

NOW & NEXT

HOW THE CHURCH IS CHANGING FOR GOOD

presented by  AMPLIFY MEDIA

Episode 8 – There's No Going Back: Taking Digital Practices into the Future

Watch this episode on demand and download related resources at
AmplifyMedia.com/NowandNext/theres-no-going-back/.

Host – Rev. Lisa Yebuah, Lead Pastor, Southeast Raleigh Table, Raleigh, NC

Panelists –

- Rev. Zach Bechtold
Pastor at Choteau, Brady, and Dutton United Methodist Churches, Montana
- Stephen Brewster
Creative and Leadership Coach, Franklin, TN
- Rev. Jasmin Elana Taylor
Associate Pastor of Digital and Media Ministry, Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, IL

Pastors and digital communicators discussed what they've learned about virtual worship since March. What worked, what didn't, and what is imperative for churches to continue to practice.

Our panelists discussed what has changed during these past two months. All had digital services before, but now there is more intentionality with connecting with people online by saying their name and noticing that they are viewing the service. There is also freedom for worshippers who might need to worship at a different time in the week. Pastors' mindsets shifted from performance worship to a more intimate, "fireside chat" form of teaching and connection.

Other thoughts from the conversation included:

- You must become flexible if you haven't already. What we've done well in the past doesn't always translate to a screen. By making it intimate, you make it meaningful. This flexibility is an act of hospitality as you change what doesn't work well for something that does.
- You don't have to be on all platforms. Choose the ones that work well for your community and staff, and focus on those.
- There was something you were doing before this pandemic that can be dropped when we return to in-person worship. Use that bandwidth to continue your digital practices, which can't go away.

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- You want to create a space of “with” during a worship service. Welcome people by name and chat with them. Around 50% of people watch services on their phones or televisions, where chat isn’t available. For those people, also sparingly engage the bottom banner of the screen.
- You want to reset the conversation in chat about every 5 to 7 minutes as people join and leave services.
- Remember to follow up personally with every person who engaged in the service (“liked” it or chatted, etc.).

Specific ideas of creating an experience of worship and connection included:

- Ask people to set up an altar or holy space in their homes. Share photos of everyone’s spaces.
- On Good Friday, Trinity UCC held a Seven Cries from Chicago ecumenical service that included pastors from around the area. Sharing the virtual pulpit with other pastors to guest preach is easier than ever.
- The panelists saw an increase of frequency for online events. For example, in the past, they might have hosted a game night once a month. Now people want them weekly. Keeping a digital space for this sort of recreational community is important.
- Lead Social Media 101-type classes for members who aren’t connected well digitally but want to be.

Our digital faith communities and connections are here to stay. Let go of the things that aren’t working, and connect well with the people who will remain in your community online.

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