

CHURCH DURING COVID-19:

A Step-by-Step Guide to Taking Your Church Online



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Over the past several weeks, many events, classes, and travel plans have been postponed or canceled. We should all be committed to stopping the spread of COVID-19, and, as church leaders, taking precautions is necessary.

We talked to some pastors who have had to cancel service or move to virtual gatherings due to the virus to see how they're responding. Thankfully, with the help of technology, we can still reach our congregations. This eBook was created to help you strategize as a team and deliver an amazing digital experience for your church!

MAKING THE CHANGE

COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in all our usual processes, including hosting successful in-person service. Everything we've known has been put on pause. There is no reason to worry, though. With staying home and working remotely comes innovation and thinking outside the box. Let's jump into each part of your church's day-to-day processes and services.

TAKING SUNDAY DIGITAL

Now is the time to commit to a digital Sunday experience. All of us seem to be scrambling to create some sort of familiar experience for our congregations. Some churches have been regularly live streaming for quite some time, and others have yet to give it a try due to an array of roadblocks. Now, we all must provide a digital Sunday experience. We are going to discuss a couple of things before we cover the pros and cons of live streaming. Here's what you need to consider:

1. Know your team's capacity

Depending on where you live, there are different restrictions in place dictating how much in-person interaction is allowed during this time. If officials in your area are recommending no more than three people gather at once, for instance, you may have to scale back expectations for live streaming a full band.

In addition to local restrictions, it's important to consider whether you have the time and ability to host a live streamed service. Do you have a video production team on staff? Do you have the necessary equipment available?

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If you're reading this thinking, 'But I don't have the resources to do this. Our church is too small,' this is for you! In 2020, all you need is a laptop with a webcam to run a church service online. Maybe you stream to your church's Facebook™ page, or a YouTube page, or even to a Facebook group you've started. You can invite people to be a part of the service so not everyone has to be in the same place. All you do is send the invite link and they can join from their laptop or phone. Don't let COVID-19 stop you from gathering together to worship!" —Aaron Magnuson, *ONE&ALL*



LIVE STREAMING YOUR SERVICE

There are several platforms available for live streaming. If you have no experience live streaming your service, you probably don't have time to grab a team and equipment to make that happen on top of everything your church might be working through. Thankfully, there has never been an easier time to get started. Using Facebook Live™ or YouTube Live™ is a great starting point.

If you're still debating live streaming, here are a few more things to consider:



Do you have the internet speed/bandwidth to support a live stream?

If you are not running some sort of business-level internet service, you may run into problems trying to support a clear live stream. This ties into the next question.



Where will you be streaming from?

Depending on whether your staff will have to stream from home or remote locations, you may want to consider pre-recording your content.

PRE-RECORDING YOUR SERVICE

This might be the easiest way to get Sunday off the ground, as most people have smartphones. Thanks to advances in technology, we can record and edit high-quality content with our cell phones! If you have a higher quality camera and audio setup, that's even better.

Pre-recording your service allows you to have a smoother experience with an on-demand quality. There might be a better time on Sunday for your congregation to watch outside of normal service times. This also allows your staff to focus on building community on Sunday instead of trying to get the service up and live.

No matter which direction your church decides to go, I challenge you to create unique content for this time and not just do a "recorded service" the way you always do. This is an amazing time to create an engaging experience for you congregation.

MIDWEEK ENGAGEMENT

Not only is your Sunday service impacted, but all your midweek ministries also must go virtual. As a leader of a midweek ministry, I know that we've had to think outside-of-the-box to continue engaging our community members. With social media, video conferencing, and phone calls, we can create authentic opportunities to engage our congregation like never before. As we are all stuck at home with our families and our phones, there are some cool ways we can reach our communities. Below are some the most innovative ways I've seen churches embrace this time.



Daily Devotionals:

Several churches are taking this time of uncertainty to jump on Facebook or Instagram™ and spend some time in the Word to focus back on what we know is true. I've seen pre-recorded videos and completely off-the-cuff live videos with church leaders.

One of my favorite versions of this is having different staff members leading different days. This is such a cool opportunity for people on your staff that don't have a place on stage on Sundays to get a chance to serve the church. You can even send an email version out daily that comes from your pastor if that would resonate better with your congregation.

Coffee & Quarantine:

One of my friend's churches in Nashville, TN, is doing a daily Instagram Live™ show with their staff members to have a cup of coffee with the members and answer questions while spending some time together. They bring on different staff members to talk through how they're handling this time. It's a great way to bring some brightness into the life of the church in this time of uncertainty.

Weekly Worship & Prayer:

I have seen several churches do a weekly worship and prayer live stream or pre-recording to gather as a church and pray over their communities. This has varied from a full live stream to having one worship leader jump on Instagram and lead a couple songs and pray for the church. This doesn't have to be as big of a production as your Sunday service, but it's a great opportunity to gather midweek.

Digital Community/Small Groups:

This has been a fun experience—leveraging our web calling tools to meet with our community group to check in and have some fellowship. What a great time we live in to have these tools available for “face time.”

Depending on what platforms your church or community leaders use, you have access to Zoom™, Google™, Skype™, and FaceTime™ to set up weekly times to come together in small groups. If you don’t already have access to a web call service, Zoom and several others offer free versions.

Midweek service is a great opportunity try new things and find something unique to your church. Think about what your community and congregation would enjoy and lean into that.

ONLINE GIVING

In this time, you can no longer can on passing the bucket or tray for weekly giving. Many churches rely heavily on week-to-week giving. If you have implemented online giving or are looking for a solution, there are a couple things to keep in mind when communicating about giving. In a recent Church Engagement Podcast Episode, we chatted with Jonathan Carone about giving during uncertain times. Here’s what he had to say:



Be honest

Right now, your congregation is looking for clear and honest communication. They don’t know what they don’t know. You play a big role in the lives of your members, and they are willing to help where they can. Clearly communicating how you use the regular gifts your members give is crucial. Don’t be afraid to share how your church is going to use the gifts and the steps you are taking to be good stewards of their resources.



Be empathetic

Depending on your community, the impact of COVID-19 varies greatly. Your congregation is impacted and churches need to address that. Every church is in a different situation and has the unique ability to serve its community.

In this time, people are looking to ways to support their communities. More people are ordering out and shopping local. People are looking to be generous in whatever way they can.



REMOTE TEAM COMMUNICATIONS

Working remotely is an interesting experience, especially when your work is extremely relational. We all are stuck at home, and many of us can't even go anywhere. There are a handful of best practices from the remote workforce that your church staff can implement to keep things on track.

Messaging Platforms

Having a platform to instantly communicate outside of text messaging and email is crucial for productivity as a team. Depending on what your church uses for email and document management, there may be a service you can use. Microsoft Teams™ and Google Hangouts™ are both great options. Slack™ is also a great option that offers a free version.

Using a messaging platform will help your team find work-life balance. It will also help you separate individual teams for communicating while working through projects. You're able to share files and add comments that you can't share via text messaging.

Project Management Tools

When you can't share a whiteboard or collaborate in person to make decisions as a team, a project management tool is a great way to keep track of things. There are a lot of great options out there like Trello™ or Basecamp™ that offer free options for managing projects and making decisions together. When working remotely, you don't have the ability to catch things in the peripheral like you do in an office environment. The big takeaway: People on your team need to know exactly what to get done. As a leader, you can have visibility without micromanaging while using these platforms.

Regular Meeting Schedules

Structure is crucial to helping your team feel aligned. If you can set up video conference meetings on a consistent schedule, it helps your team maintain a somewhat normal flow to their day. I recommend a short all-hands meeting at the beginning and end of the week.

The biggest thing to remember is that your entire team is figuring this out while balancing their home lives. We're all navigating this new way of life, so having grace with your team is important. Overcommunication allows you to have clarity on your team's priorities but combining these tools and best practices will help the transition to remote work be much smoother.

CONCLUSION

We're all navigating this new way of doing church, and once all of this is over, we will have so many new and innovative ways to reach our communities. This isn't a replacement for meeting together in person on a Sunday, but it's a great opportunity to allow people to experience your church in a way that they never have before. When things get uncertain and people are looking for direction, churches can shine brightest. Your church was built for this!

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