

Considerations for Hybrid Worship Presbyterian Association of Musicians



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For those who plan and lead corporate worship, this next season of congregational life will offer new opportunities to faithfully discern what worship looks like in each of our particular contexts. As COVID-19 case rates decline and vaccination rates increase, congregations may offer increased opportunities for worship in their church buildings, while also maintaining opportunities for worship via online modes of gathering. For many communities, this is a new experience - yet another opportunity to “pivot” in the midst of a year of “pivoting.” How do we craft worship services that encourage full participation from the gathered assembly, when the worshiping assembly is partially gathered in the same space and at the same time and partially gathered at other times and/or in other spaces? With whom are we worshipping in these “hybrid” forms of worship, and what language will help to encourage us in faithful worship of God?

Answers to these questions will vary from context to context, particularly as the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic play out differently in communities across the country. As we encounter the particular opportunities and challenges of our own worshiping communities, we offer below a set of guiding principles from the PC(USA) *Directory for Worship* that are especially valuable for the season we find ourselves in. Similarly, we’ve compiled a set of three language commitments that will help communities to discern how best to *talk about* corporate worship in its many forms.

Grounding principles from the PC(USA) *Directory for Worship*:

- “Whenever and wherever we gather in Jesus’ name, we join the praise and prayer of the people of God in every time and place.” (W-1.0304)
 - When we gather for worship, we *always* gather with God’s people across time and space. Although the presence of technology and the realities of pandemic life have created unique conditions for corporate worship across contexts, we remember that the great cloud of witnesses is present among us *whenever* we worship.
- “Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith.” (W-1.0106)
 - Although our communities may worship in ways that look and feel different from our modes of gathering in the past, we remember that the presence of Word and Sacrament continues to guide and ground our worship.

- “The gifts of the Spirit are for building up the Church. Every action in worship is to glorify God and contribute to the good of the people.” (W-2.0202)
 - Each action in worship matters - each gesture, each word of instruction, each act of invitation. In the midst of communal change, details related to space, context, and invitation are especially important in welcoming worshipers well.
- “Personal life and public worship are deeply connected. Christian life springs from Christian worship, where we find our identity as believers and discover our calling as disciples. Christian life flows back into worship as we present to God the prayers of our hearts and the offering of our lives.” (W-5.0101)
 - As members of our worshiping community continue to participate in corporate worship from diverse spaces, we remember that we always bring the realities of our daily lives with us when we worship. God meets us wherever we are, gathering us up as God’s covenant people.

Encourage the use of language that acknowledges and emphasizes:

- the Spirit’s presence in worship, across time and space
 - For instance: “We welcome you to worship this day, trusting that the Spirit is present within and among us.”
- the embodied presence of the people of God, regardless of their location
 - For instance, “We welcome you to worship this day, wherever and whenever you may be worshipping,” rather than, “We welcome you to worship this morning, whether you are here in person or watching virtually.”
- the active participation of the gathered assembly
 - For instance: “We invite you to participate fully in the worship of God,” rather than, “Follow along this morning as we sing/pray/worship.”

Consider practical perspectives of those who worship through other media

- gathering and sending need not be limited to the on/off of a screen.
 - Allow streaming and recording to capture arrival and departure of the congregation, including audio feeds of people greeting each other.
- visual perspective is important for viewing
 - Camera angles, either fixed or on computers, should reflect realistic line-of-sight as well as comfortable personal space.
 - Focal attention during worship typically shifts. Allow for opportunities to show important liturgical symbols and interesting features of the worship space.
- considerations should be made for capturing music and spoken word
 - Dynamic range is greatly reduced in recordings.
 - Earphones and speakers typically do not convey the original acoustical environment, creating a drier listening palate.
 - Without acoustical resonance, tempo or speed often seems slower than intended.
 - Silence may indicate a technical failure and lead to unnecessary anxiety for those listening.