



Marshfield UMC Online Engagement at MUMC

Livestream Enhancement & Support (FaceBook)

- Continued to provide consistent livestream of primary worship service on FaceBook but did improve/expand our camera system. We are replacing our audio system this year so we can smoothly and separately mix online and in-person audio feeds.
- Shifted culture to recognize and celebrate a hybrid model of attendance. It is completely okay to attend online and/or in person. This was crucial, and helped people stay plugged in even when traveling or ill. Worship attendance overall became more consistent. This includes the weekly work of watching the livestream and acknowledging (liking) a comment from everyone.
- Added a weekly online host (a rotating group of volunteers — in-person, hybrid, or online worshippers) to engage the online audience. Having an online host means:
 - Worshippers are greeted, questions are answered, prayer requests given, attendance acknowledged. People feel seen.
 - Someone is there to deal with the rare spammer.
 - The AV Team can focus on the tech end
 - Increased discussion also serves to raise the amount of comments, supporting the livestream on the FB algorithm to get it shown to more people.
- Modified our language in worship. It's still easy to slip and say "Good morning!" but we try to make our worship service day and time neutral because many people watch it after the live has finished. We try to remember that people are online and sometimes directly address the online audience, modifying instructions where necessary, greeting people on our prayer list watching from home, etc.
- Physically support the local hybrid worshippers. Since we monitor attendance both online and in person, we are able to identify families who worship primarily online or in a hybrid model. We have "Church Out of the Box" boxes we send home with these worshippers so they have communion and other seasonal worship supplies for times they decide to, or must, worship from home.
- Physically and spiritually support the long-distance hybrid worshippers. We have weekly worshippers in places like Columbia, Lee's Summit, Eldon, and Bartlesville. These are usually people who came with friends or family who cannot find a church home that fits them in their community. They attend a few times a year in person and regularly online. We had to really brainstorm how to give them a fuller church experience, including the following:

- We send them Church Out of the Box boxes in the mail (including church swag). The feedback on this has been overwhelmingly positive. People reported weeping when they got their first box. They felt seen and included.
- We check in on them by phone and provide pastoral care on Zoom and by phone and text. Stephen Ministries is even able to offer their services from a distance.
- We put them on the physical mailing list so they get the monthly newsletter, any church letters, etc. It was quite a surprise to the Finance Team when pledge letters started coming in from hours away. I didn't realize how much receiving physical mail from a church makes it your church.
- We host a Homecoming Weekend each Advent when we do our Live Nativity. They come in Saturday, participate in the Live Nativity, meet in-person worshippers, have our Ladies Tea, a music-heavy worship service, etc. We make sure they have a lot to do that weekend and they get the chance to get their photos taken for the directory and meet lots of people. We have members willing to host online worshippers in their homes.

Online Discipleship (YouTube)

- We realized the key component to engaging online worshippers was not just to connect with them, but to give them ways to grow as disciples. We applied for and received a Foundation Grant to help grow online discipleship.
- We offered Zoom-based Bible studies, which benefited the people who lived 30 minutes away or so, but there were lots of scheduling challenges.
- Additionally, as a growing church, we had people showing up who felt like they missed out on the last thing we did (Bible study or other class) and we have people that will not attend in-person gatherings due to social anxiety or illness who want to do ALL THE THINGS. We developed the idea of a Digital Discipleship Library (DDL), which includes or will include (it's in constant development):
 - Online versions of the pastor's Bible studies. [NOTE: I write most of my own Bible Studies, so this is kind of a particular case.] I shoot these usually before I teach the class. I may then utilize one, or a part of, the videos in live or Zoom classes. We make a digital version of the notebook we can send by email or make available for download. We have tried out a variety of delivery methods for these (including downloads from the cloud, Zoom live delivery, and on-demand behind a registration wall), but settled on making them available to anyone on YouTube after talking to online worship staff at COR.



- We have a retired judge/Sunday School teacher who likes to spend time researching church history. He does a fairly regular series called “KenTalks” in which he talks about whatever he wants. So far he’s done series on The Wise Men, Paul, and one-offs on holidays. People love these 15-20 minute lectures. We are working on getting other Bible teachers to host their own studies.
- We have guest speakers scheduled for this summer to come present short series on discipleship topics like boundaries, finances, and means of grace. We’ve had a pastor who authored a book come tell stories from his book.
- For Confirmation, we brought in a handful of church members of different ages and backgrounds, asked them the same questions, and put together videos of their answers. The confirmands loved it. We started each week of confirmation with these discussions. I also shot a few videos for confirmation topics so we could use them again. As soon as we finished confirmation, two more teens showed up whose families want confirmed. We also have adults who want to take confirmation. With these videos done, it is merely an issue of scheduling classes and printing notebooks to recreate that experience.
- This Summer, we’re doing a series on Acts of the Apostles. Between the scriptures I’ll use for sermons, we’re creating content by a variety of teachers of our Bible studies. They’ll each research and present a video on their scripture passage. We’ll also have KenTalks on the background of Acts and a few videos of people just reading the scriptures. Along with two in-person Bible studies (one for adults and one for youth), all of our worshippers will be able to study the book of Acts beyond Sunday sermons and will have access to a variety of teachers.

Intentionally-Online Worship (YouTube)



- With grant funding (New Places for New People), we started an intentionally-online worship service on YouTube. I wasn’t sure who we were going to get with this worship service, but it seems popular with people who would probably consider themselves post-church. Retired pastors, people who don’t feel connected to the worshipping community, people who want to be anonymous, and/ or people who have been hurt by church. We do have a registration page, an email address, and a FB group for people who are ready to engage.
- The service contains an informal welcome, scripture, sermon, Lord’s Prayer, music, and blessing. 30 minutes.
- We had better attendance online when I did a different sermon online than the livestream, but it took time away from developing DDL resources, so we switched to a more off-the-cuff,

visual version of Sunday's sermon. Some worshippers watch both. Some people only watch the livestream, while others only watch the intentionally-online service.

- We put all of our content (DDL and worship) on the same channel to encourage switching among content styles. Lots of YouTube creators split their content, but that's usually for monetization purposes, and we are intentionally NOT a monetized channel.
- This is the most expensive part of our online plan, as it requires great production values, a staff member, and a lot of specialized recording equipment.
- One of the unforeseen benefits of producing this service was that it enabled a lot of people to lead worship who are either uncomfortable with public speaking, physically unable to ascend to the podium in church, work on Sunday, or live far away. Anyone with a smart phone can record a portion of the service and send it to us for inclusion. The service opportunities have really helped us have one-on-one conversations to shift the culture toward including online ministries and get people to try new things to create new disciples for Jesus Christ.

Culture Shift & Future Plans

- We are constantly asking ourselves how we can do what we do online. It's always a question. How do we translate this for our online worshippers?
- We aren't yet promoting beyond our own sphere. In part, this is intentional. We have to have sufficient mass to our library of content before we promote it. It has to be binge-able. Now that we're approaching that critical mass, we have to index everything we put on YouTube. We have a couple of volunteers who sweep through our videos and transcripts and come up with possible search terms to add to our video descriptions so our videos get indexed online. It will take time, but our views will start expanding as people find us. Our hope is that finding an answer to a question might lead new people to check out our other offerings. It's a slow growth plan.
- We have a plan for a scaleable prayer request management system in case our views and requests start increasing beyond our prayer team's current capacity. We bounce around the idea of a live prayer time, but there are privacy issues I haven't had the time to figure out.
- I am developing a monthly vlog on "a pastor's week" to help people understand what life is like for pastors behind the scenes. Becoming a content creator was not in my life goals, but the more we do it, the easier the ideas flow, and the more efficient we get at production. People regularly suggest content ideas, and we keep a list for slow times.
- Hiring a part-time Director of Discipleship to support ministry events was key to creating the time in my schedule to create content and support content creation of others.

- The Studio has become the cool place to hang out in the church. There are lots of heart to heart conversations in that creator space. It's not unusual to find all our Gen Z members hanging out with the tech director in the studio after worship. The kids and youth LOVE the room and regularly ask to participate.

A Few Caveats & Learnings

- We have a very nice dedicated studio thanks to the Conference. We have everything we need to pull off all kinds of video production, and we've been able to try things out. If we didn't have that funding, we could pull off something less fancy with with a decent vlogging camera, a good computer, and some software. Being able to have all the resources we need for good production has been an incredible blessing, and we are eager to share it. At the same time, some of our least expensive purchases have had the biggest impact. [For example, the \$189 prompter apparatus made the single biggest difference in convincing people to record video.]
- We have the right team for the online ministry we do. We have a young tech genius who is an expert at live-streaming and the equipment. I was a management consultant in online technologies before becoming a pastor and did pre-record/post-production at my last church. We have an incredible worship director who will supply music. However, I think it would be really easy to adapt the ministry ideas to the people any church has. This ministry has pulled out all kinds of knowledgeable people who have added to the team. We're also really willing to help churches try to find the right ways for them to expand online.
- Every social media or dissemination platform has a specific culture. The more YouTube I watch, the more our service transforms into YouTube content. It's apologetics work. I didn't get that when we started. I find myself talking about Paul in Athens quite often. We can't just put what we do out on YouTube and expect it to hit. We have to hold our values and present them to the culture in the language and look it understands.
- We initially did not turn on the ability for people to leave comments on our videos. I go back and forth about this, which was a recommendation from COR staff. It limits the ability to build community but protects morale and staff time. We will likely turn comments on the for the pastor's vlog and have a volunteer monitor the comments. We are currently testing leaving on comments for the worship services.
- My goal, always, is to get this ministry to the point that the next pastor can sit down and record their sermon or thoughts every week and the studio and worship staff will function no matter their technical knowledge. Right now, I edit my own sermons and studies while our tech director puts all the parts together, edits other studies, uploads, and maintains the channel and studio. He works about 2 hours a week. I spend 4-5 hours a week on content. The pre-record/post-production elements of the intentionally online service and DDL mean more polished content, but they add work and require energy and a little experience.

- Because of all of these online efforts, the primary place of growth in the church has been in-person, which has bolstered support for our online efforts. The online worship numbers have remained fairly steady, but people switch from online to in-person. We trace the source of the in-person growth to our online efforts. We've had people come in who have been watching silently for months. It is unusual to have someone whose first visit to our church is in-person.

If you have any questions, would like to see or use our online studio, or would like some help in transitioning more ministry online, please reach out to us at TheStreamsMUMC@gmail.com, and our online staff and volunteers would be glad to help.

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Marshfield United Methodist Church