

# Creating online participatory worship services

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I felt called this past week to use my experience in ministry and research on Christianity and new technology to design a [\*free guide\*](#) to creating online, participatory worship services.

Many church leaders are conducting worship services online or planning to start meeting online. This task likely feels daunting to church leaders who never have done this before and especially to those who have little to no experience using technology.

The idea of worshipping online also is disappointing to many people, especially given the time of year it is. Christian communities have long-held traditions for Lent and Easter that are significant to community members.

As I've texted and talked with church leaders over the past few weeks, some have expressed they are unsure how to make online worship as meaningful as in-person worship. Several people explained their teams feel low on creativity.

The thing is, worshipping online *is* fundamentally different than worshipping in a church building. There are real things that need to be lamented by our communities. And it is hard to innovate in a pinch.

## The opportunities of online worship

At the same time, new media provides church leaders with numerous possibilities for the coming weeks. In the midst of paralyzing anxiety and overpowering stress, church leaders can offer congregants opportunities to

interact meaningfully with each other, nurture new relationships across generations, provide tangible ways to engage in spiritual disciplines and historic Christian practices, and offer concrete ideas for witnessing to God's love.

During this unprecedented and distressing time, online worship services can be sources of hope and encouragement. And mysteriously, the Spirit of God can use the weeks we spend online to help our communities grow closer together. Depending on how we design the services, we could help our congregations to have a profound impact on the communities we live in.

- What if your community saw your church as a source of strength and extravagant love during this difficult time?
- What if you used the coming weeks to form mentoring relationships between elders and youth in your congregation?
- What if the new worship services your team creates allow even more people in your church to contribute and to be a part of the church in meaningful ways?
- What if God used the coming weeks to reinvigorate people's practice of faith?

## **The church's opportunity during troubling times**

Throughout the Bible, we see again and again how God's people found themselves in troubling and scary circumstances; yet, God's faithfulness remained. Even in the midst of profound difficulty, God's love could be felt, and God's voice could be heard.

And sometimes, miraculously, the very thing that caused heartbreak initiated resurrection.

Church leaders can create online participatory worship experiences that help people to feel God's presence, pray together, read the Bible in new ways, learn from one another and experience joy together.

Churches have an incredible opportunity to use the coming weeks online to allow congregants to tell stories to each other, build relationships and encourage each other.

With online participatory services, you can encourage groups of congregants to respond to the sermon and the biblical text in concrete, meaningful ways right from their homes, both during the service and throughout the week.

Church online truly can inspire a fully-embodied and engaging experience for all congregants—children, youth, and adults.

## **Three paths of participatory worship**

There are three paths in the guide I designed.

The “Low Stress path” offers five bulletins for online worship services and a checklist your team can use to ensure your bulletin is ready to be shared with your congregants.

The “Create Your Own path” offers a sample bulletin template and a checklist for tailoring the bulletin to your congregation.

The third is “Grab and Go.” This path is for church leaders looking for imaginative ways to supplement their online worship plans and help congregants connect, participate in worship online and live out their faith in the coming weeks.

This guide is for churches with little to no experience going online for worship. You can use it if you are high tech and have livestreaming capabilities, too.

Thanks for all you do to invest in the lives of children, youth and adults.

If you're interested in seeing the guide I designed and getting some inspiration and help for the coming weeks, click [here](#).

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