

Council of Elder Guidelines for Electronic Congregational Meetings

October 6, 2020

Background:

At their July 7 All-Elder meeting, the Council of Elders approved adding an amendment to Bethlehem's current [bylaws](#) to make explicit provision for congregational meetings to be held electronically, similar to the explicit provision already in our bylaws for Council of Elder meetings to be held via electronic communication. The following wording for the amendment was introduced in writing at the July 26 Quarterly Strategy Meeting:

“When approved by the Council of Elders, any member business meeting may be conducted as an electronic meeting by remote communication using guidelines established by the Council of Elders. All members whose remote participation in a meeting complies with such guidelines are considered to be ‘present’ for all purposes under these Bylaws and *Robert’s Rules of Order*. All members ‘present’ by any of these means have the same rights as members. The Council of Elders is not required to offer remote communication for a meeting, and no member has a right to demand participation by remote communication for any meeting for which the Council of Elders has not approved it.”

The remainder of this document highlights the electronic meeting guidelines approved by the Council of Elders at their October 6 All-Elder meeting to govern electronic meetings. The guidelines are intended to be updated as future requirements and technological changes are encountered.

Definition

“Electronic meeting” means a congregational meeting held by remote communication or electronic means (hereinafter, defined together as “electronic meeting”) that includes video and/or audio conferencing that allows participating members to simultaneously hear each other, whether by phone, internet, video feed, simulcast, or any similar means, and those members are considered to be “present” for all purposes under these Bylaws and *Robert’s Rules of Order*.

Quorum

The presence of a quorum at an electronic meeting shall be established for those present in person at one or more elder-specified locations (normally Bethlehem's three campuses), in the manner normally conducted to verify members present, by any means approved by the Council of Elders or the Chair to verify the number of members present this way.

Security and Verification of Membership

The following means shall be authorized to verify that those present are members and eligible to vote at an electronic meeting. No one whose presence as a member cannot be verified by these means shall be considered present or eligible to exercise the rights of a member.

1. Ministry Platform (Bethlehem's database management system for church member information) will be used to verify member status in order to allow participation in congregational meetings.
2. For electronic meetings held at physical campus locations and connected electronically, unless otherwise specified, members will need to be physically present at one of those campus locations to vote.

Obligation to Provide Appropriate Technology to Meeting Participants

In general, electronic meetings are intended to connect live congregational meetings held simultaneously at Bethlehem's existing campuses and encourage the congregation to attend the meeting at their "home" campus. Hosting an electronic meeting does not necessarily imply that meeting participation will extend to include those not physically present at one of Bethlehem's existing campuses, and Bethlehem is not required to provide technology for people to participate remotely if they are unable to attend at a Bethlehem campus.