



## **Round Table Discussion – Leader Guide**

*The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of virtual worship tools in many WELS congregations. The God's People Gather roundtable discussion is intended to help congregational leaders discuss how to approach virtual worship in their congregation. The video may be watched in its entirety before being discussed or, if preferred, sections of the video may be viewed and discussed.*

*Prior to viewing the video, ask each participant to jot down their answers to statement 1. After giving them time to do so, go around the room asking each person to share one of their answers. Continue to go around the room until there are no new answers.*

1. Identify at least 3 ways the use of virtual worship has impacted our congregation.

### **Pivoting to Virtual Worship (0:00-14:00)**

2. How has the pandemic impacted people's thinking about gathering for worship?
3. Of what feelings/attitudes among our members must we be aware when making decisions about how to gather together for worship?

4. Agree/Disagree: The way we worship will never be the same after having gone through COVID.
  
5. The pastors mentioned some ways their congregations were blessed as a result of being forced to worship virtually. Share some ways you believe our congregation has been blessed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
  
6. What may make liturgical worship, in particular, challenging in an online environment? What are some ways our congregation might help overcome this challenge?

*Liturgical worship is designed to be participatory. This can be challenging compared to a worship style that is primarily consumed.*

*Putting words on the screen for confession, responsive prayers, hymns, etc.*

7. Share some ways you can see God's timing in allowing the pandemic at this time.

*Technology allowed most congregations to provide virtual worship of some kind.*

### **The Importance of Horizontal Relationships (14:00-21:04)**

8. Having been forced to do so many activities online during the pandemic (worshiping, Bible study, shopping, visiting, school) affords us the opportunity to evaluate which activities work as well or better online and which things lose something by being done online. Discuss which activities work as well or better and which lose something. Why?
  
9. When you attend worship, do you think more about your vertical relationship with God or your horizontal relationship with your fellow worshipers? Do you believe being forced not to gather for a period of time will help us appreciate our horizontal worship relationships more? Discuss.

## Unintended Consequences (21:04-40:35)

10. Agree/Disagree: Virtual worship needs to be the exception rather than the norm.

11. Identify at least two situations in which a person can only worship virtually.

*A homebound elderly person. Military personnel stationed far from a church. Someone in the hospital. Etc.*

12. Discuss: When a family chooses to worship virtually on its own schedule rather than worshiping in-person at the times its congregation offers services, its children are indirectly being taught to prioritize other things over their Christian faith.

13. Professor Wendland mentioned three important "P's" when caring for people's souls. What did he mean by each?

Patience      *This is a trauma. People will react differently and for different reasons. We must be patient and encourage them.*

Preference    *In-person is the preferred way to worship. Other ways are exceptions.*

Providence    *Recognize the providential gifts God has given us by being able to reach souls in ways we couldn't before.*

14. Can you think of any unintended consequences of virtual worship that were not mentioned in the video?

15. Pastor Hein pointed out that some church activities work very well virtually, and others do not. As a group, identify as many of each as you can.

## **The Lord's Supper (40:35-43:36)**

16. How might the pandemic become a blessing when it comes to people's attitude toward the Lord's Supper?

*Not receiving it for a while may make members appreciate it more.*

*Pastors and church leaders might realize careful instruction in the blessings of the Lord's Supper more often is important.*

*Other?*

## **Final Thoughts (43:36-End)**

17. Pastor Hein mentions using the First Article gift of reason to think through how we handle virtual worship and how we provide content online. What did he mean by "use the First Article gift of reason?"

*In Martin Luther's explanation of the First Article he says, "I believe that God...gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my mind and all my abilities..." He gave us a mind so we would be able to think things through*

Whom will we task with thinking through and deciding how we handle virtual worship and how we provide content online?

What are some things they will want to consider?

*Whom are we trying to reach? (Homebound members? Visitors?)*

*How do the people we are trying to reach typically consume online content?*

18. As we make decisions going forward about in-person and virtual worship, how will we communicate the decisions we reach to our members?