

Engaging in Digital Ecclesiology: A New Approach to Virtual Ministry

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Overview

Welcome

Getting to Know You

Looking at the Numbers

The Appeal of Hybrid

Key Elements

Logistics

Q & A

This session seeks to offer faith leaders tools to embrace digital ecclesiology as a means to virtually stay connected with congregants, expand communications, and engage the community of faith in new ways. As faith leaders, we are called to embody Jesus' practice of always speaking the language of all people so that he could inspire change. Jesus always adapted and pivoted as he needed in order to be effective in his ministry. Digital communication is, in many ways, another "language" in which countless individuals are immersed. Faith leaders who also speak that language have the beautiful opportunity to reimagine their ministries.

Getting to know you!



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- Please share your name, affiliation, and one hope for virtual ministry.
- Kindly invite another person to share.
- Place in Chat your stance on digital technology (**1** – Hate, **2** – Don't mind, **3** – Want to use more, **4** – Love **5** – Can't get enough and consider yourself a pro)

The Beauty of Technology

Technology is a gift! It has transformed how we order food in restaurants, transport ourselves, learn, and experience entertainment. It impacts how we function and experience life. People use digital technology to work, connect, and communicate in other facets of their lives.

Digital platforms like Zoom have changed how we purchase products, hold meetings, teach and attend classes, manage accounts, and a myriad of other tasks.

It affords extended connectivity to individuals regardless of geographic location, opportunities to share of information, and to receive services such as doctor's visits.

The Statistics

There are over 3.2 billion smartphone users in the world, and eight out of ten Americans using them to receive the news and access information.*

The majority of adults in the U.S. (78%) regularly use social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Millennials and Generations Zs use these platforms multiple times a day, Baby Boomers also regularly use Facebook as a way to connect with family and loved ones.*

Pew Research Center survey conducted last month found that 57% of adults who attend religious services at least monthly said they have watched religious services online or on TV because of the coronavirus outbreak.*

* Elisa Shearer, "More Than Eight-in-Ten Americans Get News from Digital Devices," Pew Research Center <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/12/more-than-eight-in-ten-americans-get-news-from-digital-devices/>

* Aaron Smith and Monica Anderson, "Social Media Use in 2018" Pew Research Center <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>

* Claire Gecewicz, "Few Americans say their house of worship is open, but a quarter say their faith has grown amid pandemic," Pew Research Center <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/30/few-americans-say-their-house-of-worship-is-open-but-a-quarter-say-their-religious-faith-has-grown-amid-pandemic/>

Why hybrid worship and formational programming?

Trends in Church Attendance

- Over the past 20 years, attendance in U.S. churches declined by 20%*
- Travel, schedules, work, and other obligations impede upon regular attendance.

* Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades," Gallup News <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

Trends in Church Attendance

- Caregivers, individuals living with physical disabilities, and older adults with physical limitations are among those who have been unable to attend – long before the pandemic.
- The future of the church – Millennials and Generation Zs – present the largest population in attendance decline.

Why hybrid worship and formational programming?

New Realities the Pandemic Presents

- Job Loss
- Relocation
- 25% of church attenders aren't sure when they're coming back or aren't coming back for a long time. An additional 30% of respondents said they'd rather worship at home and only return when they can be mask-free at church.*

* Carey Nieuwhof, "When Your Church Reopens , What Will be Left and Who Will Still Come? Some Thoughts." <https://careynieuwhof.com/when-your-church-reopens-what-will-be-left-and-who-will-still-come-some-thoughts/>

New Realities the Pandemic Presents

- Worship as usual has disappeared.
- Some individuals will never return to in-person worship or other programming.
- Fears of Infection
- Shifting Values and Practices

Key elements for an impactful virtual ministry:

Pivot and Adapt

- Offering digital worship experiences cannot be an afterthought.
- Be intentional about the online experience and resist temptations to simply livestream without adaptations.
- Avoid one-sided communications by communicating with online worshippers, inviting them into conversation, and creating moments for connectivity.
- Consider youth and young adults and packaging their programming much differently than adult audiences.

Assess, Analytics, and Anecdotes

- Consistently keep a gauge of the online experience by monitoring comments.
- Use all available analytics to determine moments of strength and weakness.
- Invite feedback and utilize small groups as a lab to observe.
- For spiritual formation programming such as small group classes, utilize surveys that gather quantitative and qualitative data.

Key elements for an impactful virtual ministry:

Connect, Engage, and Communicate

- Don't rely only on worship as an opportunity to keep the congregation engaged.
- Be proactive by keeping the faith community's website updated with new content and opportunities to connect.
- Keep branding easily recognizable and consistent by utilizing consistent colors and fonts in all forms of communication.
- Utilize new technology such as QR codes to encourage giving with ease.

Social Media in Tandem

- Social media platforms are wonderful tools to promote online worship experiences and other programming.
- Update platforms with regular content and opportunities for dialogue about current events and other topics.
- Post brand-consistent content that is simple, clean, and concise.
- Encourage followers to share content.

Considering logistics:

Personnel

- You will need help!
- A dedicated staff person (full or part-time or intern) can manage digital communications for online worship experiences, formational programming, and social media platforms.

Technology + Licensing

- Consider the platform that will be used for streaming (Livestream, Zoom, Facebook, etc.) and the licensing requirements for worship songs.
- Use best practices for communicating via each platform.

Some Helpful Resources:



- Carey Nieuwhof: [“Alan George on Everything You Need to Know About Church Online, How to Make it Relational, and What Metrics to Watch and Which to Ignore”](#)
- The Barna Group: [Digital Church](#)
- Livestreaming Services: [livestream.com](#)