

Brothers and Sisters of CPC, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (2 Col. 1:2-5)

As we move to a season of online streaming for worship services, it is our prayer and hope that these efforts will bring Glory to God and comfort to otherwise isolated souls on Sunday mornings. Despite the shortcomings and pitfalls of online platforms, we are thankful for technology that allows us to connect during this time of social distancing. We also should not resent the restrictions and mandates that have been put in place for our health and safety. Complying with such directives may be one of the ways we can obey the second greatest commandment.

It would also be good for us to remember that in the very beginnings of Christianity the church was a collection of small gatherings in homes. Seems as if we have the unique opportunity of revisiting history, at least in the interim. As we embark on this season of online worship, we would like to provide some encouragement, instructions, and guidelines. Here are our initial thoughts.

1. This is only temporary

Nobody knows how long society will be held up by Covid-19. But we can take heart in knowing that no matter where we are confined, we are all saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him we all are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22). We are reformed people, and God the Father is constantly re-forming us into the image of His Son. No matter what temporary forms our worship takes, the re-forming of our lives and hearts can still happen through the power of the Holy Spirit. Where two or three are gathered, there He is!

2. We are not re-creating an experience but re-enacting a story.

The church's worship is not primarily about performative music, a pre-packaged sermon, or the professionals offering some type of "religious goods and services" to the individual. No, it's the gathering of the chosen people to renew the covenant of grace with our triune God and rehearse the story of salvation. Our liturgy is a re-enactment of the gospel narrative, from creation to re-creation by way of Calvary. Though we can't gather in the sanctuary and feel our spines tingle with the sound of the organ, we can still retell the gospel story to each other in our own homes through scripture, song, and prayer.

3. You are not a brain on a stick, you have a body...use it.

Sitting in front a screen is by its very nature passive. But worship is participatory. It is an encounter at the burning bush, a dialogue with the living God. It is a response to the incarnate Christ through embodied practices that shape and form us. So, don't just sit there in your PJ's with your feet up and watch. Do all the things you would do in the sanctuary. Kneel at confession, stand when you sing, raise your hands at the doxology. Remember that you are a congregant in a church, not a consumer on a couch. Even when we are dispersed, we are the body of Christ. In him we move, and breathe, and have our being.

4. This is Compromise, not Convenience

Yes, it's not ideal. No, we don't have it all figured out. It's the best we can do at the moment. So, don't get too comfortable and conditioned to sipping your latte in your lazy-boy during the liturgy. And please be patient with us as we work out technological issues and stumble forward week to week. We don't know how long this will last, but it looks as if we are in a holding pattern until at least Easter, and likely through April.

5. It's the Internet, not Internment

We can be grateful the use of technology to connect us to each other and give us at least a poor simulation of gathered worship. Let us be grateful for the connection, and not complain about our

circumstances. We are not isolated prisoners in our private houses, but parishioners longing for our mutual home.

6. This is the Holy Word, not Hollywood

For the next several weeks, let's all just try to ignore the fact that "the medium is the message". On Sunday mornings let's turn our screens into stain-glassed windows and treat virtual church like the real thing. The goal is engagement, not entertainment. This means several things:

- * Prepare and be prompt. Services will commence at 10:30. You may need time to set up devices, print at-home bulletins, etc.
- * Don't multitask. Turn cellphones off, don't text or tweet. Be wholly committed to the service. There will be prayer, singing, responsive scripture readings, creeds, etc.
- * You have parts in the script. Speak and sing out loud when those moments come, just as you would in "real" church.

7. It's an offering, not a donation

Tithes and offerings are an explicit act of worship and have historically been part of the liturgy.

They are a beautiful expression of thanks to an abundantly generous and loving God, a way for us to offer our treasure back to Him who sacrificed everything for our sake. In a world where money is the greatest idol, this is our way of declaring devotion to the Lord of lords. Though you are unable to drop your check or money in the plate, please take a moment to complete your offering online at the end of the service, with the intention that it is an extension of your worship. You can find instructions on that here:

8. Don't take a sabbatical from the Sabbath

Without the accountability of going to church, it may be tempting not to tune in for worship on Sunday morning. But we encourage you to continue to commit to this time (service starts at 10:30 a.m.). This is our sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15), and, by the way, it is something that should be offered continually. To that end, let us make the most of this forced and extended sabbath, which has fittingly fallen to us during Lent. On weekdays, be intentional about family worship around

the table, personal devotions and prayer. Jesus went into the wilderness, and he calls to us, “come away, my beloved”. The living water is so much more satisfying than the news and Netflix. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Brothers and Sisters of CPC, the Lord is sovereign and his steadfast love endures. He is unchanging. He is our sure and steadfast anchor. Grace and Peace to you all during this time. We will “see” you all on Sunday, where we will sing together...

*When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.
His oath, His covenant, His blood, support me in the whelming flood
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.*

On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand!