



HOW TO

Host An Annual Meeting in a Pandemic

In the State of Minnesota, congregations are able to host a remote meeting (meaning by technology) provided that there is a warrant for such in the governing documents of the congregation and during the meeting there is opportunity for simultaneous aural communication. That means that all participants can hear and speak throughout the meeting. Please contact Bishop Lull (patricia.lull@spas-elca.org) for additional requirements if the congregational meeting includes the sale or purchase of property or the call of a pastor or deacon.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do we need to meet this winter or could we simply postpone the annual meeting until it is safe to gather in person?

Chapter 10 of the model constitution for congregations calls for “at least one regular meeting per year, at a time specified by the bylaws.” Constitutionally, then, a congregation that has adopted the model constitution of the Synod must have at least one regular meeting during the calendar year. That said, depending on each individual congregation’s adopted constitution and bylaws, there may be options to delay the meeting or to conduct only limited business at a meeting and defer other items of business to after the pandemic risk has passed.

2. How do we know if our constitution allows the congregation to meet online?

In the model constitution for congregations, C10.08 includes this provision. Check to see if this language is in your constitution.

C10.08. This congregation may hold meetings by remote communication, including electronically and by telephone conference, as long as there is an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication. To the extent permitted by state law, notice of all meetings may be provided electronically.

3. We haven’t yet updated our constitution. What do we do?

If your constitution allows your Church Council to meet remotely, e.g. C.12.13 in the model constitution for congregations, the Council could pass a Continuing Resolution, allowing for an electronic annual meeting. If your Council is not authorized to meet by an electronic meeting, have them meet in person

with masks and safe distancing to pass a Continuing Resolution for both the council and the congregation to be able to meet in an electronic meeting.

Here is a sample Continuing Resolution: *In light of the pandemic prohibitions on large-size gatherings, the congregation may meet in electronic meeting format for its annual and special congregational meetings.*

The synod has resources to help congregations update their constitution. Please contact the synod office for the steps your congregation should take when starting the constitution update process.

4. How do we notify members of the arrangements for the annual meeting?

Follow the provisions in your constitution for the number of days of advance notice and whether that is by verbal communication at worship, written letter, or email. This notice can also include the Zoom link (or other platform) that will be used along with who the member can contact for help with technology. Remember that links to your meeting should *not* be posted in a very public place like social media or the church website. Posting the link publically opens up the possibility for strangers to join who might only be there to cause trouble (Zoom bombing).

5. How do we insure that we are hosting a meeting that allows everyone to simultaneously hear and speak?

Zoom, for instance, allows a person to dial-in on a landline. The chair of the meeting will need to ask if persons calling in wish to speak to a matter and a plan will need to be in place to record votes from those who phone in on a landline.

Those who dial in by telephone and are not on a smart device may present some challenges for voting, still giving people the option to call in ensures that even those without internet or a smart device can still participate. The congregation might encourage those without a smart device/internet to invite a guest to the meeting as their “tech helper” or set up a buddy system where those without a smart device and/or internet are paired up with another member, and multiple people participate on one device from the same location. Safety measures need to be in place if multiple people are participating together—masks and safe distancing.

6. What about a quorum?

Your constitution defines the number needed for a quorum. That same number is needed when meeting electronically. You could do an oral roll call to see who is present (in small sized church) but it will be simpler to record participant names as people enter the meeting. If more than one person is using a device, ask households to note all the names in the chat. Those who call in by phone need to be asked to identify themselves and anyone in the room with them.

7. How do we vote?

A simple “yes” or “no” vote (to receive a report) might be taken by the “show of hands” on Zoom with call-in persons being asked for their vote. For example, the “participant buttons” feature of Zoom is a great way for participants to give “non-verbal feedback,” such a voting, during a meeting. Learn more about the raised hand Zoom feature [HERE](#).

Also, if you have persons running unopposed for election to your Congregation Council and there are no nominations from the floor, you could have someone make a motion to elect the entire ballot with a voice vote. That motion requires a second. The president then asks persons to say “yes” for the election of all candidates or “no” to do so.

The polling function on Zoom can be used to vote on a slate of persons for election or a more discreet “yes” or “no” vote (adoption of a budget). Unlike participant buttons in Zoom, voting through a poll is anonymous. Plans will need to be in place for those calling in by phone or multiple people on the same device. Such a plan might include sending the votes of the multiple person households by chat to a designated administrator or calling the administrator to verbally give one’s vote. Patience is needed to allow all time to vote in an electronic meeting.

8. Can there be nomination from the floor?

Yes. A nomination requires someone to move a name and another person to second the motion. The second could be written into the chat function. While the ballot (poll) for elections should be prepared in advance, it can be edited the day of the meeting to add the name of nominees from the floor. Learn more about creating and editing polls for your meeting [HERE](#).

9. Can the proposed budget be amended?

Probably yes. You should check your constitution and bylaws for language relating to the manner of voting on budget matters. If there is no language prohibiting electronic votes on budget matters, you may consider your budget in the same manner you handle other resolutions and motions brought before the congregation. The budget can be posted on the Zoom screen with proposed amendments to it noted.

10. How does the congregation discuss issues or ask questions about report?

With Zoom have people indicate in the chat that they wish to be called on. When recognized by the president of the congregation, they unmute themselves and discussion begins. The president should ask those who have called in if any wish to speak before votes are taken.

11. Can we record the meeting?

Please think why you would choose to record the meeting and consider whether you ordinarily record your annual meeting. There will be minutes for the meeting and a summary of actions taken could be sent out to those unable to attend. Recording a congregational can reduce the willingness of people to speak during discussion of business. *If you choose to record the meeting, indicate that to everyone before the meeting begins.*



105 University Ave. W., St. Paul, MN 55103
651-224-4313 | www.spas-elca.org | info@spas-elca.org