

Pastoral Advice on Digital Media and Worship

Adopted by the United Reformed Churches in North America at Synod Escondido, 2024

1. According to Scripture and our Reformed Confessions, corporate worship requires in-person gathering of the congregation under the direct oversight of the consistory.
[Leviticus 23:1–3](#); [Psalms 22:22–25](#); [96](#); [100](#); [107:32](#); [111:1](#); [122](#); [133](#); [Matthew 16:19](#); [Luke 4:16](#); [Acts 2:42](#); [Philippians 1:1](#); [Hebrews 10:19–25](#); [13:17](#); [Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38](#); cf. [Church Order, Art. 14, 37, 38](#)
2. Consistories should regularly remind their members that the power of the Lord Jesus is uniquely present when the congregation is assembled for worship, and every member should make a sincere effort to gather with the congregation in-person unless prevented by infirmity, illness, or other hindrance.
[Psalms 22:22, 25](#) (cf. [Hebrews 2:11–13](#)); [68:25–26](#); [87:1–3](#); [95:1–2, 6–8](#); [100:2,4](#); [133](#); [Matthew 16:18–19](#); [18:18–20](#); [1 Corinthians 5:4–5](#); [14:23–25](#); [2 Corinthians 13:1–4](#); [Hebrews 10:24–25](#); [12:22–29](#); [Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, 31](#); [Church Order, Art. 37](#)
3. Willfully forsaking the assembly is an act of disobedience. Consistories should therefore admonish members who are content to utilize digital means as a replacement for attending corporate worship. They should urge members to gather in-person with the congregation for the sake of their own spiritual welfare, for the edification of the congregation, and for the glory of Christ, the Head of the Church.
[Psalms 35:18](#); [40:9–10](#); [122:1–2](#); [109:30](#); [111:1](#); [133](#); [149:1–2](#); [Hebrews 10:25, 13:17](#); [Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 85](#)
4. It is the duty of every member to exhort one another not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and to encourage each other: “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”
[Psalms 34:1–3](#); [122:1](#); [132:6–7](#); [Hebrews 3:12–13](#); [10:23–25](#)
5. Consistories should be careful that the language used with regard to broadcasting does not undermine the church's theology of embodied worship. Care should be taken to avoid using language such as “Please join us online for corporate worship” or “Welcome to those who are worshipping with us online.” [Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38](#); [Church Order, Article 37](#)
6. Watching/listening to a worship service remotely is not participation in corporate worship, yet many benefits may be received by those unable to attend. Potential benefits include: setting apart the Lord's Day, maintaining a degree of connection with their congregation, being fed by the ministry of the Word, and finding encouragement through the singing and praying of God's people.
Cf. [Psalms 42](#) where the Lord stirs up David's heart remotely to long for God and remember the beauty of the assembly of God's people; [Revelation 1:9–11](#)
7. Consistories are encouraged to have a deliberative discussion of the proper use of digital media for their congregation, and how to minister to their members who are unable to attend corporate worship due to illness, infirmity, or other hindrance.
[Matthew 25:36](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:12–15](#); [Hebrews 10:24](#); [13:3,17](#); [Belgic Confession, Art. 32](#)
8. The preaching of the Word may be published through digital media wherever and to whomever the church is able to proclaim the joyful message of the holy gospel.
[Matthew 24:14](#); [Romans 10:17–18](#); [Philippians 1:12–14](#); [2 Timothy 2:8–9](#); [Canons of Dort, II.5](#); cf. [Canons of Dort, I.3](#)
9. The living preaching of the Word has the central place in corporate worship. Digital media should not be considered a replacement for the living preaching of the Word.
[Nehemiah 8:1–8](#); [Acts 20:7](#); [Romans 10:13–16](#); [1 Corinthians 2:3–5](#); [2 Corinthians 4:5–15](#); [1 Timothy 4:11–13](#); [Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35](#); [Church Order, Art. 38, 40](#)

10. When members are unable to join their own congregation in corporate worship on the Lord's Day because they are away from home, they should make every effort to gather in-person with a faithful congregation in another place in order to keep the Sabbath Day holy to the Lord and to build up the church they are visiting. [*Exodus 20:8*](#); [*Deuteronomy 5:12*](#); [*Luke 4:16*](#); [*Acts 17:1–2*](#)

11. When members are unable to join in corporate worship and they choose to view or listen to a service remotely, they should give priority to their own congregation in order to maintain the unity of the body in which God has placed them. [*Ephesians 4:3, 11–16*](#); [*1 Thessalonians 5:12–13*](#)

12. The Lord's Supper and baptism shall be administered in a service of corporate worship. Private communion and baptism are contrary to Scripture. Consistories are encouraged to have a deliberative discussion about livestreaming during the administration of the sacraments.*
[*Luke 1:58*](#); [*Acts 2:1, 40–41*](#); [*16:13–15*](#); [*20:7*](#); [*1 Corinthians 11:17–22*](#); [*Belgic Confession, Art. 35*](#); [*Church Order, Art. 41, 46*](#)

13. Since bringing Christian offerings is an act of corporate worship, churches should maintain the practice of receiving offerings on the Lord's Day.
[*Deuteronomy 16:16–17*](#); [*Psalms 96:8*](#); [*Acts 2:42*](#); [*1 Corinthians 16:1–2*](#); [*Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38*](#); [*Church Order, Art. 38*](#)

14. The churches should be reminded to appreciate and enjoy through the Spirit's power the many tangible benefits of diligently attending the assembly of God's people for worship, such as:
 - a. Greeting one another with a holy kiss ([*Romans 16:16*](#))
 - b. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ([*Ephesians 5:19*](#))
 - c. Hearing the voice of God together ([*Acts 2:42*](#); [*Romans 10:14–17*](#))
 - d. Glorifying our God and Father with one voice and exalting his name together ([*Romans 15:6*](#); cf. [*Psalms 34:3*](#))
 - e. Encouraging one another in our identity as God's household and strengthening our fellowship with the body of Christ ([*Psalms 133*](#); [*1 Peter 2:5*](#))
 - f. Overcoming fear, sadness, or spiritual drift that result from being isolated from God's people ([*Psalms 42–43*](#); [*Hebrews 3:12–13, 10:25*](#))
 - g. Suffering and rejoicing together as members of one body ([*1 Corinthians 12:25–27*](#))
 - h. Increased joy in meeting brothers and sisters face-to-face ([*2 John 12*](#); [*3 John 13*](#))
 - i. Bringing joy to the spiritual leaders who watch over the souls of God's people, who must give account for them, and who are grieved by absenteeism which is unprofitable for the members of the body ([*Galatians 6:6*](#); [*Hebrews 13:17*](#); [*1 Corinthians 12:12–27*](#))
 - j. Encouraging one another in faith and good works and all the more as you see the Day approaching ([*Hebrews 10:23–25*](#))
 - k. Testifying of God's holiness to unbelievers through the congregation's united, solemn worship ([*1 Corinthians 14:24–25*](#))
 - l. Exercising regular, meaningful accountability to your leaders and fellow members ([*Hebrews 10:25*](#); [*13:7, 17*](#))

* Our Church Order uses the wording in Articles 41 and 46 of administering the sacraments "in a service of corporate worship." We believe it is beyond the scope of this report to speak to the issue of the church's administration of the Lord's Supper to shut-ins, and we do not intend our advice here to address that topic.