

The Pandemic and the Explosion of Zoom Meetings



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Today's author is the creator of a website which lists international secular recovery zoom meetings.

By Chris M

The first 7 to 8 years of my sobriety, I attended meetings almost every night of the week. I live in a small rural area of Southwest Georgia. I was accustomed to driving up to 60 miles several nights per week to be able to attend a meeting every night. In years 8 to 11 of my sobriety, I was undergoing a “de-conversion” process from theism to atheism. There was simply not an availability of secular meetings in my rural area to meet my desires and I had always heard that online meetings were not as beneficial as face-to-face meetings. So, I never really considered finding any online meetings.

The only secular AA meeting that was in driving distance from me was a meeting in Tallahassee, Florida. It met one night a week on a Friday night. Tallahassee is about 60 miles from me. Due to conflicts in my work schedule with the time the meeting started, I was typically only able to attend it once or twice a month. I was continuing to attend nonsecular meetings about two to three times per week. I tried to start a secular meeting in the summer of 2019, but I found myself sitting in a rented room by myself for two months. So, I closed the meeting.

In late 2019 to early 2020 before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, I remember seeing a small list of online secular AA meetings on a Secular AA website. I recall contemplating whether to attend one. Once the pandemic was declared and we began to have a shutdown of face-to-face meetings, I took another look at the small list of Secular meetings available. Most of the meetings were during the time of day that I was working. There were a couple that were taking place outside of my working hours, but it was only one or two nights a week.

Also, some of the nonsecular groups were asking me to start a zoom meeting for them on nights that they would meet. In February and March of 2020, I began doing this for them. Attendance was small as most everyone was unfamiliar and uncomfortable with online meeting platforms. Due to lack of attendance and other groups starting their own personal zoom meetings as well as using "covid protocol" for face-to-face meetings, I abandoned hosting any more zoom meetings. However, hosting these zoom meetings for the traditional AA groups gave me enough confidence to start attending secular online meetings.

In March to April of 2020, some secular groups began posting information about the zoom meetings they were starting in the private AA Beyond Belief Facebook Group. The list of secular meetings began to grow slowly. I was not seeing those meetings on the Secular AA website for inclusion on their list. So, I started creating my own personal list of secular zoom meetings in the Notes app of my iPhone. I created a list by day of the week. Every time I saw a secular group post their zoom meeting information, I added it to my list. My list grew to a nice small selection of meetings for every day of the week.

"Service work" has always been a staple of my sobriety. Whether I was serving on a Group, District, or Area level, I have always found great value in serving. Throughout the pandemic, I was always looking for a way to be of service to the recovery community. I had the idea that others might benefit from my list of meetings. I began posting them daily in the private AA Beyond Belief Facebook group. As I did this, I would have comments of other meeting information to add to my list. My list began to grow.

I began to see a Google doc spreadsheet link being shared in the private recovery groups. It had even more meetings than were on my list. I thought about abandoning my list and just start using the Google doc spreadsheet. For my own personal preferences, though, it was a little hard to read and navigate using my iPhone. So, I kept using my list and the format that I preferred for a list of meetings. I continued to post my list of meetings each morning for the particular day of the week and my list continued to grow. As the list expanded to about 10 to 15 meetings each day in July of 2020, I created a simple single web page to list all the meetings. I wanted to make the web page easy to read, navigate, and easy to copy & paste from using a smart phone into the Zoom app.

In July of 2020, my web page list of secular recovery zoom meetings had 207 views. In March of 2021, my web page had 3,019 views. Each month the number of views has continued to increase as people have become more comfortable with online meetings. Today there is an average of 35 to 45 meetings listed for each day of the week on my list. My list of meetings is not as heavily used nor as popularly linked to as a couple of other larger lists out there like the Google doc

spreadsheet and the Cleveland Freethinkers list. I cannot imagine the number of views they are having each month.

It has been exciting to see the secular recovery community come together through these meetings. In just one year's time due to the pandemic, I have personally gone from attending 1 or 2 secular meetings per month to attending no less than 15 to 20 per month. I have seen secular groups attendance go from an average of 5 people to an average of 30 people in the meeting. Some online secular meetings have 100 or more in average attendance! As I stated earlier, I had always heard that online meetings were not as beneficial as face-to-face meetings. My experience over the last year has proven this to be a fallacy. Do not get me wrong, if I had the availability of secular face-to-face meetings as I do with online secular meetings, I am sure I would be attending more face-to-face meetings than online meetings. For where I live, though, this will probably never be an issue. There are simply not enough secular people in recovery in my area. So, I will continue connecting to online secular meetings for a long time to come.

As the pandemic begins to fade, the ultimate question is will online secular meetings fade away as well? I do not believe they will. There are too many like me that simply do not have access to face-to-face secular recovery meetings. Sure, we can start our own secular recovery meetings. I have plans to eventually restart a face-to-face secular meeting with a couple of people. I met them in an online secular zoom meeting! I had no idea they were in the same tiny rural hometown as me. Zoom meetings made this possible! I have heard many online secular meetings state that even after the pandemic is gone, they will continue to host online meetings as well as their face-to-face meetings. This is exciting news for people like me. I have grown attached to several groups and I feel like a homegroup member of a few that I regularly attend each week. I would miss them dearly if they discontinued their online meetings.

For all it's worth, the pandemic has brought many of us pain, misery, financial hardships, and death. But it has also brought us together as a secular recovery community in ways that probably once seemed unattainable. The pandemic brought us a multitude of zoom recovery meetings. The Zoom meetings have changed how I view online meetings and how I participate secularly in my recovery. I look forward to the secular recovery community within AA continuing to grow after the pandemic. Though the number of secular online meetings may shrink a little after the pandemic, the connection will not.

Chris M. is from Donalsonville, GA. He has been around 12 Step Programs since his early 20's and has stayed sober since the age of 40. His date of sobriety is January 24, 2009. He has served in many positions at the Group, District, and Area levels. The past four years of his sobriety has been converting from theism to atheism while experiencing all the obstacles that confront the secular person within nonsecular 12 step program. He is the webmaster of his local district 12 step fellowship and has created a website listing of International Secular Recovery Zoom Meetings at [Secular Recovery Online](#).
