide if the source of inspiration comes from**

**within the group or from outside.** Is the community the source of content, or will you be watching an external source — say, a virtual rabbi or a streaming church or prayer service — together? Some families may want to watch a service together, and then eat and talk over Zoom. Figure out whether your community is turning in to each other for inspiration and guidance, or turning out. And organize, and assign roles, accordingly.

Whether matzo or deviled eggs, **have a food plan.**

Though food isn’t the purpose, it still holds convening powers. When do you eat? How central will it be this year? If it’s Passover, or Easter, what might you have each person prepare, in part to prime *them,* as they think about coming together. If it’s Iftar during Ramadan, do you mark it only with those you are sheltering in place with? Or do you break fast digitally, with others?

**Use your invitation to begin to create a world.**

An **invitation** must help your guests wrap their heads around this new way of gathering this year. Give context to this gathering. “Can you believe that for some of us, this will be our 40thPassover together?” Tell the story behind why you’re doing it this way this year. “But this year, we need to do it in a new way.” Tell them who is invited. How long will it go? What will you be doing? And tell them what they’ll need to participate — that includes a laptop and Wi-Fi!

**Give your gathering a name** that helps people understand what it is.

Is it “Easter Service”? That makes me think we’ll be gathering together to watch a broadcast from a church and then maybe have a discussion after. Is it “Wacky First Night High Jinks Seder”? That’s something totally different. The name is an opportunity to signify the intention, from the sacred to the profane.

**Help your guests prepare themselves.**

Think about everything people would need to prepare in advance.

Do they need to prepare a Haggadah reading? Do you need to distribute text to them? Do they need a second monitor to watch a streaming service? Giving people tasks to do ahead of time helps them prepare emotionally for the event. **They arrive invested.**

**Ritualize getting people who aren’t technologically comfortable onto Zoom.** At any event, giving participants a meaningful role increases the likelihood it will be a great gathering. But now, some people use Zoom every day, and some people have never used it and will need help — and they’ll need that help well in advance.

Appoint a person, or a number of people, as Ministers of Technology, or Zoom Honchos. They can reach out to do training. Ensure that everyone has done a dry run and knows how to get on, how to mute and how to chat. Waiting until the event will result in exclusion and frustration. Instead, make it a way to proactively connect the generations ahead of time.

**Create unique and meaningful orders and sequences**

**for people to participate in your event.**

Maybe you’ve asked everyone to bring a symbolic object, or show off a dish, or introduce the people in their own home with them. The order in which you do this can have meaning, if you design it that way. You could have people go from north to south, from sleepiest to most alert, oldest to youngest. Figuring that out can be half the fun — or you can make this as serious as you want. Make meaning by bringing order.

**On Zoom, shorter is sweeter.** Every interaction needs to be both slowed down and shortened. Everything will take longer on Zoom because of the coordination costs — and attention rates are lower, too. So this year, focus only on **what’s essential** for your people to mark this holy day. **Have a conversation ahead of time about what people think that is.**

And, at least this year, skip the rest.

**Let’s remember the edict of inviting outsiders into community,**

**who may be strangers, isolated or alone.**  Observances like Passover or Easter often have components of being of service to those away from their existing communities.

Now many of us are more isolated than ever. If you’re asking your community to bring new friends & strangers to the community, plan meaningful introductions. In the early portion of your event, have the person who invited them write an introduction, and have the community welcome them in.

*Future episodes of “Together Apart” wi—with Priya Parker will address how to create* ***meaningfulful human gatherings in an age of isolation,*** *all along the way from*

*birthday parties to funerals. You can listen righthere or subscribe on* [Apple](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/together-apart/id1506057555) *or* [Spotify](https://open.spotify.com/show/6xJU9iMWUFpmY9jYgsbPmL)***.***