

The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly has issued an advisory opinion on two issues of interest to congregations during the current emergency: holding virtual meetings and celebrating communion during an electronic worship service. Advisory opinions are well-thought out and researched, but they are just that, opinions, and they are neither authoritative nor binding upon the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). However, they may provide guidance to your sessions as you move forward. Below I touch on some of the most central issues to congregations in the current moment, but if you get a chance, you might wish to read the full opinion: [Church in an Emergency/Pandemic 03/12/2020](#).

Holding Electronic Session Meetings

Sessions can hold electronic meetings if this is authorized in either the church bylaws or the session's manual of administrative operations. Quorum rules apply and all at the electronic meeting must be able to hear and talk to each other. The advisory opinion gives an example for a rule authorizing electronic meetings:

"The session may meet by electronic means if all active elders have reasonable notice of the electronic meeting and the ability to discuss, deliberate, and discern the will of God and vote on business items. The quorum for such a meeting is [x] active elders or at least two active elders and one moderator, temporary or called."

The National Capital Presbytery also has a rule: [Special-Rules-1-and-2-adopted-5-20-141.pdf](#).

Sessions that do not already have such a rule, have an option, though. The advisory opinion says that:

"Although the meeting is not constitutional, in the case of an emergency, the session could meet by electronic means with reasonable notice of the electronic meeting, quorum, and at least one moderator, and take actions required to address the emergency or public health order. Reasonable notice may vary according to the emergency and the needs of the community. These decisions will need to be ratified at a later properly called meeting, regular or special. "

The advisory opinion also suggests creation by the session of an administrative commission that could handle emergency matters and gives some suggestions for doing this.

Holding Electronic Congregational Meetings

The same rules apply as to sessions, but the authorization for electronic meetings must be in the church bylaws.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper During an Electronic Worship Service

Sessions can authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper within an electronic worship service if it authorizes the sharing of communion in person (ordinarily on the same day) after the electronic service has concluded. The advisory opinion says: "[if] it is not reasonable to share communion in person as soon as possible after the service for reasons of a public health order, the session should cease and postpone the Lord's Supper until such time as it is reasonably safe to resume the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper." Normal rules concerning the sharing of the bread and cup with those absent from the service apply. See Book of Order W-3.0414.

Many of our churches celebrate the Lord's Supper monthly, and during certain seasons, like Lent and Easter, more often. But, the Book of Order's requirement is that the Lord's Supper be celebrated four times a year in a congregation.

**Please feel free to drop me an email if you have a question on process,
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