Churches Going Online

Sadly, we have had to cancel public meetings whilst the covid-19 virus is a threat. Whilst some churches may be well equipped for this with sophisticated installed video streaming systems   many are not.   This brief paper is about how to get good results cost effectively for both services and meetings.

Updates

This is a work in progress and is being updated. This version has a new section on more collaborative services. Not every option here has been tested and testing continues.   If you would like to help with testing, then contact us on our Contact Us page. The latest version will be available from the CTSA online page at ctstalbans.org/online. This version Going Online v6.docx was last updated on 20/04/2020 15:24
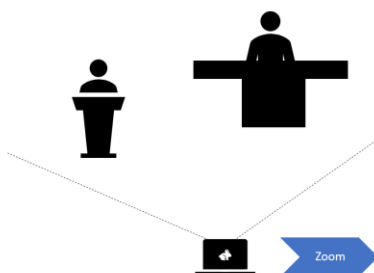
Very Brief Summary

It is quick, cheap and surprisingly easy to live stream church services. A basic setup can be improved upon step by step to provide more inclusive, collaborative worship. Privacy should be given due consideration.

How to live stream

Simplest Approach

Live streaming your church service is that hard to do.   You need a mobile, tablet or laptop, either WiFi or good mobile date and Zoom. Below are links with instructions. Remember to have any mobile in landscape (sideways) orientation when recording. A laptop is easiest as it can simply be placed on a pew.
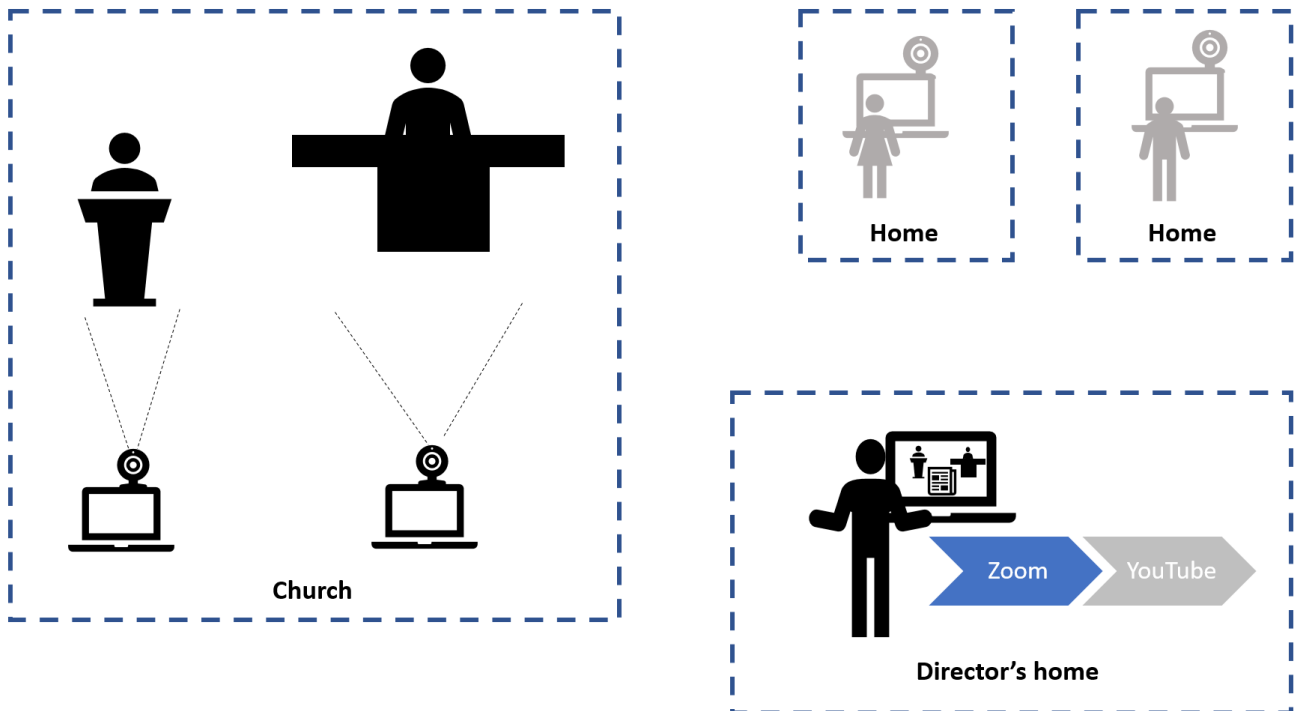
The simplest thing might be to use a laptop with a webcam positioned to take in everything: say both the altar and the lectern. The laptop will be facing the minister. The minister can then start the Zoom meeting a few minutes before the service starts. This does not require   anyone other than the minister to enter the church.

Start the Zoom meeting as you would normally. The meeting can have a password and details can be shared by web, email or social media depending on how open you want the service to be.

Multiple Cameras and Locations

The basic setup above can easily be enhanced to provide a more inclusive, involving celebration.

If 2 devices such as laptops, phones or   are available, then a choice of viewing angles can be given. The role of directing cameras can be given to someone at a remote location who can host the session and choose which camera view is seen and which microphone is used.   Readers, singers, and intercessors can be heard but not seen.   The director can also choose to input from a computer such things as power point slides. Chat can be used to co-ordinate remote participants. Note again that only the minister need enter the church.

YouTube

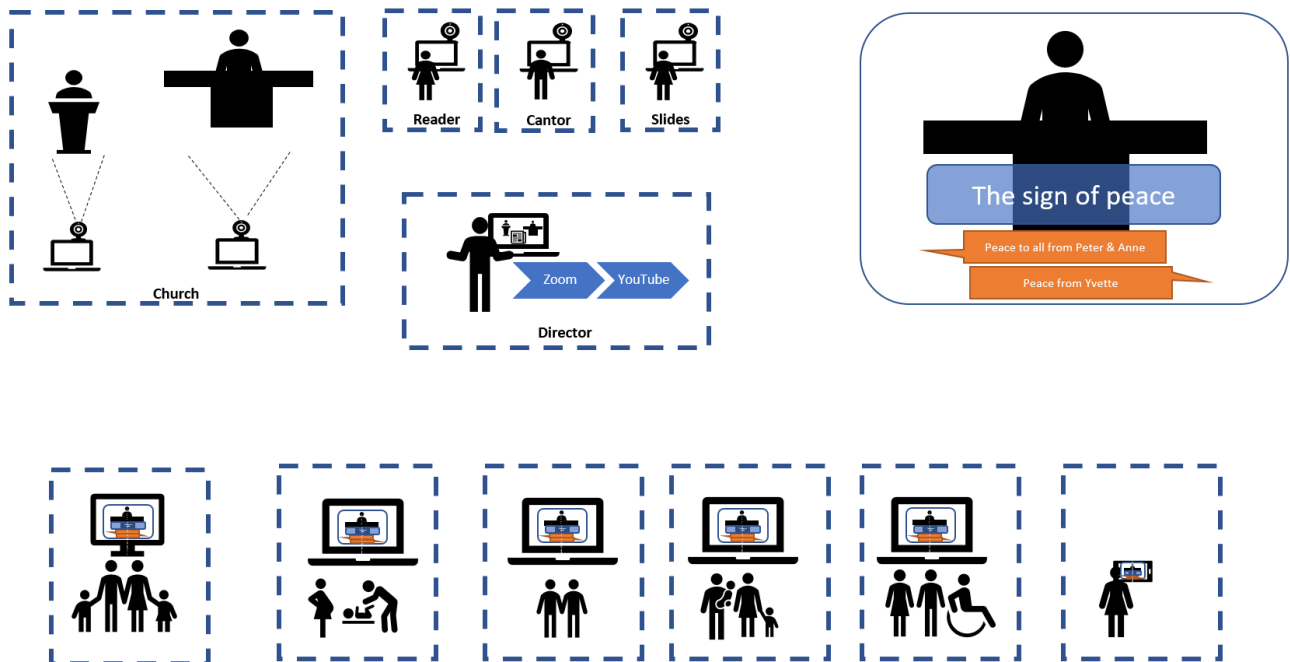A Zoom meeting can also be streamed to YouTube

Pros

- Any number of people can join
- People can watch from a smart TV, rather than a laptop

Cons

- Attendees cannot participate
- It is more open

Collaborative Setup

Despite the lockdown, church services can be quite collaborative, with the whole congregation feeling involved.

Selected members of the congregation can be involved in

- Directing
- Reading
- Singing/ cantor
- Reading intercessions or notices
- Feeding back from children's liturgies
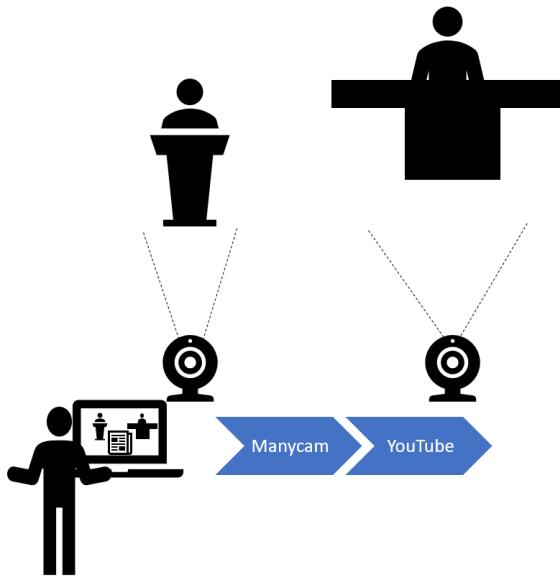- Showing slides with responses or images
- Producing captions

The congregation as a whole can:

- exchange text greetings at the sign of peace;
- offer prayer requests;
- meet up together or in separate breakout rooms after the service.

Those who choose to can watch the service on a TV via YouTube. Others can interact via Zoom on a laptop, tablet or phone. Others can get the best of both worlds by hooking their TV up as an monitor for their laptop, providing them with a large screen and the ability to input via Zoom .

Manycam

Manycam is software which allows one person to switch between cameras, including mobile phone cameras and add captions and other effects. This is interesting software and can be combined with Zoom or streamed straight to YouTube.

However, it requires a director to be on hand. It can be used in combination with Zoom, but in tests this proved to be be a bit tricky.

Live Meetings

There are a number of technologies that allow you to have effective and fun meetings. Given that face to face meetings, though preferable are not an option at this time, now is a good time to get going with online meetings. Skype, Google Hangouts and Zoom all provide free meetings.

Most people have found that Zoom is better than Skype or Google Hangouts. It allows much better quality and control over large meetings. It is limited to 100 participants and 40 mins in the free package, otherwise one person needs to have a £11.99 per month package to allow meetings up to 24 hours.

Prayer Meetings

Though Zoom is great for normal meetings it has a major failing for prayer meetings and choir practices. Zoom selects the sound from a single source: whoever is speaking loudest.   For a discussion this is great, but not if participants are all singing or praying together. On these occasions' participants need to hear all other voices mixed together. One option is Jitsi.

Jitsi

Jitsi is open source software and works differently from most video conferencing offerings. Jitsi has a lot of things going for it:

- Free – with no cap on meetings. Go to meet.jit.si
- Mixes voices together so more suitable for prayer meetings
- Can work for 2 musicians getting together, both playing at once

- Very easy to use.

However, it is not quite as polished as Zoom and has some deficiencies:

- Sometimes it can be buggy e.g. with cameras ceasing to work and needing to be de-selected and then selected to get them back working.
- It is not as polished as Zoom
- Lagging is significant when there are more than two participants, so it's not really effective for a choir practice with more than two. Hymns or prayers can be said and sung but hymns need to be slow moving.

Meeting Tips

- It is best to use a laptop or   desktop as a larger screen will help you to see more people.
- If you are using a mobile, have it in portrait orientation
- Do not have the camera too close to your face, it is better to see you in your surroundings.
- If you are concerned about people seeing your home, use the virtual backdrop feature. This works well provided there is only one person in front of the camera. In general it is best to avoid the virtual backdrop as it is it can be off-putting.
- Try to have a meeting off the hour and half hour as there can be high traffic at these times. Go for times like 6:50 or 8:10
- If you've not used Zoom before, have a test meeting with someone first though Zoom   set up is straight forward. Use our Contact Us page to set up a meeting with me if you like.

Security and Privacy

There is a balance between accessibility and security. 'Bombing' of meetings is where strangers interfere with meetings and has been known to happen. The same can happen in physical church meetings but

a) Virtual meetings could potentially be interfered with by anyone from around the world;
b) It's easier to evict someone from a virtual meeting.

If a meeting is being live streamed, then you must have very high trust in the participants. Remember that an online meeting might feel private but could be very public.

Some security steps include

- Always use a randomly generated meeting ID rather than a personal ID
- Always use a password
- Don't post a meeting URL containing the meeting ID and the password
- If necessary, send the meeting ID and password by separate means
- Have attendees join via a waiting room so you can vet attendees before they join
- Initially mute audio and   video for attendees
- Ensure that people in the meeting know if it is being live streamed and are aware of how public the meeting is.
- As host, monitor carefully, using the following mechanisms
    - Mute attendees
    - Put attendees on hold – this temporarily removes them from the meeting
    - Kick attendees out of the meeting if necessary
- Turn off screen sharing for all but the host and designated helpers.
- Use a limited number of Zoom participants with high security and live stream to

Not all these measures may be necessary for all meetings. Security is complicated. Being overzealous makes it hard for people to participate. Being too lax could be dangerous and/or illegal. Being too timid hides your light under a bushel. Zoom security has improved with the latest versions.

Child Protection

Any possibility of a child being seen online requires child protection policies to be observed. Consult your child protection officer. Consider the security steps above carefully.

Licensing

If copyright material is to be used, you probably require a license if it is to go online. This may be in addition to licenses such as CCLI. Just because you are licensed to project or make orders of service does not mean you are necessarily licensed to broadcast.

"The CCLI Church Copyright Licence   a prerequisite for the Streaming Licence. You may also require a Limited Online Music Licence (LOML) from PRS for Music if you are hosting the stream on your church website. We refer you to www.prsformusic.com"

https://uk.ccli.com/streaming/

Practice

Many churches are doing live meetings and streaming. These include

- Prayer meetings
- Planning meetings
- Children's activities
- Interactive church services

Where services are live streamed it is a bit odd with only the minister normally visible, and no ability to receive sacraments. However, a live connection with a church that you know can be a real benefit and reduces isolation. Some look around for the best service they can find. Some look for a church with which they have a connection. There is still something special about worshipping live, with your and your church, knowing that the events are happening at the instant, even if at a distance.

Many churches are doing online services. One Catholic church used Zoom for the Easter Vigil. The priest used a laptop near the front of the church most   of the time with a tablet near the alter at the consecration. Readers and the cantor were remote: parishioner heard them but saw the church. The priest approached the laptop for the homily and notices. At the sign of peace parishioners sent brief chat messages e.g. "Peace to everyone from Bob Brown". At the end of the service people were assigned to breakout groups so they could meet new people. The overall effect was very engaging, involving and moving.

One church arranged a virtual choir to great effect https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOQ8cj00Ee0.

More links

- Celebrate have a good page on online resources
- Spring Harvest this year is online and free and hopes to include some interaction.
- HTB
- Hillsong
- Catholic Services for Catholic Services at many churches.

Conclusion

In the early church, a knowledge of Greek was the essential skill for getting the message communicated. Today, digital technology is key. This may be new to many, but skills may well be present in the congregation as a whole. These skills are now vital in lockdown and churches which are using these gifts are increasingly being reported as often having attendance greater than what it was before the virus.   If you need help, please use the Contact Us page.

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