

Clergy Zoom Conversations: Building Virtual Relationships

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Rev. Bryan Tener, Director of Contextual Evangelism, Discipleship Ministries

Rev. Amy Wagner, WPA Director of Congregational Development & Revitalization

General Observations about Returning to In-person Church (Amy)

- 1) Don't make decisions in isolation: Form a "re-entry" team; involve key lay leadership
- 2) Think in reverse of closing: small to big; slow at first; remain flexible; adjust as you go
 - a. "The more practice you have at being flexible, the more flexible you become."
- 3) Follow public guidelines: cleaning, distancing, masks, sanitizer, food/drinks, track attendance (for contact tracing if someone gets sick)
- 4) Don't stop virtual ministry!
 - a. Some people may not be comfortable with coming back yet
 - b. You need to be ready to return to distance ministry at any time if virus flare-ups occur.
- 5) Think strategically: What should end? What needs to start new? What needs to be adapted?
- 6) Use space differently: small groups in large spaces; use outdoor space when you can

Suggestions for Building Virtual Relationship/Nurturing New Ministry (Bryan)

- 1) Maintain online worship presence after returning to in-person ministry
- 2) Recognize that this is a season of opportunity: new people involved, new ministries emerging
- 3) Grow and cultivate lay leadership
 - a. Neighborhood Missionaries: dispersed disciples living in their own communities; encourage people to build community where they live
- 4) It's an opportune time to move from pastor-centered ministry to shared ministry model
- 5) Become an externally focused Church
 - a. Ask your community about their needs and hopes
 - i. Neighbors
 - ii. Community Leaders
 - b. Do a Mission Insite Demographic Study (missioninsite.com): great time to get to know your community
 - c. Good resource: Externally Focused Church by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson
 - d. Recognize existing relationships
 - i. Identify members who are already serving in their community (job, volunteer, etc.)
 - ii. Discover how the church can come alongside their work
 - iii. Identify relational connections in community
 - iv. Host a Zoom listening/brainstorming session to identify needs
 - e. Move from an inward focus to an outward focus in ministry
 - f. Living the mission: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."
 - i. How do we live out the mission as a dispersed church?
 - ii. Engage, lead, equip and empower laity to be in ministry
 - iii. Discipleship development is crucial during this time.
 - iv. Allow mission to be the compass point for how to be a church dispersed

6) Developing Discipleship

- a. Prior to the pandemic, Barna research showed that only 2% of church attenders worshipped online, with the majority worshipped in person. During the pandemic, that statistic has reversed. Need to maintain that presence.
- b. Developing Spiritual Disciplines
 - i. Provide material for laity to lead small groups in homes
 - ii. During online worship, invite laity to lead parts of the worship service
 - iii. Invite laity to lead online devotionals
 1. Impact increases as laity share these with family, friends and neighbors
 - iv. Share your personal practice of Spiritual Disciplines. Set the example and nurture others to find a rhythm during these chaotic times.
 - v. Teach relevant faith skills during this time

7) Making connections to develop faith

- a. Younger people who have not had a strong faith background are struggling during the pandemic. They are unprepared emotionally and spiritually for this situation. Great opportunity to nurture faith and discipleship.
- b. Share stories of hope to encourage people
- c. Share examples of how you are making new connections with new people
 - i. Use game apps to connect with others
 1. House Party online games
 2. Letsroam.com (virtual scavenger hunts)
- d. Write letters to neighbors and drop them at their door. What do you need? How can I help you? Creating new relationships with neighbors.
- e. During online worship, consider ways to make connections and develop faith
 - i. Invite people to come early to church to ask questions
 - ii. Encourage people to hangout after the service concludes for deeper discussion of sermon theme, etc.
 - iii. Offer a Zoom breakout session for guests and new people to talk with the pastor
- f. Need to create space for people to wrestle with faith and life: needs to be conversational and relational

8) Great time to develop house churches: small group extensions of the church

- 9) Discipleship Ministries is providing a resource called RE-launch to help churches connect with people beyond online worship <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/re-launch-a-conversation-on-embracing-the-ministry-possibilities-of-2020>

Q&A

How can we register online visitors and follow up with them?

- Send link to Google forms for contact information
- During Livestream worship, have participants type name into the stream & follow up

Suggestions for continuing online worship alongside in person worship?

- Provide a mid-week devotional online
- Post the worship service or a portion of it online

How can we encourage confidence to lead in laity?

- Share stories of our own faith journey with them
- Encourage them often
- Invite them to take the Spiritual Gifts Assessment on the Discipleship Ministries website
- When leading prayer, leave space for people to voice prayers

Ideas Shared by Participants in the Chat Thread

How can we safely track attendance in worship without people using attendance pads, etc.?

- Invite a member to record attendance: provide a membership checklist
- Drop attendance cards into a basket

Video about returning to church: <https://youtu.be/yCdOry3oVLE>

Print piece with a QR code that takes people to announcements on website

Mail an announcement sheet and copy of the sermon to people without technology

Use an online transcription service to generate a narrative version of the online worship service. Can then be edited into "Worship in Print" mailing to those not connected online. SONIX.AI (very inexpensive)

Record interviews with people to share testimonies and God moments.

Start a sharing stories campaign for people to share their faith story

"Pew Buddies": features members of the church

Start a daily or weekly prayer time online (laity led)