

Faith Communities During a Pandemic

Livestreaming/temporary virtual worship communities

In cases where it is advisable to not gather, or gatherings are prohibited by local government, communities may consider alternate ways to gather using technology. A helpful online document is, [“How to stream your worship service — A starter guide”](#)

The elements of Service of the Word (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 210) or one of the Daily Prayer services (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, pages 295-331) can be easily adapted for use in a virtual gathering.

In cases of virtual worship gatherings, the sacrament of Holy Communion is not to be celebrated. See [“The Use of the Means of Grace”](#) This document reminds us that Holy Communion takes place in the assembly (Principle 39). Even in times when a community cannot gather to share the sacrament, Jesus shows up, and we are still part of the body of Christ.

Consider how to honor the body of Christ in your virtual community. When possible, utilize technology that allows people to see one another. Find ways to incorporate others in leadership roles. Assign individuals to read Scripture or lead prayers from their location. Use chat features to communicate prayer requests. Assign someone to monitor the chat feed and gather these requests. Consider short, repetitive songs to allow the community to sing together remotely. Movement may still be part of a virtual gathering. Encourage people to stand to hear the Gospel or for the intercessions. Individuals may be encouraged to light a candle or have a glass of water nearby to remember our baptism.

When leading prayers or litanies with assembly responses in a virtual setting, the leader will want to speak the assembly parts aloud. Adding a slight pause before the response will help indicate that it is time to respond. “Hear us, O God.” (Slight pause.) “Your mercy is great.”

Realize that what you are doing is not a production and it will not be perfect. Gather around word and prayer and look to God whom we need more than ever.

Worship leaders are encouraged to find creative ways to build community and offer pastoral care in times where some or all people cannot gather together for worship. Some examples include:

- Host a virtual coffee hour for conversation with one another and with congregational leaders. Some digital platforms allow a larger group of participants to break up into smaller groups for conversation.
- Lead Bible studies, conversations and other classes, such as confirmation, using technology like Zoom or Google Hangouts.
- Host a regular conference call (using Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.) to check in.
- Share daily devotions via social media, email or text.
- Consider setting a common prayer time so folks know they are praying together even if they aren't gathered in person.
- Create a phone tree for checking in with those who are isolated and/or not connected online.

Conclusion

Especially in times of need, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is God's living bread come down from heaven for the life of the world. During these times, particularly with a communal health concern, the Sunday assembly of Christians is an important sign of resurrection hope in the midst of fear and trouble. In this assembly we pray for the needs of a suffering world and are sent to care for all our neighbors who are sick, hurt and hungry. As we are careful and prepare for worship either in the gathered assembly or by substituting a virtual gathering for a time, we are continually looking for ways that we can care for the "least of these." From Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's message to the church: "Respect the disease. Do not take unnecessary risks. Provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the neighbor. Make use of medical aid. Care for one another, especially the most vulnerable."

Further questions may be directed to the Worship team of the Office of the Presiding Bishop at 800-638-3522, ext. 2590, or worship@elca.org.

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