

# Online Worship and Ministry Guidelines

Many congregations share their worship services and other ministry activities online as a means of serving members who are unable to attend in person due to illness, infirmity, travel etc., and as outreach to the wider community. This may take the form of livestreaming, pre-recorded video content, web conferencing platforms (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams), or podcasting.

Using modern technology to extend the reach of the gospel is a great blessing, but there are some factors to consider when setting up online worship and ministry. This document provides an overview of the main factors congregations and ministry leaders should consider.

## *Professional standards*

As with in-person activities, it is important to abide by the LCA Professional Standards to protect vulnerable people and treat each other with kindness and respect.

- Content should be professional and respectful to all members of society.
- Images/identification should be shared only after consent is sought. Some people may not wish to have their images/identity shared online. This may particularly affect people who have restraining orders against partners, as well as vulnerable adults and children. Provide a way for those with privacy concerns to avoid being filmed without their consent. This could be handled by only filming the altar and front of the church and only filming the congregation from behind.
- Notify worshippers that the service is being filmed. This can be done through a notice in the bulletin, an announcement at the start of the service, or offering an alternative for those who do not wish to be filmed, such as receiving Holy Communion in a front pew which is out of the camera view, or avoiding sitting in the front rows, or whatever is practical in each context.
- Avoid giving people's full names when introducing them, unless they have a formal role (e.g., 'I'd like to thank Pastor Joe Blow for preaching today,' 'Mary will read the psalm for today.')
- Families with children should have the option of protecting their children's images/identity from being shared online. Children should not be shown onscreen or called by name without the consent of a parent or guardian. Even with consent, sharing full names or other identifying information about young people should be avoided.
- Maintain the privacy of worshippers/activity participants by not identifying people by name when offering prayers for specific needs (for example, identifying people who are ill, in hospital, bereaved). Doing so in an online environment may make those individuals vulnerable to unwanted activity, such as scam callers preying on the bereaved or thieves identifying which houses may be empty. It may be better to put these specific petitions in the bulletin or pray them after livestreaming has finished.
- Congregations wishing to share with their local community only are encouraged to make use of the privacy settings for Facebook or other social media/video conferencing platforms (members only, turn off comments).

## Community and cultural sensitivities

Congregations are usually focused on their local community and its needs. When broadening ministry online, there are a few factors to consider:

- Ensure that all parts of the service/activity are clearly audible for those who may struggle with hearing impairments, and consider providing subtitling, especially for any responsive prayers or liturgy, and for hymn/song lyrics. Refer to Technical Requirements below.
- Consider adding some touches into the service which help viewers feel included, such as specifically welcoming anyone watching online at the start of the service, praying for them during the Prayers of the Church, and ensuring that anyone leading the service knows where to look to make occasional eye contact with the camera.
- If the intention is to connect with people outside of the local community, congregations may wish to minimise reliance on highly localised sayings, clichés or references to local events which may not be understood by someone connecting online. Too many 'in-jokes' can be alienating.
- As with any worship service or ministry activity, be diligent in ensuring that no racist, sexist or other offensive material is included.

## Copyright

Congregations and ministry leaders must ensure that they are abiding by copyright requirements when providing online worship and activities. Detailed advice on copyright for congregations is available on the Worship Planning Page: <https://www.lca.org.au/worship/wpp/copyright/>.

Congregations should particularly ensure that:

- Any music under copyright is being used with permission of the author or is covered by a livestreaming licence from CCLI or One Licence.
- Onscreen presentations used in services (eg Powerpoints) should include the livestreaming licence number(s) and acknowledgement details on any music used in the service.
- When sharing services on YouTube and Facebook, ensure that your licensing details are included in the video or in the 'Show More' under the clip, to minimise the possibility of having the video material taken down for copyright infringement.
- Video clips and music videos are only used with the appropriate permissions (refer to the Copyright for Music Videos and Tracks information sheet).

**Note: copyright licences for worship services do not necessarily carry over to other ministry activities. If you are using music or videos in online ministry activities outside of worship, please check your licence conditions carefully.**



## Technical requirements

Online ministry doesn't have to be expensive or very difficult, but there are some aspects which need to be considered:

- Camera/s – ensure that the camera or cameras used are good quality and set up on a tripod or fixed in a stable position so there is no shaking. One fixed camera trained on the altar and pulpit area may be sufficient in a smaller church; in a larger building, you may need to invest in a more complex set up which allows for zooming in and out and adjusting camera angles.
- Lighting - ensure that the area being filmed is well lit so that those speaking can be easily seen.
- Sound quality – ensure all speakers have microphones, either headset, handheld or at the lectern/pulpit.
- Livestreaming technology - you may need a mixing desk which combines the video and sound feed, and a laptop with internet access to facilitate the livestreaming. This can be quite complex to set up, and you may need to ask for professional assistance.

## Budgetary and personnel concerns

When considering moving into online worship and ministry, it is important to exercise good judgement in the use of your resources to produce a livestream or podcast. Consider if your streaming is sustainable financially and sustainable for your personnel (especially if it relies on volunteers).

If a congregation is likely to struggle to provide livestreaming, it may be more helpful to direct those unable to attend worship to another congregation's online worship. There is a listing of all congregations with online worship resources available at [Online Worship \(lca.org.au\)](https://www.lca.org.au/online-worship).

## Related policies and procedures

**SC 12\_ ONLINE MINISTRY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

