



## **Electronic Congregation Meetings Southeastern Iowa Synod**

The circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic complicate the conducting of business that requires a congregation meeting. Since indoor, in-person gatherings are not recommended because of the dangers of spreading the virus even when trying to adhere to CDC guidelines, electronic meetings remain the best option for the foreseeable future.

Electronic meetings are legal in Iowa unless precluded by your congregation's constitution. A provision to prohibit an electronic meeting would be unusual given the provisions related to Congregation Meetings in the [Model constitution for congregations, Chapter 10](#), but make sure you check your congregation's constitution.

Requirements for announcing an electronic meeting are the same as for an in-person meeting – notice given in advance that includes announcement in worship on 2 consecutive Sundays prior to the meeting and by mail or electronic means to all voting members at least 10 days in advance.

While an electronic platform like Zoom might be the norm, it is not the only possibility. Any electronic means (including audio/phone) that allows all participants to hear and to be heard is allowed.

Voting is the biggest challenge. If all votes require either “yes” or “no,” voice or hand signal that can be seen by the chair or moderator, (either by physically raising a hand or by using a “raised hand” feature like Zoom provides). But this sort of “up or down” voting eliminates the possibility of anonymity, which is legal but may be undesirable to participants.

There are voting tools available for purchase, but the cost, together with the potential for technical complications usually make them less desirable for the regular business of a congregation meeting.

For anonymous ballots or those that provide multiple options (like when electing people to positions of leadership), many congregations in have opted for a physical ballot that is dropped off at a designated location (usually a ballot box at the church – frequently in the parking lot) following the electronic gathering. If this physical ballot option is used, it is essential that

- A limited time period for delivering a ballot is clearly communicated to all participants (For instance, “You may drop your ballot at the ballot box in the church parking lot between 1pm and 3pm today.”)
- At least two persons (in positions of elected leadership or appointed by the congregation council) are present at the drop off site during the allotted period to assure that any person delivering a ballot was actually present and participating in the electronic meeting and that they are only delivering their own ballot. Delivering another person's ballot is considered voting by proxy and proxy voting is strictly prohibited. This means that a person participating in the electronic meeting who is unable to deliver their own ballot is prohibited from voting.

If more detail is needed or desired, see the updated (10/20) ELCA resource on electronic meetings [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Remote\\_Meeting\\_FAQ\\_for\\_Congregations.pdf?\\_ga=2.117358406.1930735389.1606757480-2115464545.1606757480](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Remote_Meeting_FAQ_for_Congregations.pdf?_ga=2.117358406.1930735389.1606757480-2115464545.1606757480)