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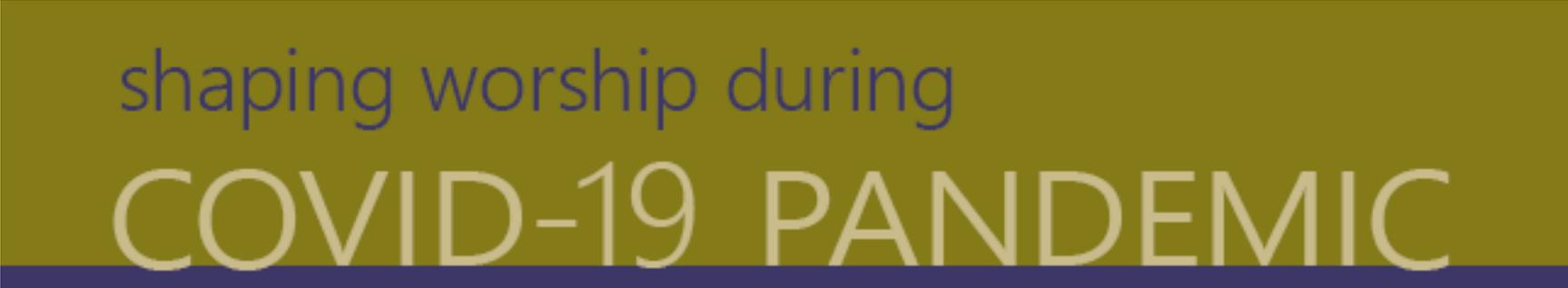
# Shaping Worship During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Maintaining Community via Virtual Worship at St. Monica Catholic Community, Santa Monica, California

St. Monica Catholic Community aims to welcome and engage every member toward deeper participation in worship and parish life. In this edited conversation, Dale Sieverding explains how to keep members of a church community feeling connected even though they cannot commune together.

**By:** [Dale Sieverding](#), [Joan Huyser-Honig](#)

**Tags:** [communion](#), [coronavirus](#), [covid-19](#), [covid-19 series](#), [technology](#), [worship planning](#)

**Conversation** posted on April 14, 2020



shaping worship during  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Dale Sieverding**: director of worship (overseeing liturgy and music) at [St. Monica Catholic Community](#)

**Current city:** Santa Monica, California

**Denominational context:** Roman Catholic

**Worship roles:** Sieverding sees his actual job as director of worship, hospitality, and engagement. He is passionate about [mentoring worship leaders in every ministry](#), not just in liturgy and music.

**COVID-19 situation:** When California's stay-at-home order came in mid-March, we had just three days to take our entire church experience online. At first we thought it would be for just two weeks. Then we realized it would last through Holy Week and Easter and perhaps many weeks beyond. We had to make some tough decisions about who and what would need to be cut back. Our pastor and four priests are quarantined in the rectory, out of an abundance of caution. I've been working from home since before then because I was ill and didn't want to pass on anything. Two church administrators still go in to work, and three priests and a camera operator go into the sanctuary for livestreaming.

Our congregation of 7,000 households is highly educated and generally tech savvy, with good technology access. We are grateful to have been livestreaming services since 2011, so we have the equipment and experience with technical details.

**What's working well—or not:** We are livestreaming daily Mass, two Sunday Masses, and other events, such as a virtual Stations of the Cross. Many other churches are participating in our livestream—so many that our server crashed on the fourth Sunday of Lent. Our IT director was able to increase capacity, so it was fine for later services.

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***—Dale Sieverding***

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Whole lives are being upended, so we are doing all we can through good liturgy and livestreaming to keep our community together. To maximize participation from our dozens of liturgical ministers [lay leaders], we ask them to pre-record elements from home. They proclaim intercessions, proclaim Old Testament and New Testament lections, or lead a song. In ordinary circumstances, hospitality ministers welcome people about five to seven minutes before mass begins. Now we have them record their messages of welcome, such as letting people know they're welcome, we're glad they're listening, and we pray that they are OK.

The liturgical and hospitality ministers send their video files to Dropbox, and we splice it in so the livestreamed Mass feels like a seamless experience for viewers. We broadcast live on Livestream and Facebook, and now our hospitality ministers run the chat/comment room that runs alongside the video. Besides welcoming people, they help solve problems when people can't see or hear the video.

We also allow time in the livestream so the people at home can speak their intercessions and pray for spiritual communion. For Holy Thursday, the Vatican issued a specific worldwide directive that there would be no foot washing in church. So we pre-recorded three or four families washing each other's feet at home.

**Most helpful worship resources:** We are calling upon the best resources from our experience, especially [OCP](#) (Oregon Catholic Press) and [GIA Publications](#).

Seeing familiar faces helps bring peace, calm, and comfort. People want to see their priest as well as others. For our first virtual Mass, our high school students recorded opening and closing songs in their homes. Our music director mixed it, and that was our music. We plan to do more with virtual choirs. For video editing, we can use Final Cut Pro X [Apple only], Adobe After Effects, Adobe Motion Graphics Software, and Adobe Premiere Elements. [Adobe Premiere Rush works on mobile devices.]

The historic concept of spiritual communion is another helpful resource. In the Middle Ages, people did not receive the Eucharist widely. Saints Thomas Aquinas and Alphonsus Liguori developed and refined the concept of spiritual communion for times when you're unable to receive the sacrament from a priest. Instead you can join yourself to Christ in prayer while viewing the consecrated host. Here's our version of this prayer for spiritual communion:

*My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.*

**Needs, questions, or insights to share:** California's shelter-in-place order allows up to ten people to gather for funerals or worship. However, we believe it's important to model utmost safety, so we livestream with four or fewer people. When pre-recorded elements appear on a screen near the altar, it's obvious that people uploaded from their homes. We continue focusing on providing our community with a powerful, profound, meaningful experience of the liturgy.

You can use your email signature block to get the word out about current worship services. Mine now includes these details after my contact information:

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/StMonicaCC725](http://www.facebook.com/StMonicaCC725)

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/StMonica90403](http://www.instagram.com/StMonica90403)

**Livestream:** [www.livestream.com/StMonica90403](http://www.livestream.com/StMonica90403)

We are #StillStMonica—our Masses and events are available live online:

Daily Mass: 12:10 p.m.

Sunday Masses: 9:30 a.m. & 5:30 p.m.

Stations of the Cross: Fridays, 7:30 p.m.

For churches with less technology, priests can develop a phone script and ask people to call congregants using the script. It could include instructions like "For Holy Thursday, this is what we recommend. . . . and here's how you can get help with groceries. . . ." Some people won't pick up their mail for fear of being infected. But they want contact, which is why phoning is so effective.

## LEARN MORE

Watch this [livestreamed mass at St. Monica](#). Notice how the three priests involve each other and online worshipers in the Lord's Prayer, passing the peace, and spiritual communion (40:48). Enjoy the virtual high

school choir (45:30). The service ends with a woman leading Matt Maher's Lenten song "[40 Days](#)" (51:36).  
Read [reviews of free and paid video editing software](#).

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Dale Sieverding

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## **COVID-19 and Worship: Resources for Churches Adapting to Social Isolation**

As containment of COVID-19 forces your worshipping community to implement shelter-in-place worship and practice social isolation, we offer these resources to help you plan and cope in ways that encourage and support your community. These resources were initially created from events and in response to different situations and can be adapted for worship that encourages prayer and Christian community during this time of social distancing necessary to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

[Read more »](#)

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