Plumline

Online Sangha Manual

"Ever since I was a young monk, my dream has been to build a happy Sangha. Now, after sixty years of monastic practice, I continue to feel that Sangha building is the most precious work we can do as practitioners. The Sangha is our community of practice, and it is also our refuge. We rely on it and trust it to support our deepest aspirations and to give us energy and inspiration on the path of practice."

Thich Nhat Hanh, Joyfully Together

Welcome to the Plumline Online Sangha Manual. We know our beloved teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, has always supported innovative use of technology in skilful ways. We smile remembering that Thay was one of the first monks in Vietnam to use a bicycle in his younger years, and appreciate his wise use of new technologies reaching many thousands of friends and students over the years.

We are fortunate now to have globally-connected technologies enabling meetings online, no matter where we are or the conditions we find ourselves in. Many tools manifest to meet modern 'business (busyness) needs', but when approached with thought and consideration they can hold spaces for coming together, for us all to simply be.

More and more Sanghas have been using services such as Zoom to establish online. We have provided simple advice for running Online Sanghas efficiently and with consideration of security needs. You can find basic instructions here to support Sangha building and access to group practice for nourishment and healing during this time and beyond.

We cannot easily replace our usual face-to-face contact, our embraces, our hugs. Nevertheless, we can still connect with each other in a less direct manner, often in a larger scope, even in a global orbit, providing all Sangha participants and leaders with tools which support us flowing as a river, caring for this present moment and continuing beautifully into the future.

Roles in Online-Meetings

In much the same way as in physical meetings some volunteers prepare the Dharma hall, others serve tea, and again others lead the meditation, also in an online Sangha there are specific helpful roles.

Participants

Participants, especially those new to the meeting, may need a little more care and attention in online Sanghas than in physical meetings. This is because though we may see each other on screen, we cannot sense each other in the same ways we can in a physical space. Microphones are often muted online, and subtle cues such as body language can be more difficult to perceive.

As a participant, everyone needs an up-to-date version of Zoom on their computer or smartphone, or alternatively you can dial in by phone. Usually Zoom will ask you if you want to update, and you just need to confirm. If you want to make sure, you can download the latest version at www.zoom.us/download.

Meditation leaders

The meditation leader is primarily there to lead the meditation, facilitating the meditation and providing a safe space in which participants feel welcome, can share some time with each other, breathing and communicating in awareness and joy.

As a meditation leader you need a Meeting ID, the latest version of Zoom installed on your device, an internet connection with sufficient bandwidth, and a microphone. You do not need a complicated setup - a smartphone will meet the basic need for everything you need to do. You do not need a paid license for Zoom or any login data other than your own Zoom account.

Meeting hosts

The meeting host manages the meeting technically. In some cases this can be the meditation leader, but this may also be a 'Second Body', being there to support the needs of

participants and meditation leaders alike, and taking care that the Sangha meeting can take place with ease.

As a meeting host you need the Meeting ID, the 'Host Key', a Desktop Computer and a latest version of Zoom. You do not need a paid license for Zoom or any other login data but your own Zoom account.

Zoom admins

If you use a Meeting Room licenced and administered by Plumline, or another organisation, you will not need to worry about Zoom account administration. If you have a Zoom account license of your own there will be some additional things to consider.

As a Zoom admin you need the login name and password for the Zoom Pro account you want to manage. This may not be your own Zoom account, but an account licensed and owned by your Sangha, or by Plumline.

Basic guidance for meeting hosts

A Plumline Zoom Room is configured in a way that it permits an appropriate level of security while remaining easy to use for meditation leaders and easily accessible for all.

There are three things that Sanghas can do to keep the Zoom rooms a safe and protected space for all participants:

- **Assign a Host.** A host is somebody who takes care of the technical elements of an online Sangha meeting. This can be the meditation leader or - even better - a technically proficient 'Second Body'.

- **Enable a Waiting Room.** A Waiting Room protects your meeting from people just rushing into your meeting room. It is like 'closing the door', and latecomers first need to wait before the host lets them enter.

- **Take care of the right time for your meeting.** Several Sanghas use Plumline Zoom Rooms. We all take care only to use the Zoom Room at the agreed upon times, so that we do not disturb others.

1. Joining a meeting as the Host

Meeting hosts can:

- adjust security settings during the meeting, in particular activating a "Waiting Room" if the group decides that is necessary (using the Zoom feature "in-meeting security menu")

- admit participants to the meeting (using the Zoom feature "waiting room" as activated before in "in-meeting security menu")

- mute and unmute participants if needed

- play chants or songs, show Dharma talks or share Dharma texts (using the Zoom features "share screen" or "share computer audio")

- split the group in smaller groups of 2, 3 or more participants for small-group Dharma sharing (using the Zoom feature "breakout rooms")

- manage participants (including the option to remove them if necessary)

You need:

- An 8-11 digit Meeting ID

- 6-digit Host Key

- Zoom on a desktop computer, with latest software update:

Step 1 - join the meeting

Just log in with your private zoom account and join the meeting as a regular participant, using the Meeting ID.

## Step 2 - click the "Participants" button in the dashboard
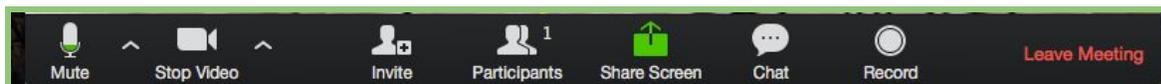
Step 3 - click "Claim Host" button.
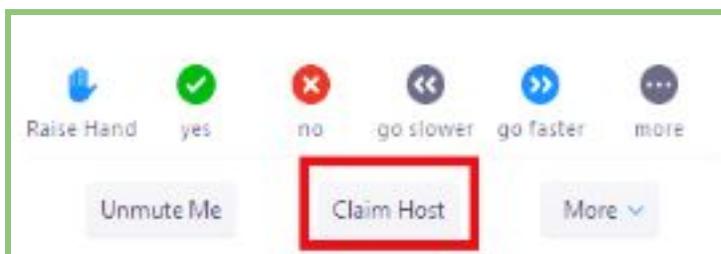
Step 4 - type in the 6-digit Host Key
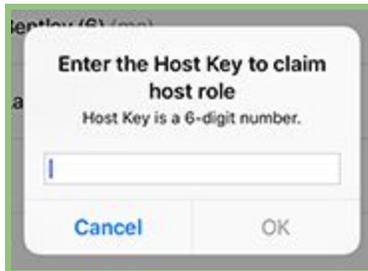
Step 5 - press "OK"

Now, you will have host controls for the meeting.

You can assign a co-host, or pass the host role to somebody else.

2. Joining and leaving - considering a Waiting Room

Each of us can experience delays arriving at meetings, with everything from a lack of familiarity to computer glitches and bandwidth issues. Delays can water seeds of anxiety, frustration, and nervousness etc - especially for new joiners who may not have met anybody in the room before.

Nobody wants to arrive in a meeting in the middle of a meditation and be disruptive, but late joiners may have made considerable effort to be 'on time', and feel left out and socially isolated if unable to join when they do manage to arrive. There are options for meeting room hosts to manage this: set the meeting options that prevent the audible alert 'ding' when joining, and set all participants' microphones to be muted automatically when joining (these features cause no disruption at all), or enable a 'waiting room' for late joiners to sit in once meditation begins.

Once everybody is with you and you are ready to start the meditation, a Waiting Room is like 'closing the door', so that nobody can accidentally disturb the meeting. The host will be aware that latecomers have arrived and are present in the waiting room - they will hear a sound and a popup dialogue asking if they want to admit the new participant, which can be done silently - and the host can also message latecomers privately to welcome them and help them settle in.

Requirements:

- you need to be logged in as a host
- Zoom desktop program which has been updated after Apr 08, 2020.

Step 1 - choose the "Security" button in the main menu
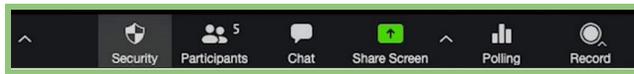
Step 2 - enable waiting room
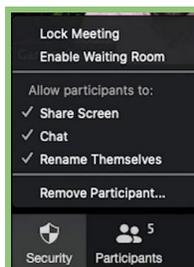
Step 3 - admit new participants to the meeting

1. As the meeting host, click Manage Participants.
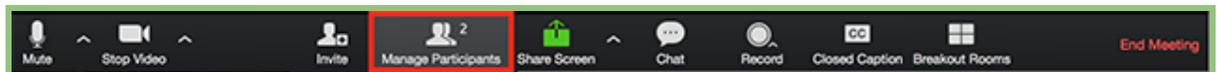
2. Click Admit to have the participant join the meeting.
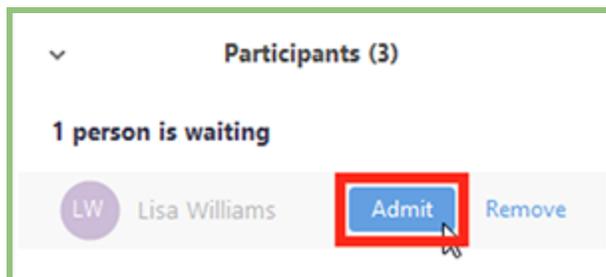
3. Take care of the right time for your meeting

- You can check in the Plumline Zoom calendar to find out which times your Sangha meeting has been booked.

- Half an hour before the meeting you can start using your meeting room. This allows you to set up and test the online Dharma hall. You can also use this time for helping new participants getting started. And you can run half an hour late. We always plan

for one hour between two meetings, so that you have enough time to prepare and to finish with calm and ease.

- If you or your participants want to test Zoom outside these times, please let us know, to make sure that another meeting will not be disturbed. Before contacting us, please check out the Plumline Zoom calendar.

Other relevant Zoom features for hosts

Manage Participants

Breakout-Rooms

Screen Sharing and Audio Sharing

Tips and Tricks for meditation leaders

How to create a warm online meeting atmosphere

Some elements, which happen in a less planned way in physical Sangha meetings, are helpful when planning an online meeting:

Arriving

A Sangha meeting might not start exactly on time, but we arrive, we take off our shoes, embrace our friends and have a chat, enter and arrange the Dharma hall, and prepare ourselves for sitting.

Tips:

- Plan time for 'arriving' also in online meetings. You might want to invite people to join 15 minutes earlier for getting ready together. In this phase, allow background noise, let participants unmute their microphones while they get ready, allow for cross-talk, greeting friends and saying hello.

- Invite a short 'weather report' so that participants can truly arrive in the online space and encounter each other despite the distances.

- Decide together whether to have microphones muted or on. In particular in smaller groups it contributes to a cosy atmosphere to not switch off microphones, allowing background noise as it happens in a physical meeting. Only during guided meditations, Dharma talks, and if technical disturbances happen through unmuted microphones, might they be muted. This helps the meeting space to feel a little bit

more natural and organic, though sometimes a quiet and distraction-free environment is nice to have too.

Creating a circle

To create a feeling of a circle in an online meeting, participants can activate [Gallery view](#) in zoom, so that they have a feeling of togetherness seeing many friends together on screen. When people are introducing themselves and especially when sharing from the heart, it can be helpful to switch to 'speaker view', so we can really place our full attention on the speaker and connect with our deep listening.

When everyone is fully present and attentive in gallery view, with video turned on, it's possible to get a deep sense of connection and community. Likewise it is also possible to see distraction in others on screen, and a slight sense of absence when video is muted, so collectively an appropriate connection is something groups can be aware of and support each other to achieve.

Participants can also be advised to [hide their own video](#) from their display. Seeing themselves might be a distraction for some.

Creating an acoustic space

In order to create an acoustic space in our online Dharma hall, you might want to consider unmuting the microphones of all participants during the entire meeting. We would then be able to hear each others' breathing, tea drinking, coughing, walking, background noises etc. This can create a beautiful acoustic space and support a deep feeling of interconnectedness among participants.

Bowing before speaking

Explain, how people can bow online when they want to start speaking. There are some options:

- unmute (as far as, by default, participants are muted) and bow
- say "I bow" so that everybody can hear you, and bow physically with everybody else
- even more beneficial than in physical Sanghas is to wait three breaths after somebody else has finished

Invite everybody to join reading texts

Inviting participants to read texts in turn creates an inclusive atmosphere which is so much more difficult to create in online Sanghas. For this, ask the meeting host to share texts via [Screen Sharing](#).

Sharing in small groups

Sharing in small groups and leaving more time for this than in physical Sangha meetings can be a profound experience. The meeting host can activate [Breakout Rooms](#) for small group sharing.

Sharing tea

Nobody can serve tea in an online meeting but the participants themselves. It is a beautiful experience to have tea readily prepared in flasks and then share a cup of tea online. If you want to do this, invite participants beforehand to prepare tea, and allow for some time to get the tea. Unmuted microphones are great for feeling present with our friends.

Saying goodbye

As in physical Sangha meetings, giving time to say good-bye. Unmuted microphones to share good wishes, give feedback, say thank-you and good-bye. A lovely and moving moment is when everybody waves goodbye.

You can even invite people to stay 10 or 15 more minutes for a chat with those who do not yet want to leave. Just do not forget that another meeting might be scheduled already 30 minutes after the end of your meeting.

Second Body

In physical meetings each of us has some friends with whom we share a little more time, have an extra long chat before or after Sangha, walk to the bus or enjoy some quality time. This kind of togetherness is more difficult in online Sanghas. You might want to decide for Second Bodies to create care and warmth also between meetings. Preferably this will be in a chain: Kate calling Jane, Jane calling Greg, Greg calling Joe, Joe calling Kate. The one calling can also be the one primarily asking "How are you" and giving time to listen, while the one being called is the one who can feel being cared for in this moment.

Inviting the bell and singing a song

There are two technical pitfalls in online Sanghas: inviting the bell and singing a song. For both, it is highly recommended to use an audio setting called "original sound".

Activate "Original sound"

Zoom uses filters for optimized audio experiences. These filters are designed for speech, not for music or sounds. To reach optimal sound, meeting hosts - but not all participants - can activate a setting called "original sound".

This needs to be activated in three places:

- In [Zoom settings](): "Allow users to select original sound in their client settings: ON" (this needs to be activated by the Zoom account admin.)

- In your Zoom client in settings, before you start a meeting. Open your Zoom program > chose Settings > Audio > Advanced > "Allow option for using original sound from microphone in meeting."

- During a meeting, now a button "Turn on Original Sound" appears in the top left hand corner. Click this button and original sound is turned on.

- Be aware as a host that with original sound on, all of Zoom's excellent background noise filters will be turned off. Conversation and noise from other rooms where you are may come through for your participants - as can other noise such as computer cooling fans etc. The option only really needs to be used for sharing the full sound of the bell, or for other instruments such as guitar, if playing and singing.

Which type of bell to use?

The larger the bell, the better online. And the better your microphone, sound card and internet connection, the better. Being aware of and close to the microphone is usually helpful when inviting the bell. Smartphones can transmit the sound of the bell, especially larger ones, perfectly well.

Singing and chanting

If singing or chanting, choose to have only one participant's microphone activated. Or play an audio file of your favorite Plum Village song or chant. People can sing on their own, and everybody will see their friends' mouths moving as they sing along.

Singing together with several unmuted microphones will be chaotic. It can be fun though, and a light-hearted aspect of our practice is to experiment! If you want to try a song with more than one microphone unmuted - for the simple joy of it - then please do!

Changing the meeting format

If you are used to physical Sangha meetings based on a fixed format, be encouraged to play with new formats for online meetings.

60-minute online format

meet already 15 minutes before the meeting starts, to get seated, for chit chat and clarification of technical questions

10 minutes weather report and intro

20 min Guided meditation

10 min Teaching book, audio, video

15 min Dharma sharing

5 min Announcements, closing circle, farewell

get-together for those who want after the meeting

90-minute online format

10 min arrival, welcome, chit chat

5 min Practice song

15 min Silent meditation

15 min Teaching book, audio, video

15 min Silent meditation

30 min Dharma sharing, sharing tea, farewell

Dharma talks, guided meditations and texts

Dharma talks

To invite Thay, a Brother or Sister from Plum Village, or a Dharma teacher in our meeting by playing a movie or sound file is a beautiful way of enriching our meeting. Sound quality of a shared video or audio can in some cases be better than when meditation leaders talk through varying quality microphones or with a slow internet connection.

Guided meditations

You can offer guided meditations as in the Dharma hall, taking care that sound quality is sufficient enough to be heard well and make a good experience. You can test your settings and sound beforehand with a friend, as quality overall will depend on your internet connection, sound card and microphone - but we shouldn't feel limited or unduly-concerned by lack of personal means. Sound files are a helpful alternative method of offering guided

meditations and deep relaxation, allowing meditation leaders to fully participate. Experimentation is encouraged with both approaches.

Texts

When reading a text or a Gatha, more than in physical Sangha meetings, a visual support is helpful for participants. This can be a shared PDF document or a PowerPoint presentation. You can invite participants to read in turns (one paragraph on each page of a PowerPoint presentation).

Instructions for Zoom administrators

Settings

Global settings can be changed at https://zoom.us/profile/setting

In some cases we offer recommendations here, and in others the answer is not so clear. 'Sangha Eyes' on account settings will be helpful to decide what is appropriate for users of your account.

Join before host	ON	Required to enable nominated hosts to join meetings

		using the Host Key
Require a password when scheduling new meetings	ON / OFF	Adds an extra layer of security, but also makes login for users more complicated
Require Encryption for 3rd Party Endpoints	ON	
Chat	ON / OFF	Some Sanghas might want to disable chat to avoid distraction, but it can be useful to broadcast messages to everybody.
Private Chat	ON / OFF	Allowing people to message each-other, and the host/co-host, privately
Play sound when participants join or leave (with option: "Heard by host only")	ON / OFF	Make sure that you check the option "Heard by Host Only". For some facilitators this option can be a distraction / disruption - they prefer to keep their eye on the total number in the participants menu item, to see if any new people have joined during silent periods, for instance. Others prefer to hear a sound when somebody is entering, so that they do not need to keep an eye on the total number of participants. Bandwidth limitations for participants can mean that some come 'in and out' throughout a meeting.
File transfer	OFF	
Feedback to Zoom	OFF	
Co-host	ON	
Always show meeting control toolbar	ON	
Show Zoom windows during screen share	ON	
Screen sharing (Host only)	ON	Temporarily allowing participants to use screen sharing can be activated in the Security menu bar. Activating this in global settings risks disruptive behaviour in larger groups where participants are unknown.

		Turning screen sharing on for all is something to consider for only closed groups with specific needs, where an activated waiting room is also in place.
Disable desktop/screen share for users	ON	
Whiteboard	ON	For collecting notes during a meeting, can be useful for caretaking council meetings
Remote control	OFF	
Allow removed participants to rejoin	OFF	
Allow participants to rename themselves	ON / OFF	Some people will join and be named 'iPhone', for instance, or the name of their device. Once they learn how to rename themselves this can be useful, or a host can edit the name on their behalf.
Breakout room	ON	
Remote support	OFF	
Far end camera control	OFF	
Group HD video	OFF	
Virtual background	ON / OFF	Some Sangha members may be uncomfortable sharing the background of their home environment - either through differing levels of privilege, circumstance, or personal security concerns. Allowing people to set a virtual background can be a really helpful and supportive element for some.
Allow users to select original sound in their client settings	ON	
Waiting room	OFF	Needs to be off for the meeting initially (and managed in-meeting), if nominated hosts want to claim a meeting using the Host Key.
Blur snapshot on iOS	ON	

task switcher		
Recording (in Recording tab)	ON / OFF	Note that max. one meeting can be stored in Zoom's cloud storage. Recording might be a privacy concern for participants and there are few times when recording - perhaps a Dharma talk - meets a need.

Meetings

Meetings can be added and changed at https://zoom.us/meeting

Recommended settings:

- Topic: Sangha name and place
- To establish a 'Digital Dharma Hall', set meeting as "recurring" / "no fixed time"
- Meeting ID: "Generate Meeting ID" sets a separate meeting ID for each meeting
- Meeting password: not essential, though adds an extra layer of security and confidence
- Video: on for host and participants
- Audio: both computer and telephone, set dial-in country
- Meeting options:
    - **Enable join before host ON** (is less secure, but required to be ON if the hosts wants to join the meeting via the Host Key)
    - **Mute participants upon entry ON / OFF** (depending on your preference and the size of the Sangha, usually for large Sanghas you will mute participants upon entry, for smaller Sanghas not)
    - **Enable waiting room OFF** (host activates waiting rooms manually at the beginning of the meeting - if you activate waiting rooms here, hosts cannot join via the Host Key!!!)
    - **Only authenticated users can join ON / OFF** (adds an extra layer of security, but is also more complicated for users to use)
    - **Breakout Room pre-assign OFF** (you could chose ON if you are planning an AGM in which you want to split people in smaller, pre-set groups, such as working committees)

A note on security

Zoom have made global headlines for enabling positive, wholesome social connection in a time of international difficulty and distancing. There have also been news reports regarding security and privacy concerns. Aware that such reports may contribute to additional fear and anxiety in the current conditions - where places of refuge and safety are essential - we are determined to support the community with advice and guidance that cultivates confidence in the use of Zoom as an appropriate service for online Sangha meetings.

Zoom have acted quickly and responsibly, working with international specialists and cyber security agencies to close security gaps and address concerns. Some risks remain, but with close attention and sensible steps we have every confidence in the use of Zoom as a place to create safe environments for Sangha activity.

For more info on security, check the [Plumline - Zoom Security](#) updates.

Email Templates

Inviting new hosts

Dear friend!

Welcome in sharing our Zoom account!

Meeting name: [Sangha name as in zoom.us/meeting]

Meeting ID: [11-digit Meeting ID]

Host Key: [6-digit Host Key]

Meeting times: [Meeting time as in Google Calendar] - you can use your meeting ID up to 30 minutes before till 30 minutes after the meeting time. Please do NOT use outside these times, because you might block another scheduled meeting in the same line.

Please check your meeting times in our Zoom calendar: [Zoom calendar link] - and let us know if there are changes.

You can find detailed guidance how to join a meeting as a host [here](#).

All information which is relevant for your participants is in [Template email for inviting participants to your meeting](#).

Some useful links for further guidance:

- [Online Sangha Manual](#)
- [Security Info](#)
- [Plumline Zoom settings](#)

Feel free to contact us if you have more questions. We can also schedule a training session with you and other hosts in your Sangha.

With a smile :-)

Inviting new participants

Dear friend!

Our Sangha will meet online

Date: [date]

Time: [time from - till] - please join us 15 minutes earlier for a chat and for getting seated. This is also a good moment to solve some technical questions. Note: please do not use the Meeting ID outside our meeting times.

Get seated in a comfortable place at your home or outside. And do not forget to prepare a cup of tea, maybe in a flask, since we will share tea before getting to the Dharma talk.

Joining by computer

To join the meeting, please download the Zoom software by going to www.zoom.us/download on your computer. Once you start zoom, you need to enter the following meeting ID to join the meeting.

Meeting ID: [Meeting ID] or click the link https://zoom.us/j/[Meeting ID]

Joining by tablet or smartphone

Install Zoom from the app store, open and join meeting by entering our Meeting ID [Meeting ID]

Joining by telephone

If you want to join us without using a computer, you can do so, and it is easy :-)

Just dial a local phone number:

Then enter the Meeting ID [Meeting ID] followed by # key, you are in.

Some guidance for participants

Please keep video on to support connection

Please keep sound on, though with microphones muted when our group decides

Say "I bow" when you are bowing to talk and after you have talked

Give 3 breaths before and after you talk

Please do not leave the meeting early without saying goodbye

Questions? Comments?

Check the Plumline website www.plumline.org or write to smiles@plumline.org and we will be there for you :-)

:-) *With a smile from the international Plumline Sangha, dear friends!*