

**What you have learned should inform what you do next for both a hybrid time and a post-Covid world.**

So what have you learned?

By now, you're either having conversations about how to open - even if it won't happen for months, or you've opened and are wondering how it's going and what to adjust. And you should be thinking about whether the pandemic is going to alter congregational participation forever.

So, again, I ask, what have you learned?

I think your most important next step is to do some fact-finding evaluation and receive some constructive criticism and insight from your congregants. Here's how I would do that:

1. First, during this pandemic, have you maintained that you have a broadcast worship experience or did you create a production worship experience?

Broadcast = before shelter-in-place, you already had a live stream, a TV channel or some other video capabilities and you continued to do that but just to an empty room.

Production = you created something completely new. Preaching, music, video effects are all new and different from what you did before.

And of course, you can be a hybrid of the two. Maybe you kept worship as broadcast but you changed bible study to production, or community groups or Sunday School classes changed. Maybe the youth program is doing something new.

2. Second, what are you evaluating?

The worship experience?

How to receive sacraments?

The feeling of community?

How to experience music?

How to receive the sermon?

Whether people still feel like they are receiving spiritual formation or Bible study?

What do you WANT to learn?

3. Third, who are you reaching in this digital time?

I'm not going to talk today about the audience you don't know about - new visitors who have found you through friends, social media, or google search. They are important and

you need to explore this audience. But for today's conversation, I want to focus on your invested congregants. How you figure out who to ask?

Don't forget you have access to anonymous feedback in the form of metrics. Youtube analytics, Facebook insights, Vimeo analytics, website Google analytics, email open rates. These all tell you an anonymous story about how people are engaging with what you're sharing. But I want you to learn some critical and personal feedback too.

1. How many people do you see in an average month during worship (or Bible study, etc - whatever you are evaluating that has become a digital experience)?

For my church, it's 300-400 people, not family units. For every 150 people, give or take, you need to interview 5 family units. So for my church, I need to talk to 12 households.

2. Who are those 5 family units? That's for you to determine based on active involvement of your congregants. Create a stereotype of 5 households.

Here's what that looks like at my church:

- A. Widowed woman in late 70s/early 80s who is still physically active and involved
- B. Empty nesters, a couple, in their late 60s/early 70s with grandkids who live within driving distance
- C. Family connected to youth group - with at least one teenager (middle or high) and maybe one college student
- D. Family connected to children's program - with at least one elementary aged child and maybe one teenager and/or one preschooler
- E. A single woman, never married or divorced, in her 40s

3. Then I would pick specific people who fill this persona. And since we need to interview 12, I would decide how many widows - maybe that's only 2 and it's one man and one woman, and I need 4 empty nest households, 2 youth group families, 3 children's families but at least one is a single mom, and only 1 single woman.
4. Then you need to call them (not email or survey) and ask them three questions:
  - a. What has your digital experience been like?
  - b. What do you think, as best you can predict, your post-covid world needs for a digital experience would be?
  - c. Have you shared your digital experience with anyone?
5. I would create subquestions for each of these to help me get to what I need. What has your digital experience been like = when do you watch it? Who

watches with you?

6. What do you do with this information?

It should inform what changes you may make. If you've had personal time to clean out your closets because of Covid19, then think of it the same way. Now is the time for you to make changes and you need the data to back up what changes you need to make, if any.

Maybe it's about budget and how you staff. Maybe it's about changing some programs to be online. Maybe it's about reach to a new audience. Maybe it's about rethinking what God is calling for your congregation to be in a post-covid world.

7. Don't hear me say that digital is the only experience. If all this has taught you that all you want is to create something different than everything else we experience in a week, lean into that. But be the best at it and learn from this experience of how to make that even better. And learn how to market that!

Finally, if you gather all this information and you feel you have direction of where to go and now you need your staff and congregation to buy in and you don't know how to do that, it would be a good time to hire a consultant to help. This is literally what they want to help you with.