How to stream your worship service — A starter guide
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If you’ve ever wondered how to stream your congregation’s worship or events online, this guide is for you. It’s not comprehensive, and the information contained here may change at any time because the software and hardware are always evolving. But the guide explains how to begin streaming for very little money and with equipment you already own or might borrow.

Following are some suggestions and considerations. We will recommend several programs and services, but we do not endorse any product or receive compensation from any of the providers mentioned.

1. Focus this process on people rather than technology
You may think that streaming your worship service is primarily about technology. Consider instead that it’s about connecting people through technology. Starting with people as your priority will foster a more harmonious process and a better outcome. Simple and low-tech solutions might be best.

Streaming doesn’t require a lot of money; it can be done by a few people and need not detract from the worship experience. People’s worship experience and desire for privacy are important. Giving them advance notice of the recording and allowing them to opt out of participating will help build trust and goodwill.

2. Identify your audience
Do you want to stream your service for members, or is it also open to the public? If the stream will be public, you will need to address privacy issues for anyone on camera and copyright issues pertaining to music and other creative works. If the stream is for members only, copyright and privacy issues are simpler. If you stream for a public audience, see number 5 for guidance on copyright and photographic permission.

3. Streaming options
There are many programs and apps that enable you to stream a live event. Here are a few options, starting with the most basic:

   a. Smartphone
      If you own a smartphone, you can download an app (Skype and Zoom are among the most popular) that lets you create a meeting and email members a link that directs them to the smartphone’s video feed. You can also use a service like Facebook Live.
b. App-driven stream
There are a myriad of apps that allow you to stream. Two of the simplest are
Switcher Studio and ManyCam. Both allow you to create a multiple-camera stream
using mobile devices (such as smartphones or tablets). You can use the same devices
to both serve as cameras and the switcher. Switcher Studio (switcherstudio.com)
works only with Apple devices and requires an annual subscription fee (starting
around $400/year). ManyCam (manycam.com) works Apple and Android mobile
devices, also with PC or Mac computers. It allows you to use smartphones, tablets,
webcams and conventional video cameras all together. It is free if you are using one
mobile device. If you want to add additional mobile devices, you will need to buy an
upgrade of the app for $2.99. ManyCam also can be controlled with a PC or Mac. If
you use the computer version, it requires an annual subscription (starting around
$120/year for businesses).

c. Stream hardware
Among the many hardware streaming products and systems are Elgato HD60 S
capture card (costs around $180 from Amazon, Best Buy and Target) and Sling
Stream (mySlingStudio.com). Hardware streaming requires conventional video
cameras and an operator for each.

4. Streaming platforms
Facebook Live and YouTube Live are two popular platforms for streaming video online free of
charge. Any of the aforementioned recording options are compatible with these platforms. You
can make the stream viewable by anyone or limit the viewers only to those with a direct link.

5. Copyright and photographic permission
If you stream music, you will need to obtain clearance to stream any copyrighted music being
used in worship. Christian Copyright Licensing International (ccli.com) and One License
(onelicense.net) both offer licenses for streaming worship music, with rates based on average
attendance. Once License is currently offering gratis license options for new users through April
15. Subscriptions to sundaysandseasons.com and to the Augsburg Fortress liturgies licenses
include permission for livestreaming Augsburg Fortress and ELCA liturgical text and music
content which is copyrighted or administered by Augsburg Fortress. Augsburg Fortress is
temporarily expanding permission for all ELCA and ELCIC congregations and worshiping
communities to include Augsburg Fortress administered liturgical text and liturgical music
copyrights in a livestream or podcast. More details area available at
www.augsburgfortress.org/temporary-licensing.

If you don’t want to pay for a license, you can silence the audio signal during any musical
portions (if you’re streaming live, you should avoid stopping and restarting the stream). You
could also prerecord the service and then edit out the music, but watching the service in the
moment might be important to viewers.
You must also be certain that people know you’re streaming an event and agree to be seen on camera. Get people’s consent before they’re recorded. Instead of asking each attendee to sign a consent form, you might post a notification at each entry to the worship space, leave notification cards at the entrances and in the pews and announce during the service where people can sit to avoid being on camera.

For most congregations, we recommend starting small, keeping the process as simple and inexpensive as possible and not spending a lot of money right off the bat. Maybe start by recording a stream of the sermon with a smartphone. If you can borrow several mobile devices, try ManyCam. Two or three mobile devices placed around your worship space might be all you need.

Think of your stream less as a production than as a conversation. Who is watching, and who might you invite to watch? What works for them? Consider how can you include your audience, incorporating their online comments or their own video. Have fun with this! It may open up new ways of engaging as a community.

Please send us your feedback, recommendations and experiences.

Go in peace, stream your worship!

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