



## Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ

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### **Guidelines for Congregational “Member” Meetings During the COVID-19 Pandemic October 3, 2020**

As we continue to minister through the fall season of this COVID-19 pandemic, the annual or bi-annual congregational meetings are quickly approaching for many churches. The health and safety of our church members continue to be of utmost priority during this time. Upon consultation with Heather Kimmel, (the UCC General Counsel), Grant Wiens, (the Conference Attorney), state websites, and other judicatory resources, we have developed the following information for all Churches of the Missouri Mid-South Conference.

#### **There are Two Kinds of Meetings at Issue:**

1. Member Meetings                      Church Congregational Meetings
2. Director Meetings                     Church Council Meetings

#### **These Meetings are Governed by two Legal Authorities:**

1. Your State law
2. Your Church’s Constitution and Bylaws

#### **State Laws on Member Meetings:**

- Arkansas                      Does not allow for virtual meeting (allows for proxy votes)
- Missouri                      Allows for virtual meeting<sup>1</sup>
- Tennessee                     Allows for virtual meeting<sup>2</sup>

#### **Your Church’s Constitution and Bylaws:**

- If your bylaws say that your congregational meeting must be in person, then regardless of what your state law says, your meeting must be in person.
  - But read your bylaws to see if they allow for proxy voting.
  - From Heather Kimmel: “If a church decides they are going to have an electronic meeting even though their bylaws say that meetings have to be in person, they need to recognize there is a risk that a member may challenge any decisions made during that meeting as invalid. This challenge usually takes the form of a lawsuit. And, they need to be sure to ratify any actions taken at such a meeting at the next valid meeting.”<sup>3</sup>
- If your church’s bylaws say nothing about an electronic meeting and your state law allows it, then an electronic meeting is allowed (even though your bylaws are silent on the issue).
- If your church’s bylaws refer to Robert’s Rules, they specifically require the bylaws to explicitly allow electronic meetings.

<sup>1</sup> <https://revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=351.225>

<sup>2</sup> <https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/pub/execorders/exec-orders-lee34.pdf> ; <https://tsla.libguides.com/TNCOVID-19/virtualmeetings>

<sup>3</sup> Heather Kimmel email to Ginny Brown Daniel on October 2, 2020.

### **Using Zoom for Your Congregational Meeting:**

- If your state and bylaws allow for electronic meeting, Zoom or another video conference platform may be a good option for your meeting.
- The following are forms of voting on Zoom or another video conferencing platform:
  - Voice Vote
    - Call each name and record their vote.
  - Polling and Voice Vote
    - Use the Polling option for those who have video. This allows you to write the motion and the vote options in advance. Then they can vote when you open the poll.
    - For those who have joined the meeting on the phone and/or who express being uncomfortable with this technology, place them in a breakout room. Have someone record each person's vote.
    - Tally the Polling votes with the Voice votes from the breakout room votes for your final result.
  - Chat
    - Use the chat to record votes for those with video. For those without video, place them in a breakout room or ask them to verbalize their vote.

### **Preparation Work for Electronic Meetings:**

- Know your actual membership list.
- Send out explicit information to all members about your electronic meeting and directions for their voting options.
- Read your bylaws for your quorum requirements.
- Register members so you can track your quorum.
- Place members in a waiting room to mark them as present.
- Rename people, who are on video or phone so that their actual name appears for others to see and recognize.
- If you don't make quorum, check your bylaws to ensure that your church council can vote on behalf of the member body on items such as the 2021 budget.

### **In-Person Congregational Meetings:**

- Follow your Church, Conference, and local Department of Health guidelines for in-person meetings.
- Make sure that the building capacity during the pandemic will accommodate an in-person congregational meeting.
- Limit paper materials only for those whose accessibility requires it.
- Send materials electronically so that people can look at it on their phones or tablets.
- Put materials on a powerpoint screen.
- Do not use paper ballots.
- Require that masks be worn throughout the congregational meeting.
- If more than one person is using a microphone, speakers must wear a mask.

If you have any questions, please contact Ginny Brown Daniel, Conference Minister, at [ginny@mmsucc.org](mailto:ginny@mmsucc.org) or call her at 832-326-3582. In these difficult days, may God's peace be with your Church as you continue to live out God's call for your Church and God's Beloved Community.