

ONLINE CHURCH OPTIONS

Ways to gather when we can't meet

We know the church is the people, so how can we be the church when we are not allowed to meet?

Fortunately, we now live in world full of different ways to connect with each other. In this document we will explore some of the options for us to connect without being physically present.

Sunday morning worship

For many of us when we think of church, we think of Sunday morning worship. So, if we can no longer gather, what are our options?

1. We could encourage people to watch another church service either on TV or online, or encourage people to do personal devotions.
2. Mail or email a written service with prayers and sermon along with the church bulletin.
3. Record an audio of a minister leading a worship service (including prayers and sermon). Other individuals could contribute to this from their homes.
4. Film the minister leading a worship service and upload it to Youtube or Facebook.
5. Stream live from your laptop/phone using a service like Facebook live or Zoom webinar ([Read this for information about possible webinar platforms to use](#))
6. Stream live events where you are mixing sound and video feeds on the fly. (Some software suggestions if you are keen to give this a go (Pc: <https://www.vmix.com/> Mac: <https://www.ecamm.com/mac/ecammlive/>)

Technical requirements

Whether you are recording or live streaming you would need one of the following setups

1. Most simple is phone or laptop, using a built-in camera and microphone
2. Plug a microphone into laptop or phone to get better audio ([watch](#))
3. Use a video camera and plug sound from sound desk into laptop ([watch](#))

What works well (and doesn't work well) with digital services

Using online technologies don't work well for singing, following liturgy together, passing the peace, taking communion or passing the collection plate!

But there are other opportunities... for example, using online chat conversations alongside the video allows people to discuss the sermon in real time, and it allows people to share prayer requests (and critique what the preacher is saying!).

If you are opting to do a live stream or live recording, be prepared and have your content ready to go, but when you present don't rush and consider using a script. Body language is important, we suggest you lean forward and look at the camera directly.

A final thought on Sunday worship. In a time of isolation, you are not limited to leading worship just on a Sunday, you may want to consider leading a short daily live devotion.

Meetings, small groups or bible study

The heartbeat of many congregations are the small groups in which people connect - whether that is a bible study, youth group, parish council, or any of the various committee meetings.

So, what tools can we use to engage in these situations?

1. The phone. Setup a conference call to host a meeting.
2. Online software such as Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts or Messenger

Hospitality is always important when we gather. In an online environment we need to think carefully about this, communicating by email/social media beforehand with participants; ensuring the chair of the meeting is greeting people as they join; engaging in conversation; telling jokes; or having an icebreaker conversation. These are all important tools to avoid awkward silent time.

Preparation. The chair of the meeting needs to well prepared. It is advisable to test your audio beforehand and to start on time. Because participants can't have side conversations, the gathering needs to be engaging for the whole time. Such meetings can be more intense and more tiring. We recommend you do meetings no longer than one hour. Hosts also need to know participants can be more open and more vulnerable in online conversations.

Quality discussion. If you are doing your meeting using online software, we recommend all participants use their webcam and are in a quiet environment. Online conversations are always better when participants have a good internet connection. Plugging in directly to a modem with an ethernet cable is best. Using mobile data or public wifi will provide the worst connectivity, and home wifi will be somewhere in the middle for most homes.

Fellowship

Proactive members of our congregations who are friends won't need any help with connecting with each other, they will just pick up a phone and chat.

However, for people living by themselves, you may to encourage them to connect. Suggest that they call someone each time they stop for a coffee, so they don't get too lonely.

We should also consider many of our congregations only talk to each other at church activities. Bearing this in mind, what can you do to help facilitate fellowship in your context? Perhaps now is the time to:

- Set up a number of online social media groups, in which people in your congregation interact through the week.
- Speak to a telecommunication company to set up a conference call feature, where you invite a few elderly people to call in for a group conversation.

Pastoral care

Isolation can be a very challenging experience for all people. In our current context, more and more people in our congregations will be isolated physically, especially the elderly.

While elders, ministers and pastoral care workers may not be able to meet physically with people who are isolated, it is critical that we are intentional about making frequent contact.

Prayer and scripture are the foundations of resilience. When having conversations with people who are isolated, ensure you pray, read scripture and have a faith conversation. Remind them that what they feel is normal and with God's help, there is nothing to fear.

Encourage them to keep their usual routine, mealtimes, bedtimes and exercise etc. Where it is practical, urge them reach out to family and friends.

Communicate

Develop a plan about what your church will do to stay connected if you can't physically meet.

Communicate the plan to everyone. We suggest that church leaders advise their congregations how they can expect to engage in the ministries of the church if you are not able to gather.