

## **Resource Guide for churches wanting to provide a remote option for people to join in-person services**

(Updated May 21, 2020)

As areas begin to re-open and restrictions are slowly lifted, we know churches will be thinking and praying about the most appropriate ways to follow government guidelines and community expectations as they transition back to offering in-person activities. We know many churches are interested in using their conference call and video conferencing solutions to allow people to connect to their in-person services remotely. This guide will help churches think through options to make that happen.

For copyright and privacy reasons it is not recommended to record church services.

### **Church services**

There are many ways to offer a call-in option (over the phone and/or computer) for your services, ranging from the simple to the complex, depending on the importance placed on sound quality. The most complex part of adding a call-in option to an in-person service is the audio because you need to connect all components of audio in a service (readers, soloist, organ, testifiers, etc.) to the conference call line. If you use a sound system and optimizing sound quality is a priority, you may want to hire a sound technician who can advise the best way to achieve what you are trying to accomplish with the equipment you have. If you are looking for simpler or cheaper solutions, below is a breakdown of ways churches have been approaching this (sorted from simplest to most complex):

#### *Easiest and most basic option*

Churches looking for simplicity above all else will often simply use the smartphone of a member who is attending that service to connect to their conference call or video conferencing platform. The microphone on the phone is used to pick up the sound in the auditorium. If you don't use a sound system, you'll want the microphone to be as close as possible to the readers and testifiers when they are speaking. You'll want to test out how far the mic should be from those speaking, soloing, or playing music (or sound system) in order to optimize sound quality. For this option, people joining the services remotely will hear everything but won't be able to contribute with testimonies because the in-person congregation won't be able to hear them. If you use a video conferencing solution, you may still want someone to serve as a tech usher, although they don't have to be on site.

#### *Enabling those on the phone to give testimonies and making slight improvements to audio quality*

Some churches who wanted to enable those on the phone to give testimonies have purchased a Bluetooth conference speaker that is designed to pick up sound from a distance and amplify sound. This device can be connected, via Bluetooth, to a computer or smartphone in the church. This allows the microphone to be somewhat farther away from the readers and testifiers

(although the closer the better). If people on the phone want to give testimonies, an usher could hold a handheld mic up to the speaker to broadcast the sound in the edifice. If you don't use a sound system, the speaker on the bluetooth device might be sufficient if the group is small enough.

#### *Continuing to improve audio quality - computer vs. smartphone*

Many churches have reported that using a computer instead of a smartphone to capture the audio in the service will improve the sound quality. That computer will need to be in the auditorium. If you are using a video conferencing platform, there are options to improve the sound quality of both pre-recorded music (as long as you play it off that same computer) and live music. Look under the music section of our [Resource Guide for online services](#) for more information. Note that there may be copyright issues with using recorded music. You can view a document with more copyright information on this [page](#).

#### *Adding video*

Some churches that use video conferencing platforms have expressed an interest in also including a video component to the church service. Because of privacy concerns, we recommend only including video of the readers (with their permission) and not of the congregation (since it's harder to allow them to opt-in and out of using their image during the service). You could simply put a computer close to the readers so the camera can pick up both people. Many platforms will allow you to choose which computer in the conference will become the default video, so that the readers will remain the central images throughout the service. In Zoom, it's called "spotlight video" and can be designated by one of the hosts. You may want to have an additional computer in the church that can be used for audio since you will need to access that computer to either toggle to original audio or share computer sound when music is being played to optimize the sound quality. Look under the music section of our [Resource Guide for online services](#) for more information. The person that is operating that computer could also serve as the tech usher, or you could have someone off-site serve that role.

### **Sunday School**

Offering a remote option to an in-person Sunday School class is both helpful and embracing to students who might be unable to attend the regular Sunday School at a branch church. Perhaps they live a distance away, which makes getting to Sunday School very difficult. Maybe students are traveling but would still like to join their class at the designated time.

If you have students who need to join remotely, the easiest way to do this is to determine the best way for the student to connect (the solution could be different from student to student and from class to class). Some solutions might be as simple as calling the student and putting him or her on speakerphone. Another option might be to use a video conferencing option (this may work best for younger students). During the opening and closing exercises, the class can bring the phone or computer with them so the remote students can participate as much as possible. You'll want to consider ways to facilitate conversation between your in-person and online

students. While doing this, it is important to consider factors such as how the computer sound or phone sound may impact the other classes in your Sunday School.

If you have a student who is unable to attend during the normal time, you may want to consider offering remote Sunday School at another time. Offering a full remote Sunday School with multiple classes at a different time is also an option when your Sunday School embraces multiple remote students.

### **Reading Room**

Many Reading Rooms offer in-person discussion groups, Bible study, etc. If you want to offer a call-in option for this, it would be very similar to what you do for your church services. If you don't use a sound system for your Reading Room activities, you could simply use a phone or computer connected to a bluetooth conference speaker that could be passed around to pick up the audio of those speaking in the room and also amplify the sound of those speaking on the phone.