

Clergy Zoom Conversations

How to Be More Engaging in Virtual Worship

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Devotion: Video clip from weekly devotional message shared by Rev. Pamela Gardner with her Baldwin Community United Methodist Church congregation. Jackie Campbell highlighted positive features of the video style:

- Conversational in nature
- Looked directly at the camera: more personal
- Creates connection through invitational language
- During livestreaming, have a person designated to greet people by name when they log on

Jeff Sterling, Senior Pastor at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Allison Park

- Had not been doing livestream worship before the Covid-19 pandemic, but recorded worship services to share via DVDs for home-bound people
- When the pandemic first started, Jeff purchased a MEVO camera package for the church
 - o Easy to set up; connects to Internet (Facebook, livestream, etc.); can add graphics
 - o During the first few weeks, filmed in the church sanctuary with a few tech people
 - Jeff and Karen Slusser (associate pastor) were seated on the platform; musician also onsite; all social distancing
 - "worship moments": simple liturgy
 - o When the shelter in place order happened, Jeff and Karen then recorded portions of the service in their homes
 - Pre-recorded worship was livestreamed in order to allow people to share current prayer concerns
- Now that area is in the Yellow Phase, recording of worship will move back into the sanctuary (following all CDC guidelines)
 - o Sharing service via the Zoom platform: people without computers can call in to hear just the audio portion of the service

Jeff Vanderhoff, Trinity United Methodist Church, McMurray

- Had not been recorded or livestreamed services prior to the Covid-19 pandemic; shared how virtual worship has evolved in past months
- When they first started, 2 young adults volunteered to do the tech; it was just Jeff and the 2 tech people at the church: Jeff was a "talking head"
- Wanted to add more: musician was added onsite at the church
- When the shelter in place happened, it was Jeff and the 2 tech people at the church
 - o Cellphone camera worked better than a webcam
 - o Created a simple backdrop of candles, flowers, etc.
 - o Lay Leader records reading of scripture at home
 - o Children's Chat was added to engage the children
 - o Added a "blooper reel" at the end of the worship service
 - Offers a lighter side

- Encourages people to stay to the end: listen to postlude and then watch bloopers
- Jeff struggled with “Am I doing enough?”
 - Some people wanted a shorter service; others wanted a full length service
 - Should it be a podcast or a worship service?
 - Conclusion: Determine what is best for YOUR church
- Practical Tips Offered
 - Use visual demonstrations/props in message: given that attention spans are short, this holds people’s attention
 - It is easier to check out of a virtual service than an in-person service
 - Have to keep people engaged
 - Include an offertory in the worship service: share a “ministry moment” to highlight what the church is doing during the pandemic
 - Provide an opportunity for online giving
 - Invite people to give and then have an musical interlude and ask people to ponder their blessings
 - Added a “social hour” at the end of the worship experience
 - Following the worship, have a time for people to join an online Zoom to chat about the message; use a lay person to facilitate conversation
 - Look for people who are re-connecting to the church or connecting for the first time; share those stories (with people’s permission)
 - Connection is not the same as community (quoted Scott Hughes, Discipleship Ministries)
 - Online Worship is not community
 - Find ways to connect with people to create community

Question & Answer/Comments & Input from Participants

- Make sure you have proper licenses for music and liturgy used in virtual worship
 - Facebook monitors this and can shut down audio and/or video
 - Licenses vary with the size of the worshipping congregation
- Recommendations for platforms and equipment
 - MEVO camera: can be purchased on Amazon for under \$400 (camera, rechargeable battery & AC adaptor; a kit can be purchased for around \$700 church includes additional equipment like an adjustable stand
 - Can livestream on Facebook or YouTube for “free”
 - Controlled by an app on an iOS or Android phone
 - Micro SD card records; then download to a computer for archiving or transferring to a DVD
 - Black Magic mini-video switcher with Canon or Sony camcorder with HDMI recommended for ongoing streaming
 - Marantz Pro AVS all in one system
 - Panasonic Lumix G85 with a Rode VideoMic: for recording but not streaming
 - Adobe Premiere Elements: video editing software (about \$100)
 - Olive: basic free video editing software (contact Rev. Erik Hoeke for info)
 - Resource people available to help: Rev. Brandon Moore and Rev. Sean Lewis

- How long should virtual worship services be?
 - Generally, less than an hour
 - Shorted than an in-person worship service
 - Place sermon earlier in the worship: after 20-25 minutes, people will drop out of the service
 - Put announcements and other “in-house” parts later in the service in order to better engage visitors
 - Liz Lennox noted that you can access analytics and insights provided by Facebook and streaming services
 - Can see whether or not people’s attention is being held
 - Where do people lose attention and click off? Can make adjustments
 - Break down the full service into smaller segments to share (i.e. share sermon only)
 - Online 2020 Festival of Homiletics worship has been 30 minutes

- Concern for privacy as churches continue to livestream worship once back to in-person worship?
 - Virtual presence may not necessarily be in-person worship livestreamed
 - A virtual presence can be a weekly devotional, prayer, etc.
 - During live prayer times, always stress that joys and concerns should be non-confidential in nature
 - Always ask permission to put someone on the prayer list
 - Use first names only in prayer
 - Put a disclaimer in the bulletin that worship service will be broadcast
 - Designate a “safe space” in the sanctuary where people will not be seen during livestreaming, broadcast, etc.

- Suggestions to be more engaging
 - Use different camera angles and settings every week
 - Provides variety for the viewer
 - Allows viewer to “see” different parts of the church building/property
 - “Skit Guys”: can purchase online vignettes to use for special occasions (i.e. Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, etc.)
 - Can be included in virtual worship
 - About \$15.99 per skit
 - A monthly 4 video package is available
 - Invite viewers to light a candle in their homes as they watch worship: creates a connection

- Outdoor Worship?
 - Can be a good option if social distancing can be maintained and limits on the number of people gathered can be observed
 - Drive-In Car Worship
 - Park every other car (have parking lot attendants direct people)

- No restroom facilities available so worship needs to be shorter (35-40 minutes)
- FM transmitter: low frequency, FCC compliant
 - Can purchase for \$99-200
 - Can be purchase on Amazon
 - Check with members to see if anyone already has Ham Rodio equipment
- Check with local authorities before launching (to comply with local regulations, etc.)
- No bulletins: email bulletins to people ahead of time; print out and bring with them
- Can set up a “no-touch” offering box: drive by to deposit as exiting worship space
- Good to rehearse the drive-in worship with a smaller group of people
 - Church Council would be a good group
 - Can work out glitches and get feedback from participants to improve quality

Closing Tips Offered by Jackie Campbell, Conference Director of Communications

- Get better camera shots: tight shot of speaker
- Look directly at the camera
- Invite online discussion
- Have someone greet those joining in Chat thread and monitor comments during worship
- Use a variety of people during virtual worship – church staff, lay leader, etc.
- Give people something to “click”
 - Online giving
 - An email contact
- Offer a variety of online experiences
 - Vesper Service: hymn sing-along
 - Weekly Devotional
 - Prayer service
 - Classes/studies

Resources

GCFA offers a downloadable PDF how-to with some tech details on Livestreaming.
<https://www.gcfa.org/media/2217/live-stream-your-ministry-0420.pdf>