



Elder Work Overview

God's People Gather (GPG) encourages Christians to return to in-person worship following the COVID-19 pandemic. No doubt, there will be some who do not return for a variety of reasons such as:

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

A congregation's elders will want to serve all of these members, using God's Word to comfort and encourage them. The number of members in the first group will likely decrease as more people are vaccinated and the pandemic recedes. Members in the second group are people the elders have likely worked with even before the pandemic. The difference now is that these members may have a different excuse for not being in church, namely, they claim they are worshiping virtually. Members in the third group are not despising God's Word but are missing out on the blessings of in-person worship. Elders will want to find ways to remind them of these blessings and encourage them to return.

So, who are the members who need the elders' attention? Who falls into these three categories? One way to find out is to hold a GPG celebration service. Following the service, find out which members have not attended in person worship in the past 12 months (including the GPG celebration service.) This will provide a list of members who need your attention.

Once you have identified those who need your attention, determine (based on your ministry situation—size of congregation, number of elders, etc.) how you will reach out to them. Ideally, an elder or pastor would visit each of them to discover what their thoughts are regarding in-

person worship and to encourage them to return. If this is not practicable, a phone call would be the next best option. Should you fail to be successful reaching them via phone, try sending an email, text, or social media message. The goal of all these will be to set up a time for a face-to-face visit so a meaningful dialogue can be had.

In order to assist elders in preparing for these visits, you may wish to use the Bible study included in the Elders Toolbox. You may also wish to use the Panel Discussion video and accompanying study guide or the white paper and its study guide in preparation for your visits. These resources will help ensure all of your elders and pastors are bringing a similar message about in person worship to your people. The Elder Visit Outline can also be used to prepare for visits.

For more information and training on how to reach out to those who have not returned to worship, you might consider using the *Welcome Home–Elder Training* materials from WELS Congregational Services available at <https://welscongregationservices.net/welcome-home-elder-training/>