

# Videoconferencing Systems for Meetings

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1. Congregations may use videoconferencing systems, such as *Zoom* or *Microsoft Teams*, to benefit those who are unable to attend the local congregation meeting in person during the COVID-19 pandemic. These systems allow brothers and sisters to see each other, offer comments, and present their meeting parts. In this way, they can ‘encourage one another.’ (Heb. 10:24, 25) The body of elders decides what technology the congregation will use. Meetings held by videoconference should *closely follow* the established arrangements and format for meetings held at the Kingdom Hall and should be in accord with the following guidelines.

## VIDEOCONFERENCE ORGANIZER

2. The body of elders should select a capable elder (or ministerial servant under the direction of the coordinator of the body of elders) to serve as the videoconference organizer. He will oversee the technical aspects of the meeting, including playing media, creating smaller groups for association, managing the settings and security for the videoconference account used by the congregation, and so forth. As needed, he ensures that appropriate reminders are provided to individual meeting attenders to minimize disruptions and improve the quality of the meetings. He coordinates the training of brothers who serve as audio/video support and attendants during the videoconference. If the congregation is using *Zoom*, he should be familiar with the latest version of *Zoom Online Videoconferencing Instructions (zoominst)* and review portions of it with those whom he trains as hosts and co-hosts. He should provide a copy of *Zoom Online Videoconferencing Instructions* to those who do not have access to it on [jw.org](http://jw.org).

3. On occasion, there may be technical difficulties or service outages that unexpectedly affect all users. If this happens, the body of elders may decide to delay the meeting until later in the day or week. If necessary, the elders may have to cancel the live meeting and send all publishers and interested persons a link to the recorded meeting on JW Stream.

## MEETING INVITATIONS

4. Interested persons may be invited to attend congregation meetings by videoconference. When extending an invitation to an interested person to connect to the meeting, the publisher should provide appropriate reminders to him regarding proper dress and decorum for

Christian meetings. Details on how to connect to meetings held by videoconference should not be shared indiscriminately. For example, they should not be shared on social media or the Internet, posted on the outside of the Kingdom Hall, or included in letters or meeting invitations sent to those who have not yet expressed interest. Neither should such details be provided in a recorded message heard when the congregation's contact telephone number is called. Elders should use good judgment before extending an invitation to disfellowshipped ones. If a disfellowshipped one is invited, the elders may inform him when he should join and leave the meeting and whether he should turn his video camera on.

5. There is no objection to a publisher tying in to another congregation's meeting on occasion. Good judgment should be exercised to ensure that no one develops the habit of joining other meetings instead of regularly attending the meetings of his own congregation. (Prov. 27:23) Elders should not make rules in this regard.

## **ASSOCIATION**

6. The body of elders should determine when to start and end a videoconference, based on local circumstances. Keeping in mind the principles found at Romans 1:11, 12 and Hebrews 10:24, 25, the session should start well in advance of the meeting and extend for a time after the meeting to allow for association and an interchange of encouragement. The body of elders should consider arranging smaller groups for association to make it easier for meeting attenders to have meaningful conversations with one another.

## **USE OF VIDEO CAMERAS**

7. Meeting participants should usually turn on their video camera when presenting parts for the benefit of the audience. *Whether an individual or a family head in the audience chooses to turn on his video camera is a personal matter.* The elders should generally not make rules in this regard. (For an exception, see [paragraph 4](#) regarding disfellowshipped ones.) If one chooses to display his video, he should be modestly dressed and ensure that what appears in the background reflects the respect and dignity appropriate for a theocratic event.—2 Cor. 6:3, 4; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10.

## **AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

8. Commenters may either raise their physical hand or use an electronic hand raising feature. If necessary, individual publishers could be assigned in advance to comment during some of the meeting parts. However, there is usually no need to preassign all comments. It is best not to spotlight the conductor during parts with audience participation. Participants can unmute and mute themselves. Optionally, the body of elders may decide to assign the brothers who serve as audio/video support to unmute and mute meeting participants.

## **SONGS AND PRAYERS**

9. Whether an individual stands for songs and prayers is a personal matter. There is no need to announce this aspect one way or the other. There is no need to ask the brother offering the prayer to turn his camera on or off during the prayer.

## **CHAIRMAN**

10. About a minute before the start of the meeting, the chairman should make a brief announcement that the meeting will soon begin. If necessary, the announcement could include reminders to help meeting attenders minimize disruptions, such as the need to mute their microphones when they are not speaking and to maintain a modest appearance when their camera is turned on. The coordinator of the body of elders decides which reminders need to be repeated at each meeting, and he may prepare an appropriate announcement for the chairmen to read. Optionally, the elders may decide to display a few key reminders on the

screen, using a simple slide, or to play a brief prerecorded audio-only announcement with the reminders.

## **SECURITY**

11. Measures should be in place to minimize disruptions and to maintain the dignity of a Christian meeting. This may include requiring a password to enter the meeting and having a virtual waiting room that requires attendees to be admitted by an attendant. The videoconferencing software should be kept up-to-date. Only authorized ones should be able to display pictures and other media. The administrative username and password for the videoconference account used by the congregation should be kept secure and disclosed only to those who have been authorized by the body of elders. Additional security features may be utilized but should not be so restrictive that it makes it difficult for older ones and newly-interested persons to attend.

12. The videoconference system should not subject users to commercial advertisements. Neither should it be used to store audio or video files, record the meeting, or post the meeting online.

## **AUDIO/VIDEO SUPPORT**

13. At least one exemplary brother should be assigned to care for audio/video support at each meeting. If possible, another brother should be assigned as a backup on standby to assist him. (If there are very few qualified brothers, a capable sister may fill in until other brothers become available or can be trained to care for audio/video support.) The brother caring for audio/video support downloads the media for the meeting in advance and displays it during the meeting. He (or the videoconference organizer) begins the videoconference well before the start of the meeting and helps those who are assigned to care for parts on the meeting to resolve potential technical issues before the meeting begins. He organizes smaller groups for association as decided by the body of elders. (See [paragraph 6](#).) These responsibilities may be shared with the attendant or other qualified brothers, based on local circumstances.

## **ATTENDANTS**

14. At least one exemplary brother should be assigned to serve as an attendant for each meeting. He joins the videoconference well before the scheduled meeting begins and is alert to those joining the videoconference. The attendant is primarily responsible for letting individuals into the videoconference and minimizing disruptions during the meeting. He is attentive to assist new ones, and, at times, he may need to mute an attendee's microphone or stop an attendee's video. He watches for disruptive individuals and inappropriate images or communication throughout the videoconference. If someone joins the meeting and intentionally causes a disruption, the attendant should quickly remove the person from the meeting and report the matter to the coordinator of the body of elders. The attendant is responsible for taking attendance. The coordinator of the body of elders determines the most practical way to take attendance. However, it is understood that it may not be possible to obtain the most accurate figures. These responsibilities may be shared with the brothers assigned to serve as audio/video support or other qualified brothers, based on local circumstances.

## **MEETINGS FOR FIELD SERVICE**

15. Meetings for field service may be held by videoconference in the normal manner. It may be possible for the brother assigned to conduct the meeting to care for audio/video support as well and to serve as the attendant. If qualified brothers are not available, exemplary sisters may care for these assignments. After the meeting, the videoconferencing system can

continue to be used as publishers share in various forms of the ministry, such as letter writing and telephone witnessing. If the group is large, the conductor may decide to arrange the publishers into smaller groups so that all can have a meaningful share in the ministry. Working together in the ministry provides an interchange of encouragement. If the brother assigned to conduct the meeting will continue in the ministry, it is best for him to work closely with the group whenever possible rather than working on his own. (Judg. 7:17; Heb. 13:7) Of course, publishers may choose to use their personal videoconferencing accounts for engaging in the ministry. Since only approved publishers should attend meetings for field service, the attendant should be mindful of this when letting individuals into the meeting. Some congregations may choose to use a meeting invitation different from that used for other meetings. The elders should determine what is best, considering the needs of the congregation.

### **ELDERS' MEETINGS**

16. To maintain confidentiality at elders' meetings, a meeting invitation different than the one provided for the midweek and weekend meetings should be used. If a personal videoconferencing account is used, then the same security guidelines used for the account used by the congregation should be applied.

### **OTHER THEOCRATIC EVENTS**

17. The videoconferencing account used by the congregation may be used for other theocratic events that would normally be held at the Kingdom Hall. Based on the approval of the Congregation Service Committee, this may include baptisms, funerals, and weddings. Personal videoconferencing accounts may be used for these events as well. The body of elders should use good judgment regarding those who are extended invitations to these events in harmony with published direction. Elders should consider legal requirements for weddings held in this manner.

## CHECKLIST FOR AUDIO/VIDEO SUPPORT AND ATTENDANTS

18. The responsibilities listed below may be shared with other qualified brothers based on local circumstances. Likewise, the brother caring for audio/video support and the attendant may need to assist one another.—See [paragraphs 13](#) and [14](#).

<b>Before the Meeting</b>	
<b>Audio/Video Support</b>	<b>Attendant</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Download all videos and other media in advance (such as with <i>JW Library</i>)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sign in to the videoconference account to start the videoconference at the time designated by the elders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Admit the attendant into the videoconference</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Test the audio and video setup of those presenting meeting parts, as needed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If a polling feature is used to take attendance, set up and launch the poll</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If directed by the body of elders, create smaller groups for association and end them before the meeting begins</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> About one minute before the meeting begins, mute all attendees and, if possible, spotlight the chairman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Admit attendees into the videoconference, and monitor them for potential disruptions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Help adjust screen names so that attendees can be identified, if possible</li> </ul>
<b>During the Meeting</b>	
<b>Audio/Video Support</b>	<b>Attendant</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Play videos and display pictures as needed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spotlight speakers during talks, if possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Be alert to potential disruptions and be prepared to take appropriate action. This may include muting/unmuting, disabling a camera, or removing a disruptive attendee from the meeting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Take the attendance, and provide it to the coordinator of the body of elders</li> </ul>
<b>After the Meeting</b>	
<b>Audio/Video Support</b>	<b>Attendant</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If directed by the body of elders, create smaller groups for association</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Stay online until the time designated by the body of elders to end the videoconference, and then end the videoconference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Monitor attendees for potential disruptions until the videoconference ends</li> </ul>