

TIPS FOR TO VIDEOING ONLINE COMMUNION FROM DISCIPLESNET CHURCH



DisciplesNet Church is an online Disciples of Christ church operating since 2010 to bring the church to people not able to attend a physical church. The leadership team meets weekly to create a worship video that is uploaded to YouTube and Vimeo, available globally. From the first, leaders decided that communion was such an important part of worship, that worship must include this sacrament. We recognize that ‘online’ cannot replace on site, but sometimes online is our best or only choice.

Here, DisciplesNet leaders share wisdom they’ve gained over the years, hoping some might help pastors and worship leaders live-streaming or recording video when traditional worship is shut down for a time.

1. How does online communion work, and what elements of communion do viewers take?

- a. We ask people to prepare for worship by making ready a piece of bread or something that will represent bread to them (cracker, tortilla, etc.), and something to represent the drink: juice, water, wine, etc.
- b. During communion, the ideal **prayer of consecration should offer thanks and blessing for the bread and cup that each of the people gathered at the table holds before them, “including that which is held now in our mind’s eye.”** That last part recognizes that some people are not able to eat and drink due to a medical issue or other reason.
- c. We like to **reach the bread tray and cup toward the people**, making eye contact and speaking words that might be said at communion at this time: “the body of Christ broken for you...”
- d. Normally, we ask people who may be worshipping together in a single place—such as a family or group of friends at a retirement home— **to serve each other, but in this time of concern about contagion, that may not be such a good idea.**
- e. Theologically, we see that **the Lord’s table already extends forward through time and space.** Pastors often mention that as we take communion, we are one with people worshipping around the world.

The DisciplesNet team had an epiphany during one of our first team communion times via Skype. This meeting had brought together team members from several different time zones and three countries. After finishing the time together, a team member asked introspectively, “*So, where are we now? What is the place? And.... what time is it?*” The response was spontaneous, and in one voice: “*We are in God’s place, and in God’s time.*” Someone added, “*isn’t that the way it always should be?*”

2. What helps things feel more real and engaging?

Over the years DisciplesNet has used cognitive science to help draw people to the table and help it feel more authentic. You may wish to look at the [video clip example here](#) to see how you might modify it for your congregation. *We never get it perfect, but we say our best gift is to be present.* Communion begins at **22:55** in the video, with elder Susan McNeely presiding. (Susan is a founding member of DisciplesNet, a church and regional leader in Indianapolis—and a retired chemist.) Link: <https://youtu.be/mrMkLWKnwRU>

- a. Note the **burning lamp** to give some visible action in addition to a talking head. People can see the flame flickering, sometimes smoke rising. Most will understand the **symbolism of the light.**
- b. We added the visible **pouring of juice** from pitcher to chalice. Seeing and hearing the pouring juice gives auditory and visual cues, and helps invoke taste memory. Ideally there’s enough juice to raise it up and pour visibly and audibly. We never pretend—we authentically sharing real juice and breaking of real bread, and partaking of the elements, keeps this moment authentic and real.

- c. The stuffed **sheep visible at the table are important symbols** in DisciplesNet’s culture, representing the sheep of God's pasture present at that moment, even though the team cannot see the worshippers on the other side of the camera.
- d. It always helps to use worship elements that your insiders will recognize and appreciate—chalice, stole, inside story—that can be conversation starters.

3. **Any other tips help to get the most helpful image and most natural looking recording?**

- a. Ideally, try to **get as much of a closeup to the table as possible**—if people are too far away to see the elements, it symbolically distances them more than it would in a regular church setting. Mount the camera or phone on something rather than holding it. Use landscape if possible.

We found that sitting at the table rather than standing allows us to capture the moment better: this allows center screen to be the elements rather than awkward space between our chin and belt-line. This also allows the presider to make eye-contact—highly important online.

- b. Wearing **solid colors** (blues, lavender, grays, pastels, ivory) rather than prints increases visibility and prevents the moire effect. Wearing a non-drab **splash of color** at worrisome times is like a breath of fresh air. Be aware of your background and remove objects you don’t want seen.
- c. One quirky thing the team learned early on is how differently **spatial perspective works on a close-in camera**. If you are able to have a close up of the table (which we recommend), we’ve found it important to **keep your hand movements close to your body, moving side to side** as much as possible, rather than reaching forward and back as you typically would in the pulpit. Side-to-side movements will look natural on camera, but reaching hands or leaning the head far forward to emphasize a point, will distort the perspective of their size, and they’ll look out of proportion. Consciously or unconsciously, viewers’ minds will be alerted and distracted by the unnatural proportions. (Moving hands side-to-side takes some awareness and practice.)

With this in mind, while offering the chalice, don’t reach it very far forward toward the camera—just a couple of inches will do the trick. Otherwise, the distance between your head and chalice can make it look like your head is being served up on the chalice like an ice cream cone— especially if you center the chalice under your chin. LOL, trust us. Keeping the chalice off to the side of your body often helps it be more visible (this depends on the background, however.)

- d. We train ourselves to **look straight ahead into the camera** as if we are making eye contact with the viewer; do not look left and right. This is hard, because in a pulpit we typically glance left, right, and center. But on camera, those glances cause us to look off camera, as though there’s something else in the room that the viewer can’t see, and that raises a mental alarm or distraction.
- e. Ideally, **situate the camera lens at your eye or forehead height**. If the lens is far below your head, looking up, you’ll end up with a distracting pig-nose look, and your nose and jaw will look huge and your eyes tiny. Use perspective to your advantage: if your eyes are a pivot point you can learn your head forward and get your pastoral eyes the center of attention.
- f. If you want to keep and post the video for perpetuity, **hold your pose for several seconds when you finish**—longer than you think necessary. We found that if we don’t we tend to jump up while we are still speaking. Awkward when it is replayed.
- g. **Smile**. Your smile may truly be the only one someone see that day. And, if your video freezes up, you want your face frozen in a good look rather than grumpiness. Mommyisms aside, it’s tough when trying to find a frame with a smile for your video’s thumbnail, but can’t find a single one.