

Guidelines on Live-Streaming Services

As the Covid-19/Coronavirus outbreak advances, congregations are struggling to respond. Some are turning to live-streaming video as a way to glorify God together, stay connected as the body of Christ, and seek the healing work of the Spirit. This may be particularly important for elderly members and those with compromised immune systems, or in regions where public gatherings are discouraged or restricted.

The following guidelines are provided to assist pastors and other leaders in offering such services of worship in a faithful and effective way. Please note that these suggestions are offered with temporary or emergency situations in mind, not for long-term use in live-streaming worship services. Also be aware that this document is not intended as medical or legal advice; consult a doctor or attorney as needed.

- *Hybrid Gatherings.* Many congregations will begin to experiment with live-streaming by providing a way for some people (particularly those who are home- or hospital-bound) to join an existing public gathering by viewing the video feed. In these cases, the order of worship may remain the same for those gathered in person (with the exception of new practices around passing the peace and communion). Leaders should find ways to acknowledge and connect with online participants before, during, and after the service, so they don't feel isolated from the community. Musical selections that will appear in the video should be in the public domain (see below) or must be omitted from the live-streaming portion of the service.
- *Sacramental Celebration.* Where local situations require online-only gatherings, congregations should reschedule and refrain from sacramental celebrations (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) as these require physical presence, material elements, and embodied participation.
- *Daily Prayer.* Services of daily prayer—such as those found in the *Book of Common Worship* (WJKP, 2018) or *Glory to God* (WJKP, 2013), or in the PC(USA) Daily Prayer app—are good options for the order of worship when a congregation is gathering primarily or only in virtual space. The primary ingredients of such services are psalms, Scripture, and prayers of thanksgiving and intercession. A sermon or meditation may be included after the reading of Scripture.
- *Congregational Participation.* Make use of the features of your chosen media platform to provide for congregational participation through comments, posts, likes, shares, etc.
- *Offering.* Find other ways to collect the offering, such as giving through text messages or online giving platforms. The Presbyterian Foundation's [online giving](#) service provides a quick and easy way for people to set up regular, automated gifts to the church.
- *Copyright Permission.* Be advised that a standard license for congregational song from OneLicense or CCLI will *not* cover rights and permissions to live-stream the words or music of copyrighted hymns/songs; a special broadcast/streaming license must be purchased. Additionally, anthems, hymn arrangements, and other musical offerings under copyright are not covered by such licenses. These require further permission to broadcast.

For this reason, leaders just beginning to explore live-streaming are advised to select hymns and songs in the public domain. For service music and anthems that will be live-streamed, consider using a hymn in the public domain.

- The [Harry Fox Agency](#) is a good source of information for licensing questions regarding choral anthems.
- *Audio/Visual Production.* Think carefully about camera (and microphone) placement to allow for clear, non-distracting visuals and good quality audio. Be sure there is adequate lighting and projection or amplification of voices. Be mindful of what appears on screen, especially if you are broadcasting from a place other than the church sanctuary.
- *Technical Specifications.* Some leaders will use their smartphones to broadcast video. If you decide to purchase another camera for this purpose, be sure it has HDMI or SDI out components. A digital SLR camera may also be used, but the ability to zoom may be more challenging. You may need special hardware to convert the camera signal into a USB format to stream through your computer.
- *Platforms for Streaming.* Commonly used and widely accessible platforms for video-conferencing and live-streaming include Facebook Live, Google Hangout, Periscope, Skype, YouTube, Zoom.

Here is a list of links, articles, and resources that may be useful in learning how to live-stream worship services:

- [Top Live Streaming](#)
- [Ultimate Guide to Live Streaming](#)
- [Switcher Studio](#)
- [Church Streaming.tv](#)

This website provides information on copyright laws:

- [Broadcasting, Streaming, and Recording.](#)

Here is a news story on the live-streaming ministry of Westminster Presbyterian Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania:

- [Why in the world would we do that?](#)

Tom Trinidad of has offered set of best practices for pastors and congregations on his blog:

- [Pastoral Response to the Novel Coronavirus](#)

John Fong in Elizabeth Presbytery is working on digital discipleship resources for churches affected by the Coronavirus:

- [Ask John Fong](#)

The PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship has drafted a statement that may be used in church newsletters or at the beginning of a worship service.

- [Pastoral Statement on the Coronavirus / COVID-19](#)

For further guidance on developing a congregational plan for an outbreak of contagious disease, please see this resource from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (available in English, Korean, and Spanish):

- [Preparedness for Pandemics](#)

The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada provides guidance on congregational song:

- <https://congregational song.org/corona-virus-congregational-song/>
- <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/church-attendance-is-an-individual-choice/>

Thanks to Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) national staff Mari Elia Evans, David Gambrell, Randy Hobson, William McConnell, Paul Seebeck, and Robyn Davis Sekula, as well as Mary Margaret Flannagan (New York), Mark Koenig (New York), Don Lincoln (Pennsylvania), Tom Trinidad (Colorado), and Nathan Young (Washington) for their contributions to this resource.

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