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COVID-19 Lockdown: Creating Live-streamed Worship in 3 Days

MARCH 9, 2020 BY **UMJEREMY** — 21 COMMENTS

I pastor a church under COVID-19 restrictions. This is how we worshipped online with only 3 days prep.



When restrictions lead to lockdowns...

Last week, I wrote “I pastor a church near a COVID-19 outbreak. Here’s what **churches can do**” after a meeting with the Public Health department of Seattle’s

region. I detailed several ways how local churches can adapt their worship to slow or stop the spread of the virus, and it has been shared widely, even by public health administrators and denominational leaders! Wow!

While such recommendations work for a majority of churches, they are not sufficient when a COVID-19 flareup leads to stronger recommendations for public gatherings. Such is what happened in my local church.

The day after publishing that article, the **county health department, city government, and our denominational authorities** agreed: **churches of more than 50 people in attendance should not gather until the COVID-19 flare up is contained and resolved**. That means 14 days of containment, so we are not recommend to worship in person for 3 weeks.

I know! Crazy times, but that's the proper answer when public health authorities ask for church's help in containing a fast-moving virus like this. Indeed, in South Korea, the biggest outbreak came from **a single woman at a megachurch**. We don't want to be "that church" in Seattle, and are happy to be a good community partner at this time.

...Lockdowns lead to Live-streaming

Even out of concern for physical health, churches want to care for the spiritual health and connectedness of our congregations. Our church **opted to provide online worship**, a livestream of a worship service with volunteers and staff to our folks who were at home. We used Youtube, but Facebook Live or Vimeo Live are also great options.

It was *staggering* how many considerations and adaptations needed to happen to turn in-person Christian worship into an online experience. The comments and flood of emails we got from grateful church members made the effort worth it, and you can learn from our mistakes and efforts.

The following is how we adapted, created, and published livestreamed worship in only 3 days. While we are a church with some resources already, adaptations of this can be done rapidly for churches willing to invest a little money (or have donors willing to make it happen) and volunteers able to jump in quickly.



Livestream General Considerations

The staff and volunteers at my local church should be commended for rapid deployment of a streaming solution that had great video, audio, and projection. Here's how we did it (and most of the credit goes to them, not me).

- **Video:** In lieu of buying a video camera without time to do proper analysis, we opted to use an **iPhone** and Macbook setup which provides great video and mobility. Often someone on staff or a volunteer has one a church can use.
- **Audio:** Almost every church has a built-in sound system already, so hopefully that sound system has an output, even for headphones or other monitors. What that means is that churches can use their current audio setup, and run a cable out to the same device that is capturing the video. In our case, we had to purchase a 50 foot cable to run from the sound booth in the back of the sanctuary to the front, but your setup may be easier.
- **Projection:** We didn't know or have an idea of how to do multiple streams or connect a powerpoint projection to a livestream. Our "hack" was to wheel in a flat screen TV into the worship space (see the photo above) which we then used for projection like usual. You may not have a mobile solution like we did, so you'll need to be creative as to how to project lyrics, or simply post the bulletin in the comments of the livestream.

Tech setup

Here's the tech we had or bought quickly to make the solution work. Hopefully all things you can get within 24-48 hours, depending on your location.

- Camera & Livestreaming device: iPhone & Macbook (they work together well, but other solutions might work too. Check with the apps)
- Apps: Open Broadcasting Software (**OBS for Mac**) and the **iOS app OBS Camera** (\$16)
- Audio hardware: Mixer and cable from soundboard to mixer (usually 1/4 inch cable, think like a guitar cable). The cheapest mixer recommended is the Focusrite Scarlett, \$160 (**Amazon link**)
- Video hardware: Tripod and iPhone clip (many on Amazon, **this one is \$8**)
- Projection: Flatscreen TV, computer cable, and laptop for slide projection using Google Slides (free online with Google Apps for churches)

The biggest barrier: Copyright Considerations for Music

These are tricky. If you don't get this right, your stream can be blocked or unpublished (while it is streaming!), and a local church can be sued for violations of copyright.

Here's the misunderstanding: Even if a hymn is in a denominational resource like a hymnal, **the hymn is only authorized for a church's local singing, not for live streaming**. Here's what we did as a congregation that usually sings out of hymnals.

1. **Check the copyright holder for the hymn you want to use.** On the page of a hymn in your hymnal, check the copyright holder, or check the "Copyright and permissions" index in the front or back. If none, check with your denominational publisher. If it is public domain, you are good to go. But if there is a copyright notice, it will say who owns it and you have to track it down. You can also check **Hymnary.org** for copyright holders.
2. **Get a license for that copyrighted material.** For example, say a hymn is copyrighted by GIA publications, you would need a license for it. Many of them are bundled with one of the top three licenses: **CCLI**, **CCS**, or **OneLicense**, which all are varied costs and can add up quickly.

3. **Stick to the licensed version.** Some hymns have different tunes, and some special music use different arrangements that should be honored. If you are unsure, ask your denominational experts or the publisher directly.
4. **Report the usage to the copyright holder (or bundled service).** You have to follow whatever stipulations any given license or any given permission statement requires, which can mean a slide at the end with acknowledgements or reporting back to a bundler what hymns you used that Sunday.

The key thing is ANYTHING copyrighted MUST be covered by either a license covering that content OR by pre-obtained written permission by ALL copyright holders. And you have to document EVERY SINGLE COPYRIGHTED THING you livestream.

All the above means, **you HAVE to plan ahead and obtain permissions, copyright, and plan well in advance** so you can get what you need to stream legally. This is the biggest barrier to rapid deployment, but we turned ours around in 3 days after some adaptation and substitutions, and you can too.

Unforeseen Copyright: Liturgy

Liturgy: It seems strange, but **liturgy is copyrighted**. Someone wrote it for your hymnal or online, and that means that someone (or the copyright holder) should be acknowledged or compensated for their work if it is streamed online. Again, a hymnal resource for local churches is fine for local use, but once you broadcast, it gets iffy.

The best answer is to **write your own liturgy**. Liturgy is the work of the people, and writing your own liturgy reflects your context and experience. Do this!

But for many denominations, liturgy is deep and ancient and should connect us with those who went before. That's why we use the liturgies in hymnals and denominational resources: to connect us to one another using similar materials across time and space. But here's the thing: even denominational resources may be copyrighted—check with your denominational authorities with this question. Fun note: **the entire Book of Common Prayer from 1979 is free to use**. Good work, team!

For United Methodists, **the UMC rituals and liturgies are copyrighted**. And here's the "Ask The UMC" response to these questions:

You will need to obtain written permission from United Methodist Publishing House to stream such materials legally. Remember, too, that UMPH can ONLY give permissions for things it owns. You would need to contact individual copyright holders for all other items in both resources. Contact UM Publishing for questions: permissions@umpublishing.org

Finally, if you contract with worship liturgy providers, check with them on livestreaming. We subscribe to **enfleshed** (and you should too!) for our calls to worship and other liturgy needs, so if you likewise get copyrighted content from liturgical sources, you need to check with the publisher if they are okay with their content being streamed beyond the local church.

Streaming Final Notes

~~**Remember Streaming is not to be saved or viewable later.** Streaming only covers live broadcast, not archived videos. So you'll need to delete or unpublish the livestream as soon as it is done. Congregants will complain, but remind them that **Livestream is a substitute for in-person worship**, so they should carve out the same time slot as the gathered group.~~

- **Update:** Per the helpful comments from David, it appears that all three big copyright players all allow videos to be saved. However, you must maintain an active copyright license, and if you cancel the license, you have to remove the videos because you are no longer covered.

You can see how the legal ramifications might be prohibitive to your local church streaming its entire service. **This is why many churches only stream the pastor's sermon:** you would assume she isn't copying the sermon from somewhere else! But without the rest of the worship experience, it doesn't feel like worship. A tricky conundrum that is worth the effort for the spiritual support it provides.

Closing: A Crisis and an Opportunity

As they say in leadership circles, never waste a crisis. A containment crisis like this is a great time for churches to get up-to-date on a few things:

1. **Offering livestreaming every week or once a month** can reach out to the community in new ways. Doing the extra work each week or once a month can have long-term connection benefits to your congregants or to new people.
2. **Offer online giving** to allow people to give securely and can set up monthly gifts so that the church has a revenue stream for missions and ministry even without physical gatherings. And this works going forward too when the ban is lifted!
3. **Connecting with each other.** Our congregational care team jumped in and called everyone in the vulnerable people groups, catching up with folks who hadn't been called in a while and who valued the connection. Anyone of any age can call, so this is a great way to get seniors and homebound members in on the mission.

Your Turn

Thoughts?

Thanks for reading, commenting, and sharing on social media.

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Filed Under: **worship.hack**

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Rev. Jeremy Smith is a United Methodist clergyman who blogs about faith, technology, internet theory, and geeky topics. [Click here to learn more.](#)



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Comments

Eric Folkerth says

March 9, 2020 at 1:35 pm

If a church is able to get a good soundfeed of their existing sound board, you take that feed into an iPhone using iRig2.

It's about \$150 bucks...and while designed for a guitar/instrument feed...you can go out from the soundboard, and straight into to the iPhone with your pre-mixed audio feed.

It can give you a really nice quality sound and decent picture for literally almost no \$\$\$

Reply

David T says

March 15, 2020 at 5:46 pm

Eric – I'd like to be able to recommend a "sound board to phone" interface to churches here in the Desert Southwest, but I'm confused about your iRig2 recommendation. According to the IK Multimedia website, where all of their interfaces are linked (see link below), the iRig 2 is only \$39.99. There's an "HD" version that's \$99.99, and some iRig I/O devices starting at \$149.99. I think you're referring to the "iRig 2" but the good news is that it's only \$39.99.

<https://www.ikmultimedia.com/products/index.php?R=INIT&FV=product-type-menu-interfaces&CV=Product&PSEL=Interfaces>

Reply

Emily A says

March 9, 2020 at 2:23 pm

I work at a church that livestreams and then archives videos of services, and I want to add a note about obtaining copyright permissions. There are different aspects that licenses cover for streaming audio of music, streaming written lyrics, and posting recorded worship videos. Make sure you get the right license or licenses for what you plan to do. Or if you are contacting individual copyright holders, I expect that it would help to be clear in your request for permission about which combination you are planning.

There is also a difference between playing prerecorded music and playing live music. Facebook and YouTube especially have algorithms to detect music recordings in your livestream, and that is most often when you could get shut down, because those sites don't know that you have a license/permission to play the recording.

Reply



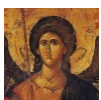
Jonathan Hanson says

March 28, 2020 at 3:57 pm

We got shut down last week for this very thing. I used some prerecorded videos for the worship section of the live stream and even though we are covered by our Livestream license, we were dropped. Do you happen to have a solution if we don't have the option of recording our worship team live?

Is there a way to use prerecorded worship video for live streaming without getting stopped by algorithms?

Reply



Michael says

March 9, 2020 at 5:07 pm

I must say that I really appreciate how our church both streams the service live and retains the stream for viewing later. "Time-shifting", if you will. Outbreaks

notwithstanding, the normal reason I'm watching the worship video is when I'm traveling, so often the "play back later" is a great benefit when in distant time zones.

While I'm no expert, I wouldn't be surprised if there are indeed different types of licenses needed.

Also, for those streaming on YouTube — a lot of TVs now offer "apps" now that can play recorded and live YouTube streams. For livestreams, they seem to now overlay the chat (if enabled) on the right side of the TV screen, which can be nice for people to greet each other, etc.

Reply



David T says

March 10, 2020 at 11:15 am

I'm pretty sure that the advice under "Streaming is a live experience, not a video to view later" doesn't agree with the provisions of the streaming licensing from CCS, CCLI, and One License, all of which allow for "on demand" access to the worship services after the fact. Quoting CCS, "These webcasts can be live or on-demand." Quoting CCLI, "...you may...retransmit Songs performed in your church services in audio and/or video form." I also just spoke with One License and they allow up to 3x the views/downloads (even after the fact) of the licensing category you're in. While it's good to err on the side of caution when it comes to copyright, licensing, & permissions, as long as a church has obtained the appropriate streaming licensing and permissions for the content of their services, in most cases, it can indeed be legally viewed later and the church doesn't need to "delete or unpublish the livestream as soon as it is done." I'm a choir director, and have not only helped local churches with licensing, but I also have experience being the licensing/copyright/permissions person for Annual Conference live streaming.

Reply

Nancy Bass says

March 14, 2020 at 9:05 am

Go to One License website. They have granted a temporary 'gratis' license for COVID-19 I believe until April 15? Just check the site

Reply



Jonathan Hanson says

March 28, 2020 at 3:58 pm

We got shut down last week for this very thing. I used some prerecorded videos for the worship section of the live stream and even though we are covered by our Livestream license, we were dropped. Do you happen to have a solution if we don't have the option of recording our worship team live?

Is there a way to use prerecorded worship video for live streaming without getting stopped by algorithms?

Reply

Shirley DeLarme says

March 11, 2020 at 10:35 am

Don't forget to have permission to photo / publish people / performers faces and names

Reply



Christopher G-R says

March 11, 2020 at 11:22 am

I am wondering in what ways feedback from the "congregation" can be facilitated. Things like prayer requests, talks with children or even conversational messages. It's

these organic pieces of worship that makes each service unique even when the liturgy is fairly routine. You said you got lots of comments...what were they like?

Reply

Larry Glass says

March 11, 2020 at 7:51 pm

Set up live streaming to FB and have FB group as a private group, e.g. not viewable by subscribers denied access

Reply

Will says

March 12, 2020 at 12:53 am

Live streaming really helps me, when I am not well enough to attend church. That being said, I am concerned by Italy, for example, apparently banning religious assembly, which strikes me as a huge human rights violation. And also one cannot take communion unless one either attends a church, or a minister attends to the parishioner.

I also don't think its legal under US law for churches to be forcibly closed. And I don't think a parish should close its doors on its people. However, having more services for smaller groups and making increased use of deacons to visit the elderly and deliver communion seems a good idea (and also potentially a good way to popularize midweek services; John Wesley felt Methodists should be in church on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday as well as Sunday; his Sunday Service Book (a recension of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer tailored to the needs of Americans in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, when in a state of confusion both the Methodist Episcopal and Protestant Episcopal churches came into being) prescribed the Litany (and fasts) for Wednesdays and Fridays, and also featured Mattins and Evensong following the usual Anglican template, with minor variations, in addition to the Holy Communion service.

I wish every Methodist parish in the US had a litany and morning or evening prayer on Wednesday and Friday, evening prayer (Evensong, Vespers or Compline, or a combination vigil service with communion) on Saturday night, and choral Mattins followed by Communion on Sunday. But I would settle for an end to praise and worship music in favor of the beautiful hymns one finds in the actual hymnal (the 1965 Methodist Episcopal hymnal is particularly nice; Cokesbury also sells the ever popular Lutheran Hymnal of 1941, and I have heard of some Methodist parishes using it, as its pretty much the only widely available traditional language hymnal still in print).

Reply

Cindy says

March 12, 2020 at 8:59 pm

If using an iPhone to livestream via Facebook, is relying on the internal mic a horrible idea? Or just connecting a small microphone to it? Do you have to patch through the sound system? We don't have a sound board in the traditional sense.

Reply



David T says

March 13, 2020 at 7:37 am

Using the internal mic works well if you can position the phone close enough to the "action" to capture good-quality sound. Typically, that means up in the first pew/row (which United Methodists tend to avoid, anyway!). This usually helps avoid picking up the extra "room sounds" (coughs, sneezes, infant noises) and echos more present towards the back of many churches. When putting the live-stream phone up close, you'll probably want to pan the phone as needed to capture the current action, or even point it towards a screen with lyrics/liturgy (and zoom in). The church I attend has been streaming sermons on FB live for several years using a phone on a tripod located close to the pastor.

Reply



David T says

March 13, 2020 at 8:35 am

Also, while many people stream in portrait mode, it would probably be better to turn the phone into landscape mode for this kind of stream, as less panning will be needed (and this must be done **before** starting the stream or you'll wind up with a landscape view in portrait mode, with everyone having to tip their heads to the right, and lots of comments telling you to "turn the phone!!!").

Reply

Tim Smith says

March 22, 2020 at 9:02 am

Zoom (not the video conferencing company) makes an inexpensive aftermarket mic that plugs into the lightning port of an iPhone6 or later generation, and significantly improves the audio quality. Just check on compatibility before you order one, and know that supplies may be limited at the moment!

Reply



David T says

March 13, 2020 at 9:32 am

ONE LICENSE has just announced that for "new customers or for existing customers who do not already have a Podcast / Streaming License" they're offering "a one-month gratis license, valid through April 15, 2020." The publishers covered in their

streaming/podcasting licensing include the more “traditional” as opposed to “praise” music, such as Augsburg Fortress, Hope, Carl Fischer, GIA, OCP, Taizé, but also GBGM (think “Global Praise”) and the United Methodist Publishing House. You’ll find info at onelicense.net or more directly, at news.onelicense.net.

I just got off the phone with CCLI, and they’re offering a 10% discount on their annual streaming license add-on, so I grabbed that for our church for a little over \$60 (it varies, based on size of congregation). I called CCS as well (Christian Copyright Solutions, owned by the same parent company as CCLI) and they’re offering a 10% licensing discount through the end of April. I had the CCS rep look up some of the traditional hymn and anthem publishers and most of them are covered under either ASCAP, SESAC, or BMI, which are part of the licensing from CCS.

Reply

Will says

March 15, 2020 at 4:11 am

So you know, there is a very easy alternative for that, and that is to use hymns which are now in the public domain, which you can find in abundance in older hymnals, for example, the Methodist Episcopal Book of Hymns from 1947, or its red-bound successor from 1965, or the classic Lutheran Hymnal from 1941, or the 1940 Protestant Episcopal Hymnal, or the esteemed 1906 English Hymnal edited by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

I know of no churches which have gotten into trouble for using traditional hymns, or even relatively recent settings of the Psalms and Canticles by composers such as George Dyson, Healey Willan, Herbert Howells, Edward Bairstow and T. Tertius Noble. Indeed the latter are routinely recorded in the UK and broadcast on Radio 3 as part of Choral Evensong (which we really need in the US).

Reply

Nellwyn Beamon says

March 19, 2020 at 7:45 am

The United Methodists have since allowed all service-related materials to be used for streaming except any musical settings of the Psalms.

Reply

Ann Utke says

April 5, 2020 at 11:12 am

You Tube gets terribly slow and overwhelmed at random intermittent times, with uploads taking an ungodly amount of hours these days. Technology works great, until it doesn't work. Sorry, just really frustrated.

Reply

Nancy says

April 5, 2020 at 11:19 am

Is there a way to live stream music from a different location (our music director playing the piano) within our live stream worship service? Is there a way to pause the service then have the musician go live with her music, then back to the service? We would have copyright information printed on the FaceBook page in the description of the video. Would that work?

Any help anyone can give would be greatly appreciated! We would really like to have music with our Easter service.

Nancy

Reply

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These two are on @AOC's insta live rn. My heart is exploding.



4h

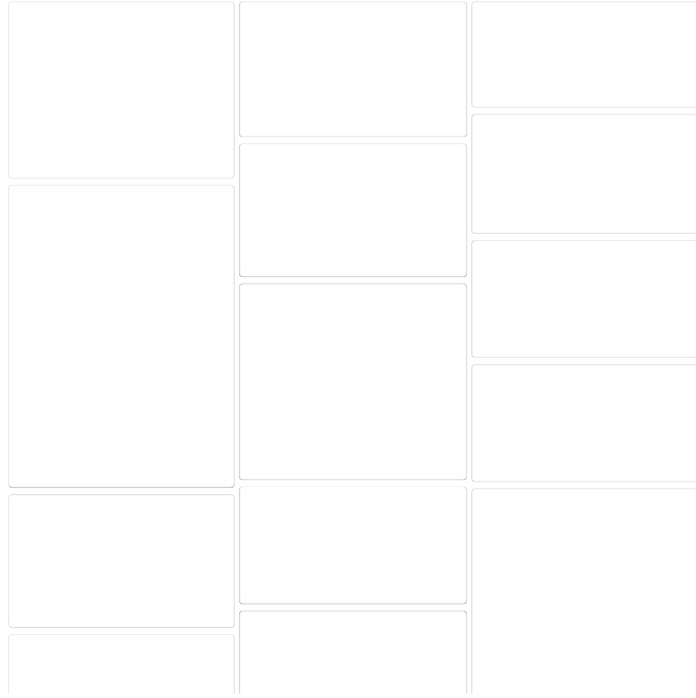


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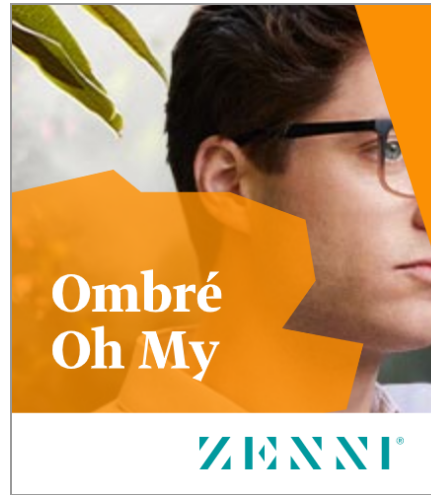


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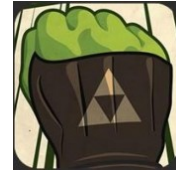
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