**Harbor Online Community**

*Brief summary*

Our community first began to form in the fall of 2019, in Pittsburgh, PA. At the time, it was “a small group Bible study with no church affiliation,” with about 10 people who were all former (or current but disillusioned) conservative evangelical Christians. The group was formed to meet a felt need to have a space to explore faith in Jesus with unanswered questions, critical biblical scholarship, and/or progressive social commitments.

With the arrival of the global pandemic in early 2020, the community shifted to Zoom. There was no plan to change the basics of what we were doing, until a new vision emerged in the middle to later part of 2020. New people began to join our weekly calls from all over the US (and Canada). We realized that this type of community was needed by many folks—not only during the pandemic, but in an ongoing basis. For people with similar experiences as ours who live in a small town or rural context, an online community may be the only way to join a progressive Christian community.

So we incorporated as a non-profit in February of 2021 and launched our website the following month. Since then, we have gathered weekly on Zoom with an evolving liturgy of storytelling, Bible study discussion, and contemplative prayer. There is no musical worship, as this is difficult on Zoom and triggering to some of our members. There is no sermon, as we are committed to mutual and dialogical modes of learning. But our gatherings are nonetheless worshipful, as we engage the Scriptures in an atmosphere of vulnerability and love.

In addition to our weekly worship gatherings on Thursday evenings, we have established a weekly Wednesday lunch call as well. This is a two-hour window when our Zoom room is open for any and all to just spend time together. There is no structure or content, just people chatting while they eat lunch on their screens. The lunches are an important part of what we do, since we are limited in our relationship-building opportunities in this online, non-localized space.

The other elements of what our community does include justice efforts, occasional Pittsburgh-based physical gatherings, a private Facebook group for members, occasional online fun events, weekly blog content and email newsletter, and social media presence. These are good first steps, but we hope to strengthen and add to them as our community grows in size and depth. For instance, pending our world’s progress battling the pandemic, we would love to start holding annual or semi-annual retreats for Harbor members to gather in person for a weekend of friendship and spiritual practices.

*Interest in hosting a resident*

I (Jon) have discussed this possibility with board members, and they are excited about the possibility. We are currently looking to hire one or more people part-time to help me lead the community. The hours and responsibilities are very flexible, so the job description we submitted to Sara is very negotiable and can be tailored to the availability, passions, and giftings of the resident. In light of our financial capacity, we would look for a resident who can work 5-15 hours per week.

We believe that Harbor would be a good site for a resident because of its innovative nature. On the one hand, what we are doing is exciting and rewarding, so a less adventurous resident could come in and meld seamlessly into our ministry. On the other hand, Harbor can be like a sandbox to try out different ideas without fear of failure. The possibilities may be limited by factors like our online context, but not by any rigid sense of how things must be done. In addition to the innovation, this site would also provide valuable experience related to: online church, dialogical ministry, post-evangelicalism, and social media outreach.

A resident would be mentored and supervised by the pastor or, we hope (pending a hire), one or more co-pastors. For the time being, that would be Jon Mathieu, 304-280-5759, [jonmathieu28@gmail.com](mailto:jonmathieu28@gmail.com). The resident would also engage regularly with our leadership council, adding extra layers of support, mentorship, and team dynamics. These relationships would entail weekly Zoom calls.