

In today's busy world, live streaming is one of the best ways to engage your congregation. Among the many ramifications about the spread of COVID-19 is a sudden need for churches everywhere to rethink their Sunday services, moving from a physical to an online gathering for a season. But livestreaming can feel like a daunting challenge, especially for small-to-medium-sized churches that lack the budget and team to execute such a production. The following is a practical guide for how small- or medium-sized churches can get started in livestreaming.

What Platform Should We Use?

There aren't too many services that allow you to produce a decent live stream for free and those that do come with certain strings attached. However, if you are just starting out and you can't afford a professional church live streaming service, a free option might be what you need.



Live streaming with [YouTube](#) has become increasingly simple over the years. With its ability to reach the masses, a church live stream via YouTube is a viable free option.

PROS:

- The HD video quality is very good and YouTube will even accept and playback 4k video content
- Simple to set up
- Second largest search engine in the world
- Third most visited website in the world, making functionality very familiar to users
- Available to viewers without needing account
- Easy subscriptions to your channel
- Viewer analytics - YouTube statistics are a great way to see how your videos are performing
- The upload utility is very straightforward and encoding times are very quick
- Videos are easy to share with options for email, website embedding, Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and more
- Your audience can interact with you by giving your video a thumbs up and leave text and video comments

CONS:

- 4-hour live broadcasting limit
- Inability to schedule streams
- No way to accept donations
- Ads are found everywhere on YouTube and come up before, after, otop and beside your videos. Ads distract from your message and can cheapen your channel of communication.
- There are no paid subscriptions for added features or the removal of ads on your videos.
- Some features are not available to all users and only come when you reach a specific number of views and have a good standing reputation.
- There is very little web player customization and an undesirable landing page when videos are done playing.
- Literally everyone and their dog is on YouTube! Your content can easily get swallowed up in the sea of cat videos.



Streaming with Facebook Live is undoubtedly the most popular free live-streaming platform with [78% of online audiences](#) tuning in. However, just like YouTube, popularity does not exempt it from serious flaws.

PROS:

- Simple to set up, though;
- Most churches already have a group page
- Potential for massive following
- Reach some of your existing followers via a notification that your church is “going live.”
- Trial run with the privacy setting on “private.”
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CONS:

- Facebook videos don’t pop up in search engines
- Potential copyright issues for music
- Inability to accept donations
- No analytics
- Facebook Live video notifications are received by about one-third of page followers
- Facebook gets to [utilize your streamed content](#) however they see fit



[Vimeo](#) is a pay service (with a free level) for hosting your videos, so there are no bothersome ads. The pay level is for those who would upload more than a certain file size limit each month or those that want HD quality videos. Vimeo also allows for download of your video in full quality from the page the video is on, which is a nice option.

Vimeo is the perfect place to upload all your HD sermon videos and other content that you want to directly embed onto your website. With a paid account like Vimeo Plus or Vimeo Pro, you can remove all Vimeo branding from your player and make it look like it is part of your website. This is perfect for utilizing the rock-solid infrastructure of Vimeo while keeping your site on brand.

PROS:

- Vimeo offers the highest quality in online video encoding and the Pro account offers “2-pass encoding” for much cleaner videos that require less bandwidth to view.
- Paid accounts offer priority uploading, no banner ads, HD embedding, player customization, advanced statistics, privacy settings and more. (Having at least a Vimeo Plus account is a must for church media!)
- The ability to brand the playback of your video with logo overlays, outros and website URLs.
- Vimeo’s website has very few ads and will not shock your audience with unexpected content popping up.
- Cleanly embed your videos on external websites without any advertising or link-backs.

CONS:

- It’s small user base means your audience probably won’t have an account to comment or “heart” your videos.
- It caters to the professional community and has restrictions on what can be uploaded to the site.
- Sometimes the video player is buggy and doesn’t stream videos properly.
- Even with a Pro account, video encoding doesn’t seem as zippy as YouTube, but this could be due to the higher quality it is trying to achieve.
- There are bandwidth and video storage limitations on most of the accounts.



Zoom's bread and butter is their video conferencing software. Zoom is quick and easy to set up and get a personalized meeting room link. If you're interested in Zoom's webinar feature, it is important to note that it is actually an add-on to their video conferencing service (not included).

The features available for your Zoom meetings will vary based on your account type, user type, and how your account is configured by your Zoom account owner or admin (if applicable). You can access your Zoom account through one or more of the following login options: email and password login, Facebook login, Google login, or Single Sign-On.

There is a license-free user account. A "basic" user can host meetings with up to 100 participants. Normally, if 3 or more participants join, the meeting will time out after 40 minutes; this has been lifted due to COVID-19.

Licensed: A licensed user is a paid account user who can host unlimited meetings on the public cloud. By default, they can host meetings with up to 100 participants and large meeting licenses are available for additional capacity. There are significant features available, including add-ons, such as webinar.

PROS:

- Video calling - No buffering, automatic adjustment, and very rarely does anyone have to say "can you hear me now?"
- Audio calling - Perfect and recorded for future review
- Conference calls - Easy to bring in 10+ parties without any loss in quality
- Screen sharing - Easy to use, get to choose what window or monitor to share
- Scheduling - Easy to schedule an event and export to calendar then invite guests
- Can see everyone in the group while chatting.
- Can mute people in the group as needed, but they don't have power to mute the moderator.
- Has the hand raising function which helps very well with discussing.
- With the webinar function, you can stream to Facebook Live and Youtube Live.

CONS:

- User experience in scheduling
- Recording editing - Could use some more robust tools for editing a recorded video/audio before export.
- Air time recording - Does not automatically cut out muted segments with only one participant in recordings.
- No web feature for new people who join so they don't need to download the app first.
- Basic accounts cannot utilize user and account add-ons such as webinar or conference room connector.

Church Livestream Technology Setup

Live stream starter kit

Below is the fastest way to get up and running in order to stream your service.....

- laptop with a webcam and streaming software. (See below)
- Audio from sound board goes into the laptop with the cable (see below)

One step up

Camera - Camcorder with power cord, HDMI out and 8mm audio in jack.

Canon VIXIA HF R800 Camcorder (Black)

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01N7OAH3I/ref=cm_sw_r_other_ap_i_84mDEbQ42WVKG

Tripod with fluid head - for smooth movement

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01MZZGBPS/ref=cm_sw_r_em_ap_i_f-mDEbNNYCXBS

Sound - sound mixed for live feed, not house. Sent to camera via xlr to 8mm cable

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07K58L9MW/ref=cm_sw_r_em_ap_i_RanDEb2VNQDKB

Camera Video to PC converter - Blackmagic Design UltraStudio Mini Recorder - Thunderbolt

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B009D91314/ref=cm_sw_r_em_ap_i_WE5CEbK5M1FB8

Cables - Thunderbolt to USB-C cable for a PC

Computer - Intel i5 Processor, 8GB of RAM and at least 500 GB storage.

You may want to get an external hard drive if you also want to record your live video locally.

Streaming software - OBS (FREE)

<https://obsproject.com/>

Stream location - YouTube or Facebook account with live stream enabled. (Will take **24** hrs for account activation)

Your YouTube or Facebook link can be embedded on a website or sent out via email or Instagram.