



TIMELY RESOURCES FOR A TIMELESS ISSUE

Already before COVID-19, some churches were utilizing video and streaming technology for worship and Bible study. The pandemic forced many more congregations to make this pivot. In much of the country, in-person worship was prohibited for months. As lockdowns lift, congregational leaders are wrestling with two key questions:

- How can we encourage our members to return to in-person worship?
- How should we think about virtual worship post-pandemic?

That first is a timely, virus-related question. That second question is timeless, something churches may be asking until Jesus returns.

The *God's People Gather* program, produced by WELS Congregational Services, attempts to help congregations answer those questions.

RETURNING TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP

God's People Gather provides resources that help churches put together a congregation-specific plan that reaches out to the various types of members who have not yet returned:

- the member who, for legitimate or illegitimate reasons, believes gathering in large groups is still too risky
- the member who was not very active even before the pandemic and now uses COVID-19 as an excuse to stay away from worship
- the member who enjoys the convenience of online worship and plans to continue worship from home even post-pandemic

Surveys have shown that this last group is massive. It includes parents who think it is easier to keep children in line at home, Boomers who prefer watching worship while eating breakfast, young adults who fast-forward over everything to get to the sermon, etc.

Reaching these different groups will require different tactics and messaging. *God's People Gather* is intended to help congregations think this through.

VIRTUAL WORSHIP POST-COVID

During COVID-19, many churches have seen tremendous blessings come from an increased use of video ministry efforts.

- It provided enhanced worship and Bible study opportunities for those who were not able to attend in-person: homebound members, military members serving overseas, etc.
- It allowed us to enjoy sermons and music from countless congregations in our fellowship.
- Some congregations reported being able to reconnect with straying members. Other congregations reported increases in Bible study and small-group study participation when those went virtual.
- Still other congregations used virtual worship for outreach.

So, how will congregations use technology post-pandemic? In 2022, will your congregation offer a full Saturday night service, Sunday morning service, and a virtual service?

If some members worship virtually most of the time, so that you see them in-person just a few times a year, is that a "new norm" church leaders should accept? Or might there be unintended consequences to such a strategy? For those who prefer virtual worship mainly because of its ease, do we serve them spiritually by indulging that convenience-mentality?

What does Scripture and the collective wisdom of the Church say about this? What are the "best practices" for virtual worship in a post-pandemic world?

God's People Gather helps church leaders wrestle with these questions.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Virtual Worship Discussion

- **Panel discussion video.** The panel includes both parish pastors and synod leaders talking through various aspects of using technology in a post-pandemic setting.
- **White paper.** This document will complement the video, covering many of the same issues but using a different format. Congregations can decide which will better serve their needs or whether using both might be beneficial.
- **Discussion guides for each.**

Return-to-Worship Planning

- **God's People Gather blessings videos.** These are 60 to 90 second videos that can be shared with members in a variety of ways. They are meant to encourage in-person worship by sharing reasons that believers gather in-person: for worship, for the Lord's Supper, for community, and for service.
- **Elder encouragement plans.** Many members will need personal encouragement to return to in-person worship. This resource helps a congregation's elders come up with a plan that is appropriate for its setting.
- **God's People Gather Worship Celebration Plan.** Helps congregations, if they so desire, plan for a service that pulls out all the bells and whistles when the time is right—an enhanced "return-to-normal."
- **Kick-off event ideas.** Some congregations may desire to have an every-member weekend that includes celebratory activities beyond worship: food and fellowship, children's activities, etc.