

GUIDELINES ON LIVE STREAMING SERVICES

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in the way churches operated, particularly in terms of worship services. As restrictions on gatherings and social distancing measures were implemented, churches had to find innovative ways to connect with their congregations. One of the most notable solutions was the adoption of live-streaming services. Many churches turned to live-streaming as a way to glorify God together, stay connected as the body of Christ, and seek the healing work of the Spirit. This newfound approach not only enabled churches to continue their mission during the pandemic but also allowed them to extend their reach and create a lasting impact on their congregations even after the pandemic subsided.

The following guidelines are provided to assist pastors and other leaders in offering such services of worship in a faithful and effective way. Please be aware that this document is not intended as medical or legal advice; consult a doctor or attorney as needed.

- *Hybrid Gatherings.* Many congregations experiment with live-streaming in order to provide a way for people (particularly those who are home- or hospital-bound) to join an existing public gathering by viewing the live 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 live video should be accompanied by an appropriate license(s) or be obtained from the Public Domain (*see below*); otherwise, they must be muted during or omitted from the live-streaming portion of the service.
- *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. As always, please make sure to first acquire permission from the copyright holder or use works that are in the Public Domain or otherwise available for use without explicit permission.
- *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.
- *Permission to Use Copyrighted Music.* Be advised that a standard license for congregational songs from One License, Christian Copyright Solutions or CCLI will *not* cover rights and permissions to live-stream the words and the musical performance of copyrighted hymns/songs/poems; a special broadcast/streaming license **must** be purchased. Additionally, anthems, hymn arrangements, and other musical offerings under copyright are not covered by such licenses. Furthermore, an additional license(s) must be acquired in order to play prerecorded music during the livestreamed worship service. For this reason, leaders just beginning to explore live-streaming are advised to select hymns and songs in the Public Domain or contact One License, CCLI, and Christian Copyright Solutions about obtaining their streaming licenses. The [Harry Fox Agency](#) is likewise 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

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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.

- *Ask Members to Not Post Their Own Videos.* Church members are not covered by the licenses that your church obtains. This means that if members are live streaming a service or special event on the internet themselves, the members could be violating copyright laws.
- *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](#)
- [The Ultimate Guide To Live Streaming Church Music Legally](#)
- [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](#)

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