

Virtual Worship is Here to Stay---Let's Make It Accessible!

The DisAbility Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church would like to thank Jim Patterson for his excellent article, "Virtual Worship is Here for Good," which was published by UM News Service on January 25. Here is the link to it--- [Virtual worship is here for good | United Methodist News Service \(umnews.org\)](#)

The committee recognizes the benefits of virtual worship and would like to add a few ways of ensuring that everyone, regardless of ability, can worship God, study scripture, and enjoy Christian fellowship. It's easy to include everyone!

Physical Disabilities

- People with disabilities have been asking for on-line meetings for years. Virtual Church is a great relief for people who have difficulty with transportation and in leaving their homes for other reasons.
- Typing into the chat takes longer for some people, so allow time and grace.
- Some people speak slowly. Patience needs to be encouraged by the leader/moderator.
- Some people may require time to gather their thoughts before beginning to speak and others may need to physically prepare before speaking once they have a chance. Requiring a raised hand or other symbol to be shown as a request to be called on can mean that everyone has a turn to be heard.
- People who are not feeling well on a particular day can still attend church.
- Virtual Church is an opportunity for people with disabilities to lead in worship. This provides fresh ideas and fresh voices. Anyone can lead because anyone can record or log in from anywhere.

Hearing Loss

- Almost all churches have persons with hearing loss. It's frequent in those over 50, but not everyone will admit it, and it's often unknown. A variety of accommodations can be offered by churches, which fall into three categories: assisted hearing, captioning, and sign language.
- Assisted hearing devices may be as simple as a sound system (and requiring everyone who speaks to use a microphone) to hearing loops.
- Captioning is strongly desired by most Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, and can also aid those whose first language is not English. Automatic captioning has improved, but care (and editing) is required so that "praise to Jesus Christ" does not end up being rendered as "prey of cheese and rice." Captions are available for many services such as Facebook, YouTube, and Zoom.
- Deaf members are more accustomed to using sign language. Interpreters can be incorporated into a video.

- The United Methodist Committee on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Ministries web site offers [information on a wide variety of accommodations](#) as well as [Breaking the Sound Barrier in Your Church](#), a practical guide to Deaf and Hard-of hearing ministry, and a recent blog post that offers [guidance for online meetings and events](#).
- If communicating by phone or podcast, consider providing a transcript that can be e-mailed.

Blindness

- In a virtual meeting, all persons should state their names before they speak.
- All audio should be muted to reduce background noise and make it easier to hear.
- If you are sharing electronic documents or slides in a virtual meeting, the screen should be described because screen readers will not read this material. Alternatively, materials being displayed on screen can be emailed prior to the meeting/service. In general, all images, documents, slides, and videos should be described verbally.
- If the chat option is being used in a meeting or portion of a worship service, persons using screen readers should mute their screen readers to avoid hearing every chat post being read out loud while someone is speaking. The host should read the chat posts aloud so that everyone can hear them.
- If internet links are included in the chat section of a virtual meeting, those links should be sent out by email after the meeting/service.
- For people with low vision, change the contrast on shared screens, using white letters on black whenever possible.

Older Adults

- Many of our churches have an aging membership. As people age, they may need help with the technology we use for virtual worship, Christian Education, and connection.
- Pastors, staff, or care team members should call all church members regularly to check in and ask if anyone needs anything, including help with technology to attend church functions and to find out if people need help with setting up appointments for vaccines, etc.
- The help needed may be recurrent or on-going, so a support team may be needed to coach people over the phone, grocery shop and run errands, etc.
- Church members should be encouraged to keep in touch with each other, either by making phone calls, e-mailing, or mailing notes or cards. This is one way that older adults can be in ministry to others.

- It is important to support people with dementia and their caregivers. Whenever there is a loss for words or conversation, remember that people often remember hymns and the Lord's Prayer even when they are otherwise unable to communicate. For more information, please go to [Discipleship Ministries | Ministering to Families Facing Alzheimer's... \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](https://umcdiscipleship.org)

Mental Health

- The isolation we have been experiencing during the pandemic has resulted in challenges to our mental health. Being able to attend worship and other church events can be a great help to combatting depression and anxiety.
- Be aware of people who are struggling and reach out to them by phone. If someone needs professional help, supply phone numbers and other contact information for nearby professionals.
- For more resources, please see [Mental Health - Disability Ministries of the United Methodist Church \(umcdmc.org\)](https://umcdmc.org)

This resource was prepared by Rev. Lisa McKee, Rev. Eric Pridmore, Tim Vermande, Rev. Leo Yates, and Deaconess Sharon McCart. For more information and resources, please visit umcdmc.org. You can e-mail us at information@umcdmc.org.