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The Church Has Left the Building: A Leadership Perspective of Online Church versus Traditional Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE CHURCH HAS LEFT THE BUILDING
A LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE OF ONLINE CHURCH
VERSUS TRADITIONAL CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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PORTLAND, OREGON

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 26, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Preaching as Story.

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The Scripture quotations contained herein are taken from King James Version, New King James Version, New Living Translation, New International Version, English Standard Version, and Message Bible, unless otherwise indicated.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my life's work to my parents, the late Bishop Arthur and Mrs. Anna Jennings, who instilled in me the importance of faith and family. My father had only a sixth-grade education, and my mother an eighth-grade, but they were advocates for education and made sure my siblings and I had an insatiable appetite for the academic experience. My cheerleaders have gone on to be with the Lord; and I miss them dearly. But their unwavering faith in me has caused me to reach heights in life I could have never imagined.

I also dedicate this to my only birth child, Nyesha. Your love strengthens me in ways I could never express. I am proud of your academic achievements. Do not ever think that they will not pay off. I am proud to be your mom and hope that my accomplishments have inspired you to become all that you can be; do all that is in your heart to do; give as much life to others as you can possibly give, expecting nothing in return. Jesus died that we might live; and we live this life that others might live.

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Finally, to all those that believed and had faith in me. I completed this because of you. I dedicate this work to you as evidence that when you have tried and failed, try again. If your dream did not manifest like you expected, dream again. "Your destiny is

waiting on you and it won't go anywhere without you. Believe in the God that believes in you."-Anonymous

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To the God of all Grace, whose love is unchangeable—thank you.

ABSTRACT

Where it was once thought that the decline of traditional church goes into a brick and mortar edifice meant that America was becoming less “faith based”, the ever-increasing number of online worshippers indicates otherwise. Due to the rapidly shifting culture toward an online worship experience, the traditional church must re-evaluate and reform their processes to include this new wave of Christianity. If churches cannot transition to accommodate the new culture of church that is only accessible via the Internet, there is a possibility that they could lose the opportunity to share the Gospel Message with a population that may never enter a church building.

The aim of this study is to determine how the needs of the Internet church differ from the traditional church, and how this dynamic can be strategic in determining the most effective method of serving the e-church community. It will examine ways to build strong relationship bonds between the pastor and the Internet congregation and how social media can be instrumental in this effort. Thus, the research questions are as follows: Does the online church meet the religious needs through the internet connectivity, fellowship, and relational interaction? What is the role of a pastor who shepherds both traditional and Internet congregations? Does online church satisfy our corporate need to have a meaningful worship experience? In this context, the intent is also to identify and describe the Internet congregation’s demographic and how it impacts the pastor’s role, by researching the story behind the needs of the current Internet audience and how to effectively engage them in online participation. On this basis, it is recommended that pastors consider the major benefits of online church; the convenience

that online religion permits, the unrestricted usage of a multiplicity of platforms, and the cost efficacy of reaching the world for Christ.

CHAPTER 1.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

After thirty years, the pastor of an influentially stalwart and robust church in the Midwest passed away. A stable congregation of about 350 failed to redefine its vision or mission. Shortly following the pastor's death, three candidates were recommended for the position. The youngest candidate was unanimously voted in. A recent graduate from seminary, he was excited and full of ideas. After about a year into the position and feeling settled in, he tried implementing some of those fresh ideas to bring the church up to date. One, was broadening the church's scope to attract a younger congregation by launching an Internet worship service. The congregants were all in favor, but the Board declined. After several attempts to convince the Board of the impact it would have, the Board took drastic measures to provoke him, instead, to resign. The young pastor stood before the congregation, gave his resignation, and almost half of the congregation followed him out the door.

The young pastor started his own church, opening with the 175 that followed him. Growth spurts happened over the course of three years, a lot faster than the church was prepared to handle. The congregation doubled in attendance, not to mention the major following of their Internet church. The first month the Internet church launched, almost 7,000 new members signed on. By the end of the third year, the e-membership was at about 14,000. The demand was so great that an Associate Pastor was added to oversee the fast-growing congregation. Not only did the e-membership exceed the traditional membership, so did its giving. The weekly tithes and offering from the Internet church doubled that of the traditional Sunday morning giving.

The above story is indicative of many American protestant churches, as we witness the succession of ministries from one generation to another. The church faces a new problem. The debate is whether our church culture is rapidly shifting toward an online worship experience, forcing the traditional church to re-evaluate and reform its processes to accommodate the transition.

Where it was once thought that the decline of traditional church goes into a brick and mortar edifice meant that America was becoming less “faith based;” however, the ever-increasing number of online worshippers indicates otherwise. Broadus wrote that the cyber church has replaced traditional worship, but he concluded from his research that the cyber worship experience is superficial compared to the traditional one because there is no actual “person-to-person” connection and little focus on communicating with God.¹ In contrast, Hutchings suggested that the new cyber church concept is a social blend of spiritual practices, education, and digital resources that complement the traditional worship experience rather than replace it.²

The Internet Church constitutes radical evolution in the way traditional church spreads the gospel without losing its core value. The church structure has to be flexible enough to contend with postmodern society and the decline of Christianity as we know it. The Internet Church culture has the potential to benefit the brick and mortar structure in a way that promotes and facilitates a consistent message to the faith-based community for which they can be held accountable. The movement of the church community from its

¹ Matthew Broadus, “Exploring the Lived Experiences of Online Worshipers,” (DMin Diss., University of Tennessee, 2011), accessed January 5, 2018, <http://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=ccisymposium>.

² Tim Hutchings, “Contemporary Religious Community and the Online Church,” *Information, Communication & Society* 14, no. 8 (2011): 1118, accessed January 5, 2018, ProQuest.

traditional setting to embracing the online environment warrants a look into other faith-based organizations that in concept, help support the expansion of church online.

Web church is not new. Whether on the radio, or on the Internet, or some form of social media, the church has had an electronic presence of some kind on the Worldwide Web. However, as we transition from just a presence in the community to posturing for inclusive e-church communities, traditional pastors are challenged with shepherding two types of communities: the traditional church congregation and the Internet church congregation.

Scholars have begun to take an interest in a movement that is revolutionizing the way we “do church” in the information-driven age. “Sociologists, theologians, and cultural theorists involved in the fifteen-year-old tradition of research into religion online have always debated the future of Christianity, and whether the Internet will lead to a rebirth of a spirit-filled people, or to the ultimate demise of organized religion.”³

The Internet

Over the last 30 years the Internet has evolved into a system that houses the “largest combination of computers connected together by high-speed data lines that provides a massive worldwide web (www) of communications.”⁴ The Net was first created as an experimental government network called ARPAnet (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network). Lincoln Labs in Massachusetts originally designed it in

³ Peter Horsfield and Paul Teusner, “A Mediated Religion,” *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (March 2008): 294, accessed March 5, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2007.13.3.278>.

⁴ Jefferson Todd Mullins, “Online Church: A Biblical Community” (DMin Diss., Liberty University, 2011), 13, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/435>.

answer to the government's need for enhanced communication.⁵ ARPAnet offered a system of hardware and software primarily used for text messaging without color, sound, graphics, or the ability to link one location to another. Over the next 20 years, "it slowly evolved into a complex set of systems that brought messaging opportunities to revolutionize the way both governments and individuals communicated."⁶

The word Internet is a shortened version of the word Inter-networking,⁷ which means a network of data and information.⁸ The Internet in its complexity can help transport ministry to the wide Christian network through the filters of the online church. "The network formed in cyberspace can lay the groundwork for a Christian network at the local and international levels, realizing the greatest dream of building a truly global church online."⁹ David Mercer deduces the Internet to be "one of the most profound achievements in human history."¹⁰

The Internet has become a widely-used resource, virtually used by anyone with a computer and a service subscription to an Internet provider, a smartphone, or a tablet or other mobile device. This essentially enables any use, with the click of a button, to access an endless abyss of information. This accessibility makes the Internet a powerful tool.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Dae Suk Lee, "An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism through a Case Study of the Sarang Community Church" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2011), 437, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/437>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David Mercer, *Building Powerful and Robust Websites with Drupal 6* (Birmingham, UK: Packet Publishing, 2008), 1.

With proper utilization, it can be a tool that can harness a positive experience or with careless/unmonitored usage, it can be a dangerous weapon.

Religious organizations have discovered that the use of the Internet to connect with its parishioners has become a more productive way of communicating information, providing resources, evangelizing, strengthening their faith, and ultimately connecting with the world. No doubt, the Internet has changed how Christianity is viewed and its identity in the community. According to Waters and Tindall religious leaders hesitated to use the Internet because of the fear of being able to retain organizational control.¹¹ Their reluctance has cost them a star seat in the rapidly moving cyber world. “The spectrum of Christian critiques of the Internet ranges from warnings about the potential seduction and deception of Internet technology and the virtual worlds it helps create, to enthusiastic advocacy of the Internet as a tool for Christian ministries.”¹²

Due to the rise of online church organizations, there is concern whether people that cannot be touched, can be pastored. Another concern is whether successful discipleship, personal enrichment, fellowship, and pastoral care in a virtual environment that is effective and safe, can be offered. Religious organizations chose to prepare themselves to take full advantage of all the resources made available via the web before regulations and restrictions are set in place to control the use of the World Wide Web. Understanding the importance of an Internet Church would be of great value to pastors chosen to lead the way in this age. Building a strategic plan, casting the vision, recruiting

¹¹ Richard D. Waters and Natalie T.J. Tindall. “Marketing Churches on the Internet: An Analysis of the Dialogic Potential of Christian Web Sites,” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 15, no. 4 (November 2010): 369-381. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/nvsm.400>.

¹² Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner, *Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet* (College Station, TX: Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2011), 61.

the right people and moving confidently forward will act as the catalyst for where change takes place.

Background of the Study

Internet church is not new. Whether on the radio, or on some form of Internet, the church has always had a presence of some kind on the worldwide web. It appeared for the first time shortly after the MODEM program was developed in 1978. Since then, “...online religious participation and activity has been increasing at an incredible rate. In the year 2000 more people were using the Internet for religious and spiritual reasons than were using the medium for online banking or online dating services. In 2003 the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 64% of wired Americans have used the Internet for religious and spiritual purposes.”¹³

Approximately 2.2 billion people have connected to the Internet in the past two years. The most recent research reveals that approximately 84% of people use the Internet daily. The average person spends over 8 hours on at one electronic device, including social media, banking, and watching online services. At least 92% of all Americans have some type of electronic device, i.e., cellphones, smartphones, desktops/laptop computers, MP3 players, Game Consoles, e-book readers, portable gaming devices.¹⁴ In this day and time, there exists countless numbers of options to connect people to the church and the church to people; most importantly, to connect people to God and God to the people.

¹³ Andrew Perrin and Maeve Duggan, “Americans’ Internet Access: 2000–2015,” *Pew Research Center*, June 26, 2015, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.pewInternet.org/2015/06/26/americans-Internet-access-2000-2015/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Statement of the Problem

Jason Caston, author of *The I-Church Method*, tells a group of students from Biola University that, “The Internet church is not here to replace the traditional church; it is only an extension of it.”¹⁵ This is an interesting statement given the fact that scholars seem to believe technology has changed the role of religion in the present world. “According to the so-called secularization thesis¹⁶...the religious sphere has simultaneously become more pluralistic...this will lead to the disappearance of religion.”¹⁷ Historians suggest with global modernization, the traditional church gradually loses its influence in society. This happens as societies advance, values change, cultures shift, populations transition, and conflicts of interest increase. The premise is, that what was designed for the secular world has become a nemesis in the religious community and caused even more of a paradigm shift than the church was prepared to engage. Technological innovation has no doubt contributed to the secularization of modern society, but also to the decline in attendance in the traditional church and the rise of cults online.

¹⁵ Jason Caston, *The iChurch Method: Changing the World When You Login* (Dallas, TX: Caston Digital Publishing, 2012), 5.

¹⁶ “The statistics demonstrate that American Christians have become increasingly vague about their beliefs or even reject various orthodox doctrines” (Bruce, 160). Bruce agrees with sociologist Wilson’s conclusion that secularization has taken two forms: “In Europe, the churches became less popular; in the United States, the churches became less religious” (Bruce, 156). Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160, 156.

¹⁷ Karin Sporre and Gudrun Svedberg, *Changing Societies: Values, Religions, and Education* (Umea, Sweden: Umea University, 2009), 44.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was twofold; one, to assess how the culture of the online church impacts and relates to that of the traditional church; and two, to determine how the church can engage the online audience in meaningful worship experience. The church has yet to grasp the benefits of utilizing the Internet to evangelize the world, while the Internet age spirals swiftly forward. Even though the Internet is a swiftly moving target, we (the church) still have time to develop significantly rewarding strategies that will enhance the use of the Internet in a new church age and impact the world for Christ. After an initial “demonizing” of the Internet, the church has come to a plausible understanding of the benefits of its involvement in technological advancement.

Rationale

The vast opportunities to get the gospel of Christ to the world have opened up to the church an array of possibilities to communicate with people that would otherwise be out of reach. Technology has made it *virtually* possible to interconnect through podcasting, streaming audio and video, media downloads, self-broadcasting and re-broadcasting, and to share the wonders and resonances of our Christian faith, 24/7, to work with any schedule at any time in any zone around the world.

“The Internet was originally designed for the impartation of scientific and defense information...”¹⁸ It has experienced many changes since it was introduced to the public in the late 1990s. Those reconstructions have impacted the religious community’s

¹⁸ John Edmiston, “Internet Evangelism & Cybermissions and Their Impact Upon How We Will Do Missions in the 21st Century,” October 2007, accessed January 10, 2018, http://www.cybermissions.org/articles/21stC_missions.pdf.

cultural dynamic and how they are perceived in the social networking marketplace. A faith-based presence has existed online in some form since the 1950s.¹⁹ The concept of the virtual congregation and the Internet church is the new and emerging culture in today's religious community. The penetration of the Internet into society, with over three billion users worldwide, is evidence that the church might take its rightful place among the masses of streaming media practices. "The Internet has become not only a tool for facilitating new forms of network interactions, but an environment that is changing how we perceive and interact with one another."²⁰

The digital revolution has had a transforming effect on church culture and the Christian worship experience. The intelligence and ingenuity of our contemporary technical society has makes moving the Church were the people are a necessity. The emergence of the Internet challenges how we approach life, transforms how we think about norms, and reshapes how we interact with others. The Internet church is intended to be an extension of that ideal for the churchgoer and believers at large. The Internet church may not replace the traditional church, but what has happened is the traditional church has had to become more liberal in its ideals of the faith and more pragmatic about its approach. Traditional church is challenged with modern pluralism and to compensate, the church has adapted a more "market-like context in which the message can be marketed."²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner, *Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet* (College Station, TX: Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2011), 59.

²¹ Ibid., 45.

Research Questions

Research Question #1: Does the online church meet the religious needs through internet connectivity, fellowship, and relational interaction?

Research Question #2: What is the role of a pastor who shepherds both traditional and Internet congregations?

Research Question #3: Does the online church satisfy our corporate need to have a meaningful worship experience?

Significance of the Study

The effectiveness of online churches were compared to traditional churches with regard to the overall influence and retention. The significance of the current study lies within the scope of the question of whether the online church can create a meaningful worship experience and offer purpose-filled engagement.

Because the concept of online religion is still so intriguingly novel, churches with substantial Internet parishioners are still developing ways for these members to participate from a virtual perspective. For the most part, online worshippers are respectively lenient when measuring the church's effectiveness on involvement.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the current study. Some of these terms are interchangeable.

Brick and Mortar

Brick and Mortar will be a term used interchangeably to refer to the Traditional Church setting. It will constitute the physical gathering of parishioners in a physical building.

Cyber Culture

“Cyber culture is the cultural characteristics and practices emerging from a frequent computer usage rate and from people’s active online networking. This culture exists and thrives exclusively in the absence of direct physical human contact, which is the exact opposite of how other cultures are formed.”²²

Culture

Culture will be defined as the behaviors and beliefs that are characteristic of a particular social, ethnic or age group.²³

Internet Ministry

“Internet ministry involves producing, editing, and distributing Christian multimedia contents through wired, wireless and satellite service to provide extended church services to global audiences.”²⁴ For the purposes of this work, the term Internet Ministry might be interchangeably to describe the Online Church.

Online Church

The online church is defined as a gathering of people on the Internet to facilitate religious activities, particularly worship services. Other terms used interchangeably will be: Cyber church, Virtual Church, Internet Church, E-Church, Digital Church.

²² Lee, “An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism,” 16.

²³ *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “culture,” accessed January 3, 2013, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/culture?s=t>.

²⁴ Lee, “An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism,” 15.

Traditional Church

Traditional Church is the term used for the physical gathering of people in a physical building for public Christian religious activities, more specifically for worship services.

True Worship

Experiences, which are characterized by love, peace, and fulfillment.

Worship Experience

Worship experience denotes a participant's sense of feeling and expressing a spiritual fulfillment. It is the human response to the spiritual encounter; particularly, in the Christian community, the worship experience is an encounter with God.

Assumptions and Limitations

There is a scarcity of studies on the subject. The Internet Church is a relatively new ministry field, and it is still being developed in a way that is simplistic enough for church leaders to understand the concept. Therefore, we face major challenges in lines of demarcation between definitions. For instance, there is Internet Church, which is the topic of this thesis, and Internet Ministry, which explores another form of ministry offering, not to be confused with Internet Church, but can be interchangeable in theory.

Then there are the different names: Cyber church, Virtual Church, Internet Church, E-Church, and Digital Church, which carry the same topical meaning, but perform different actions. For this study, at any given point, the names will be used interchangeably.

Other assumptions and limitations to this study are as follows:

Assumption #1: The debate that exists is whether our church culture is rapidly shifting toward an online worship experience, forcing the traditional church to re-evaluate

and reform their processes to accommodate the transition. However, failing to revise processes to accommodate the new culture of church that is only accessible via the Internet, there could be a mass closing of sanctuaries throughout the country.

Assumption #2: Due to the lack of regulations and the liberal ability to develop websites without constraints, suggest that anyone can create a site and call it religious. The danger is that these websites leave people exposed to fraudulent business practices.

Limitation #1: It is difficult for religious leaders to establish credibility with online users. Developing a level of trust in the virtual world has its challenges, because the lack of interpersonal connectivity between groups does not provide the opportunity to create a real-world relationship that garners trust.

Limitation #2: Religious leaders have to be prepared mentally and emotionally to handle the harsh reality of other people's derogatory opinions being hurled in a public environment. Also, this scrutiny exposes us to other communities that challenge the way the religious and Christian cultures are perceived on a grander scale.

The Internet not only increases access to alternative sources of religious information, but empowers people to contribute information, opinions, and experiences to public debates and conversations. Christians must develop new skills in technological literacy. They also need new skills of discernment to see how the Internet has created a new social sphere that facilitates spiritual interactions, establishes new authorities, and legitimizes practices for the community.²⁵

Because this study was prompted due to scarcity, there may be incongruities throughout, but a scholarly approach was taken to provide a greater general understanding of the Internet Church, what it is, and how it is achieved.

²⁵ Campbell and Teusner, *Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet*, 67.

Nature of Study

The current study was performed through academic online resources, contextual investigation of cultural intermediaries (scholars who have a passion for the evolution of church culture), field research activities, and personal professional experience, to compare the traditional church experience to that of the online church. The research revealed some key themes, which will be addressed throughout the current study: community, communication, spiritual experience, architecture, and integration. That will mean addressing issues like starting an online church, using digital storytelling to activate empathy as an agent of social change in virtual reality; or using data visualization to engage audiences, to study their emotional reactions, and how to use facts to convey difficult-to-understand subjects or issues in a simplistic, easily relatable context. The expectation is that we will find ways to better understand the psychological demographic of the e-church congregation pastors serve and what their expectations may be when they browse the Internet in search of God.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

My specific outline is as follows:

- Chapter One is the description of the ministry problem and rationale that necessitates this type of study in this age, including a summary of supporting evidence.
- Chapter Two will present an investigation into the Biblical foundations, for partnering with organizations to help carry out the mission of the Online Church.

- Chapter Three will introduce theological and historical foundation in support of the Internet Church concept.
- Chapter Four will focus on the pastor's role in an Internet Church setting, and how these church leaders prepare for e-church shepherding.
- Chapter Five will provide a general but detailed technical look into the meaningful online worship experience.
- Chapter Six draws on effective Internet strategies for starting a web-based church. These strategies are intended to help church leaders of all size church samples to engage in and become better equipped for the new culture of Church.
- Chapter Seven concludes with a review of the Traditional Church, a reflection of how technology has impacted the Church, and a prediction of the Internet Church of tomorrow. The review will give recommendations for further study about Internet Church.

Chapter Summary

“As the Internet came to dominate every sector of people's lives in the twenty-first century, people have come to share a homogeneous lifestyle in what was a heterogeneous society.”²⁶ The world gets to meet those with like passions and learn diverse cultures because the Internet has intermingled communities and groups together in a common space where barriers that once separated us have been shattered. The Internet now shapes how we live our social lives with the use of, and demand for e-business and open markets, such as open universities, online libraries, e-banking, and

²⁶ Lee, “An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism,” 1.

online shopping.²⁷ As the Internet evolves how we live socially, economically, intellectually, and politically, it also impacts our spiritual well-being.

There is one common denominator among ALL web surfers: they are progressively thinking people. The approach to ministering to these individuals must engage them on a level that catches and holds their attention long enough to relay the Gospel message. The e-Church audience is fertile, ripe ground for integral ministry to be administered. The church has a unique opportunity to advance the gospel message through correct foresight, keen awareness, wisdom, and prudence, and successfully reach souls for Christ. Developing a basic understanding of the virtual church movement and the shifts that are taking place as this new culture impacts the way worship is produced and achieved in a virtual setting, is paramount to implementing effective programing.

As we research the culture of the virtual congregation, new terminology and language emerges, which challenges our efforts for more efficiency with being intentional about building these online congregations. Becoming aware of and re-evaluating the virtual language barriers² that exist helps religious leaders to focus their attention in areas that would play a significant part in a successful launch.

The religious community must transition its thinking from using the Internet as a ministry tool to Internet as being ministry itself. Rather than communicating information about ministry via the web, the Internet becomes the catalyst for ministry. Embracing the Internet as the message and the messenger now gives new meaning to how the technology itself is taken advantage of. In order that the church becomes a significant part of the virtual world in the future, it must repurpose the presuppositions that the Internet will not be an authentic placeholder in the future life of the church.

²⁷ Ibid.

Mullins agrees that a gap exists between the opportunities available to the church with the new technologies and the actual readiness of the church to use them.²⁸ It is the church's responsibility to gain as much knowledge and perspective about any, and everything that will help take the gospel to the world. Subsequently, the Internet has made it much simpler to spread the gospel. The fundamental question is whether the church sees the change as an essential part of how the gospel is articulated to the world.

Internet community environments create competition. It is incumbent upon the ministry desiring to intellectually engage in the social context of e-church to enhance and promote ministry online to create an exciting environment that sets them apart from the competition. Yes, church has competition! Many pastors have taken the initiative to start their online church and are now reaping the rewards of their speedy reaction to the new movement.²⁹

The global environment demands flexibility and innovation. "With the rise of globalization [sic], intensified by the development of modern technological society, the character not only of social life but also of Christian life has undergone significant changes."³⁰ This demand is imploring ministry to create a space to explore learning in new ways. Enabled learning becomes an important part of how ministry engages with its digital citizenship.

²⁸ Jefferson Todd Mullins, "Online Church: A Biblical Community" (PhD, diss., Liberty University, 2011), 52.

²⁹ Lee, "An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism," 17.

³⁰ Kam Ming Wong, "Christians Outside the Church: An Ecclesiological Critique of Virtual Church," *Heythrop Journal* 49, no. 5 (2008): 822, accessed December 13, 2017, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

From a ministry perspective, enabled learning would be the efficiently enhanced use of storytelling, reflective engagement, and resource connection through the support of effective social media outreach. Enabled learning reaches people where they are, however does not allow them to remain there. It creates a collaborative learning environment that is sustainable and a viable source of innovative learning platforms. Equity should be the focus to ensure that every digital citizen will get involved in the learning process.

Since competition is the Church's distraction, leveraging online connections will create sustainability. However, knowing the competition will heighten awareness and create a benchmark with which to maintain relevance. The digital space is all about change and touching every generation. The church must be about the changing times while exemplifying a sense of stability in an unstable environment. The digital space is a place where the church can gather a multitude of people of all creeds, colors, ages, and genders; and to retain the congregants' attendance will require that the church is well-positioned, strategic, and evolving.

The ever-evolving digital presence is the church's greatest frontier. The Internet has affected every part of humanity. Having a digital strategy that considers over seven billion active mobile devices at any given moment is a ministry's cognitive awareness that the digital space is all about change. Otherwise, our relevance could be in danger of extinction. As the church strives to keep up with the technological changes, its greatest assurance is that Jesus is the rock on which the church's foundation rest and maintains

stability in spite of the changing times. “Website traffic is going to increase as we find more ways to integrate the offline experience with the online.”³¹

The challenge that the traditional and cyber church faces as it postures itself to have a worldwide presence is the lack of technological skills. As the Internet speeds so swiftly forward, the ability to stay relevant is a major concern. With religious institutions only recently exploring the use of the Internet as a means of spreading the Gospel, they lag so far behind secular organizations that by the time they reach the potential to integrate, there is the possibility of losing the ability to market themselves to the unchurched cyber community and reach other religious surfers.

For ministry to advance, it must encompass a compilation of cross generational lines; where there will be a cognizant awareness of what it takes to master new skills and acquired knowledge. The use of the World Wide Web will assist in accomplishing this purpose. Leadership needs to embrace the power and use of the World Wide Web and everything that it has to offer, for a successful online ministry. Ministry leadership needs to see the value of investing in marketing solutions that further ministry objectives. It will take time and resources; but will be well-worth the investment. Essentially, a ministries objective will guide and define what will be effective in closing the generational gap, in its online ministry pursuit. For the church to touch every generation in the future, they will have to reflect on the past.

In the recent past, to go online in search of a church meant to find out more about the church and its vision; to get announcements and learn about its social context. People who are searching for meaningful church online are searching for a place to have an

³¹ Andrew Conrad, “5 Features We’ll See in the Church Website of the Future,” Capterra, March 23, 2017, accessed January 3, 2018, <https://blog.capterra.com/5-features-well-see-in-the-church-website-of-the-future/>.

ecclesiastical experience, like what they would have, if they were to attend a physical service; more interactive, more participatory. They are searching for someone who can and will engage with them on their terms – their level – from their perspective.

With the increasing competition of religious practices for mediated space, questions arise about accessibility and reach as it relates to the responsibility of the organization. The participation of these religious organizations could possibly require membership with secular networking to accomplish desired goals. This form of bonding and bridging can impact the religious organization's credibility. It is possible that the partnering for social good send an undercurrent of improper representation of the place of worship. Additionally, the interface with other digital resources could be perceived as a conflict with the objective, of the purpose at hand. Will the expansion of spatial relations lend to misinterpretation of the church's scope and use of the Internet? Critical concerns continue to emerge from this collaboration of church and Internet. It forces the religious community to make decisions that impact the traditional means of responding to conflicts and complex challenges, all in the name of credibility. Further analyses have yet to determine the impact as the church becomes comfortable in an unfamiliar space.

CHAPTER 2.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR PARACHURCH MINISTRY

With the demands of the Internet church membership being at an all-time high, this study is an effort to forge conversations along that will aide in making support to this new congregation more efficient. Therefore, this chapter will explore the parachurch and its history, determining its authenticity. It will identify challenges in the similarities and differences that could impact the parachurch's relevance. That will require exploring history, mission strategies and future paradoxes. Recommendations will be made as to ways the parachurch and the local church can parallel each other in reach and work alongside each other in support of the needs of the Internet church's audience.

Overview

Calls from all over the world come in to the church offices for some type of help; from just needing prayer to "I'm an e-member, and my mom is in intensive care; can you send someone to pray?" Or, "When will you be in our area to hold services? We cannot get to you, but will you come to us?" Or, "We had a major disaster and have lost everything—can you help us? You are our church home, right?" The experience has been that people's expectations are the same, whether they are a traditional church congregant or an online member. We never imagined that we would face the opportunity of literally having to serve the world at a moment's notice. Offering local assistance does not always work. Even the online congregants want to feel like their home church is their first responder. For regular online church congregants, cyber worship has become a way of life, only paralleling what is already commonplace in their day-to-day activity. Usually,

this regular online community consists of people who are not connected to a local church, and they are not tied to any one congregation or denominational affiliation.

Early readings suggest that there is an incredible opportunity for parachurch organizations and local churches to partner and support the needs of the Internet church congregants. The benefits seem to outweigh the risks. “Some local church leaders as well as parachurch leaders consider inter-organizational partnership of utmost importance while admitting that some tensions exist in the partnerships.”¹ This chapter intends to underwrite the partnership of two organizations for supporting the needs of the congregants of an online church.

Initially, the argument was the parachurch movement is ancient in its context and cannot compete in the current church climate. Sources claim, however, that the scope of parachurch organizations is changing to require partnerships with like-passionate organizations, like church, to carry out future missions. Like any major organization, scopes, missions, and strategies are revised to support the current industry needs. Parachurch organizations are redefining themselves to maintain their significance in the present market.

The Internet church is meant as an extension of the traditional brick and mortar church with a focus and commitment to the New Testament Church context. The question remains, how can parachurch organizations come alongside church, traditional or otherwise, and be effective? Building a relationship between the mission of parachurch organizations and the goal of the traditional church to support the needs of the E-church

¹ Sunday H. Daleng, “The Partnership Between Churches and Parachurch Organizations in Nigeria: Trends, Implications and Prospects” (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016), 6.

will take the effort of both organizations finding that common ground where together they can extensionally support the divine mandate.

The Parachurch

The parachurch is a term used to describe the relationship and function of organizations whose primary work is outside that of the direct influence of a local church,² although the parachurch's philanthropic mission advocates for a pairing of the two. "Parachurch organizations are 501(c)(3) public charities focused on providing religious goods and services outside of any congregational or denominational sponsorship."³ For almost all their existence, parachurch organizations have set themselves apart from the church in a way that marginalizes the church's overall mission. They failed to consider their place of accountability in the grand scheme of missiology. They robustly ventured out to extend themselves to the masses without any ties or regulated structure that reflects church.

Ralph D. Winter, advocating for the legitimacy of the two structures of God's redemptive mission as necessary for world evangelization, said, "the denomination and the local congregation are modalities, while a mission agency or a local men's club are sodalities."⁴ Therefore, the para-church initiatives, which are basically mission agencies, are sodalities.

² Ibid., 8.

³ Christopher P. Scheitle, Erica J. Dollhopf, and John D. McCarthy, "Spiritual Districts: The Origins and Dynamics of US Cities with Unusually High Concentrations of Parachurch Organizations," *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 505, accessed July 25, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2017.14>.

⁴ Ralph Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," *Missiology: An International Review* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 224, accessed March 5, 2016, https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/02/History_of_the_ParaChurch.pdf.

Reid describes parachurch as “Voluntary, not-for-profit associations of Christians working outside denominational control to achieve some specific ministry or social service.”⁵ This better qualifies what assuages secular organizations to support ministries outside the local church. In name only are these organizations affiliated with Christianity, but with no jurisdictional devices. Combining both definitions to get a clearer picture of the parachurch, Willmer resolves parachurch organizations as “organizations that are not part of the traditional, organized church, yet that are engaged in churchlike activities.”⁶

History of Parachurch

History shows that the parachurch concept began as an evangelistic outreach nearly 100 years before Christ’s birth.⁷ Jesus referred to these Jewish evangelists as “traversing land and sea to win a single proselyte.”⁸ These were Jews that settled in Rome prior to Christianity, around 59 B.C. Scholars note that there were at least five synagogues that were separately domiciled in the poorer neighborhoods of the Jewish communities, without any oversight from a central organization or hierarchical structure of control, sometimes inciting unwelcomed government intervention.

During the first century under the Roman empire, Christians refused to worship the Roman gods or the emperor, and they would be persecuted and sometimes executed. So, they found ways to meet that presumed a different identity, in order that they may

⁵ Daniel G. Reid, Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, and Harry S. Stout, *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 863.

⁶ Wesley K. Willmer, *The Prospering Parachurch* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1998), 12.

⁷ Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission.”

⁸ Matthew 23:15 (Berean Study Bible).

continue to their mission. They would form secular organizations with assumed names that cloaked who they were; however, allowed them to operate on behalf of the church. Consequently, the foundation and spread of parachurches.

“Paul built on their effort and went beyond them with the new gospel he preached, which allowed the Greeks to remain Greeks and not become circumcised, and culturally assimilated into the Jewish way of life.”⁹ Scholars catalogue Paul’s ministry as a parachurch. Scriptures record no evidence of Paul being subject to any religious authority. Once the Church at Antioch commissioned him out for missionary work, he operated independent of the church. He formed a leadership team that was self-sufficient and independent of any other resource, known as the missionary band. Paul’s missionary band became a prototype for the parachurch structure.¹⁰ Rather than members, this structure was populated by volunteers committed to a cause.

During the 1000-year medieval period, a new wave of the parachurch structure evolved. Monasteries were birthed under Pachomius,¹¹ a military veteran, which drew over 3,000 followers. With stark contrast to Paul’s structure, the parachurch was designed around a Roman military structure, which made for a more disciplined commitment. It is a widely held view that the monastery perpetuated church growth more so than Paul’s missionary band structure. Although there was rivalry between the two,

⁹ Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” 221.

¹⁰ Ibid., 222.

¹¹ “Pachomius the Great,” *Wikipedia*, last modified April 14, 2018, accessed January 3, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachomius_the_Great.

“the monasteries were uniformly the source and the real focal point of new energy and vitality which flowed into the diocesan side of the Christian movement.”¹²

It was not until the 19th century that Protestants again became actively engaged in mission work. Either supported or sponsored by a church, these parachurch mission bands constituted a separate structure from the local church. Toward the end of the 19th century, hundreds of parachurch structures were established, independent of and not regulated by the local church structure. While the need for the local church structure was significant, the parachurch movement became more legitimate.

As the parachurch organization continued to evolve, it took on many different forms and missions, all which supported the local church in an undisclosed manner. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the widow and the children... describes the scope of the parachurch structure. Where the local church did not have the resources to follow through on these mission fronts, parachurch organizations seized the opportunity to define their scope around these missions, making the parachurch a “de facto leader in contemporary evangelism”.¹³

In 2010, “according to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, 91,272 non-profit Protestant organizations filled a 990-T Tax Form for Christian work. These organizations reported total revenues of \$1.8 billion a year, with total assets of over \$4 billion. And these billions did not include churches, Christian non-profits which reported less than \$25,000 a year, or any of the Country’s 106,000 Christian educational

¹² Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” 223.

¹³ Mark Galli, “A World Vision for Church and Parachurch,” *Christianity Today*, May 2014, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/may/world-vision-for-church-and-parachurch-.html>.

institutions.”¹⁴ It has been my experience that most church organizations have limited or no resources for mission’s work or outreach. Parachurches have access to resources independent of the church that help them to provide service and resources not available to the church. Some Parachurch executives have articulated their experiences with trying to partner-with secular organizations for missions, but they were declined because they had no real structure or connection in church missiology. There are those secular organizations that support parachurch organizations, in part, because they have no institutional loyalty.

Substantial Dissimilarities or Supporting Causes

It is important to note what distinguishes the church from the parachurch; purpose, vision, and description. They differ greatly in principle. The term *church* appropriately defined is “a body of believers that are members of an individual congregation sharing the same fundamental beliefs meeting in one central location.” The extended version of the term *church* as seen in Scripture is The Body of Christ, the household of Faith, the Bride of Christ, and so on. Haywood quotes Mack Stiles’ definition of the distinct characteristics of the church:

The church is the God-ordained local assembly of believers who have committed themselves to each other. They gather regularly, they teach the Word, celebrate communion and baptism, discipline their members, establish a biblical structure of leadership, they pray and give together.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mack Stiles, “Nine Marks of a Healthy Parachurch Ministry,” 9Marks, March 1, 2011, accessed March 9, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalnine-marks-healthy-parachurch-ministry/>.

¹⁵ Josh Haywood, “Is the Modern Parachurch a Reflection of Misguided Ecclesiology?” (senior honors thesis, Liberty University, 2011), 12, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/honors/243>.

Haywood points out that what sets the church apart is regeneration, unity and commitment. The parachurch concept is so widespread that experts suggest it now leads the local church in many ways. The parachurch targets specific issues, where the church has become more adaptive to the needs of the congregation. The church's focus is theological; the parachurch is more ethics-driven. Parachurch organizations have the latitude to defer to philosophies of their choosing, whereas the church is strictly committed to its fundamental beliefs. With no accountability to the local church, the parachurch continues to define its scope and approach by its own mission. "Parachurch groups have the opportunity to specialize in all kinds of niche ministries."¹⁶

Haywood writes "The claims of those who support and praise the parachurch are often that it is a new and effective way to spread the gospel to the modern world that is more effective than what the local church body can do itself."¹⁷ This sounds reminiscent of an instance in Scripture when the people were pursuing Jesus:

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the far shore saw that the disciples had taken the only boat, and they realized Jesus had not gone with them. Several boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the Lord had blessed the bread and the people had eaten. So, when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But do not be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval." They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?" Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent."-John 6:22-29 (NLT)

¹⁶ Aaron Menikoff, "Are Parachurch Ministries Evil? Bad and Good Arguments for the Parachurch," 9Marks, February 15, 2015, quoted in "Korea Campus Crusade for Christ: A Parachurch Organization," *San Diego Korea Campus Crusade for Christ*, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://sdkccc.weebly.com/what-is-a-parachurch.html>.

¹⁷ Josh Haywood, "Is the Modern Parachurch a Reflection of Misguided Ecclesiology," 21.

The parachurch seeks to meet the physical needs of the traditional church, but the appeal is to follow Jesus' model, offering both natural and spiritual enrichment. There are parachurch movements that steer away from evangelistic efforts, so that there is no conflict of interest with secular support organizations. These movements continue to become identified as the "not-for-profit" entities that they are.

Two Structures

In many cases, the follower base of a parachurch organization is vast because of its detachment from any denomination or local church. Parachurch organizations can become categorized under two types of mission fields, based on scope and objective. The first is those that service only the needs of a community through activities unrelated to the church. Then, there are parachurches that become movements, such as these modern-day examples we are familiar with: Billy Graham, Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyer, David C. Cook, World Vision, and so on.¹⁸ People would rather support parachurch organizations because there is usually no relationship with a local church. It is interesting how many people would like to become affiliated with Christianity without the connection to a specific congregation. Much of their perception of the local church can become attributed to either prior experience, upbringing, or cultural values. "Since we live and work with all different types of people, we need to attention on how others might see something."¹⁹

¹⁸ These parachurch organizations take on the form of crusades, activist groups, interfaith college or university groups, etc. Their primary focus is evangelism and spiritual enrichment or social rights.

¹⁹ Harvey Herman, Jr. and Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: The Missing Generation in Our Churches* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016), 45.

Enhancing our awareness of others' perceptions helps us to understand why they do or do not support certain initiatives. What are their influencers? What offends? What gratifies? What contributes? What counteracts? These are "filters that distort or enhance the way people see."²⁰ Churches that consider their parishioners' filters are much more likely to experience growth and productivity in their congregations than those that do not. On the other hand, parachurches are not influenced by external filters, but become influencers themselves by their cause. Parachurches attract those with like passions and whose points of view are similarly relative to establish mission and vision, without drawing them to the bleeding side of the Savior. "The standard cliché for parachurch is that it is not the church, but an arm of the church. Yet historically, that arm has shown a tendency to develop a mind of its own and crawl away from the body..."²¹

Modality and Sodality

Modality and Sodality are missional terms invented by Ralph Winter²² that distinctively identify the difference between the church and the parachurch. "While modality is "a mainly non-voluntary, inherited structure," which maintains a "benefit-of-the-doubt membership", sodality is "more likely to become voluntary, contractual, and purposive."²³ Modality, or churches, enter a relationship by membership; sodality, or parachurches, into relationship by volunteering. "Although he advocates for parachurch,

²⁰ Ibid., 46.

²¹ Stiles, "Nine Marks of a Healthy Parachurch Ministry."

²² "Ralph Winter was an American missiologist and Presbyterian missionary who helped pioneer Theological Education by Extension, raised the debate about the role of the church and mission structures and became well known as the advocate for pioneer outreach among unreached people groups. He was the founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission (USCWM), William Carey International University, and the International Society for Frontier Missiology." "Ralph D. Winter," *Wikipedia*, last modified April 9, 2018, accessed April 27, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_D._Winter.

²³ Daleng, "The Partnership Between Churches and Parachurch Organizations in Nigeria," 34.

Daleng views the parachurch as suffering from “imperfect accountability.”²⁴ He believes they have “serious flaws that undermine their utility as engines of accountability, which means the parachurch is not obligated to a standard of measure.”²⁵

Trueman (2006) refers to parachurch organizations as Coalition Movements that divide their members to unite them. Merriam-Webster defines a coalition as a temporary alliance of political parties formed for a mutual cause.²⁶ To think of a parachurch as a political party almost totally derestricts its mission as being religiously motivated.

Trueman continues “...the parachurch is not the church. It does not do what the church does, and it does not supplant the church in the minds and lives of those involved in its work.”²⁷ He strongly encourages church leaders in the grand scheme of church affairs, to utilize parachurch organizations to serve them in a subordinate and insignificant way.²⁸

One of the greatest misfortunes of the local church could be the growth of parachurch organizations. Parachurches free people of institutional accountability and commitment, while providing an antidote for those who will commit to humanitarian efforts, sometimes in the name of Christianity. Some people feel they can have a relationship with God through their works without an alliance to the formal structure of the local church.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Doug Lederman, “Imperfect Accountability,” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 2, 2010, accessed January 8, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/03/02/voluntary>.

²⁶ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. “coalition,” accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coalition>.

²⁷ Carl Trueman, “How Parachurch Ministries Go Off the Rails,” *IX 9Marks Journal*, March 1, 2011, accessed March 9, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalhow-parachurch-ministries-go-rails/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

One Mission: The Online Church

My local church is fortunate to have a philanthropic organization, called MegaCARE,²⁹ that seeks out those in desperate need of aid. Through clean water programs, construction of shelters, and food and medicine distributions, MegaCARE provides relief around the world. However, our reach is not expansive enough to support the thousands of Internet church members we have worldwide. Because is it not a parachurch, our resources are limited; the need exceeds our ability to respond.

Biblical Foundation

While some theologians believe that para-churches are biblically-supported in concept and theory, others contest the claim that the mission of para-churches are equipped to walk alongside the church and carry out the missionary task because of the lack of accountability. The relationship between The Apostle Paul and the Philippian church may be a great fusion of modality and sodality to consider. From the onset of his ministry in Philippi, Paul developed a bond with the church there. Whether it was Paul alone or Paul and Silas, they were treated extraordinary love and care. It was this unique union that resulted in a ten-year partnership. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippian church of his gratitude for their support of his mission. He makes special mention of their financial contributions. His note of appreciation for their kindness conveys the benefits of partnership. This Scripture shows us how connecting for a cause can make a huge difference in serving the global church.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me

²⁹ For more details on MegaCare, see <http://thepottershous.org/megacare-missions/>.

to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-8, ESV).

Verse five speaks specifically about *koinonia*, or partnership, participation, sharing and fellowship. The Philippian church sent a representative to Paul when he was in prison, with a financial contribution for his ministry. This is partnership. “It denotes cooperation in the widest sense, their participation with the Apostle whether in sympathy, or in suffering or in active labor or any other way.”³⁰ The Philippians supported Paul’s missionary work in prayer, with encouragement and with offerings. The Philippian church is probably one of the greatest examples of partnership recorded in Scripture.

Another example in Scripture of parachurch work is found in Acts 6:

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.” Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6 NLT)

Along with exponential growth, came growing pains. Without insinuating malevolence or intent, let us review this from a theoretical perspective; because no growth happens without discomfort. It is apparent that the Jerusalem church had started a food program and did not anticipate rapid growth. As with the on surge of churches who have started E-churches without a growth strategy, or a static document that defines the

³⁰ Joseph B. Lightfoot, *Philippians: The Crossway Classic Commentaries* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 83.

parameters surrounding the E-church goals. What do you do with unexpected growth? How do you compensate for the lack of anticipation of expansion? How do you keep the church flowing without stagnation? Although growth is a good problem to have, it can be bad for the brand when there is failure to meet the needs of those who respond to the call. Complaints came into the Jerusalem church from the outside...that is what happens when mainstream critics hear about the disparity.

How can the local church and the parachurch find common ground? How can the two merge resources and still win? The seven men, or deacons, which were chosen and ordained to expand the food program, were indicative of the legitimacy and necessity of a parachurch organization that can partner and help, with the excess weight that is happening when we open the doors of the Internet church. The Great Commission has transcended the restrictions of brick and mortar, from an organized system of believers, to a substantially larger than life edifice without walls and beyond denominational constraints. For the greater good, partners in mission can combine resources and fulfill assignments that no one organization could do alone.

The Internet Church a Mission Field

To serve the needs of a global community, the church must see themselves as engaging “a lifestyle of common ground with the world, yet without moral or spiritual compromise; where they are not afraid to challenge assumptions, even the idols within a culture that harm and enslave people.”³¹ The church has become deliberate about being

³¹ W. Rodman MacIlvaine, III, “What is the Missional Church Movement?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (January–March 2010): 90, accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.dts.edu/download/publications/bibliotheca/DTS-What%20Is%20the%20Missional%20Church%20Movement.pdf>.

the missionary presence³² in the indigenous communities they reach.³³ “The church was never meant to be stationary. It was never meant to be defined by a building; it finds its purpose in its mission.”³⁴ “The question is not a non-churchgoing community but a non-going church.”—A. Scott Matheson, 1893³⁵

While the Internet Church platform is accommodating to the churchgoer, that is not its only audience; it is also meant to go to the unchurched. “The walling in of the church in space and stone which was rampant by the fourth century, is sometimes called by historians the “petrification” of Western Christianity.”³⁶ The church’s remedy to petrification is the Internet Church.

A church that has no plan to reach beyond its walls swiftly becomes a relic.³⁷ When it no longer takes advantage of the opportunities to carry out the Great Commission by utilizing every tool given for that purpose, it is aimless. Even with unlimited access to the world, with no passion or focus, to advance the kingdom globally,

³² Alan Hirsch discussed this point in, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 217–241. This concept of unity was also championed by Newbigin in a short work based on his Kerr Lectures at the University of Glasgow called, *The Household of God*. See Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basic Readings* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 31.

³³ “The needs of the indigenous culture have always been taken seriously by biblical writers as evidenced by Paul’s message to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17:16-34. Stark asserts that Christianity was an urban movement in the first century, with Christians especially concerned about serving specific needs in their cities.” Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Religion and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 30-31. See also, Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, CA, 1997), 76–94, 161.

³⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 58.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

and remain motionless, the greatest achievements would be done in vain. The church is much more stable when it is on a mission than when it is stationary.³⁸

A generation ago, missionaries traveled to other countries on ships that took several weeks to arrive. As recent as the 1990s', the airplane became the mode of travel, arriving in only hours to the mission field. Today, missional journeys are happening uninterrupted by technology within seconds.³⁹ Thus, the Internet Church is a mission field, taking to the highways and byways, by way of the skyways.

Olson contends that “the Internet is just as valid a mission field as any geographic locality...”⁴⁰ Rather than a tool, Célérier⁴¹ “considers the Internet to be a missionary field.”⁴² With the possibilities for all aspects of church ministry on the Internet, “God has designed humankind to be incredibly adaptive creatures, which are capable of maximizing the effectiveness of any communication technology”⁴³ and that we might take the mission field for Christ. There has been an occurrence in the physical church-buildings, and a surge of attendance in online ministries. Given the global reach of the Internet in almost every culture, the opportunity for the church is greater than ever to

³⁸ Ibid., 91.

³⁹ David Sills, “How Technology Has Changed Missions,” Southern Equip, Southern University, 2016, accessed December 26, 2017, <http://equip.sbts.edu/article/technology-changed-missions/>.

⁴⁰ Jon Olson, “Rethinking Missions: A Pathway for Helping the Next Generation to Fulfill Christ’s Great Commission” (D.Min. diss., George Fox University, 2010), accessed December 26, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=dmin>.

⁴¹ Eric Célérier is one of the original pioneers in Internet Evangelism and founder of Jesus.net. According to *Wikipedia*, Eric has over 250,000 French-speaking subscribers to his website and plans to launch an English-speaking website soon. “Eric Célérier,” *Wikipedia*, last modified September 24, 2017, accessed January 5, 2018, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Éric_Célérier.

⁴² Eric Célérier, “The Internet: The New Missionary Challenge of the Twenty-First Century,” *Lausanne World Pulse*, May 2008, 29, accessed January 5, 2018,

⁴³ Mark M. Stephenson, *Web-Empower Your Church: Unleashing the Power of Internet Ministry*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 21.

leverage the internet in our outreach efforts.⁴⁴ CEO Walt Wilson writes “We are the first generation in all of human history to hold in our hands the technology to reach every man, woman, and child on earth.”⁴⁵

Anti-Christian Countries

When my local church started the online church, we experienced-and continue to-an influx of people from around the world that signed on for E-membership. Some of those people are in countries that are anti-Christian. On one occasion, a woman from a communist country came on a Sunday morning to physically join the church. When the call was made for new membership, she came. But she wrote me a note and it said “I am an E-member, and I wanted to experience my new church in person. Please do not make my information public knowledge; I cannot take a picture for security reasons. No one can know that I have joined a Christian church.” She left with a hug and a promise. There are stories like this one happening all the time. Then there are those who e-mail, call, or use some form of social media to get in contact with us, desiring help from places where churches are not allowed, or Christians are treated as second-class citizens. But here is where para-church organizations can play a major role.

In some Islam nations, where Christianity is punishable by death, parachurch organizations can go in and tend to the needs of the impoverished. A former professor of mine who was raised Muslim and trained an Islamic leader in Bangladesh, came to know Jesus and now returns to his country under the cloak of a parachurch foundation to help

⁴⁴ Olson, “Rethinking Missions,” 25.

⁴⁵ Walt Wilson, “Internet—the Transition of Everything from Atoms to Bits,” *Lausanne World Pulse*, November 2008, 25.

the poor and take the message of hope to the hopeless. As these anti-Christian religions continue to grow, there will be a greater need to get into places where churches are prohibited to help the impoverished find relief.

A Brighter Future

I toured a parachurch organization called Team Rubicon. Team Rubicon is a disaster response service organization that deploys first responders to disaster areas worldwide. They have over 40,000 volunteers currently affiliated with the organization. Founded by two veterans, the company culture is focused on veterans, repurposing their skills, experience, resources, and goodwill, to help connect them back into the civilian community. Their deployment is based on the scope of work for a particular disaster.

After touring the facility, we sat with the decision makers to understand their desire to partner with our ministry. Two pastors' sons lead this facility. They feel connecting with a well-established ministry would further enhance their impact in their regional community. We would be the first church to partner with them as they explore new opportunities to grow their mission. Other than being a fund support, they see the need to partner with someone who can offer follow-up efforts once they have pulled out. The church would be their discipleship initiative; enhance the quality of their personal touch.

We were able to identify some feasibly accommodating ways to having a beneficially enhancing relationship. From disaster relief to personal touch, it was a good fit. We offered to start a "Team Rubicon Chapter" at our church, since we have over 1,000 veterans and active military personal in our ministry. In support of our MegaCARE organization and our Military ministry, it could become an extension of our mission in

offering first responder training, contributing to the personal touch by deploying our ministerial volunteers to the sites, and having an outlet for our medical volunteers to assist with medical camps. We look forward to building that relationship in the coming months. In kind, Team Rubicon also has volunteers globally that assist in disaster efforts and can deploy at a moment's notice. Our partnership with Team Rubicon will help those who reach out to us from other places in the world to service our Internet Church membership. The ray of hope is that parachurch organizations are seeing the need to filtrate back into the local church model to further some of their mission. According to parachurch research sources they now seek to become interdependent to some degree to merge missions and become fiscally accountable.

Chapter Summary

Protestant churches have, since their establishment, wandered far from the missionary ideal set forth in the New Testament. Yet, the accusations against the parachurch society range from the theological to the financial. The argument remains, that the parachurch organizations perform worthy missional causes, and their pursuits are superintended by the church.⁴⁶ With the spread of parachurches in recent years, some have great cause to wonder if these parachurches are hurting or helping church congregations. “The major criticism, and one that is easiest to make stick, is that they

⁴⁶ Gil Pyo Lee, “From Traditional to Missional Church: Describing a Contextual Model of Change for Ingrown Korean Diaspora Church in North America” (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007), accessed December 21, 2016, <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1459&context=ecommonsatsdissertations>.

lack accountability to anyone but themselves. Parachurch groups are religion gone free enterprise.”⁴⁷

However, there are parachurch organizations that have many of the same goals and motivations as the church...supporting believers, spreading the faith, and so on. There is some reason for affinity between the two organizations, even though there are still principle elements that give them their own distinctions. The church is broad but focused in vision and mission, and narrow in doctrinal interpretation. The parachurch is narrow in purpose, scope, and target, but broad in denominational tolerance. The church ministers to a wide spectrum of ages and needs, yet specifically geographical. The parachurch is narrow in age demographics but geographically scattered.⁴⁸ Whether formal or informal, profit or nonprofit, public governmental or private venture, special purpose or single interest, parachurch organizations are goal oriented or mission-driven. A healthy relationship between a church and a parachurch will be one where the boundaries are not confused but relied on to fulfill the mission of meeting the needs of the Internet church congregation. “Differentiation is the ability to embrace diversity and uniqueness and to be responsive to the external environment: integration is the ability to achieve harmony and oneness.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Christopher P. Scheitle, *Beyond the Congregation: The World of Nonprofits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35.

⁴⁸ Jerry White, *The Church & The Parachurch: An Uneasy Marriage* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1983).

⁴⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Aqua Church 2.0: Essential Leadership for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1999), 168.

Church “leaders realize that social media is not a fad but a fundamental shift in interpersonal communications”⁵⁰...the need for all available help for the Internet church congregants is becoming apparent. With them comes the same problems, issues, circumstances, troubles, disappointments, setbacks, joys, sorrows...as anyone else. Once they know there is a listening ear and a caring heart, the floodgate opens.

This chapter speaks to pastors and leaders who have found the grace to embrace the online church phenomena. Although increased technology use is no guarantor of growth, it can be rewarding to ministry in this digital age. Even though being an Internet pastor means more than just having a social media account, sources say that there is significant growth with pastors who are engaging in the online church opportunity offer spiritual development. One need only know it is not easy; neither does it have to be complex. But the greater need is for the partnering of organizations that can support these endeavors. As we, in some sense, repeat history in a churchless culture, there need be organizations that can go into estranged territory on behalf of the church, using assumed names and carry out the work of the ministry.

⁵⁰ Anthony Coppedge, “Predicting Church Trends: Pastor of Social & Digital Communications,” Anthony Coppedge.com, 2016, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://anthonymcoppedge.com/predicting-church-trends-pastor-of-social-digital-communications/>.

CHAPTER 3.

THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

The doctrine and Old Testament foundations are the pillars of magnificent history, which rely on ancient stories. The theology was written down as poetry and prose (e.g., poems), and filled with metaphors and ambiguity. There were no commentaries, dictionaries, explanations, or google, as points of reference. The Word stood active, as stated in Exodus 3:14 “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you”. (KJV) The historical perspective and divinity of the “Word of God” is the genesis of the religious and historical foundations that we rely on today.

The story unfolds from primitive rituals and ironies, with the epitome of love; as a witness of the sacred and magnificent love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to a fallen people, in a fallen world. The historical foundations lead the way, with primitive styles, strange combinations, startling and provocative events, issues, and circumstances that are archaic and mysterious. As written in 1 Timothy 3:16 “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (KJV) This type of doctrine was sometimes mysterious; however always new and fresh, and brought hope to the reader. These words are the foundations, which are written and believed as the “inspired word” to lead sinners (young and old) to repentance, through the cross of Jesus Christ, and for the church to convey *His Story* on to the

mission field. “Though the centripetal aspect of mission is a less prominent note in the New Testament, *The Story* is still one that represents a biblical theology of mission.”¹

This chapter is intended to scripturally support the Online Church as the form of mission that will carry the gospel message to the world. The world depends on the sacred compilation of the Pentateuch or Torah as the historical foundation. There is a drive to compare what the prophets and priests of old had to say, to what the pastors of this age are saying to the world today. This chapter seeks to undergird the conversation of the Online Church concept as a foresight of Jesus’ plan of the Great Commission. In the fullness of time, it would be revealed when ships and trains and planes could no longer help carry the message to remote parts of the World. Jesus already knew what we would need to reach the world with the Good News! “And then he (Jesus) told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:15-16, NLT)

Jesus, The Media Mogul

Jesus was popular. He always had a crowd following him. Not always for the right reasons, but people were always around him. People wanted to be in Jesus’ presence because they could touch Him, and He could touch them. Matthew records:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So, his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And **great crowds followed him** from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 4:23-25 [NKJV])

¹ Darren Sarisky, “The Meaning of the *Missio Dei*: Reflections on Lesslie Newbigin’s Proposal That Mission Is of the Essence of the Church,” *Sage Journals* 42, no. 3 (2014): 267.

On another occasion, Luke writes:

“While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him. But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.” (Luke 5:12-14, 16 [NKJV])

From the announcement of his birth to the cross, to the moment of His ascension into heaven, multitudes were with Jesus.² It was something about Jesus that left people either moralized, mesmerized or mad. John recollects:

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” (John 11:45-50 [NASB])

Jesus was not moved by the large groups of followers or spectators; neither was He blindsided by naysayers. There was no doubt about Jesus’ intentions: “to make disciples of anyone who will take seriously the command to follow him to the ends of the earth.”³

Matthew concludes with this mandate:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20 [NKJV])

² Arthur Blessitt and Denise Blessitt, “Jesus (Crowds-Multitudes),” The Official Website of Arthur Blessitt, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.blessitt.com/jesus-crowds-multitudes/>.

³ Don Fanning, “Eschatology and Missions: ICST 420 Theology of Missions,” *Themes of Theology that Impacts Missions*, Paper 8 (2009): 6, accessed December 30, 2017, http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgm_theo/8.

Jesus makes it clear that once he has left earth, he will not return until every nation has heard the Gospel: “This good news of the kingdom [the gospel] will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end [of the age] will come.” Matthew 24:14 (AMP) “Clearly in the apocalyptic vision of our Lord, the history of humanity could never be brought to its proper conclusion until God’s purpose to make known his divine love through Jesus Christ his Son to all ‘peoples’ is accomplished.”⁴ The world as we know it, will not end until all ethnicities, regardless of religious or political beliefs, have heard about the love of God through the finished work of His Son.

Take It to The Nations

The English word used to define *nations* in Matthew 24:14 is “ethnos” or ethnicity. Ethnicity refers to a group of people having “a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like...traits, background, allegiance, or association.”⁵ The term ethnicity is the closest derivative for characterizing what a nation resembles. Depending on the term ethnicity to help determine when the end of the age will come is even more complex.

There is no known source that records definite numbers of ethnic groups that exists in the world today. Every source differs based on its variables. Some sources say a little over 20,000; others suggest around 16,000; yet others propose an even smaller

⁴Ibid., 4.

⁵ *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “nation,” accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/nation?s=t>.

number.⁶ With every new society, new ethnics groups emerge from the coalescence of two separate cultures. In 2009, Fanning speculated based on approximately 12,000 ethnic groups⁷ “Many of these ethnic groups have been reached with the Gospel, some are projected to integrate with other groups losing their individual identity, leaving approximately 4,000 unreached groups. Several groups have initiated contact and linguistic works with over a thousand of these groups leaving just over 2,000 totally unreached groups at this date.”⁸

The Biblical term used to describe *nations* is the word “Gentiles”. The word Gentile simply means “non-Israelite” or “stranger”. Sometimes referred to as “heathen” because this group of people worshipped idol gods. This is the group that Jesus commissioned the disciples to go to: The Gentile, the stranger; the heathen; those that worshipped other gods...because they do not know Jesus!

Most befitting at this point is a look at Jesus’ missional work in Sychar:

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn’t baptize them—his disciples did). So, he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”

Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.”

⁶ Joshua Project, “How Many People Groups Are There?” Joshua Project.net, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/how_many_people_groups_are_there.

⁷ Fanning, “Eschatology and Missions,” 6.

⁸ Ibid.

“But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?”

Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

“Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

“Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her. “I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied.

Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”

Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus told her, “I AM the Messiah!”

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?” The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?”

So the people came streaming from the village to see him. (John 4:1-30 [NLT])

The greater mission was to continue where Jesus left off: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12, ESV). The greatest work of mission yet to be accomplished is for the Church Age to reach the world.

The Mission

The concept of mission has changed over the years. Thus, a variety of definitions underscores the need to develop a concise meaning for the purposes of this paper.

“Mission is generally understood as “the ability or strength that is given to one person or several people to complete a certain duty or responsibility.”⁹ It is nothing less than going out to proclaim or officially announce good news. “Its basic content is the gospel or good news, the reign/kingdom of God, the person and work and message of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ In summary, mission is the global march of the church with the cross-cultural expansion of the Gospel.¹¹ There are two types of missions: one is related to “the expanding of the Church as an institution; the other is related to the concrete mission of God and His word.”¹²

Issues with the Mission

When the Online Church opens its doors to the world it faces the major challenges of mission: 1) multiculturalism; 2) multi-faith context; and 3) best practices in missions.¹³ Multiculturalism, or cross-cultural, as Dr. Reisacher¹⁴ prefers, is best depicted in

⁹ *Encyclopedia of Concepts*, s.v. “Mission,” accessed January 1, 2018, <http://concepto.de/mision/>.

¹⁰ Howard Culbertson, “Definitions of Missions,” *Missiology* at SNU, 2015, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/missiolo.htm>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Encyclopedia of Concepts*, s.v. “Mission.”

¹³ Evelynne Reisacher, “Mission with the Mind of Christ,” *Theology, News & Notes* (Fall 2013), accessed January 1, 2018, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/mission-with-the-mind-of-christ/>.

¹⁴ Evelynne Reisacher, associate professor of Islamic studies and intercultural relations, has taught at Fuller Theological Seminary since 2001. Her current research involves exploring gender issues in Islam, Muslim-Christian relations, world religions, and how they affect regulation across cultures.

Scripture when “a Gentile church planted by a Jewish believer from Tarsus in a Greek city colonized by Rome.”¹⁵ The multi-faith context exposes the online church and its viewers to an array beliefs, religions, gods and goddesses. Finally facing the uncertainty of how to do ministry in this multi-cultural/multi-faith environment in a way that is most effective and produce optimal results.

Missional Theorists

Perhaps the answers to the challenges would best come from those whose life’s work is mission. Foundational theorists that have researched, developed, and founded structures, principles and theories that help guide the mission work onward. Reisacher summarizes the work of influential missiologists drawn to these challenges. Out of their work, two main theories were developed: incarnational mission and contextualization.”¹⁶

The concept of the incarnational mission, like Jesus’ incarnation, is a work of “self-emptying and self-enslaving...”¹⁷ best described by Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, contributors of the “incarnational mission theory” surmise “we must love the people to whom we minister so much that we are willing to enter their culture as children, to learn how to speak as they speak...play...eat...sleep...study what they study.”¹⁸ This teaches us how to communicate to the hearts and minds of people of other cultural backgrounds. Sweet contends “we have taken the commission to mean go and pull people out of their contexts and make them disciples with the protected zones of our

¹⁵ Reisacher, “Mission with the Mind of Christ.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

churches, and then send them out to spread a unitary Christian culture. Not so. Our starting point is not telling people where they should be, but being with people where they already are...”¹⁹

Whiteman considers contextualization to be the most critical issue with mission to date. Since its inception in the 1970s²⁰ theorists apply this theory as they continue to expand their knowledge of the relationship between the Gospel, the church and culture.²¹ A. Scott Moreau, a missional theorist of the contextualization concept interprets it as “the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds.”²² Every theory and concept we apply in mission has to be tested against biblical knowledge and compared to the most contemporary theories from the variety of disciplines that enrich the field of missiology.²³

Reisacher’s final emphasis is on the third mission challenge and is based on the Scripture in Philippians 2:5 “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Having the mind of Christ in mission work is to serve in context: suffering and persecution; violence and victimization; but selflessness will result in satisfaction and humiliation will result in exultation. I am reminded of the acronym “WWJD” (What

¹⁹ Len Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 151.

²⁰ Darrell L. Whiteman, “Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge,” *Sage Publications*, 1997, accessed January 1, 2018, <http://spu.edu/temp/denuol/context.htm>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Reisacher, “Mission with the Mind of Christ.”

²³ Ibid.

Would Jesus Do?), penned by Charles Sheldon²⁴ and preached by Charles Spurgeon²⁵ in the late 1800's, and adopted by Christians in the late 1990s, who used the phrase as an axiom to demonstrate the love of Jesus through their actions and lifestyle. Thus, the basic response to best practices in mission is to do what Jesus would do, like Jesus did it! In behavior, in attitude, in humility and in service to all mankind, mission is rendered in love.

It is my conclusion that these theories of mission are best suited for each other and produce amicable results when they directly interact. The efficacy of the Online Church rests in applying both concepts in their mission practices. Then we can see mission as the global march of the church with the cross-cultural expansion of the Gospel. These challenges are no match for the One who sent us and has equipped us to go. I am compelled to resolve with Whiteman:

The common bond that unites us and bridges the chasm created by language and cultural differences is the Holy Spirit, who knows no boundaries of race, class, gender, or social location. Encounters with Christians from other cultural context expand our understanding of God, for no longer are we satisfied with our own limited perception and experience.²⁶

²⁴ Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps*, 1896, as cited in "What Would Jesus Do?" *Wikipedia*, accessed January 1, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_would_Jesus_do%3F.

²⁵ Charles Spurgeon, as cited in "What Would Jesus Do?" *Wikipedia*, accessed January 1, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_would_Jesus_do%3F.

²⁶ Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge."

The Mission of Love

House Church

Christ Refuge Temple (House), Midwest City, Kentucky. This was the site of a little Pentecostal gathering every Sunday morning, afternoon, and evening; every Tuesday evening for prayer class; every Thursday evening for Bible Study; some Friday evenings, and every Saturday morning for rehearsal and cleanup. Six families made up the regular Sunday morning congregation: Fraziers, Wards, Mitchells, Hickombottoms, Browns, Hayes, the pastor and his four. Twelve adults, sixteen children. Here was the Sunday Bulletin:

- 9:00 Sunday School
- 10:30 Break (Snacks bought in from the corner store)
- 11:00 Morning Service
- 1:30 Break (potluck lunch)
- 3:30 Afternoon Service
- 6:00 Break (family dinner)
- 7:30 Evening Service
- 10:00 Benediction

Together we they learned; together they worshipped; together they ate; together they fellowshiped. For the first fifteen years of this church, this was community. Outings and picnics; revivals and tent meetings; outreach and door-to-door witnessing. The pastor made sure to follow the house church strategy:

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions (*occasionally*) to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes

and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. (Acts 2:44-47 [NLT])

As the children grew, the community decreased; and it was not replenished. Large church buildings began to surface all over the city which became more popular than house church. As the children grew, so did the public church buildings. By the late 1960s to mid-1970s, although it did not completely diminish, the house church lost its members to the big church building on the closest corner. Now potlucks had to be planned; and eating in the sanctuary, other than the Lord's Supper, was not tolerated. Fellowships were scheduled outside of church time, and we met less at the building because there were maintenance costs and upkeep. The sense of community – that 'house church' feel – had changed. Now the larger the congregation, the less we knew about each other. And the old congregational song of the storefront church that justified the individualism was:

I don't know what you come to do; I don't what you come to do...
 But I come to clap my hands – my hands; I come to clap my hands.
 "I don't know what you come to do; I don't what you come to do...
 But I come to pat my feet – my feet; I come to pat my feet.
 "I don't know what you come to do; I don't what you come to do...
 But I come to shout for joy – oh joy; I come to shout for joy.
 "I don't know what you come to do; I don't what you come to do...
 But I come to wave my hands – my hands; I come to wave my hands.
 "I don't know what you come to do; I don't what you come to do...
 But I come to say Amen – Amen; I come to say Amen!

Independently (but collectively in the same room), each would have their own vertical worship experiences, forgetting all about the horizontal "house church rock". With the increase of diversity in the congregations and lack of community, even tensions rose among the brethren.

The Early House Church

For the first three centuries of early Christianity, the church meetings were held in homes. The first house church recorded in Scripture is in Acts 1, where after witnessing Jesus' ascension at the Mount of Olives, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and gathered in the 'Upper Room' of a house there. Here they were to wait until they received the help of the Spirit they needed to take the gospel to the world.

The early 'house church' structure dissolved around 312/313 AD, after Constantine's Edict of Milan and masses of people started attending the local church.²⁷ After many years of religious persecution, Constantine enacted a law that legalized Christianity and made it the religion of the Roman Empire. Consequently, the need to meet in small, private, intimate settings ceased. People were now free to share their faith in public without the fear of maltreatment.

In house churches, it was easy to share love; people got to build full relationships. But with the erection of public church buildings to accommodate more people, the atmosphere of community dissipated, the feeling of love diminished, and the church's morality began to decline.²⁸ In that moment, the dynamic of community had evolved.

Christianity, as the official religion of Rome, became a ruling power in society. There was no need for the compelling power of persuasion; the decision to become a

²⁷ Christopher Owczarek, "Is there a Biblical Foundation for Consecrated Life?" Symposium: Consecrated Life, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. *Tangaza Journal of Theology & Mission* 30, no. 1 (2016): 30, accessed December 30, 2017, http://www.tangaza.org/theology/img/journals/Tangaza_Journal_2015.pdf.

²⁸ Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion: The Story of the Religious Orders and How They Shaped Our World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 2, 51.

Christian was a part of the religious-political synthesis.²⁹ “Christians have always been active in mission and evangelism, even when the regnant doctrine of the church demoted mission to being (at best) a peripheral activity in which a few might engage.”³⁰

While triumphant in some respects, Christianity’s alliance with the state caused it to compromise its true mission. The church begins to fail at its nature as the true reflection of Christ. To follow Jesus seems to have lost its essential quality and central meaning. Arney inserts “Rejecting power and releasing authority, while sounding biblical, appeared a practical impossibility; even irresponsible in light of her times.”³¹ In his review of Tertullian’s criticism against the church, Arney retorts, “The church was faced with limited choices in her effort to hold together the diversity of Christian faith. To ‘protect’ the Gospel she became ever more willing to use the power she had accumulated in her long journey from the fringes to the center of Imperial society.”³² As the church lost the support of the state, there needed to be a paradigm shift.

While hundreds of years later, theologians converge to address the decline with intellectual armory, Jungel warns “If the church wants to stay alive it must-be able to breathe out. It must go beyond itself if it wants to remain Christ’s church. It cannot exist

²⁹ Sarisky, “The Meaning of the *Missio Dei*,” 258.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Christopher Lars Arney, “Thriving in Broken Futures: The Paradox of Church in Historic Watersheds” (D.Min diss., George Fox University, March 2013), 50, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1039&context=dmin>.

³² Ibid., 45.

as the church moved by the Spirit unless it is or once again becomes a missionary, evangelizing church.”³³ The church had to return to its First Love.

Love Fulfills God's Requirements

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Roman church, addresses some of these same concerns, as the church faces the loss of love, community and moral. Tension developed between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and mission had succumbed to prejudice and pride. Paul challenges the Roman believers to pursue unity in the Body and operate in the love of Christ. Paul's message was that the gospel was to the whole world, not just to one people or the other.

In his letter, Paul writes (as he reminds us all)

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:3-5 [ESV])

The church has suffered the complacency of mission as a misstep to the distractions of external influences. As we swiftly find ways to recreate ourselves, in hopes of redeeming the time, we leverage the time the church has left by rediscovering our centripetal in a motivated sequence:

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one

³³ Eberhard Jüngel, “To Tell the World About God: The Task for the Mission of the Church on the Threshold of the Third Millennium,” *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 353 (2000): 203.

another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:10-18 [ESV])

Chapter Summary

A Christian Prophet from India recently complimented the United States for its generosity. He spoke about the great blessing that America has been to nations around the world. He said the very fact that he was saved was the result of the message of salvation preached by an American evangelist in 1978.³⁴ He goes on to say

America has been so good to send missionaries all over the world to bring light to darkened corners. America has also been generous in giving to other ministries to help spread the works of God all around the world. Finally, America has been generous in humanitarian helps – ministry to the poor. All this generosity has been added up in God’s cup to show you grace in these last days.³⁵

The mission of any online church venture lends to embody the new commandment Jesus gives, that in doing so, even online, the love of Christ will show forth. Any other cause would fail. If the love of Christ shines through the people, it will spread throughout the community and others will be attracted to Christ, and not to the community, but to the love of the community. “The rule of God requires a Community, a people of God in whom it can be established and from whom it can shine forth so that the world at large may be transformed.”³⁶ God is love; that is the love that creates the Community and establishes a people from whom He can shine forth. The online church

³⁴ Prophet Sadhu Sundar Selvaraj, “Final Grace Period,” (lecture at the On the Earth as It Is in Heaven Conference, The Gathering, Moravian Falls, NC, August 17–20, 2017), accessed December 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SedHuxDB6YI&feature=youtu.be>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Albert De Jong, “Father Simeon Lourdel, Missionary of Africa (White Father),” 2015, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.tangaza.ac.ke/theology/img/journals/Tangaza%20Journal%202013-1.pdf>, 30.

initiative is not just an extension of the physical building; the online church is a conduit through which the love of Christ can continue to flow. John writes: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”- John 13:34 (NKJV)

Christianity without mission is not Christ. Church without mission is not community. Mission without love is not God at all. The current efforts to return mission to the forefront of ministry are contemporized to meet the movements of this current society. Fervently striving to regain the sense of community and initial purpose, the mandate God gave to the church is still its unfinished agenda.³⁷ Make no mistake; God will not leave Himself without a witness in the earth. Therefore, God has ushered into this society the most notable, revolutionary theologians and intellectuals, to marry innovation and technological advancement, literature, and education, to birth the appropriate ideals with mission in mind. That rise in intensity resulted in the extension of the brick and mortar to the world—the Online Church. Dr. Hearn summarizes:

The next generation of Christians will become missional and techno-missional as they relate, communicate, and connect with the majority of the world’s population through the Internet. Whether using the Internet to combine resources, organize worldwide campaigns, evangelize through virtual churches, or break down barriers to ecumenism, tomorrow will vastly change from today. It is the church’s responsibility to help create this new culture. The only way to create new culture is to create more culture. With over 3 billion strong, Generation Y will create more culture. By understanding technology and how it influences individuals, we can use technology to help the next generation re-write the manual that is missional ecclesiology in order to reach the world for Christ.³⁸

³⁷ Sarisky, “The Meaning of the *Missio Dei*,” 267.

³⁸ Michael D. Hearn, Jr., “How Information Communication Technology Can Reshape Missional Ecclesiology: The Making of a Technomissional Church” (D.Min diss., George Fox University, 2013), 66-67, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/53>.

CHAPTER 4.

THE PAJAMA PASTOR

This chapter responds to research question #2: What is the role of a pastor who shepherds both traditional and Internet congregations? It explores the effect of the traditional pastor's role on the e-church setting, and what the church can do to develop a basic understanding of the role the traditional pastor plays with the Internet congregation. It will examine ways to build strong relationship bonds between the pastor and the Internet congregation and how social media can be instrumental in this effort. This section will also outline how the needs of the Internet church differ from the traditional, and how this dynamic can be strategic in determining the most effective method of serving the e-church community.

Against this background, this section will integrate discussions around connection, communication, culture, and customs. The intent is to identify and describe the Internet congregation's demographic and how it impacts the pastor's role by researching what tells the story behind the needs of the current Internet audience and how to effectively engage them in online participation. It will address issues like using digital storytelling to activate empathy as an agent of social change in virtual reality; or using data visualization to engage audiences, to study their emotional reactions; and how to use facts to convey difficult-to-understand subjects or issues in a simplistic, easily relatable context. The anticipation is that we will find ways to better understand the psychological demographic of the e-church congregation pastors serve, and what their expectations may be when they browse the Internet searching for God.

Overview

When the online church started at The Potter's House of Dallas in 2012, I was the Internet Church Pastor, or the "E-Pastor". The online church was called TPHONLINE-The Potter's House of Dallas' online e-church website and placeholder. Three months after launch, the membership for the online church was 15,000. The recorded membership to date is approximately 43,000. That membership includes people from all over the world, in places like Angola, Anguilla, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Morocco, Montserrat, Norway, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saint Kitts, Nevis, UAE, Ukraine, Vanuatu, and on. Viewers can watch live Sunday and Wednesday services, and other events are streamed live; give online donations, submit prayer requests, receive salvation, share their experiences via social media outlets, and become a member of the e-campus by following the listed steps. In addition, online members can have access to online discipleship and personal enrichment programs, online Bible study, pastoral care, and podcasts. There is no associated cost to be a member of the online church. Interestingly, the online donations double, sometimes triple, in-house donations on a weekly basis.

The online membership grew so swiftly and the demand so great, that our senior pastor decided to hire a full-time associate pastor to manage that flock only. The role of this new pastor evolved to a place where ministry alone was not enough. Donations skyrocketed and the demand for product sales doubled. With the increased exposure and reach of the ministry, the technological infrastructure could no longer support the numbers. As a result, cyber security risks increased, and modifications were made to sustain a new church that we were not prepared to receive. This new pastor had a more

extensive and exclusive role than we could have imagined. From the shaping of this new e-pastor role, several questions emerged:

1. How can pastors prepare for the role of an e-church shepherd?
2. How do we engage the people that follow us online?
3. How is efficacy measured in this role?
4. What online platforms are most useful for an online worship experience?
5. What do people see when they see us online?

In preparing for this new role, we were tasked with doing extensive research of other online church models, like Lifechurch, Hillsong, Jesus Culture, Bethel Church, and interviewing the pastors of these e-church congregations. The consensus was that it is impossible to pastor an e-church congregation with traditional pastoral skills alone. The online church would require 50% ministry and 50% technology; they both move the church toward greater relationship. One cannot connect the traditional ministry with the online church, without the right technology.

The Pastor's Role

For many hundreds of years, the pastor's role was clear cut and simple: preach/teach the gospel, attend to the needs of the congregation through house/hospital visits, console the bereaved, perform church ordinances, and serve the community. For the last 50 years, most American churches have had multiple pastors serving the same congregation. The lead pastor usually preached, while the associate pastor usually oversaw pastoral care, Christian education, small group Bible studies, missions, worship, etc. The role of the Internet church pastor was similar to that of an associate pastor, however, the responsibilities are a bit more entailed.

The pajama pastor is the pastor who is responsible for regular social engagement with the Internet Church audience, whether in prayer, spiritual care over a congregation, encouragement, or devotion. For instance, the Internet pastor at our church does weekly blogging, written blogs and vBlogs. Then, there are the weekly written devotional messages with systematic spiritual content. Every Sunday morning immediately following service, the Internet pastor does a recap of the sermon to be accessed by the online congregation later in the day. And, as the online congregants reach out for other resources, like benevolence, grief, weddings, etc., this pastor is their point of contact. There are even monthly baptismal services where people fly in from all over the world for baptism. Where these responsibilities are disseminated among all the associate pastors, this one pastor has the responsibility for all assigned areas. This pastor becomes the face that the online congregation is familiar with, other than that of the lead pastor.

Studies show, however, that in the next ten to twenty years, most people will have their faith-based experience in an online environment.¹ As we transition from just a presence in the community to posturing for inclusive e-church communities, traditional pastors are challenged with shepherding two types of communities: the traditional church congregation and the Internet church congregation.

Campbell suggests that “effective emissaries for Christ must learn the customs and culture of the groups to whom they minister.”² The same holds true for pastors that shepherd virtual congregations: “They need to immerse themselves in cyber culture and

¹ Global Christian Center, “How People of Faith are Using Computers and the Internet,” *Global Christian Center*, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://globalchristiancenter.com/church-resources/applying-technology/24541-how-people-of-faith-are-using-computers-and-the-internet>.

² Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 138.

its worldview before being effective at sharing their faith in this new cyber world.”³

According to the Barna Group, a pastor’s age and church budget are the major factors in whether or not they use social media.⁴

Leader Shift

Unparalleled social, economic, political, and cultural change has inspired calls for a new kind of ministry. Increased interest in integrating global competency into all ministry does, is how it will shift to meet the ever-surging demands of the insatiable search for answers online. A stubborn resolve to conversion can be volatile. Leaders who fall in love with status quo are in danger of becoming obsolete. Having a projected goal to move toward a system that can provide scalable solutions to the online church society will ensure sustainability. Coppedge writes “when church leaders realize that social media is not a fad, but instead a fundamental shift in interpersonal communications, the need for such a position will become apparent.”⁵

The traditional church model is no longer adequate to prepare or motivate the believer toward growth or improve quality of life. “Christian churches have to awake to the challenge of responding to the emergence of a new, global reality—a reality that points to a growing phenomenon of Christians outside the church.”⁶ Virtual reality and

³ Ibid.

⁴ Barna Group, “The Rise of the @Pastor,” June 13, 2013, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/the-rise-of-the-pastor/>.

⁵ Anthony Coppedge, “Predicting Church Trends: Pastor of Social and Digital Communications,” *anthonymcoppedge.com*, 2016, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://anthonymcoppedge.com/predicting-church-trends-pastor-of-social-digital-communications/>.

⁶ Kam Ming Wong, “Christians Outside the Church: An Ecclesiological Critique of Virtual Church,” *Heythrop Journal* 49, no. 5 (2008): 822–840, accessed December 13, 2017, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

augmented reality are changing the way the digital generation interacts with society and is determining what lies in the future.

T.D. Jakes defines leader shift as “the most effective way to minimize efforts, achieve positive outcomes, and reduce the risk of burnout.” He goes on “to not make changes in leadership strategies will stifle effectiveness and hinder productivity and earning potential.”⁷ A leader shift is reflective in that it takes the past experiences into consideration as it plans to move forward. A leader shift is resilient in that the change is designed to withstand the polarities that come with making paradigm shifts. It is collaborative, in that it works alongside other systems and methods for a smooth transition; it is creative in that it is open to offering ideas and concepts that make for a relevant transformation.

Leader shifts are cultural, as the environments around them affect how they change, making them empathetic to the needs of the environment. Without being stressed or strained, leader shifts are adaptable to fit future modifications, in spite of potential complexities. What is a leader shift? Ministries need to navigate the waters of change as our country and our congregations become increasingly global. Adjusting the way our churches engage and deliver the Word of God is critical, and pastors need be consistently aware of delivering the Message in innovative ways that will attract people worldwide. A leader shift then, is the ability to choreograph a sound strategy to communicate the pastoral message to congregants and to those seeking spiritual guidance and deliverance. Whether the strategy is digital or holographic, it must be able to convey a prolific message to its hearers. Coppedge also believes that this shift in leadership is “a reflection

⁷ “Bishop T.D. Jakes,” TD Jakes Ministries, 2017, accessed November 22, 2017, <http://pastorsandleaders.org/>.

of the unique DNA and needs of a church in context to their local and glocal (globally local; time and venue are almost entirely irrelevant on the Internet) communities.”⁸

Leaders find themselves in the right place and in the right role, but with the wrong perspective. To stay relative and effective, pastors, leaders and even organizations must shift their thinking and perspectives to digital leadership. The sacred task is to be responsive to contextual and generational shifts in ways that increase and enhance Christian proclamation and practice. Shifting will empower the church and its leadership to present all things ministry to a constantly evolving generation while remaining true to the faith and committed to mission.

According to Dr. William Curtis, Sr., the near future of pastoring resembles ethical mentorship.⁹ With the barrage of online influences, truth and simple transparency are under fire, and there is a demand for determining what right behavior really is. “Although truth is under suspicion in a relativistic culture, we continue to believe that it exists, and can be found in situational dynamics and behavior enactment.”¹⁰ The church’s relevance is in danger, and while pastors want to solve all their problems, they must otherwise lead people to Christ, the Problem Solver, by challenging them to be hungry enough to search for what is right and true.

⁸ Coppedge, “Predicting Church Trends,” 2016.

⁹ “Ethical mentorship is about helping people with the quality of their thinking about issues important to them—particularly to their career and to their personal identity. Ethical mentors focus on helping people think through situations, where they have recognized the potential for conflict of values, or ethical lapses. They also help people develop their ethical awareness, so that they are better able to foresee and avoid ethical dilemmas.” David Clutterbuck, “Step Forward the Ethical Mentor,” *David Clutterbuck Partnership*, October 4, 2013, accessed October 20, 2017, <https://www.davidclutterbuckpartnership.com/step-forward-the-ethical-mentor/>.

¹⁰ Philip M. Brownell, *Spiritual Competency in Psychotherapy* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2014), 1, accessed February 13, 2017, eBook Collection EBSCOhost.

Wilson¹¹ addresses church leaders who have yet to embrace the Internet culture. His book concentrates on the imminent technological revolutions and how the Christian community is vehemently bombarded with the complexities that accompany new information technology. I concur with Swartz¹² when he expresses how the uncertainty of the future creates a dependency on scenarios that forecast a projected but strategic outcome, based on pre-determined elements without focusing on the critical uncertainties that arise from the pace of innovation.¹³

The Internet makes the existential availability of the online church possible because the Internet is operating while the church doors are closed; and archives appropriate inspirations and resources. Internet pastors can make helpful resources available to an online congregation by simply developing a comprehensive website that is accessible, user-friendly, and informative. Including web-links provides easy access to educational and devotional products that they—the pastors—feel qualify as significant to their movement and supportive of their method of delivering the gospel. A website is considered effective when the message is clear, concise, and current; and appeals to the masses, retains the audience, and attracts and draws critics. A pastor of any congregation

¹¹ Walter Wilson is a technology executive who is known for being instrumental in helping his California church go from not being on the Internet to having a well-recognized presence on the information superhighway.

¹² Peter Swartz, *Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development*, The Rockefeller Foundation and Global Business Network, May 2010, 10, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.nommeraadio.ee/meedia/pdf/RRS/Rockefeller%20Foundation.pdf>.

¹³ It is the responsibility of the church and its pastor to take the gospel to the world. To accomplish this in our technologically expansive global community, they must be virtually, existentially available. While a significant number of Americans do not regularly attend any church and decline is consistent, the possible remedy to stabilizing the declining numbers in the traditional church setting is the development of the online church.

is considered effective when the church experiences retention, growth, discipleship and profit.

Evolving Brick and Mortar

It is an up-and-coming trend, which by all intents and purposes, provokes competition between the traditional church and the e-church congregations. To make a broader appeal to the modern-day congregant, more pastors are using high definition video and holograms to sermonize their parishioners. With the increase of multi-site church facilities, or satellite churches, and to escalate physical attendance, pastors who use this technology are appearing as images in digital form on the pulpits. According to a report from Berean Research, over 8,000 churches nationwide have begun to use some variation of high-def video to deliver their pastor's Sunday morning sermons.¹⁴ The author of "The Multi-Site Church Revolution," Geoff Surratt, writes "a church can spend anywhere from \$50,000 to \$2 million on the high-def technology, but the cost may be worth it because the technology allows churches to reach more people without constructing new buildings."¹⁵ And, countless numbers of believers get to hear one voice, that connects them to one pastor, resulting in a shared worship experience.

¹⁴ Marsha West, "Multi-site Churches, Holographic Pastors and Virtual Relationships," Berean Research, February 28, 2016, accessed February 28, 2016, <https://bereanresearch.org/the-absence-of-shepherds/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Jewel¹⁶ infers that pastors must be able to navigate the bewildering seas of the digital age by knowing what technologies are right for their church, and how to use them. Kraeuter,¹⁷ author of *Guiding your Church Through a Worship Transition*, believes that the pastor analyzes the church's current setting by evaluating the physical setting to determine if changes are needed to accommodate either a different worship style or a new one. Current research reveals the most efficient platform to represent online church is the *churchonlineplatform.com*.¹⁸ This platform allows ministry to be more social with the e-church audience; and when people log in to the website they are automatically directed to a chat dashboard. A team of leaders who have been trained to operate the live chat dashboard are sitting in the live service while chatting, which gives the e-audience the feel of being there themselves.

It is important that ministry designs programming that is functional; ensuring its effectiveness and assuring the programs are housed on practical platforms. What people look for is responsive websites, rich content and interactive videos that create hype.¹⁹ The church does not like to admit the main intention; however, every website has the propensity to make money. Every ministry needs financial support to survive. Since the e-church is a link from the church's website and not just an arbitrary space, the websites are designed for social media, visually appealing, effective advertisement, and have

¹⁶ John P. Jewel, Back Cover, *Wired for Ministry* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2004), accessed February 25, 2016, https://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product_slideshow?sku=430754&actual_sku=430754&slide=98.

¹⁷ Tom Kraeuter, *Guiding Your Church Through a Worship Transition: A Practical Handbook for Worship Renewal* (Lynnwood, WA; Emerald Books, 2003).

¹⁸ Churchonlineplatform.com is powered by lifechurch.tv.

¹⁹ Leona Taylor, "Shifting Your Digital Strategy into High Gear," (lecture, International Pastors and Leaders Conference, The Potters House, Dallas, April 28, 2017).

Google exposure. It will take having a mobile strategy that helps to manage online content. The development and implementation should be made to evolve as the needs of the members do, whether they are traditional or online congregants.

Digital Storytelling: Surviving in This New Space

Every pastor aspiring to build online ministry must teach or preach beyond what the building will allow. Do not let sermon delivery exist in a bubble. The old building is not designed for diverse learning modalities. Communication, collaboration, connecting and curating developed around the digital community will allow for different types of learning abilities to occupy a sacred tech space and participate collectively.²⁰ Every pastor aspiring to a successful online ministry has to look for alignment and actualize it, regardless of limitations, restrictions or competition. The goals can be to be an extension of the brick and mortar and to remove segmentation.

According to statistics, there are over 14 billion active digital devices in the world with over 3.5 billion users online.²¹ It is projected that by 2020, there will be over 11 billion users. The pastor seeking to launch a successful Internet church must have some knowledge of what it takes to endure an ever-evolving digital presence, and how using technology intelligence can make for a pleasing *customer* experience. Strategically sharing the spirit of a ministry and its pastor in a creative way will be key in helping to communicate goals and objectives to the masses.

²⁰ Trebor R. Scholz, ed., *Learning Through Digital Media: Experiments in Technology and Pedagogy* (New York: The Institute for Distributed Creativity, 2009), ix, accessed December 12, 2017, https://dmlcentral.net/wp-content/uploads/files/Learning_Through_Digital_Media.pdf.

²¹ Simon Kemp, "Digital in 2017: Global Overview," *We Are Social*, January 24, 2017, accessed December 20, 2017, <https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-in-2017-global-overview>.

A ministry's online success will take planning to join the digital movement, knowing it will take a little time to establish presence. It will take creating a strategy and a roadmap to design functional programming, with content that meets the people where they are. If the ministry can garner a skilled team to support the efforts, securing a small budget will be all that is needed to get started. Having processes, analytics, and scales in place will help optimize the experience in a cost-effective way, and at the same time, generate revenue with user-friendly platform compatibility. Shaping the visual identity of the ministry and its leadership, and its need to provide specific content to achieve their goals will be of utmost importance in surviving in this new digital space. Andrew Careaga claimed: "What is certain, however, is that the Christian faith will not be left untouched by the Internet. In fact, this technology is already shaping Christianity in ways that few people in the traditional church would have imagined."²²

Building Electronic Relationships

To reach the world, pastors must have some understanding of the world. "The future of learning will not be determined by tools but by the re-organization of power relationships and institutional protocols."²³ Internet ministry presents opportunities to touch nations that otherwise would not be accessible. In our current climate where travel restrictions are being enforced to prohibit access to areas of the world that were once accessible, we must master other means of carrying the gospel to the world.

²² Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 21.

²³ Trebor R. Scholz. "Learning Through Digital Media: Experiments in Technology and Pedagogy," 2011, ix.

To transmit a comprehensible message to the global community, a pastor must have some level of global competency. There must be a developed increased empathy for foreign situations. While this type of empathy is most easily appropriated by living in foreign countries, although not always practical, it can also be attained through research and participating in cultural community environments close to home. Millions of foreign people in America have not lost their identity nor have they ceased to practice their cultural norms. Developing empathy for other host cultures can intensify a pastor's sensitivity to what influences behavior and how and if the ministry can support those cultural needs.

Another opportunity to develop global competency is to consider and examine the concept of International Mindedness²⁴. International Mindedness means to be intentionally aware of the global cultural climate. It is a term that expresses one's ability to "be better prepared for global challenges by becoming lifelong learners of people different than themselves through an intercultural understanding and respect. Internationally-minded people are globally engaged and value multilingualism."²⁵ A key factor in cultivating relationships in a global society is recognizing the common humanity and the responsibility each carries for the other.

Global competency will require that a pastor engage in introspective consideration of their own understanding of international mindedness. A fundamental component to developing global competency and International Mindedness is to have a personal understanding of the traditional and internet church to connect with others. Primarily, a

²⁴ Jacques Weber, "Global Competency Through International Mindedness," (lecture, SXSW.edu, Hilton Austin Downtown, Austin, TX, March 7, 2017).

²⁵ Ibid.

conscious awareness of self, enables one to remove themselves and see through another eye. If you are not willing to step outside of self and look at it from another's perspective, you cannot have International Mindedness. In addition, if you are not willing to change your perspective, you are in danger of excluding yourself. To be globally competent and internationally-minded, pastors are reminded to first know themselves.

Global competence requires a fundamental knowledge of other cultures, being able to identify social issues, and engage in them. Casting a message without understanding the complex global environment can be lethal. "International-mindedness requires trilingual immersion, intercultural understanding, and local engagement of global issues. You cannot teach if you are not willing to join the journey."²⁶

Strategic Relationships

While developing global competency is one form of relationship building, there exists a more intentional and methodically-influenced perspective to relational enhancement. In his article *The Internet and the Church: An Introduction*, Timothy Hutchings writes the following:

Strategic, well-considered online activity can offer Christian organizations opportunities to change the relationship between leaders and followers, build connections between churchgoers and present their message effectively to wider society. There are three key theories to help understand online activity and offers an overview of religious engagement with digital media, emphasizing the importance of social networks, the opportunity to take an active role in shaping media and the way media are used, and the complex balance between control and participation. Those theories are: author-focused communication, network-focused communication, and *E-vangelism*.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tim Hutchings, "The Internet and the Church: An Introduction," *The Expository Times* 122, no. 1 (September 14, 2010): 11.

Hutchings points out that the Internet provides numerous resources and extremely effective ways to stay connected to both the traditional and the online churchgoers, online. He emphasizes the fact that academic reports suggest that a great deal of research has been presented on the religious community and has determined that everyday Internet communication is valuable in touching both communities. Hutchings refers to Heidi Campbell's research findings that argue "the local church has considerable influence over how their members relate to new media ... and their use of a given technology maintains or reinforces certain patterns of group life."²⁸ Hutchings cites five primary strategies that Campbell identifies to connect the church and its pastor to the people and justify the effective usage of Internet space: "spiritual network for a religious experience, missionary tool to carry the gospel to the world, religious identity by connecting with a global network of believers, a worship space, and functional technology that can be utilized to help shape society in positive ways."²⁹

Connection and Collaboration

Many outsiders perceive that Millennials prefer digital connections over face-to-face encounters, and worry those digital connections are a poor substitute for the real thing. In a generation that finds their connections and attachments very meaning through Instagram, Snapchat, etc., ministry has to commit to avoiding experiences that give the illusion of relationship or the façade of association and put effort into contextualizing the unfiltered truth of spirituality; spirituality is relational. The love Scripture promises will

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

only materialize when time is invested in the work of the relationship. The work of the relationship reveals the worth of spirituality. This unveils a lot about the online audience the church will service – the generation, their feelings of entitlement, their idiosyncrasies, their pretenses, and imperfections. It also helps ministry to form experiences that best serves their spiritual desires or lack thereof.

For the online congregant to have a spiritually relational experience, the church must have a conciliatory cultural experience. How people think and act about their social context and the way they think about God, will affect their spiritual perceptions, and determine whether they will connect and commit.

Most people come to know God through the lens of culture. Ministry develops a comprehensive cultural consciousness when it endeavors to attract, engage, and convert on a global scale. Church leaders must learn to recognize cultural patterns and values, understand cultural nuances, and appreciate others' differences. It is difficult to change or attract what you do not value. Effective ministry only happens through the sanctity of the soul and the emission of the heart. Having a broad concept of and appreciation for culture is the mind of a ministry that seeks to reach the soul and transform the heart with the Gospel of Christ. Appreciation for culture builds trust between the ministry and the ensuing congregant. "The most effective means of changing people's minds requires grasping the minds they already have. If you engage with anyone, you engage with them on their terms, not yours."³⁰

³⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing 2009), 185.

The Transformative Experience

Using the right metrics, a pastor can assess effectiveness and accountability, gain insight, and make decisions about the allocation of resources into what is or is not working for the ministry. Although numbers tell a story, they can be misleading; but transformed lives, spiritual growth, fruits of the spirit, and congregational health are not. The definitive measurement of an effective ministry is transformation. When a person is transformed, it affects not just their spiritual person, but everything they do—from their prayer and worship life to becoming witnesses for Christ and evangelists and disciples for the ministry, in their communities and at home. In fact, one person's spiritual transformative experience can simultaneously impact the church. These transformed lives become global partners for the mission of the ministry in various ways: from offering their gifts and services to the church to the giving of their financial resources to support the ministry that made this difference in their life.

It is important, then, for a pastor to understand what constitutes a transformative experience. Rather than just preaching because out of requirement, making a concerted effort to learn what it takes to cause transformation; not just haphazardly stumbling into transformative experiences every now and then, but to create a continual *altaring*³¹ experience that happens every time.

Lasting change that abides must have a dateable moment of decision. Altaring does just that. Altaring, according to Dr. Leonard Sweet, is defined as a monumental experience in one's life that helps them get from where they were to the pivotal point they are in at that moment. Altaring points to the experience from God that is God's

³¹ Leonard Sweet, (Lectionary, Orcas Island, WA, 2017).

experience.³² What constitutes a transformative experience is altaring. What matters in the message is the moment that drew you to the altar of change. People must be called to a point of making a moment of decision. Those who communicate the message have to reflect on their transformative experience and what made it so transforming. It was that moment when you realized something happened because something was said, that when it happened, it was obvious that something had changed.

Whether online or face-to-face, people are having similar experiences. Usually, we are all, at one time or another, making big life decisions. We all come to life's crossroads and are looking for answers, either in our heads, or from someone else's words or experience. Our radars are out, emotions are on overload, and we are vulnerable to whatever opportunity seems to present itself as a viable solution.

Spiritual Pluralism

The main challenge the church faces as it prepares to compete online is, people are exposed to a diverse community of voices. Every social network has the same objectives: attract, engage, and convert. It is now a way of life. However, with thorough evaluations of the pastor's projected reach, a strategy can be designed to maximize the ministry's presence in a target market and beyond.

The church's gravitation toward a generation called Millennials was for the most part influenced by the rapidly emerging cultural infiltration of technology. The Millennials are the generation that bridge boomers and before with Generation Z and the demographics after them. All kinds of institutions have had to come to terms with the

³² Ibid.

need to engage this population of emerging adults effectively. For everyone, and especially for the church, this is an extraordinary time in history to build high levels of tension around seeking to harness the legacy of truth and ethics of those who have gone before to the future of those who will come after.

This insurgency of holographic pastoring is not without its critics. “A hologram is not a person,” says Carl Trueman, in his blog post “Holograms, Gnosticism, Celebrity, and Mission.” “A hologram cannot hear God’s people. It cannot see God’s people. It cannot feel the needs that God’s people have. It cannot baptize or administer Holy Communion. It cannot visit the sick. It cannot bury the dead.”³³ Another critic referred to holographic preaching as pastor high-jacking; even another labelled it a personality cult; yet another called it non-moralizing missionaries. Holographic pastoring for thriving churches is another way of building community in multiple locations and linking them together in one centralized place. This is not necessarily an alternative to reaching a more global community, but an option for reaching people it may not be possible to touch.

Chapter Summary

How do you pastor a church you cannot touch? How do you offer pastoral care in a virtual environment that is effective and safe? How do you stay up to date on everyone’s needs, hurts, aspirations, and challenges, and offer help and provide assistance that shows unconditional love and hospitality?³⁴ Dr. McDonald infers “in order for church to matter (traditional or online), we have to figure out how to get the people in

³³ Carl Trueman, “Church and Parachurch: Friends or Foes?” *9Marks Journal*, March 1, 2011, accessed March 9, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/journal/church-and-parachurch-friends-or-foes/>.

³⁴ David McDonald, *Then, Now, Next: A Biblical Version of the Church, the Kingdom, and the Future* (Jackson, MI: Westwinds Church, 2017), 59–60.

the game. They have to be given opportunities to make choices, take risks and have some control over what happens to their spirits and how.”³⁵ The church’s methods must be strategic and calculated to maximize our efforts. The Internet church audience is fertile, ripe ground for integral ministry to happen. Continuing to develop a basic understanding of the needs of the Internet church community and the shifts that are taking place. This new culture impacts the way worship is produced, and support is offered, which is paramount to forming the right relationships.

The local church was established for more than just preaching the gospel. It does more than evangelize the sinner, teach biblical principles, and provide a place of fellowship. The local church is the body of Christ in the world. We are the physical representation of God in the earth, and we have been commissioned to carry out the work Christ commanded that we do in his stead.

Not just organizations or governing bodies, or ministries, but people all over the world are trying to increase their demographics through technology and build community. Consumers of all ages are devouring content, whether videos, news, images, or coupons. Mobile technology makes that demand even more easily accessible. With the integration of multiple devices, the consumption is swiftly creating a further global reach and an even younger audience. With the decline of the traditional churchgoer, a strong social media presence is crucial to the church’s continued success.

The biblical text “enlarging territory”³⁶ takes on a whole new meaning in this digital age when enhancing the online experience and personalizing online relationships takes priority over tending to the traditional churchgoer and meeting their systematic

³⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁶ I Chronicles 4:9, 10 (King James Version).

needs. Enlarging territory means taking an expert approach to engaging a global audience and taking advantage of the opportunities to spread the gospel around the world with minimal financial constraints.

In this new church age, customizing content has a higher rate of return than creating more of the traditional in-house ministries. Although the church cannot fail at reaching those who reach back, by extending their physical and financial support, failing to maximize the use of a most powerful tool, to reach the world for Jesus could be considered a potential misappropriation of funds and judged as an apathetic stewardship.

As the place of worship evolved in the Bible from the Tabernacle to the Temple(s) to the Synagogue to the Church, it continues to do so today. Each serves a different purpose, but the message is cohesive. The revolution of church today introduces new concepts to central worship, experiencing God's presence, and the assembling of parishioners to one virtual place, without compromising the fundamental message. As we hope toward unprecedented growth and success, the church has to attempt something so great that it is doomed to fail, except God be in it; manage the gap that separates us, from where we are now to where we are trying to go; and, build a bridge from the stationary to the mobile.³⁷

³⁷ Dale Bronner, "Minding the Gap," (lecture, International Pastors and Leaders Conference, The Potter's House, Dallas, March 7, 2017).

CHAPTER 5.

THE ONLINE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

“It is all too common for people to attend “church in the sheets” and only tacitly concern themselves with the liturgy while they fold laundry, doze, or continue watching the NFL with lowered volume.”¹ This is the general summation of those who question the validity of the online church. This chapter seeks to provide a better outlook on how people take their online worship experience more seriously than that and desire to fully participate in the service.

What a person gets out of a worship experience will depend on their decision to engage. Worship is not an emotional experience—worship is a call to meet God where He is seeking for us to come. When we worship, we connect, because worship is how we connect. Worship is not restrictive; worship can happen anywhere.

Overview

This chapters responds to Research Question #3: Does online church satisfy our corporate need to have a meaningful worship experience? As the church scurries to find new and exciting ways to support the growing number of Internet churches, every pursuit is energized by the demand for more than just a Sunday morning sermon or a Wednesday night Bible study online. This chapter will further assess how interaction online can reimage someone’s faith. As we strive to thrust forward past the traditional without losing

¹ David McDonald, *Then, Now, Next: A Biblical Vision of the Church, the Kingdom, and the Future* (Jackson, MI: Westwinds Church, 2017), 106.

sight of its inherent roots, this study is designed to discover innovative ways to lead the charge in reinforcing the benefits of using social media in the new church age.

It is important to know how Internet-mediated communication fosters learning, life enhancement and growth in a religious environment. Identifying the most effective form(s) of communication is key to a viable online worship experience. That type of communication will result in interpersonal interaction, mutually satisfying relationships, and contextual fulfillment. The absence of either could determine the success or failure of the online church's longevity. Usage, presentation, social type, all play a significant role in the way communication engages its participants. The church has to experience dialogic revolution in order to fulfill its mission in an electronically-driven age.

Therefore, this chapter will focus on what the online believer desires to experience. Next it intends to describe the aesthetics of mediated communication that add substance to a persons' spiritual experience online. Finally, it proposes to summarize some of the various mediated communication platforms that benefit the online worship experience. Several key terms evolved as a result of this study: religious surfer, secularization, cultural sensitivity, learning styles, and artistic interaction.

The Importance of the Internet Church

The Internet church is important because it meets people where they are-literally; at home, in prison, in remote areas of the world where a brick and mortar may not be readily accessible, and even in the workplace. The Internet church is an opportunity to connect with people from all social classes, in all areas of the world where travel may be impossible, but Internet is available, just to interact with the lost and facilitate conversion.

“The Internet can connect people in a manner that the church no longer can by providing a place where on a daily basis we can confess our sins, weep together and laugh together, know the intimate details of one another’s lives and pray for one another in very specific ways.”² Duff adds that “the church recognizes the potential power of the Internet to promote human understanding, combat loneliness and share the Gospel.”³ People expect the church to be a place where they can feel safe from judgement and offense. The Internet has created a safe-haven and the church can take advantage of its benefits. According to Doody’s research, “vibrant sermons, devotionals and prayer rooms are the most sought after spiritual activity on the Web. Other popular areas of online community ministry include service to support others, evangelism, and benevolent care.”⁴

There are many benefits to having an online church; the main being convenience. Technology makes it possible for individuals who are otherwise committed or incapacitated in some way to be able to have a worship experience in the comforts of their own environments. Stetzer⁵ includes those in regions of the world where the Gospel is persecuted daily. The online church becomes a median to assemble themselves in a remotely safe environment to worship God.

² Leonora Rand, “The Church on Facebook: Why We Need Virtual Community,” *Christian Century*, June 30, 2009, 25.

³ Nancy Duff, “Praising God Online,” *Theology Today* 70, no. 1 (2013): 22.

⁴ Daniel Charles Doody, “Survey of Best Practices for the Development of Online Religious Communities,” (D.Min diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 115, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1381&context=doctoral>.

⁵ Ed Stetzer, “Is an Online Church Really a Church?” *Christianity Today*, April 2, 2014, accessed December 26, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/april/is-online-church-really-church.html>.

Scholars' support for the benefits of the online church do not outweigh their disdain for what they contend as questionable attempts to escape real community. Wong⁶ conjectured that the sense of community created by the online church has yet to create a sense of belonging, as millennials and the newer generations are in search of the latter. Hutchings⁷ proposes that the nature of the online community differs from that of the traditional church community, because the needs differ. While Cho writes that "a ministry without roots in the physical world can be just as effective as brick-and-mortar churches,"⁸ he also reports that "some theologians argue that cyber churches do not meet user's spiritual needs and feed into the idea that God can be turned on and off with the flick of a computer switch."⁹ Most scholars opine that the online church experience is an experience in the same way that video games are an online experience. They argue that online church is still closer to television or the webcast of a presidential debate than it is to an immersive, experiential encounter. They further conclude that online church is still for out-of-town viewers, absentees (i.e., sick, shut-in), or people who want to "try before they buy."

⁶ Kam Ming Wong, "Christians Outside the Church: An Ecclesiological Critique of Virtual Church," *Heythrop Journal* 49, 20. 5 (2008): 822–840, accessed December 13, 2017, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

⁷ Tim Hutchings, "Creating Church Online: A Case-Study Approach to Religious Experience," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (2007): 243–260, accessed January 25, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2007.13.3.243>.

⁸ David Cho, "A Ministry Via Modem: New Cyberchurch Boasts 40,000 Congregants," *Washington Post*, October 14, 2001, accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-484570.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

The Worship Experience

Many people question whether the e-church offers valid relationships and worship experiences on equality with the traditional church. To determine whether their concerns are justified, let us define “true” relationships, because spiritual enrichment, increased faith, and overall wellbeing characterize the relationships. Likewise, let us define “true worship” as those experiences, which are characterized by love, peace, and fulfillment.

True Relationship

E-church offers true relationships, though they differ from those relationships in the traditional setting. Because the Online Church is a group of people who gather in a central locale in cyber space via a web link, they do not get to experience the personal interaction that takes place in a traditional setting. In a traditional church setting, that feeling of relationship has opportunity to be expressed immediately by sharing in prayer and praise and giving, with those in the immediate setting, although these same elements are carried out by the online congregation at the same time. What unites both the traditional and the online congregants is the sense that all are participating in the same liturgical elements at the same time.

Online church participants usually gather intentionally, with the same expectation of those in the traditional church setting; that is, to have an encounter with God. Estes supports this by adding “a virtual church is a local church because it is a place, a specific group of people present together under the headship of Jesus.”¹⁰ True relationship, by definition, is a holistic connection with God and with humanity. Both congregations

¹⁰ Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 68.

gather to learn how to build relationships with God and with humanity. “People who have a spiritually-motivated relationship with God tend to mature in a spiritually-motivated relationship with one another.”¹¹

As we grow in our knowledge of God, our spirit man is enriched. “In Christ, we are enriched in every way, with all kinds of speech and knowledge-and we do not lack any spiritual gift because of it.” (I Corinthians 1: 5-6 NIV) In this relational sphere, it is when we are enriched, that our faith is increased, because “faith comes by hearing the word of God.” (Romans 10:17 NIV) One of my favorite Scriptures about community is Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV):

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

We are stronger together than we are apart. As we draw strength from one another in this relational community, faith is increased. As we take this faith walk together, we are sure to experience a holistic well-being, as John writes “Enjoy good health and all go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” (III John 1:2 NIV)

Sweet extends a comprehensive understanding of a true relationship: “The Scriptures introduce us to a God known by his relationships, a God revealed and experienced...and where everything stands in relation to everything else-by yourself, you are nothing, in relationship, you are everything. True selfhood requires community.”¹²

¹¹ James P., Froehlich, Geraldine M. Fialkowski, N. J. Scheers, Peter C. Wilcox, and Richard T. Lawrence, “Spiritual Maturity and Social Support in a National Study of a Male Religious Order,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 5 (May 2006): 465, accessed January 6, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-005-0011-0>.

¹² Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 130–131.

Jesus describes the essence of true relationship: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Matthew 22:37-40 (KJV) Regardless of the church setting, the ultimate goal is to have a relationship with God and a relationship with those in your community.

A passage of Scripture that pastors use to encourage interaction in a traditional church setting is I John 4:19-20 (NLT): “We love each other because he loved us first. If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we do not love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?” Here is the apex of true relationship. True relationship happens when what has been learned and experienced online is carried out in the lives of those who are heard and believed in their communities among their peers, loved ones and friends. Therefore, the relationship quality is present in e-church when members learn and demonstrate the truth of that knowledge in their lives and in their surrounding communities.

True Worship

E-church offers true worship, though it too differs from worship experiences in traditional settings. Unfortunately, worship is too often identified with externals; the building, the music, the lifting of hands or praise dancing. From a physical perspective, worship happens in a traditional setting when worship leaders and congregants are in active participation together. But the fundamental quality is present in e-church when

participants engage both head and heart.¹³ True worship, then, is defined as a strong affection for the things of God (in spite of the external expression). True worship is making God and His kingdom priority (Matthew 6:33 KJV). The chorus of an old hymn simply says:

“In Your presence, in Your presence
There is peace.
In Your presence, in Your presence
There is joy.
I will linger, I will stay
In Your presence, day by day.
Till His likeness
Be seen in me.”

-Author Unknown

“A true worshiper is not focused on someone who is seeking a self-fulfilling relationship-true worship is focused on a God who offers a loving relationship...”¹⁴ True worship brings a person into the knowledge of God and the awareness of His presence. In fact, the quality of relationship with God and humanity is a result of the quality of worship. The first mention of this type of worship in Scripture is in Genesis where humanity was created to have relationship with God and with one another. Harris ascertained that a relationship with God involved intimacy, physically and emotionally feeling the presence of God.¹⁵ While some would argue that the presence of God cannot

¹³ David Mathis, “Worship in Spirit and Truth,” *Desiring God*, January 5, 2014, accessed January 6, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/worship-in-spirit-and-truth>.

¹⁴ Seong Ji Choi, “A Study of the Relationship Between Parenting Stress and Spirituality Among Mothers of Elementary Children in Selected Korean Churches,” (PhD. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 117.

¹⁵ Grant M. Harris, Rebecca S. Allen, Sheila Black, Martha Crowther, Daniel Durkin, and Patricia Parmelee, “An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Coping and Relationship with God Among Older Adults with Functional Impairments,” The University of Alabama, 2014, 86, accessed January 7, 2018, http://acumen.lib.ua.edu/content/u0015/0000001/0001690/u0015_0000001_0001690.pdf.

be physically experienced, those who have experienced true worship prove otherwise. Scriptures tend to support their claim.

There are several instances where Good engaged in meaningful, intimate relationship with humanity. The most familiar is in Luke 1:35, where the arch angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

E-church offers true worship because it is not externals; true worship is God-centered, and can be accomplished anywhere, not just on the mountain, as the Samaritan woman exclaims to Jesus. True worship is not confined to a physical local. Whatever the context, true worship happens in the heart.

Everything exists because of its relationship to someone or something else. Relationships are the essence of all things. Worship then is the culminating of at least two entities in a meaningful and deliberate way that renders mutual sequential benefits. Worship is the consensual coming together of the Divine and Humanity in a manner that perpetual interaction is desired. True worship births love, peace, and fulfillment.

Communicative Competence

The online worship experience is a mode of communication where worship surfers¹⁶ can find outlets to express and exchange views and ideas, concepts and

¹⁶ According to PewInternet.org, Worship Surfers, or Religion surfers, are very devout persons, usually belonging to a minority religion, who log onto the Internet almost daily in search of groups with similar belief patterns that present faith in distinctive ways online. The Internet also gives these surfers quick access to online resources they frequently search for in support of their religious profile. Elena Larsen, “Part I: Defining the Religion Surfers,” Pew Research Center, December 23, 2001, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.pewInternet.org/2001/12/23/part-1-defining-the-religion-surfers/>.

ideologies in an indirect interconnection with those of like faith or not. Those who are in search of spiritual motivation connect by way of common experience. An effective online worship experience depends on at least five fundamentals: communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity, interpersonal relevance, varied learning styles and interactive artistic aptitude. Thumma summarizes:

...congregations with a greater use of technology (especially when combined with electronic instruments and projection screens) are more likely to describe their worship as innovative, joyful, thought-provoking, and inspirational. Faith communities that embrace greater use of technology are also perceived as being more spiritually vital. Perhaps even more importantly, these perceptions also have an effect on member participation and involvement.¹⁷

When communication was once thought to be linear, it was difficult to achieve a desired result. That concept did not consider all parties of a communication process. However, more relevant research and findings more accurately represent communication as a process of exchange, where both parties—speaker and listener—are sending and receiving messages simultaneously.¹⁸ “And as long as there is coordination and interdependence among the components of communication there is every possibility that our communication will turn out to be effective.”¹⁹

The expectation of an online worshipper is that the computer-mediated communication²⁰ meets all the dimensions of a purpose-filled dialogue. In context, the

¹⁷ Scott Thumma, “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations,” *Vitality*, March 2011, accessed January 2, 2018, <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/technology-Internet-use.html>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁹ Ipsita Mishra, “Effective Communication is a Continuous and Cyclic Process,” *Literally Communication Blogspot*, November 23, 2012, accessed January 2, 2018 <http://literallycommunication.blogspot.com/2012/11/effective-communication-is-continuous.html>.

²⁰ Romiszowski and Mason describe CMC as “the process by which people create, exchange and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages.” He goes on to say that the dynamic of CMC makes interaction between

effectiveness of its collective responsibilities determines a purpose-filled dialogue.

Results of subsequent studies show the online worshipper tends to measure this experience by five common competencies: trust, openness, involvement, commitment, and investment. Trust is an issue of credibility, where the organization has a proven track record of character and integrity, visible by its follower retention and its overall influence. Openness speaks to the organization's level of transparency and its ability to offer access in what appears to be a very restricted environment. "When millennials and digital natives are accustomed to sharing all aspects of themselves with their virtual friends, today's top leaders seldom share the same passion for openness."²¹

Also, of high importance is the online worshipper's desire to be involved and the organization's ability to provide the opportunity for involvement. Equally austere is the online worshipper's measurement of the organization's commitment to effective communication. In other words, what is the organization's level of obligation to ensuring a practical but relational message throughout the dialogue, which is as inoffensive and unobtrusive as possible, and at the same time ethically binding and gainfully transforming. That communication is on purpose and that purpose motivates a reciprocal impact.

The goal of the online church or online religious community is to share a specific and precise message with reasonable accuracy that promotes unequivocal change and unquestionable conversion. Ultimately, the level of investment made in the online

participants quite complex but rewarding. Alexander Romiszowski and Robin Mason, *Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2003, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/01a7/9daec41b9074f12354c0606bca9d1958d318.pdf>.

²¹ Charlene Li, *The Engaged Leader: A Strategy for Your Digital Transformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Wharton Digital Press, 2015).

religious experience is a determinate to the level of commitment the organization has toward its message and communication competency. People who consider themselves online worshippers or parishioners are usually tech savvy and expect a certain degree of web content and design to support the online presentation. They expect that the communicative process is as aesthetically attractive as the spoken word. “Internet pastors...cite their 24-hour access to interactive tools and social networking platforms to show their online experiences are as meaningful as those that take place with face-to-face congregations.”²² We will elaborate more on this point later in the chapter.

Intercultural Sensitivity

For the online congregant to have a spiritually relational experience, the church must have a conciliatory cultural experience. There can only be connection if there is relation. Culture can determine how people experience spirituality.²³ How people think and act about their social context and the way they think about God, will affect their spiritual perceptions, and determine whether they will connect and commit. Most people come to know God through the lens of culture. Ministry develops a comprehensive cultural consciousness when it endeavors to attract, engage, and convert on a global scale. It is difficult to change or attract what you do not value. Effective ministry only happens through the sanctity of the soul and the emission of the heart. Having a broad concept of

²² Anne Hammock, “Online Churches Draw Believers, Critics,” *CNN*, November 15, 2009, accessed January 2, 2018, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/11/13/online.church.services/index.html>.

²³ Tanya Luhmann, a Stanford anthropology professor and co-author of a new article in *Current Anthropology*, writes “phenomenological experience is always the result of the interaction between expectation, cultural invitation, spiritual practice and bodily responsiveness.” Julie L. Cassaniti and Tanya Marie Luhmann, “The Cultural Kindling of Spiritual Experiences,” *Current Anthropology* 55, no. S10 (2014): S333–S343, accessed January 2, 2018, doi:10.1086/677881.

and appreciation for culture is the mind of a ministry that seeks to reach the world with the Gospel of Christ. Appreciation for culture builds trust between the ministry and the ensuing congregant.

Online parishioners are represented by people from around the world, some of whom are in search of something different than what they are being offered in their current sphere. “Building relationships with people from different cultures is key in building diverse communities that are powerful enough to achieve significant goals.”²⁴ Understanding culture and diversity builds community. Establishing relationships with people from different cultures builds a network of strength and trust. These people connect to online ministries with the expectation that the communication context is sensitive to and familiar with the countless diversities of culture, and that the understanding of intercultural differences can lead to a valuable online experience and cross-cultural contribution. As a church embraces the complexities of intercultural communities, the opportunities become limitless as to who they can influence and profit from connecting with.

Technology has been good for Christianity in a number of ways...it has greatly magnified the voice of those preaching the gospel...a pastor has a possible audience in the millions...it has enriched the message of the Cross by providing more information to more people in a shorter amount of time...increased the number of channels of distribution of the gospel...provided helps for encouragement, strengthening and edification...and allows Christians to administer grace to a world that is distracted and burdened...by using tools that people are familiar with and expect to see in everyday contexts.²⁵

²⁴ Christina Holt, Stephen Fawcett, Vincent Francisco, Jerry Schultz, Bill Berkowitz, and Tom Wolff, “Community Tool Box, Chapter 27, Section 2: Building Relationships with People from Different Cultures,” University of Kansas, 2017, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/building-relationships/main>.

²⁵ Dale B. Sims, *The Effect of Technology on Christianity: Blessing or Curse?* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Baptist University), 8–9, n.d., accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www.dbu.edu/Naugle/pdf/The%20Effect%20of%20Technology%20on%20Christianity2.pdf>.

Devito²⁶ believes that technology and media are inspiring a decrease in intercultural differences, which traditionally leans toward a more homogeneous society. He argues that in doing so, however, often means neglecting various cultural behaviors, which is certainly not the goal of the organized church, unless these traditions conflict with the beliefs of the Christian faith. More so, it is the ideal of the Christian faith to identify that common ground where we all come into the knowledge of the *truth* that exists about the Eternal God and His love for all mankind. A great example of this is the Apostle Paul's discourse on Mars Hill in Acts 17. He meets the listeners where they are, then presents his logical explanation about the altar of the "Unknown God". Intercultural sensitivity is the deemphasizing of contrast differences and focusing on the spiritual formation of all people, irrespective of their historical, sociological or anthropological traditions. In fact, "Christians and Christian communities have a special obligation to demonstrate the reality of Christ's culture-transforming love. In obeying the twin mandates of the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission, we will discover more and more of the creational blessedness of multicultural diversity as human beings are reconciled to God and to each other because of Jesus Christ our Lord."²⁷

Intracultural Sensitivity

While pastors prepare themselves and their churches for embracing a non-linear congregation, everyone feels the effects. From the staff to the long-standing traditional

²⁶ Joseph A. DeVito, *Essentials of Human Communication*, 8th ed. (New York: Hunter College of the City University of New York, 2014), accessed January 8, 2018, <http://www.mesacc.edu/~bruwn09481/Syllabi/documents/TextBooks/DevitoChapter01.pdf>.

²⁷ "A Christian View of Diversity," Geneva College, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.geneva.edu/about-geneva/diversity>.

membership, they experience the transitioning textures of the cry of these church leaders who have broadened their missions in an unconventional way. Inevitably, conflict will arise that implies the vision and strategy, for this new venture was not completely thought through. Sometimes the results are costly, but the rewards are astounding.

Interpersonal Relevance

“Communication technologies and religion have the ability to create meaning, shape relationships and form community.”²⁸ Research shows that the online worshipper is in search of “social cohesion.”²⁹ The online worshipper will attend or tune into an Internet service if in fact there appears to be some sense of community in what they see and feel from the face-to-face congregation. They (online worshippers) go where they can create a sense of personal identity. Evaluations of ongoing studies continue to emerge from the popular topic of online community—how it looks and what it feels like. According to Roxburgh, “In late modernity, churches increasingly find themselves in a vast free market of spirituality and choices of complex proportions. They have become but one more special interest group anxiously seeking a market niche in the culture.”³⁰

²⁸ Christine S. Hinrichs, “Exploring the Use and Effectiveness of Mediated Communication by Churches,” (Master of Art Thesis, Gonzaga University, 2011), 16, accessed December 19, 2017, http://web02.gonzaga.edu/comltheses/proquestftp/Hinrichs_gonzaga_0736M_10123.pdf.

²⁹ Social cohesion is when a society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility. OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 2011), 16–23, accessed January 2, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/persp_glob_dev-2012-en.

³⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 13, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://books.google.com/books?id=f6xZfUNq7FoC&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq=In+late+modernity,+churches+increasingly+find+themselves+in+a+vast+free+market+of+spirituality+and+choices+of+complex+proportions.+They+have+become+but+one+more+special+interest+group+anxiously+seeking+a+market+nic>

And, while we await the results, we consider the various approaches to creating an online culture that best leverages worship, fellowship, evangelism and discipleship for the kingdom of God.

Interpersonal relevance requires the exchange of information, feelings and meaning between all parties of a communication process. In a virtual environment, where this mutual exchange meets with more technical opposition, the success of the online worship experience relies on the collaborative efforts of both the church's use of technology and the visitor's interpretation of the church's presentation.

One-way churches create community, or a sense of interpersonal relevance is evident with deputizing online parishioners to express their experience on the church's social media sites; share their learning and evangelize others to get connected. Most mega churches offer the use of the common digital tools via their website, such as, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Podcast. The larger the church, the more extensive the forms of digital communication are.

Learning Styles

“Discovering and growing in how to validate and design digital educational and worship experiences is the challenge for the twenty-first century educators, pastors, and church leaders.”³¹ The challenge exists primarily between generations and is triggered by their varying learning styles, thus setting the expectation of each person's online

he+in+the+culture.&source=bl&ots=6QKic0t678&sig=NZ0E1kMXfWOhiTkxGW0Z3Z5uOZE&hl=en&a=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-2J_HkM_YAhVMulMKHVbmB2MQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

³¹ Edward Hammett, Paul L. Anderson, and Cornell Thoma, *Reaching People Under 30 While Keeping People Over 60: Creating Community* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2015), 133.

experience. In his book *Reaching People under 30 While Keeping People over 60:*

Creating Community, Edward Hammett writes

As people have different dress preferences, so they have different learning styles. The younger generations are visual learners...they learn through interaction, research, dialogue, and challenges via the computer. Most of the over fifty crowd learn through auditory means and in groups. Those over sixty learn through linear teaching styles and in classroom settings...under thirty learn best via computer online learning, small group facilitator or with a personal life coach.... The older generation likes expository teaching and preaching...the younger responds more to life issues and topical preaching that is driven by visual means and small group dialogue.³²

In recent years, churches began offering multiple learning experiences, not just in children's ministry, but also in the adult worship services, understanding the dire need to present the Gospel in multi-sensory format. There is video support for music and sermon notes and Scriptures now viewable in graphics, color, and animation, on bigger-than-life-size screens. When extended to the online viewer, these multi-sensory formats have the wherewithal to inspire the same or similar response as in traditional settings. As in any worship service, there will be situations, which are questionable; however, there will be things that generate interest, and other things to take away and use.

The Apostle Paul says, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."³³ In the age of digital interactivity, the church must chameleon in hopes of illustrating the Gospel in a variety of learning opportunities that spark a desire to have a communal encounter with the Holy Spirit. It will take understanding all types of learning modes for this to happen.

³² Ibid.

³³ I Corinthians 9:22 (NIV).

Artistic Interaction

Studies show that worship surfers are attracted to live streaming designs and layouts that are user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing. Churches and religious communities that are interested in building websites that attract the attention of their online viewing audience, must be willing to invest in the total makeover of their physical presence as well as their virtual one. “An effective web site could lead to increased interaction between the organization and its members, increase the credibility of the organization and potentially lead to an increase in new members and increased activity in current ones.”³⁴

For the last year and a half, our church has undergone an outstanding transformation that cost millions of dollars but was worth it to add more substance to the online worship experience. Lighting, color, and stage-logistics have been addressed for more effective communication at spreading the message of hope to a world in need of it. Live streaming, design, and layout have been changed to address the following:

- HD-Hi-Definition Streaming.
- Color Usage: Blue color hues to make the streaming warmer and more inviting cause, with less glare for people using mobile and tablet devices for live-streaming of online messages.
- Added social media components to make the web site more interactive...Users can see and interact with other LIVE tweets, FB posts and others that are online so they all join in on a live conversation.

³⁴ Hammett, et al., *Reaching People Under 30 While Keeping People Over 60*, 20.

- The stage has been reconfigured where the speaker centers and focuses on the color ratio and movement, which are conducive to the speaker's movement with LIVE streaming.
- Diverse audiences, where the internet translated messages to multiple language users, such as Spanish, French, German, and Portuguese.

The response to the changes has been phenomenal. According to our digital media department's stats, online streaming attendance has increased 6-8 times the size of the face-to-face audience (about 50,000 viewers at any given LIVE streaming), donations have almost doubled from the previous online viewership audience and continues to surpass the giving of the physical congregation at any given service. With the integration of internal resources, such as Marketing and Technology, the investment has already superseded the initial growth expectation.

Kluszczyński³⁵ suggests that the context of artistic interaction is a medium of communication that creates artwork in a mediated transmission between the sender and the recipient. The artifacts needed to create artistic interaction are provided by the sender (ie., the church, its website design(s), stage presence, accessibility, etc.)³⁶ Effective interactive art commands sensory engagement and creates interconnections between individuals involved in it.³⁷ The more active the sender, the more responsive the recipient

³⁵ Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, "The Context is the Message: Interactive Art as a Medium of Communication," *ISEA96 Paper*, 1996, accessed December 10, 2018, https://www.academia.edu/4801569/THE_CONTEXT_IS_THE_MESSAGE._Interactive_art_as_a_medium_of_communication.

³⁶ "Interactive art is a form of electronic art that involves a recipient in a way that allows the art to achieve its purpose. It is an art type that interacts with a spectator's fields of perception." "Interactive Art," *Wikipedia*, last modified February 14, 2018, accessed February 14, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interactive_art.

³⁷ Kluszczyński, *The Context is the Message*, 7.

becomes, and the less likely it becomes to lose any participant in the communication process. The investment made in the aesthetic transformation of our church and website have demonstrated to us that properly employed artistic interaction has the potential to contribute to a richer religious experience.

A survey of 449 persons attending an online worship service was conducted to examine the behaviors of the participants after viewing the mediated service. Of the ones that responded, the results were that they all had a similar experience. There was a particularly positive outcome after watching the worship service. The participants interacted with the mediated worship as if it was a face-to-face setting, suggesting that the sample audience was more than likely religiously-experienced. The findings also demonstrated that the participants were satisfied overall with the message that was conveyed through the preached word. The participants were motivated to make material contributions; and all were inclined to revisit the online worship experience again.³⁸ The worship content is the core of online ministry. The core content is comprised of the general congregational worship and the sermon. It is where most churches focus time, energy and resources.

Communication Tools

The result of an effective online worship experience is the collaboration of artificial and technological intelligence. The ability to use machines to make human decisions along with the use of content management systems can make for a pleasingly

³⁸ Brian John Klebig is a graduate student at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. His passion for communication research led him to study the online worshipper's experience when attending a mediated worship service. His focus is (Tele)presence, which he defines as the "experience of feeling like one is in the mediated environment, and with others...despite being separated by various screens or devices."

rich viewer experience. The bridge between knowledge, skill and mastery is the closing of the gap from where ministry is today to where it is striving to go tomorrow. The gap filler between the church and the world is the Web. The church's intrinsic use of the Web will determine its effectiveness in the world. The investment in content marketing, data analytics, and marketing solutions will help the church transition to this generation and future generations' new way of life. This new way of life will require time, resources, budget, strategy, and positioning; but with accurate administration, it will touch every generation in a digital space where a multitude of people can gather with little to no cost and leave with more intellectual content and spiritual experience than money could ever pay for.

“Individuals go online with a variety of motivations, from utilitarian to aesthetic: to gather information, for identity experimentation, in search of social cohesion and...even with spiritual motivations.”³⁹ It is a blended effort and a conscious decision on the part of the Internet surfer to connect with the site that most readily appeals to their quest for gratification.

As ministry strategizes to develop programs and processes that employ practical online communication tools and embody the worship experience, the challenge then is to supply highly interactive opportunities for these online congregants to connect with Jesus and with one another.⁴⁰ Investing in applications that ensure the Website is responsive is key to a successful online strategy.

³⁹ Heidi Campbell, “Considering Spiritual Dimensions Within Computer-Mediated Communication Studies,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 20, no. 2 (2005): 130.

⁴⁰ David McDonald, “Prayground TV” (D.Min diss., George Fox Theological Seminary, 2005), 33.

The church and other religious affiliates are yet to efficiently utilize all that is available to them on the World Wide Web. With online worship still in its infancy, the focus becomes, how to manage new and current relationships with church technology. Church leadership aggressively pursues and even creates sources that accommodate the growing needs of their congregations.

In the last four to five years, more internet streaming resources have been developed and made available to the church public—some free, and some with associated costs. Among those are ustream.com, mediasocial.tv, livestream.com, and streamingmediahosting.com. Costs range anywhere from \$80-\$300/month, depending on the features.

The new *Churchix* software which was recently introduced to the church environment comes with quite a bit of controversy,⁴¹ and face recognition software components, which are intended to track member and event attendance, face-to-face. The creator and owner of *Face-Six*,⁴² which is a face recognition software company, believes that this technology will be commonplace, and incorporate an innovative idea into church congregations, and become a cutting-edge way to have internet church. *Face-Six* suggests that the software might be used for tracking attendance; however, it could be used for security purposes, collecting donations, and measuring demographics. The software could

⁴¹ For more information on the software, visit churchix.com.

⁴² “Moshe Greenshpan, founder & CEO of the Israeli facial recognition company Skakash, said its subsidiary Face-Six’s clients include airports, law enforcement agencies and casinos. After an international church asked the company for a similar service, they decided to launch Churchix, a company designed to help churches specifically, in February 2015.” Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Skipping Church? Facial Recognition Software Could be Tracking You,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 2015, accessed March 21, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/07/24/skipping-church-facial-recognition-software-could-be-tracking-you/?utm_term=.3b07ee741438.

create reports and send mass announcements and advertisements to the online congregants.

Critics argue that the church is not ready to implement a *known* surveillance tool, even though other features are available. The undercurrent suggests that it could be an invasion of privacy, and every person would be a suspect, increasing the level of discomfort in the congregation at any given event. Contra wise, given the current climate of our world, the idea of introducing security identification strategies to the church could be beneficial. Especially in a megachurch setting or anywhere there is a considerable number of parishioners, it may be an asset to the safeguarding and welfare of many lives.

Chapter Summary

A total worship experience can happen at the “points of intersection, where life intersects biblical truths.”⁴³ The seemingly endless controversy stems from an ongoing debate about being able to recreate a true spiritual experience in an online setting. May I submit to this examination that it is possible that it is not the ministry’s responsibility to recreate the spiritual experience, but to have it, so that it may be experienced; or, to articulate a sense of what happens in the presence of true worship. It is possible that through our limited, finite ability some may endeavor to construct something that they have yet to experience themselves. It is possible more so, that, when true worship is present, it is contagious. Contagious enough to create a Luke 1:41 experience, when Elizabeth heard Mary’s salutation, the baby leaped in her womb and she had a worship phenomenon. It is believed that being immersed in a worship that connects the human to

⁴³ Hammett, et al., *Reaching People under 30 While Keeping People over 60*, 156.

the Divine and has the power to create an infectious environment that unites the brick and mortar, and the online congregant in a way that transcends, at the least any obvious barriers, distance, and time.

Studies show that the online believer does not necessarily resemble the familiar face of the traditional worshipper. Unless these individuals are directly connected to a ministry, they tend to be more exploratory about mediated religious communications. These worship surfers are searching for unique opportunities to collaborate with religious communities whose online presentation is representative of the organization's culture, credibility, and communal outreach.

Findings also indicate that the online viewer is intentional. Consequently, the mediated communication process must be as intentional. An effective online worship experience rests on these essentials: purpose-filled dialogue, intercultural sensitivity, sensory interaction and building community. The mediated communication process demonstrates a motivation to convey a specific message that is clear and concise and leaves minimal or no room for ambiguity. The message is both thought-provoking and engaging and evokes interaction. The online worship service is designed to satisfy the needs of a potentially globally-diverse audience.

The organization is deliberate about forming a community that is closely connected to their traditional members and ultimately leads to building a sub-culture, leveraging similarities and differences, where both the traditional and the online participants can form a bond. This sub-culture is a product of shared experiences, closer relationships and mutual connections inspired by intentional communication.

This study was limited to the results of other researchers. But the compilation of credible reference materials indicates an incredible amount of interest into the world of the online worship space. As Christianity evolves, and expressions of religion increase, there emerges an insatiable desire to investigate pragmatic and logical means of contributing to the study of online communities that serve the traditional church and its expansion into the new way of doing church.

Christianity is a collection of multicultural diversity; from race, age, gender, and culture, to political views, social status, and worldviews. But in the pursuit of One God, we all connect through worship.⁴⁴ Since we all have that shared love and shared need, we must come to the same place to experience the same God.

⁴⁴ The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology state that “the English term “worship” conveys multiple, interrelated meanings...First, it means God-pleasing and God-focused way of life; second, it refers to specific actions that intentionally adore, magnify, and praise God, both inside and outside public worship services; third, it implies a public assembly, as in a worship service. Evangelicals are unified in insisting that external acts of worship be “from the heart” and connected with integrity to all of life.” John D. Wilyiet, *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195369441.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195369441-e-21>.

CHAPTER 6.

STARTING A WEB-BASED CHURCH

Starting a web-based church can be both challenging and rewarding. Determining what will work for the potential audience takes time to develop and perfect. Having the right strategy for the right vision must be systematic and methodical at best. The rewarding thing is that you will be able to reach and minister to people all over the world and play a bigger part the Great Commission.

The following pages will give an overview of the concept of online church and origin, and continue with simple instructions, on how to get started with building an online church website. As you build your website, more ideas will come to mind. Just remember one thing: KEEP IT SIMPLE.

Overview

There are many views as to where the Online Church concept began. Let us start here. The church has always seen the value in technology. In Jesus' time, sacred Scriptures were housed on a technology called scrolls. By the end of the first century, the Scriptures were manually transferred to a new technology called the codex.¹ The codex was much like a binder, or a book, which allowed for easier distribution and transportation of the Scriptures than scrolls. It was a mode of carrying the gospel through technology. Fast forward, in 1439, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. Fifteen years later, Gutenberg's printing press was the first to distribute 180 Bibles to a

¹ David T. Bourgeois, *Ministry in the Digital Age: Strategies and Best Practices for a Post-Website World*, (N.p.: 2016), 5, accessed January 4, 2018, https://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product_slideshow?sku=856619&actual_sku=856619&slide=0.

wider population.² Gutenberg's invention changed the world forever. "The media revolution had ignited and flourished throughout the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the science revolution eras."³ Yet no other invention could rival the printing press, until the Internet.

In the 1980s, "hobbyists and computer professionals began to experiment with ways to use bulletin board systems to facilitate religious conversation and interactions."⁴ The Encyclopedia of Global Religion, Volume 1, records the first religious service on the Internet to have been a memorial service for the NASA Challenger in 1986.⁵ Since then, the Internet has affected all of humanity, regardless of their socio-economic, or political class. "What began as a means of storing and transferring information has become a tool of business, education, and relationships."⁶

According to more recent statistics, almost 80% of the global population in developed countries has 24/7 connection to the World Wide Web. The most viewed web content is video or live streaming. The church has the world in its grasp. Technology has made it possible for the church to manifest itself throughout the world. In fact, the number of active mobile devices supersedes the number of humans on the planet, which means most humans own at least two mobile devices of some kind. The greatest

² Jefferson Todd Mullins, "Online Church: A Biblical Community" (D.Min. diss., Liberty University, 2011), 20, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/435>.

³ Dae Suk Lee, "An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism Through a Case Study of the Sarang Community Church" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2011), 43, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/437>.

⁴ Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner, *Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet* (College Station, TX: Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2011), 2.

⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof, A Review of "Encyclopedia of Global Religion," *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 11, no. 3-4 (2012): 176–178, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10477845.2012.723599?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

⁶ Mullins, *Online Church: A Biblical Community*, 21.

opportunity to evangelize the world is to form true relationships that lead to the True God.

Interpretative Strategies

Since I began this research three years ago, there has been as much acclamation as there has been intrinsic criticism about the Online Church. Justifying the validity of the online church concept takes moving in an organic manner. So, for the purposes of this study, interpretative strategies refer to the use of information necessary to interpret the terms of this study. In earlier chapters, interpretative strategies were used to establish a link between Biblical text and contemporary context. Interpretative strategies help keep a consistent flow in a changing environment.

Using an array of media methods for the building of community and sharing of resources, services and events is vital for any church leader to know who is trying to deliver church online and engage followers.⁷ “In most cases, pastors find their church’s current status inadequate and their resources insufficient.”⁸ The shaping of technology modes to support an online church’s framework reflects the characteristics of a greater desire to contribute to the changes that are taking place within the wider culture of Christianity.⁹ “The diversity of Christianity is happening, not by reproducing the apparently successful models, but by institutions, groups, and individuals drawing on

⁷ Pamela Grayson, “The Spiritual Development of Online Church Attendees Compared with Traditional Church Attendees” (Ed.D. diss., Dallas Baptist University, 2017), 54, accessed December 10, 2017. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/10c59d47571ee2f6dfb5788ff022589e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

⁸ Lee, “An Effective Internet Ministry Strategy for Church Evangelism through a Case Study of the Sarang Community Church,” 43.

⁹ Peter Horsfield, *From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media* (Somerset, CA: Wiley, 2015), 281.

traditional Christian intellectual, communal, liturgical and symbolic resources for relevant and transferable concepts and practices...”¹⁰

A concept that has matriculated from the designers and creators of imaginary worlds into the online virtual community is worldbuilding—a term usually associated with fiction.¹¹ In the Internet church community, worldbuilding is virtual representations of people, places, objects, and things to offer virtual forms of education, worship, and evangelism. Virtual worldbuilding exists that claims to be able to create an authentic experience through designs that provide a metaphysical presence, giving the perception of a real-world church environment. Churches in other parts of the world use the Internet to assemble multiple forms of data and visual images and virtual architectural designs by hyperlinking to other church websites throughout the world to present a more global view to their audiences.

This research study illustrates that the online software and virtual world known as *Second Life*, an innovative website can be purchased for a small fee, with internet space, which can be rented to create simulations of “real-world” scenarios, called “in-world architecture”. The objective of the website provides pastors an opportunity to construct virtual representations of people, places, objects, and things to offer “virtual forms of

¹⁰ Ibid., 282.

¹¹ “Worldbuilding is the process of constructing an imaginary world, sometimes associated with a whole fictional universe. The resulting world may be called a constructed world. Constructed worlds can be created for personal amusement and mental exercise, or for specific creative endeavors such as novels, video games, or role-playing games.” “Worldbuilding,” *Wikipedia*, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldbuilding>.

education, worship and evangelism.” According to Gelfgren and Hutchings¹² Second Life claims to be able to create an authentic worship experience through designs that provide a metaphysical presence, which give the perception of a real-world church environment. The authors aim to explore how Christians are embracing this new concept and incorporating it into the traditional Christian setting by surveying the Christian spaces in Second Life. This study was focused primarily on virtual architecture and text, which limited the ability for other forms of activities to be explored. These *Second Life* experiments have largely failed. *Second Life* has decreased in website provisions, and only provides a fraction of its former size. More believers have abandoned this virtual website architecture and replaced the online services with text-based connections via Facebook or Drupal.

One major concern for the new strategy is the use of religious AVATARS.¹³ Avatars are real-world counterparts that are used in virtual church architecture to represent the members of the online congregation. Avatars are icons, pictures, logos, animated images that represent a person or style of inspiration, to protect a person or even an online church with confidence. They are created to give the feeling that one is navigating through a physical building, having a real-world worship experience. Avatars socialize, teach/preach, and ask questions during services just as if it were a physical setting. These avatars can also navigate from site to site until they have found a virtual

¹² Stefan Gelfgren and Tim Hutchings, “The Virtual Construction of the Sacred: Representation and Fantasy in the Architecture of Second Life Churches,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 27, no. 1 (2014): 59–73.

¹³ Avatar is the Hindu word for the incarnation of one of their gods appearing on earth in human form. In the Internet community, an avatar is something visual used to represent non-visual concepts or ideas or is an image that is used to represent a person in the virtual world of the Internet and computers. For more on avatars, see: <http://www.yourdictionary.com/avatar#fhmOYpp0o0WAwUMS.99>.

church home. Interesting. Scary. Some researchers of the virtual world contend that the virtual setting is a real setting because they believe the virtual world is a real world. To that degree, these researchers also support the thought that the gospel can be effectively communicated from one avatar to another. The combination of fantasy and reality has been proven successful in the church world in this context. This study concludes with an entirely new thought process, which explores the options and opportunities that exist in the world of online church.

In his article “Virtual Church”, Teusner makes an interesting observation about the terms *virtual* and *reality* when they are used in the same context. The term *virtual reality* is an oxymoron. An oxymoron, illustrates a figure of speech, in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction (e.g., faith unfaithful kept him falsely true). The virtual church means to exist, and something virtual has been said to be an illusion. Thus, to call the online church a virtual church would imply that is it only an image and not the actual thing, which then criticizes its validity, denies the experience of community and belonging, and undermines the mission of online faith gatherings. (p. 2) “Many people who found themselves marginalized by their beliefs would miss the opportunity to join a functioning community that could offer the Body of Christ in an illustrated way.”¹⁴

Culture plays a major role in determining how the concept and strategy of a virtual church. Some would argue that something virtual is superficial because the physical church does not occupy space. The absence of material or tangible elements threatens to devalue its credibility. Furthermore, virtual reality would be an oxymoron. How religious groups and individuals identify and describe technology is determined by,

¹⁴ Paul Emerson Teusner, “Virtual Church,” ASCM Conference 29 (2006): 2, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltexte/2005/5824/pdf/Campbell4a.pdf>.

and determines, their usage of the technology. As the church evolves in utilizing technology to interpret spiritual experiences, the online pastor strives to create some real experiences in a virtual world where actuality is not compromised. One suggestion would be to create church symbols and identify points of differentiation that the intended user can use to participate in the internet space and not just a spectator.

Those who are establishing online ministries should seek to build online designs that steer away from denominational forums, so that the message of the gospel does not encapsulate into any one religious belief. Also, church-avatars and online pictures could be a way of camouflaging an audience that wants connection and power, which rebels against social barriers and joins together believers, from all over the world in a safe place. Avatars might be considered as a refuge for those in religious-restricted environments to engage in worship that has been otherwise forbidden. “Avatars allow online pastors and parishioners to carefully construct and maintain their own unique balance of integration and isolation, with both physical and social expectations.”¹⁵

Online Church Types and Forms

The key to a successful web-based church offers congregants the Word of God, which provides spiritual-food, for them and provides the offerings in varied online options. Seamless access and flexibility, audience engagement, content satisfaction, are what online viewers want to access church content at their convenience, anytime and anywhere. When it comes to accessing worship services, the congregant or online viewer wants to feel a connection with the service, even though there is no human interaction,

¹⁵ Gelfgren and Hutchings, “The Virtual Construction of the Sacred,” 21.

any time they log in. Viewers tend to return when their experience with the content of a ministry's site meets or exceeds their expectations. All these steps require a strategic content plan on which to build the online church. There are various forms of online churches. The structure can range from a simple website, which is informationally based, to a complete online experience, from real-time and live online streaming services to pastoral care. Most online churches are linked to a physical church; however, there are a few that are strictly online with no connection to a brick and mortar. What determines the structure is the vision and mission of the pastor.

No two web-based churches are alike; neither is the content offering identical. The ideas provide key indicators that help the church strategy team to create a successful plan that supports a ministry's vision. This underscores the importance of developing a strategy that takes advantage of the wide range of platforms, which exist on the Internet, and where viewers or congregants can choose the type of church service that will function best in the selected environment. The best strategy will depend on the church's existing capabilities and future growth potential.

There are two basic approaches to building a successful online church; customer (congregant) engagement or information-generated. If the objective is to capture both, one model must take precedence as the overarching guide to provide direction on deploying the online church's ministry goals. The aim is to provide the value that the visitors are searching for, and to build relationships that are essential to maintaining a stable but *crescendo* effect. Like any website, the minimum requirement provides guidance for a sustainable online solution.

“In the age of social media and easy access to a wide range of free content on the Internet, organizations are challenged to remain relevant and true to their mission.”¹⁶ In an effort to remain agile and responsive to the needs of the online participant, it becomes increasingly important to protect the ministry brand when curating information for delivery to the targeted audience. Further discussions in this section suggest that executing a robust interne plan that proactively manages all aspects of the ministry brand will ensure these aspects are coordinated, and that they continue to reinforce the brand attributes and global markets. The ministry online brand is the singular most critical piece to formulating a successful strategy.

Branding Your Online Ministry

In the age of technology, much of what the online ministries poise as interaction happens between a human and a computer. This lack of personal human-to-human connection has made for a grand opportunity for organizations to brand themselves by creating meaningful online content that sets them apart from their competition. Building a church-brand builds trust with the viewers and congregants online. This section will discuss the importance of an online church brand for a ministry.

The opinion of the online congregant becomes the voice that represents the brand in the social space. More than ever before, people seem to have more than enough time these days to post comments and reviews about their experience with any given organization. The positive understanding with the multiplicity of online brands in the social marketplace, is an opportunity to represent the world. With over one billion active

¹⁶ Tizra, “10 Keys to Successful Digital Content Strategy for Associations,” 2015, 3, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://tizra.com/downloads/Tizra-White-Paper-10-Keys-to-Digital-Strategy-for-Associations.pdf>.

social media users and over 2.5 billion pieces of content shared daily, people from around the world have access to your ministry's brand at any time. The brand must be authentic. The level of trust the ministry has developed with the online congregant or visitor will determine the type of review from the online attendance. When the online church is accessible and easy to use, then the online visitor will return to the website and harness the power of the brand, which will lead toward building brand loyalty with the online attendees.

The brand concept is an incredibly effective way of creating a successful online ministry. Branding conveys a specific and unique message that characterizes an organization. From a ministry perspective, branding becomes the heart of the ministry's vision and provides a better way to understand simply the ministry message. Branding gives the social content of the ministry site *emotion*. Engagement increases significantly when the brand connects with human emotions. It empowers people to become more interactive and participate in whatever the online site may be offering.

The online experience is a sheer result of the visitor's preference. Implementing a branding campaign means the ministry has conducted research around the audience it endeavors to reach. The research includes social branding efforts of their competitors, and how the branding efforts have impacted their ministries. The branding collaboration reveals that a personal assessment has been completed to evaluate the perception of others toward the ministry. The ministry then builds the brand campaign around rich social content that provides a more complete ministry experience online.

Without building the brand, it can be difficult to maximize the value of what one could experience through the online ministry site. The only way to ensure the most

meaningful ministry experience is to put efforts into appropriating the necessary resources toward extremely effective social content. Whether the content is video, real-time, imagery or text, every pastor aspiring to a successful online ministry should be interested in creating the most relevant social gallery that competes, compels, and converts. The wealth of the brand lies in its distinguishable and unique message.

Ministry website content can be packaged in many different forms to achieve the greatest impact. However, diversity can pose a risk to the ministry's brand. With the hundreds and thousands of platforms available, there are trustful, secure, and inexpensive website plans in place to provide an uncompromised online experience. Hard work and long hours are invested in building a brand; to lose its credibility is to lose trust and loyalty, and ultimately congregants.

Branding adds human connection back into the mechanical online experience. It connects the voice of an organization to its constituents and starts a dialogue that benefits both parties. Branding is understanding the needs of its audience and causing the organization to have an impact in a personal way. It is the human element expressed in social media sourcing that positions the brand, so that online congregants can connect with a broader perspective of global conversations. The online brands can help pastors show what they have to offer online congregants and illustrate that the Word of God can be delivered with a complete understanding, sense of meaning, and ensure that they deliver the story of what matters in a social environment.

Effective Communicate

Religious leaders today should focus on how to use media effectively to communicate their Christian message. They must consider a different approach to using

communicable instruments that their potential audience may be more connected to than they. The religious leaders' view of the influence technology has on their congregation's stability will determine how well they understand the new culture of churchgoers in this society.

In the recent past, to go online in search of a church meant to find more out about the church and its vision, to get announcements and learn about its social context. People who are searching for meaningful church service online are searching for a place to have an ecclesiastical experience, which is comparable to a traditional church service that they would have if they were to attend a physical service—more interactive and more participatory. They are searching for someone who can and will engage with them on their terms, their level of understanding and needs, and a church experience from their perspective.

Every church that has a global mission are urged to have an online presence. The days are gone for the demanding of a physical gathering. The church has to go where the people are. “Forsaking not the assembling of yourselves” has evolved in meaning since Hebrew 10:25 was first written by the Apostle Paul. The early Christians' public assembly was intended to aide in preventing apostasy. With the multiplicity of options online, ministry can become creative enough to produce multiple pathways to communicating the One Vision. In doing so, people can still assemble publicly and be part of a church-community that escapes those who divorce the faith. “For leaders not to use the Web as a communications and community-building tool is to have fumbled the future.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *AquaChurch 2.0: Essential Leadership for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1999), 234.

Effective communication is the timeless key to being a global influence in the online world of church. Communication that creates an experience as if the online congregant was in the room—an experience that influences participation through worship and a life-giving flow through the Word. There are people all over the world who are in search of something that creates an energy that provokes them to return to a designated time and place for more. When a pastor has an effective online ministry, the message does just that “it commences a whole new communication delivery system for ministry; it makes it possible for church to engage in dialogue with others that otherwise they would not have access to; it enables leaders to customize and personalize services that could meet at least the minimal spiritual needs; and, it helps remove barriers to communication and celebration—including time and distance.”¹⁸

Content Mastery

Executing on a robust content strategy can be resource intensive, so look for tools that make the creation, sale, distribution, consumption and maintenance of content as simple as possible.¹⁹

Internet 101

Hutchings describes four levels of the Internet that church-builders need to understand: “infrastructure, platforms, formats and data; and on each level there are rules to learn, expectations to satisfy and commercial companies to engage with.”²⁰ He further explains: 1) Level one is the infrastructure level. It is the materiality of digital media and

¹⁸ Ibid., 222.

¹⁹ Tizra, “10 Keys to Successful Digital Content Strategy for Associations,” 5.

²⁰ Tim Hutchings, “Creating Church Online: A Case-Study Approach to Religious Experience,” *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (2017): 212.

the audience's devices of choice, for example, wireless Internet connections, tablets, smartphones; and where and how the information will be communicated and received; 2) the platform is level two. It is the level of the Internet through which media content will circulate, whether that is a place like Facebook, or if the church builds its own. 3) Third level as being the format level, where the audience's expectation is set and ways to satisfy these expectations for retention and continued growth and participation. "The user becomes accustomed to particular genres and styles,"²¹ that are distinctive and defining. The needs of the ministry's viewers should take precedence. Tirza, A Direct Digital Publishing company, recommends creating a survey to collect data from a ministry's target audience to ascertain those needs using the following information as a guide:

1. Determine the demographics and psychographics of the viewers;
2. Determine what challenges these viewers face in their cultures/lifestyles;
3. Determine what content they prefer; ie. video-sharing, blogging, etc.;
4. Determine the type of content they prefer; ie., interactive, informational, etc.;
5. Determine what type of devices are mostly used;
6. Determine what the viewers feel best builds relationships.²²

Bourgeois found that "52 percent of organizations that collected data ahead of time reported Internet ministry success, compared to 26 percent who skipped that step."²³

Level four is the data level, where information is measured and analyzed to determine what kinds of content are most likely shared or used; and to develop rules that

²¹ Ibid., 213.

²² Tirza, "10 Keys to Successful Digital Content Strategy for Associations," 7.

²³ Bourgeois, *Ministry in the Digital Age*, 5.

ensure data security.²⁴ Creators of online church have to adhere to the constraints and restrictions that come with media logic, or “religious institutions can construct their own media channels and platforms and online communities can develop their own unique cultures.”²⁵

The most effective way to develop a ministry’s E-church platform is to develop in-house resources and skills, combined with outsourced expertise to ensure the flexibility and desired control.²⁶ This strategy is cost-effective and organizationally efficient. Choosing one source over the other may limit flexibility and reduce the level of control. Empowering internal resources to learn and manage the process reduces the initial investment without compromising the value of the web content. “A properly considered strategy is the foundation of ongoing relevance and healthy organizational growth well into the future.”²⁷

Clear Internet Goals

Religious organizations (even more candidly, churches) have different opinions of media and the Internet, and its usage. Campbell explains how these organizations perceive the Media and the Internet, and their relationship to religion, in three views: 1) Media and the Internet are rejected because they are perceived as biased technology that prioritizes entertainment over information, and by “becoming a part of the technological society and the values it promotes, the church loses its ability to critique the values of that

²⁴ Hutchings, *Creating Church Online*, 213.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Tizra, “10 Keys to Successful Digital Content Strategy for Associations,” 9.

²⁷ Ibid., 3.

society.”²⁸ 2) Rather than applied, media and the Internet which reflect upon as a social institution, and understood and studied for its long-term effects. 3) The ideal view of Media and the Internet are perceived as “a neutral instrument that can be used for good or evil, dependent on the way it is used.”²⁹ Organizations with this opinion can accept technology as a means of innovation, rather than a conflict of interest. Campbell concludes “Many religious Internet Advocates have an idealistic view of the technology as an equalizing medium able to mold viewers for religious purpose.”³⁰

The understanding of content and the nature of an organization’s views about the Internet, helps to appropriate the intended use of an online church. It helps to define how simple or complex its structure should be, and whether the online content should be linked to a physical congregation or a stand-alone entity. Understanding the nature of the organization’s views will help to develop clear goals.

Therefore, content mastery will first require clear goals. Mullins proposed that simply stating the goal in written content can be used to reach more people for Christ is “ambiguous and indistinct.”³¹ The development process of an online church is “shaped by the founder’s understanding of group history and core practices.”³² The ministry has to take time and write out specific objectives as part of a successful web strategy.

²⁸ David H. Michels, “Digital Faith: Law, Ethics, and Theology for the Online-Engaged Church,” CSIR, June 5, 2015, 2, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://digitalcommons.kent.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=acir>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mullins, *Online Church*, 86.

³² Bourgeois, *Ministry in the Digital Age*, 5.

Research³³ revealed that “churches with written goals report more Internet ministry success than those who skip that step.”³⁴ Huyser-Honig poses three simple questions to give direction for writing goals: What is the vision? Who is the target audience? How the message will be delivered to the viewers? Bourgeios also found that “52 percent of organizations that collected data ahead of time reported Internet ministry success, compared to 26 percent who skipped that step.”³⁵ “Content is key; but the content must be relevant to the visitor. A website may be filled with information, but if people do not care about the information, then they do not care about the website.”³⁶

Getting Started

At one time, the strategy for building an online church was carried out by a certain group of experts: thought leader, web designer, web developer, software engineer, communication personnel, IT, Marketing, a strategist. All these people would be decision-makers in the entire process. Today, the opportunity to start ministry online is relatively unpretentious. The resources that exist online now give step-by-step guidelines on how to start an online church, most of which are free, but offer additional services for

³³ Dr. Dave Bourgeios is a Biola University Information Systems Professor. He founded Genesys11, a software designed to help churches improve their Internet ministries. Joan Huyser-Honig, “Your Church’s Digital Front Door: Choosing your online Presence,” *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for the Study and Renewal of Worship*, 2011, accessed February 20, 2016, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/your-church-s-digital-front-door-choosing-your-online-presence>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bourgeios. *Ministry in the Digital Age*, 5.

³⁶ Mark M. Stephenson, *Web-Empower Your Church: Unleashing the Power of Internet Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). Mark gives comprehensive instructions for starting a web-based church. He is the Director of Cyber Ministry and Technology at Ginghamburg Church. Visit his website: www.WebEmpoweredChurch.com.

a minimal fee. It can be as simple as having five elements on the church website: links to the church social media, other helpful site pages, ways to donate and the history of the church. Huyser-Honig lists some of the more popular sites that are available with streamlined processes. These user-friendly instructions are attractive to the organization interested in launching an online church more efficiently.

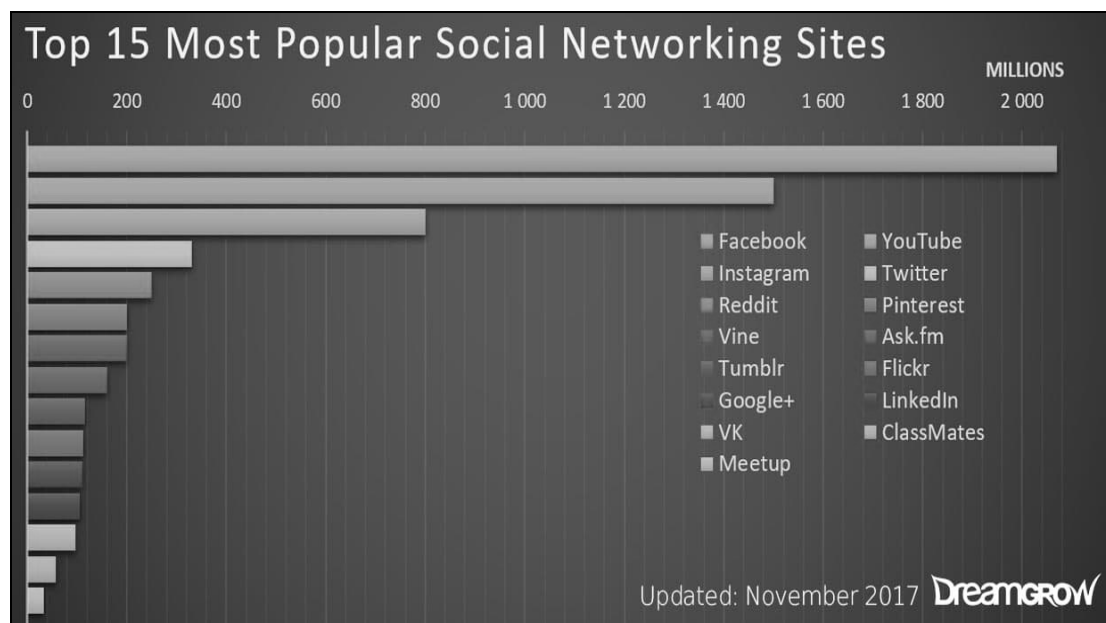
- Church Juice: an online company offering free resources designed to help churches use effective communication tools, regardless of the medium. They offer training on marketing, branding, social media, internal communications, and website development. Go to: <https://churchjuice.reframemedia.com>
- Monk Development: a for-profit company that helps churches align their missions with the digital space. They offer design, web development, content strategy, and other products that build comprehensive solutions for a successful online church. Go to: <https://www.monkdevelopment.com>
- Internet Evangelism Day: an online subscription-based resource with almost four million users that exist to help Christians understand the huge and growing potential to share the good news of Jesus through digital media. It is a year-round resource guide, with ideas and strategies for all types of digital evangelism, including a newsletter, blog, and twitter feed. Go to: <http://www.Internetevangelismday.com/index.php#ixzz51f9fI46t>
- Clover, Faithwebsites, Wordpress: these platforms are used primarily by churches starting their first online ministries. Go to: www.clover.com, www.faithwebsites.net, or www.wordpress.com.

- Church Marketing Sucks: a clever website of resources that offers churches communication tools. Go to: www.churchmarketingsucks.com.³⁷

These are just a few of the many resources that currently exist in the digital space to help churches start their online ministries. Although successful digital platforms deliver remarkable value to users, all platforms are not equal. Clear and defined goals will help determine the resources that will sufficiently support the vision for the online church. Technology is powerful enough to provide a variety of resources that accommodate both the traditional and the online church and remain theologically sound regardless of the means of delivery.

Online Applications

The diagram below reflects the 15 most popular social media applications in the world.



³⁷ Huyser-Honig, "Your Church's Digital Front Door."

Figure 1. The chart illustrates the Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites. The most prominent social media sites are FACEBOOK, with over 2 Billion users and YouTube, with over 1.5 Billion users. “Members of these sites maintain profiles, connect with each other and interact. In addition to updating profiles, one major activity on social networking sites is friending, a mechanism by which people acknowledge relationships with and keep up with their friends or acquaintances.”³⁸ Social media applications enable users to create, share, and deliver content. They also promote active user participation and real-time feedback. They are gateways to maintain connection, improve productivity and build reputation. With the right approach and the right application, ministries can experience the greatest impact on a minimal budget. Accessed January 2, 2018, <https://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/>.

The numbers of social media users are staggering, which is why the church must take full advantage of the opportunity to reach the largest population of people across generations. According to a study performed in 2015, a person spends on average around two hours per day on social media and the average person has about five social media accounts.³⁹ The church must leverage that time to use technology in all its forms. All congregations should intentionally develop technological skills to support the ministry, regardless of the church size, and despite how sophisticated or inept.⁴⁰

Pre-Launch Action Items

It is good to have a pre-launch strategy in place. As with the launch of any new project or event, there are some action items that need proactive attention. With the launching of a new online-church, select a pre-service checklist that can be followed

³⁸ Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff, *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2008), 2.

³⁹ Lauren Davidson, “Is Your Daily Social Media Usage Higher Than Average?” *Telegraph*, May 17, 2015, accessed January 7, 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/11610959/Is-your-daily-social-media-usage-higher-than-average.html>.

⁴⁰ Scott Thumma, “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations,” *Vitality*, March 2011, accessed January 2, 2018, <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/technology-Internet-use.html>.

before going live. Before the 9 a.m. service at our church goes live, staff and volunteers have been on site at least three hours prior to start time, making sure that the lighting is right, the streaming feed is coming through online, the audio levels are stable, the big screens in the sanctuary are connected to the online feeds and viewable in the sanctuary; presentations, bible readings, study guides are all working and viewable online...leaving enough time to fix what is broken, correct what is wrong, or add what is missing. This takes the guesswork out of wondering if the launch will be successful or problematic. Of a surety, no matter what size the church, presentation is everything, and the first-impression is a lasting-impression!

Girardier,⁴¹ after starting the online church at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, blogged about his experience and wrote a checklist of action items that he thought anyone whom considers an online church might be aware of, before launching the first live service. His list includes creating a pre-roll video that welcomes the new viewers to the launch and prepare the face-to-face audience ahead of time, and the expectations of the online church. The most important item on his checklist is this: “Spend a few weeks prior to the launch viewing other church’s online services. While you are watching, ask the following questions:

- How is this experience different than sitting in the pew on Sunday morning?
- How is this experience different than just watching a replay of the sermon on YouTube?

⁴¹ Darrel Girardier is the Digital Strategy Director for Brentwood Baptist Church, and former Creative Director for LifeWay Christian Resources. He has a blog housing many valuable digital and social media resources, and he has a very popular podcast called “#AskDarrel” where he answers questions and gives solutions to people about social media, church communications and technology. For more on Darrel, go to: <http://darrelgirardier.com>.

- Did you feel welcomed when you viewed the online campus? If so, why? If not, what would make you feel more comfortable?
- How do the moderators/hosts handle outside guests who have opposing agendas?
- Are there clear calls to action for next steps (both spiritual decisions and invitations to visit the physical campus)?⁴²
- Are there other ways to interact with the campus other than chat? Can you give online? Can you ask for prayer?⁴³

Girardier suggests two of his favorite reads, both which offer quality advice, when launching an online church: *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*, by Atul Gawande and *Work the System: The Simple Mechanics of Making More and Working Less* by Sam Carpenter.

Chapter Summary

Most churches have realized that the first step to starting a web-based church is evaluating the church's potentials and deficiencies. Next is handling the infrastructure, both human and structural. Then determining what can be outsourced and what should remain in-house. Finally, create strategic high-tech multimedia contents that attracts both local and global audiences.

This chapter was intended only as guidance for implementing the basic steps of starting a web-based church. It stressed the three key elements to a successful web-based church: 1) offer viewers a variety of appeasable options; 2) finding the most effective

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

way to communicate the Christian message; and 3) understand the organization's perspective and intended use of the online church. Keeping in mind that developing in-house resources and skills will save time and money, only outsourcing what is necessary.

Fortunately, there are many resources available online to help church leaders launch web-based churches, many of which are free. Many congregations have already opened the doors of their online churches. Most of these church leaders are willing to share their experience and help others get started. It is a matter of personal preference, and how much time will be spent in developing this virtual church environment.

The exchange of digital information over data networks is becoming the center of economic and social activity, with information becoming commodity number one. Horsfield writes "The increased capacity, diminishing size, and increasing mobility of technologies of information and communication have insinuated computerization into almost every aspect and activity of daily life."⁴⁴ He further states, "despite a highly diversified social and cultural landscape, for the first time in history the whole planet is organized -embedded in culture and tooled by technology."⁴⁵

The impact of modernization and secularization can be both optimistic and harmful to the traditional church. With the rise of cults in the online community, a more subjective view of faith and belief can be formed because of relatively easy access to self-expression and religious trends of the new "free world"—the virtual society. Instances relevant to opposing the church's power, such as misrepresentation, or the removal of or tampering with digital information, are risks that the church is vulnerable

⁴⁴ Horsfield, *From Jesus to the Internet*, 262.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

to in the digital space. Measures have been taken to manage or minimize the risks the social media content could pose to religious organizations. “The church of the future will be committed to innovation and experimentation, understanding that our imaginative work amounts to cooperation with God.”⁴⁶

From novices to experts, there are cultural intermediaries, whose firm interest is in the progress of church culture, which have contributed to the conversation about the use of technology in the spiritual space. There is no longer a need to believe that the new online church culture is based on presumptions. Even though there are still untapped research for future and empirical studies, we have witnessed an influx of attention being given to the topic. As a result, churches are now hiring “industry experts” to help build and develop successful websites and Internet churches to keep up with the times. Digital Marketers, Creative Specialists, Developers and Subject Matter Experts have found ways of providing innovative concepts to churches who have reached out in search of platforms that will help them connect to people around the world.

⁴⁶ David McDonald, *Then, Now, Next: A Biblical Vision of the Church, the Kingdom, and the Future* (Jackson, MI: Westwinds Church, 2017), 290.

CHAPTER 7.

YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

Overview

The intent of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Traditional Church and the Online Church in our current society and sought to project the future based on historical data and current outcomes. Taking into consideration that the world is changing as this dissertation is being written, there are some things the church can do to prepare for the coming technological turbulence. Underwood postulates “When a tsunami event occurs, historical relationships deteriorate. Those who are not prepared are the last to perceive impending change in the environment and are not agile enough to take advantage of the turbulence.”¹

This study examined the traditional church’s current state, its leadership, attendance, and level of innovation. In addition, the Internet Church was evaluated based on its benefits, leadership, opposing views and its global outreach. Although it was not measured, this study discussed in detail the role of a pastor who shepherds both church congregations, and how partnering or outreaching can help facilitate the needs of these regular online attendees that are from somewhere around the world.

This final chapter is intended to help the church and its leadership become proactive, anticipatory, and productively reactive as they venture out into the world of Online Church. Proactive because they have gained the knowledge necessary to create winning strategies. Anticipatory because they have prepared themselves appropriately for

¹ Jim Underwood, *Thriving in E-Chaos: Corporate Strategy for Uncertain Times* (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, 2002), 17.

the reality of church in the future. Productively reactive because their response to the vulnerabilities of Internet usage will be based on historical data, current outcomes, and future projections. Since “we live in a world of ambivalent participation”² technological connectivity is inevitable.³

No doubt, religion in every form widely exists on the World Wide Web. Christianity is the youngest. In hopes that this study will discharge the apathy that exists among Christian leaders and their congregations, this is an attempt to provoke creativity and innovation among those who are engaged in taking the gospel to the world. “The church simply cannot afford to remain antiquated, with a rapidly advancing technology movement when they can leverage technology for the advancement of the Kingdom.”⁴

Reviewing the Past

The past, in this case, is the Traditional Church. The past indicates the church as we knew it. The traditional church denotes the physical church and its working components (i.e., the people, the building, the public gatherings, etc.). Let us look at the traditional church in the past, and look at the innovation, creativity, and relevance that online church offers viewers today.

² Lee Rainie and Janna Anderson, “The Internet of Things Connectivity Binge: What Are the Implications?” *Pew Research Center Internet and Technology*, June 6, 2017, accessed December 26, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/06/06/the-internet-of-things-connectivity-binge-what-are-the-implications/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ J. Todd Mullins, “Online Church: A Biblical Community” (PhD diss., George Fox University, May 2011), accessed January 5, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1467&context=doctoral>.

The Traditional Church

The traditional church has always stood as a pillar of the community, along with the school and the fire station. It was the gathering place for families to come together for corporate worship. The church thrives in community. Community would thrive where there was a church. The church helped build community, in terms of building relationships. Wilson explains, "As members of Christ's body rubbing souls with one another, entering one another's pain, and celebrating one another's victories."⁵ Other theorists call the church a haven of safety and emotional comfort.⁶ It has been found that coming to church would help people cope with stress and the troubles of life much easier. In times of loss, crises, illness and other adverse life events, people could go to the church to find solace in the comfort of the arms and care of others.⁷

The church in the community was also a place of growth and maturity. Lockhart points out that "spiritual growth is influenced and supported by not only a relationship with God and Scripture, but also relationships with teachers, mentors, fellow Christians and significant others within the learner's scope of community."⁸ One not only gained spiritual knowledge to help grow their faith and shape their belief, but the church also taught social skills, because they led by example.

⁵ J. Wilson, *Future Church: Ministry in a Post-Seeker Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 204.

⁶ Joshua David Straub, "God Attachment, Romantic Attachment, and Relationship Satisfaction in a Sample of Evangelical College Students" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2009), 54, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1326&context=doctoral>.

⁷ R.W. Hood, Jr., B. Spilka, B. Hunsberger, and R.L. Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 1996), 135.

⁸ Eileen. B. Lockhart, "Online Theological Pedagogy: The Influence of Dialogue on Spiritual Formation in the Online Theological Classroom" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2012), 96.

The Traditional Church Attendance Decline

The traditional church congregation typifies and comprises four generations: Pre-Baby Boomers (Silent Generation), Baby Boomers, GenXers, and Millennials.⁹ For the purposes of this study, the youth, or GenZers, are not included in the attendance count. Their attendance is usually subjected to their parents' or guardians' participation, which are predominantly the cause or cure of congregational attendance.

“Traditional church attendance has declined, while online church has steadily increased.”¹⁰ With Baby Boomers becoming less mobile, Millennials are becoming more disenchanted with traditional church. The latter cause is a derivative of what Grayson¹¹ calls “ineffective ministry”.¹² According to the Barna Group, the generation whose attendance has declined the most are the GenXers-those born between 1961 and 2001. Studies show that their reverence for religion has diminished and their ambition towards church has been redirected towards a search for all things home and community.¹³

The Unchurched

A recent study released on a new population of individuals known as the “churchless” reveals how the cultural lapse of church is a factor that has led to the decline

⁹ William Benke and Le Etta Benke, *Church Wake-up Call: A Ministries Management Approach that is Purpose-oriented and Inter-generational in Outreach* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 9.

¹⁰ Pamela Grayson, “The Spiritual Development of Online Church Attendees Compared with Traditional Church Attendees” (PhD diss., Dallas Baptist University, 2017), 93.

¹¹ Benke and Benke, *Church Wake-up Call*, 9.

¹² Grayson, “The Spiritual Development of Online Church Attendees Compared with Traditional Church Attendees,” 93.

¹³ Harvey Herman, Jr. and Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: The Missing Generation in Our Churches* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016), 45.

in attendance among GenXers. Barna and Kinnaman support Herman's findings that "unchurched people today have different expectations of church involvement from those of previous decades."¹⁴ The statistics are quite telling, as Barna points out "the younger the generation, the more post-Christian it is."¹⁵ Almost 50% of Millennials are churchless, which would stand to reason if their parents or guardians are GenXers, when 40% of these qualify as post-Christian. Only a third of the Boomers were churchless, due to the high probability that almost 75% of the elders were churchless.¹⁶

In their new book *Churchless*, Barna and Kinnaman identify five trends that contribute to the decline in church attendance and the increase in America's churchless population. The highest probable cause of churchlessness is secularization, the strongest factor associated with the transition of "a society's affiliation with religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and institutions."¹⁷ Some scholars deny the claim that America is in a culture war,¹⁸ given religion is the most important element in social change. Yet others attribute it to the rise of moral conflicts,¹⁹ while still others maintain that there are no definitive predictors that pinpoint the religious decline over time.

¹⁴ George Barna and David Kinnaman, "Five Trends Among the Unchurched," Barna Group, October 9, 2014, accessed December 30, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/five-trends-among-the-unchurched/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Secularization," *Wikipedia*, last modified April 8, 2018, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularization>.

¹⁸ John Frendreis and Raymond Tatalovich, "Secularization, Modernization, or Population Change: Explaining the Decline of Prohibition in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (June 2013): 379–394, accessed January 7, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00878>.

¹⁹ Christopher Z. Mooney and Richard G. Scheuldt, "Does Morality Policy Exist? Testing a Basic Assumption," *PSJ Policy Studies Journal* 36, no. 2 (April 11, 2008): accessed January 5, 2018, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2008.00262.x/abstract>.

Second, the unchurched are responding less and less to the church's efforts to connect. Survey shows that "the best way to get people to come to church is for a friend to invite them out."²⁰ They are more interested in high-touch, relationship connections (pastoral home visits), and much more resistant to other forms of outreach (i.e. phone calls, mailings billboards, home visits).²¹

Third, following closely behind, is the loss of church as a normative part of mainstream America. In an interview with Carey Nieuwhof, David Kinnaman²² says "Twenty years ago, 1 in 8 people had never attended church; today 1 in 4 have no muscle memory of what it means to go to church regularly." The numbers point to an interesting conclusion: "the churchless are largely comprised of de-churched parents."

The last two trends Barna and Kinnaman identify church expectations and church contributions. The unchurched would prefer attending an activity at church rather than a service, and they are not sure what Christians contribute to society. Consequently, it is not that GenXers are dissatisfied with church; they are uninformed about how church plays a role in the home and community of today's society. "People always make time for the things they value most ... if declining attendance is an issue, chances are it's because they do not see a direct benefit."²³

²⁰ Barna and Kinnaman, "Five Trends Among the Unchurched."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Carey Nieuwhof, "CNLP 024: Churchless: Why and How America is Learning to Live Without The Church: An Interview With David Kinnaman," *CareyNieuwhof.com*, 2017, accessed January 5, 2018, <https://careynieuwhof.com/episode24/>.

²³ Ibid.

The Millennials

According to Christian research experts,²⁴ Millennials are leaving church in record numbers in search of something they say the church no longer offers. The results of the study reveal five discoveries characteristic of the Millennial generation, and what church leaders could do to bridge the gap.

Millennials are concerned that the church is no longer relevant. They are highly skeptical of religion but still thirsty for God.²⁵ They are in search of a consistent between worship experience and messaging. They want to know that what they see is a clear sign that they are in the right place. Millennials want the church to be a place of rest.²⁶ They want to come to church without making any commitments until they are ready to fully enter in. The Millennial generation wants to get something from church that they cannot get anywhere else – that is Jesus. They want to be called to follow Jesus – not activity. Finally, the Millennials want the church to mentor them for the next generation, equipping them and arming them with solutions for the greatest impact and sustainable life.

Pastor Shawn Williams²⁷ says, “Millennials want to be taken seriously today...not somewhere in the future...”²⁸ They understand that the church is “unapologetically a

²⁴ Daryl Wicker, “5 Things Millennials Wish the Church Would Be/Exponential,” Content Market Study, How to Walk Out Christianity, March 29, 2017, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://darylwicker.com/5-things-millennials-wish-the-church-would-be-exponential/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid.

place of worship, learning and experiencing community.”²⁹ They desire that sense of belonging.

The Churchless Christian

There is one other notable category we should mention: believers that do not attend church. The numbers are startling. In 2001, Benke and Benke noted “approximately 60% of all Americans do not attend church regularly. Half of the 40% that do attend church are not born-again Christians. 10% of Americans that do not attend church at all profess to be Christians and trust in Christ alone.”³⁰ Pew Research Center survey reveals that adults that are non-religiously affiliated still believe in God but are far less religious. They have chosen not to practice a specific faith.³¹ The unfortunate truth is people want “religion without religion; to separate religion from itself.”³² The following chart from Pew Research Center is a 7-year comparison landscape study between the religious affiliated versus the ‘nones’³³ between the years of 2007 and 2014:

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Benke and Benke, *Church Wake-up Call*, 6.

³¹ Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious: Modest Drop in Overall Rates of Belief and Practice, but Religiously Affiliated Americans Are as Observant as Before,” Pew Research Center, Religion & Public Life, November 3, 2015, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

³² Ananada Abeysekara, “The Im-possibility of Secular Critique: The Future of Religion’s Memory,” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11, no. 3 (2010): 1, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://www.tandfonline.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/doi/citedby/10.1080/14755610.2010.505432?scroll=true&needAccess=true>.

³³ *Nones* is the term “sometimes used for people with no religious affiliation in the United States.” “Nones,” *Wikipedia*, last modified April 8, 2017, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nones>.

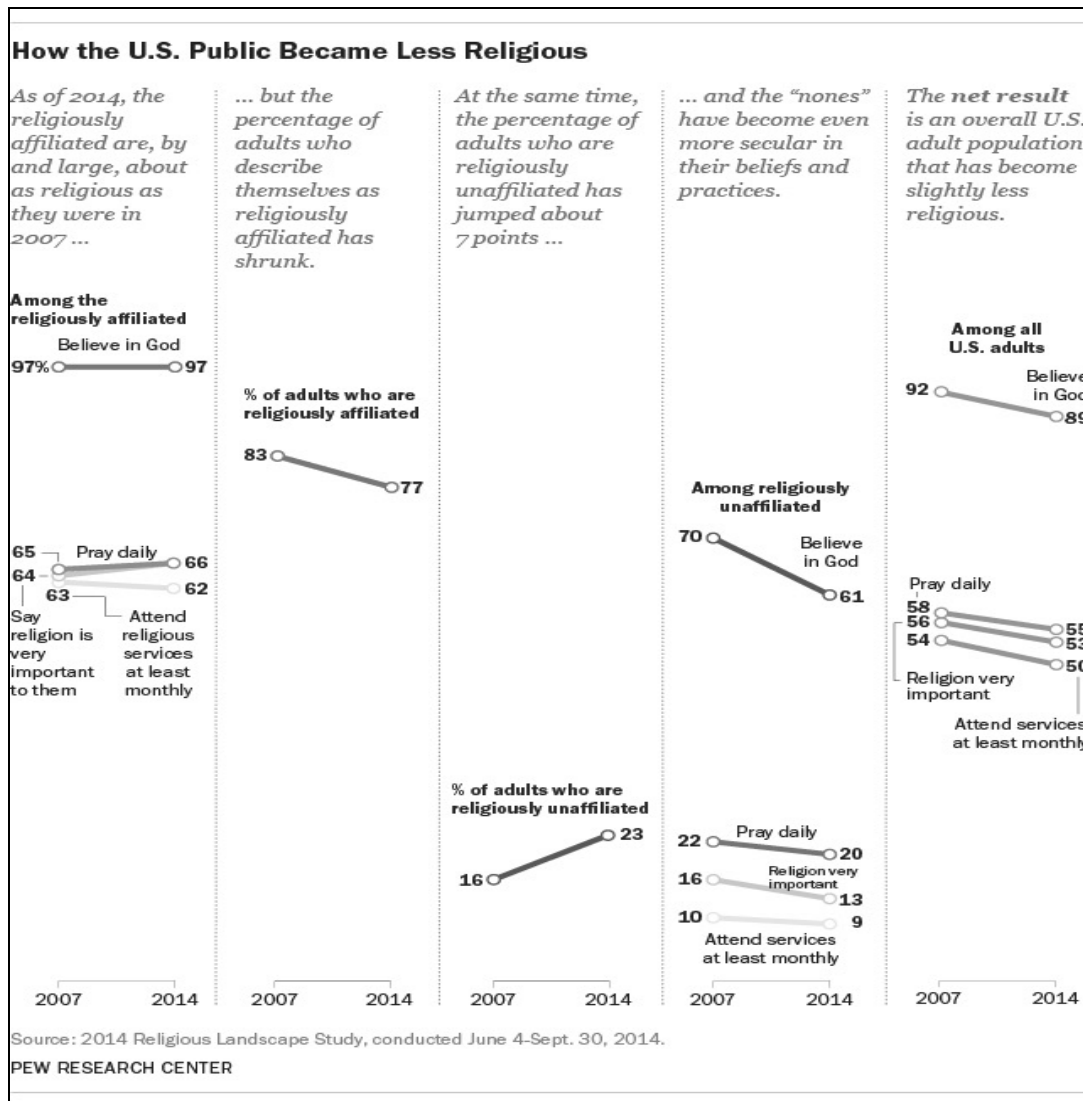


Figure 2. The illustration shows how the U.S. Public Became Less Religious. The attendees from 2007-2014, have declined in religious beliefs, which reflect the church attendees, who attend church services at least monthly, pray daily, and found that religion was very important. Accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

More recent research supports the steady decline of churchgoers. Surveys as recent as 2014 denote a decrease not only in Sunday worship attendance, but also in other church services and activities as well.³⁴ “Even fervent believers are becoming irregular in

³⁴ Eric Young, GSS Data Explorer: General Social Survey, Access and Analyze GSS Data 2018, accessed December 28, 2017, <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/>.

their church attendance.”³⁵ Nieuwhof believes the reason for the decline in believers’ attendance is due to “churches launching online campuses that bring the entire service into the home, on the phone, tablet or TV.”³⁶

“If present trends continue, the percentage of the population that attends church in 2050 is estimated at almost half of 1990’s attendance ... the church cannot keep up with the population growth if it stays on its current course.”³⁷ With the current prognosis, and the declining religious composition, the probable alternative to the Traditional Church attendance crisis is the development of the Online Church.

Reflecting Today

We dare not leave this work without talking about technology. It is the reason this thesis and others similar exist. The technology revolution will continue and will accelerate beyond the church’s ability to shift if it is not careful. Underwood asserts “as technological change accelerates...and as the digital revolution diffuses globally, more dramatic shifts in the rules of the game are expected to transcend viewers.”³⁸

³⁵ David Murrow, “Why is Church Attendance Declining—Even Among Committed Christians,” Patheos Church for Men, March 1, 2016, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/churchformen/2016/03/why-is-church-attendance-declining-even-among-christians/> Published Online.

³⁶ Nieuwhof, “10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Attending Less Often.”

³⁷ Kelly Shattuck, “7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America,” ChurchLeaders, February 2015, accessed January 6, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html>.

³⁸ Underwood, *Thriving in E-Chaos*, 286.

“In many cases, the Church has been one of the first entities to adopt or profit from technologies.”³⁹ From the Pax Romana in Christ’s time to the television of Billy Graham Crusades, technology has created a reformation of humanity’s identity and engagement within the world. Since the new Millennium, technology has improved radically. What was predicted then is happening now. Since then, new developments in optical technologies have made video streaming on the Web the level of television quality.⁴⁰ Wireless transmission, voice recognition technology, and nanotechnology have all happened since their prediction in the late nineties. Experts remind us that “the increasing level of technology innovation will have a highly predictable outcome; more complexity and more chaos.”⁴¹

Technology Defined

Let us construct a meaning for the term technology, adaptable to this study. There are many assumed definitions, which have led to many people’s fears of its usage in certain parts of society. Taking a moment to clarify the meaning is crucial to maintain consistency throughout this study.

The origin of the word technology goes back to the early 1600s. It is of Greek origin and comes from the word *tekhnologia*, which means “art, craft, or technique.” It comes from two Greek words: *techne* and *logos*. Logos means “word”. Therefore, the

³⁹ Dale B. Sims, “The Effect of Technology on Christianity: Blessing or Curse?” (Dallas, TX: Dallas Baptist University, n.d.), 5, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://www3.dbu.edu/Naugle/pdf/The%20Effect%20of%20Technology%20on%20Christianity2.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Underwood, *Thriving in E-Chaos*, 288.

⁴¹ Ibid., 289.

literal meaning was “discourse about the way things are gained.”⁴² Over centuries of transliteration, the term technology came to acquire a ménage of its meanings into one manageable sentence: “the development and use of basic tools.”⁴³ Frederick Ferre suggests that “technology stands for all practical implementations of intelligence ...”⁴⁴ while Jacques Ellul defines technology as “the mechanical inventions of man to better his lot in life.”⁴⁵ Kriegbaum believes that “knowledge is directly proportional to the speed and accuracy of technology information.”⁴⁶ Varughese suggests that the term technology has now replaced the word science; since “technology represents the practical applications of science.”⁴⁷

The use of this simple definition helps educate the church and individuals alike for the proper development of strategies that will utilize everything at their disposal for the progression of the church. This knowledge will help the church incorporate the

⁴² The Greeks used the term to express the hierarchy of knowledge. The Romans had more of an appreciation for technology and it took on a more scientific nomenclature. They recognized technology as the aperture to promote the meaning as ‘the skills and the ability to make things’. It was not until the Renaissance that the term technology began to take on the meaning much like today, as scientists and engineers organized in groups to do research. The 19th and 20th centuries are when we see more of an acceptance for what technology is to us today. For more on this history, refer to: “Abstract Thinking: The Origin of the Word Technology,” Scherology, February 16, 2014, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://evanscherr.wordpress.com/2014/02/16/origin-technology/>.

⁴³ “Technology,” *Wikipedia*, last modified April 15, 2018, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology>.

⁴⁴ Sims, “The Effect of Technology on Christianity,” 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ T.V. Varughese, “Christianity and Technological Advance: The Astonishing Connection,” Institute Creation Research, November 1, 1993, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://www.icr.org/article/christianity-technological-advance-astonishing-con/>.

strengths of the Internet and “minimize its weaknesses, resulting in a healthy integration for humanity and the Body of Christ.”⁴⁸

Technology is important to this study because it is necessary for human life and it serves multiple purposes. Thumma insists “All faith communities in this day and age should be hybrid congregations...”⁴⁹ “The global embrace of Internet technologies has reconfigured the fabric of society for congregations in a contemporary context.”⁵⁰ The use of technology is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity. In the last decade, surveys created by researchers such as the U.S. Congregational Life and Lifeway have shown that certain variables play a role in the use of technology in the church, such as leadership, generational, gender, income, education, congregation size and denomination.⁵¹ The greatest influence in the use of technology in a congregation is its size. Surveys show that larger congregations have easily adapted to technology, while “the wealthier the congregation, at any size, the more likely to employ and use technology.”⁵²

The following figure based on a study in 2010, shows the disproportion of technology usage between congregations with 50 or less versus those over 250.

⁴⁸ Michael Hearn, Jr., “How Information Communication Technology Can Reshape Missional Ecclesiology: The Making of a Technomissional Church,” (D.Min diss., George Fox University, 2013), 53, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/53>.

⁴⁹ Scott Thumma, “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations,” *Vitality*, March 2011, accessed January 2, 2018, <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/technology-Internet-use.html>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

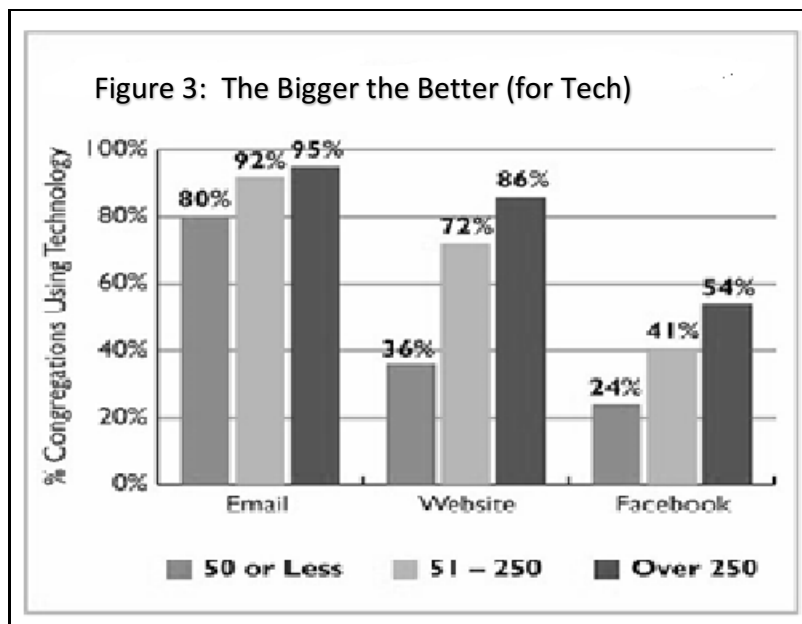


Figure 3. The illustration shows that a significant gap exists between the smallest faith congregations and other sized religious groups in terms of technology use, such as Website and Facebook use, which is far less prevalent in congregations with 50 or less attenders, than it is in those over 250, as evidenced in the Faith Communities Today. *Technology & Internet Use*, Accessed January 4, 2018, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Technology-Internet-Use.pdf>

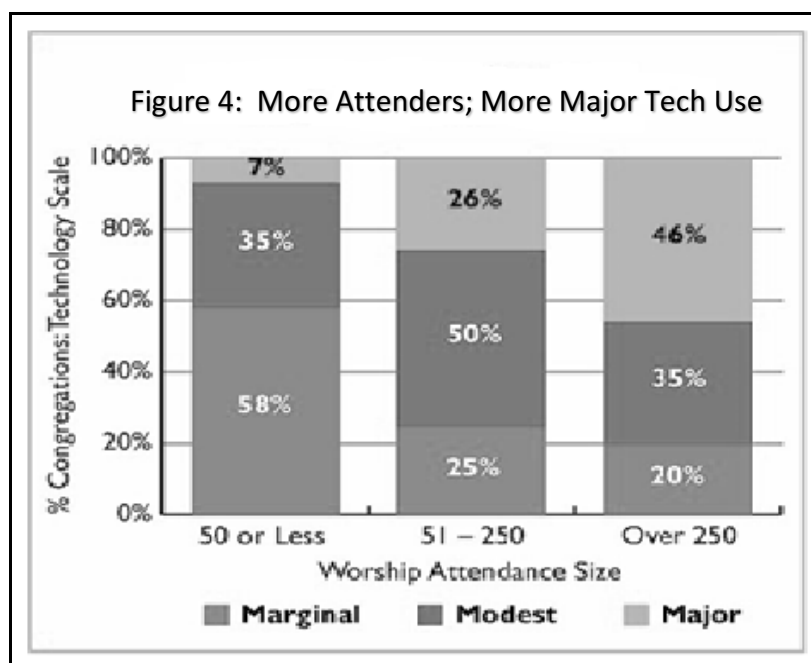


Figure 4. The figure shows that the three-point technology scale (Marginal, Modest, and Major) demonstrates the impact of the size on technology use. Over

half of the small congregations are opposed to new technology, while almost of half those over 250 attenders are major tech-savvy users. Accessed January 4, 2018, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Technology-Internet-Use>

Congregations who take advantage of the use of technology in their churches reap a multitude of benefits. First, innovation always attracts growth. “A fresh perspective, cultural transformation and the strategic agility to iterate and improve,”⁵³ will always ignite progression. Second, increased technology distinguishes one congregation from the other and increases their competitive edge.⁵⁴ One major benefit to using technology is “per capita giving increases as the use of technology rises.”⁵⁵ Even in the smallest congregation, there is visible increase in per capita giving. Survey results also suggest that the use of technology shows a positive increase in congregation growth and spiritual maturity. The use of technology removes the barriers that come with the physical church building-proximity, location, parking and even seating. It removes barriers for the disabled and the aging; the less mobile; and, it dispels the myths of belonging to and taking part in a biblical community.⁵⁶

The Importance of Technology

One cannot deny the importance and significance of technology in the earth today. Technology continues to hold value because of its worth to humanity. It has helped

⁵³ “Growth, Business Innovation and Innovative-Design Programs,” Kellogg School of Management, n.d., accessed December 27, 2017, <http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/executive-education/individual-programs/executive-programs/portfolio-growth-innovation.aspx>.

⁵⁴ Thumma. *Virtually Religious*.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mullins, “Online Church,” 142.

humanity adapt to the environment around them. Technology bridges gaps that make life more convenient. It increases the standard of living in every industry on earth.

Technology has changed every sector and touched every aspect of life, be it medical, tourism, education, or entertainment. Technology has changed the way we live. It is “the only economic force that is guaranteed to move in a forward direction.”⁵⁷

Predicting Tomorrow: Recommendations for Future Studies

This final section is a list of recommendations for future study. “To simply say that the future may be different without considering what we know about the likelihood of it being different is intellectual dereliction.”⁵⁸ With the recent onset of interest in online church, researchers, historians, and theologians have garnered the need for attention in several areas as the online community continues to develop. In fact, everyone who considers an online ministry might develop a team of innovative researchers that will focus primarily on their church’s approach but contribute to the knowledge base of online church overall.

Generational Culture Changes

One of the primary studies focus on the technical habits of ‘Gen-ers’ (e.g., X, Y, Z, and beyond). For the church to keep pace, they will need to know their audience and move intentionally to an online presence. As technology changes, so does the social culture of the online community. Taking an ongoing interest in those habits and cultures will make for the development of programming that will render effective ministry

⁵⁷ “The Importance of Technology,” The Importance of Technology, n.d., accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.importanceoftechnology.info/>.

⁵⁸ Mullins, “Online Church,” 142.

outreach. It is important to stay abreast of the progressively changing techno-culture. Despite the sweeping assertions, the concept of Internet Church is real. Despite the allegations against its authenticity, the voices of generations to come are crying out to those in the wilderness of opposition saying, “If you want me to know about your God, your religion, your belief, you had better put it on the Internet!”⁵⁹

Future Trends

Another recommendation is to study the future trends as they relate to technology, religion, and all things in common. “While many current historians use past behavior as indicative of future trends, it is appropriate to recognize that postmodern critics are suspicious of any grand narratives, particularly behaviorally based ones, and their application to history.”⁶⁰ Studying future trends means investigating the socio/political/economic/religious/intellectual conditions of the world and how they will impact the church’s effect in coming climates. For instance, one major concern on the horizon is the coming regulatory changes that will interfere with or restrict usage of the Internet in the near future. This will have an impact on the church’s global strategy for its online ministry.

⁵⁹ A review of Judges 2:10 reminds us that after Joshua and his generation all died, “another generation grew up who did not know God or even the work He had done for Israel.” Like that generation, the pattern of sacrilegious expression has become the tolerance in a multicultural world

⁶⁰ Christopher Lars Arney, “Thriving in Broken Futures: The Paradox of Church in Historic Watersheds” (D.Min diss., George Fox University, 2013), 19, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1039&context=dmin>.

Digital Leadership

Next, critical research focus must be around developing the leadership of an online congregation. There are two major elements to consider: global dexterity and technological aptitude. “Church leaders who fail to recognize the culture shift will not be able to change rapidly enough to respond to the shifts that are happening.”⁶¹

For church leadership to engage and embrace globalization is key when leading an online church. Globalization represents so many facets of life that it dictates how we host worship services on a global scale. It is just as important on a local scale as it is around the world. Kangwa provides a definition of globalization as being “the integration into world systems of national political, economic, cultural and even demographic forces in a homogenizing trend, through the global extension of Western cultural systems (i.e., power and ideologies) into the way of life of other nations.”⁶² The pastor who serves an online congregation considers the general awareness and needs, and conditions of the audience he or she ministers to, for an effective online church.

Digital leadership alongside the online pastor will be essential to the success of the online church. There is more to running an online church than just preaching from electronic devices and into a camera. The dynamics of technology are a bit more complex. The need has increased for the examination and discussion of digital religious leadership, as this leadership is responsible for developing ongoing programming that impacts the spiritual development of the online church attendees. Haley purports “digital

⁶¹ Nieuwhof, “Churchless,” 3.

⁶² Jonathan Kangwa, “The Impact of Globalization on Church Mission in Zambia: Some African Perspectives,” *International Review of Mission* 105, no. 1 (2016): 131–146, accessed January 8, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/irom.12124>.

leadership is understanding and harnessing the power of digital technology to manage the digital stamp of your business in a way that is successful, safe and has integrity.”⁶³

Digital leadership must have considerable experience in business, technology and ministry, and fully understand the nuances, benefits and risks of online existence.⁶⁴ This is an entirely new skillset required to keep ministry and business relevant in these changing times.

Social Media Policies

Finally, as the church gets entangled in the changing social media ministry context, the development of more social media policies is inevitable. These policies will present ideal strategies for continued study and analysis and ascertain the level of church awareness. Research with these policies help the church maintain positive social relationships and divert unwanted attention away from the church. A ministry focus on a broad understanding of these policies will constitute an institutional sense of the vision of the online church and its parishioners. The policies will help disseminate information appropriately and eliminate adverse repercussions as possible. Study and purpose for social media policies express the digital church leadership’s desire, with diligence about protection and trust, for the audiences from as much inappropriate behavior as they have the power to do so. The online pastor stays abreast of policies, for help with the church to provide an adequate and safe virtual environment and maintain an integral level of responsibility to the viewers.

⁶³ Alice Haley, “The Secret’s Out: 7 Traits of Digital Leaders,” Her Business, August 7, 2013, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://herbusiness.com/blog/the-secrets-out-7-traits-of-digital-leaders/>.

⁶⁴ Bourgeois, “Ministry in the Digital Age,” 5.

Chapter Summary

McDonald reflects over the cascading idea of losing community due to the online church. His concern is a restoration of the word, a rebirth of the church, and a spiritual insurgence, over-shadowed by technological advancement. He refers to the yesteryear of church engagement:

Church online makes **obsolete** the community aspect of church—like greeting strangers sitting next to you, being forced to make eye contact, and having a face-to-face conversation. It also makes obsolete the notion of dressing up in your Sunday best, as well as Sunday School being an integral component of Church Day, where families do something together, often followed by group meals and a whole set of activities related to physical church attendance.⁶⁵

Perhaps, there are ways the church can compensate for the loss of some things to gain a new reality in a generation that sees community differently. Maybe with the implementation of online church, the church can reach those that keep one foot out the door, one eye open, and people at arm's length. Krysti Wilkinson, of the *Huffington Post*, writes “this is a generation who wants someone to hold our hand, but we do not want to put the power to hurt us in their hands. We want to keep the ugly behind the cover-up, hide the imperfections with Instagram filters ... the problem with our generation not wanting relationships is that ... we actually do.”⁶⁶

There is a possibility that if the church is to get this generation to experience Jesus and all things church, we will have to forego the “flat hierarchy of the earliest Christian communities”⁶⁷ to create a persuading argument online that identifies with where they

⁶⁵ David McDonald, *Then, Now, Next: A Biblical Vision of the Church, the Kingdom, and the Future* (Jackson, MI: Westwinds Church, 2017), 106–107.

⁶⁶ Krysti Wilkinson, “We Are the Generation Who Doesn’t Want Relationships,” *The Huffington Post*, April 29, 2016, accessed October 19, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/we-are-the-generation-who-doesnt-want-reltionships_us_572131a5e4b03b93e7e435d8.

are. J. Todd Billings' concern is "when the gospel is reduced to identifying with others, the uniqueness of Christ's incarnation becomes an afterthought."⁶⁸ I personally believe the gospel was made to transcend barriers in order that it may reach beyond cultures, generations, and ideologies, and remain fundamentally soteriological without losing Christ. The Church must think like the Apostle Paul:

Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23 [NLT])

Bringing people to Jesus was more important to Paul than anything else. His goal was to win people to Jesus. Paul did not change his message, but he would change his approach to appeal to those he evangelized. On one occasion, he had Timothy circumcised in order to win the Jews (Acts 16:3). Paul stayed flexible and pliable that he may win the lost at any cost.

Nothing has had the ability to change the world so radically, as quickly as the Internet. It has made for a powerful revolution in less than 20 years.⁶⁹ Nothing has been as significantly affected as much as religion, due to the use of the Internet. The church must refuse to betoken a past era and take a radical position on operating in the future

⁶⁷ McDonald, *Then, Now, Next*, 106.

⁶⁸ Evelyne Reisacher, "Mission with the Mind of Christ," *Theology, News & Notes*, Fall 2013, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/mission-with-the-mind-of-christ/>.

⁶⁹ Thumma, "Virtually Religious," 1.

present. “Religious congregations are making dramatic strides in adapting to this reality, though not without unevenness and ineptitude at times.”⁷⁰ The church must offer its powerful contribution to technology. Technology has given the church manifold blessings.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

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APPENDIX A

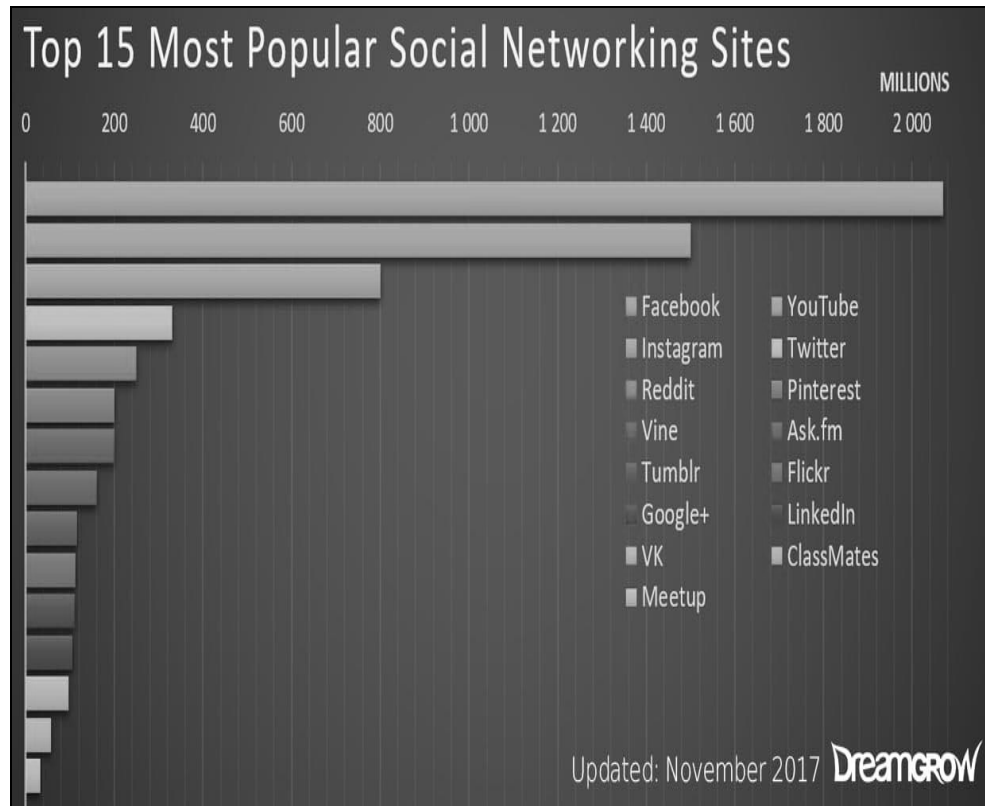


Figure 1. Shows an illustration of the Top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites and Apps [November 2017]. The graph shows the top 15 social networking sites in the world. Facebook leads the world in social media and YouTube, follows in second place, with Instagram trailing in third place. Illustration accessed from <https://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/>

APPENDIX B

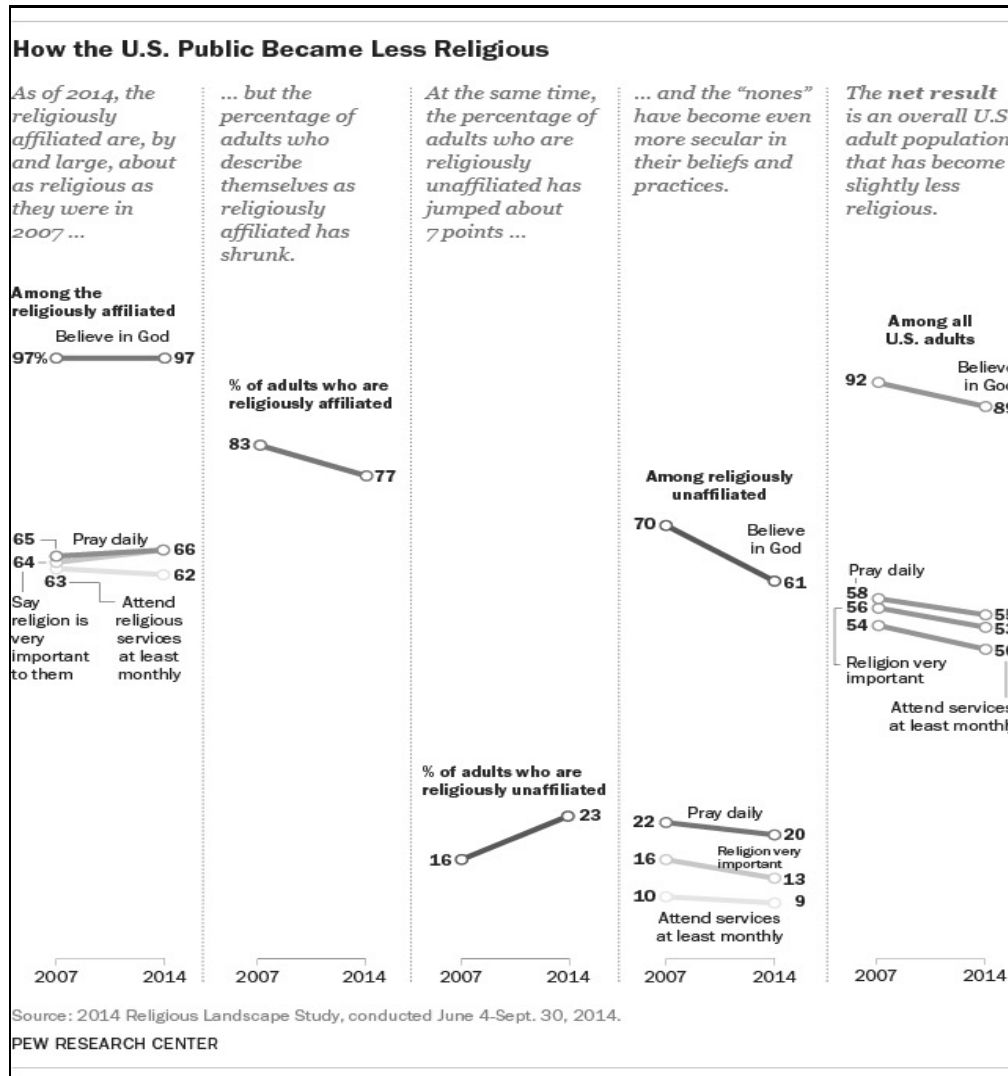


Figure 2. Shows an illustration of a Landscape Study conducted in 2007, by the Pew Research Center, of the growth of the “nones,” which is defined as people who are not affiliated with a church; however, say they believe in God. This illustration shows a share of the population from 2007-2014, with their declining levels of religious observance, and decline in the nation’s overall rates of religious belief and practices. Access from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

APPENDIX C

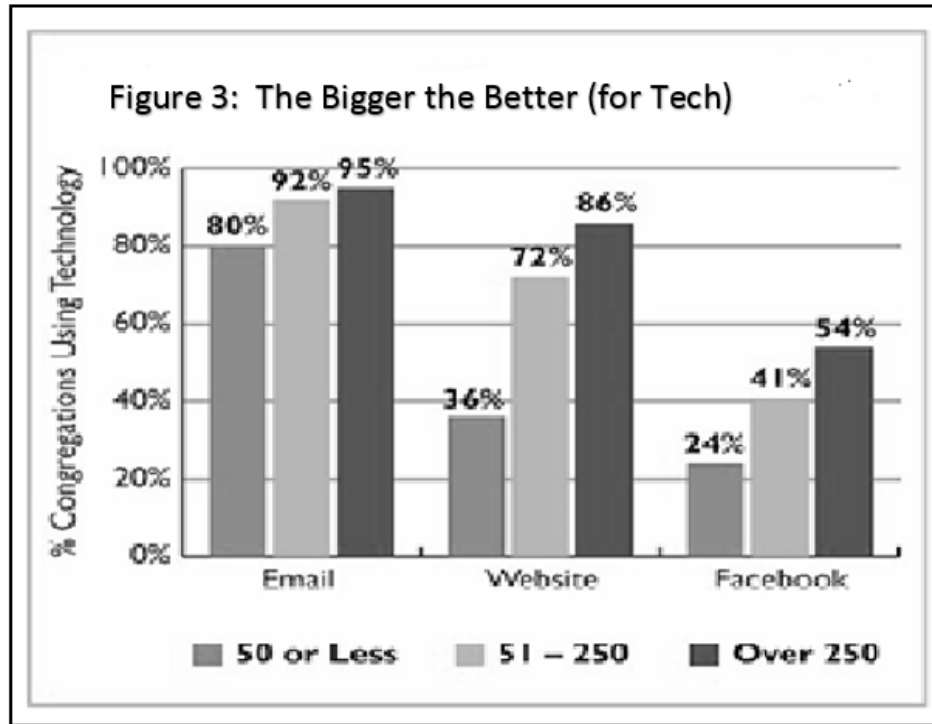


Figure 3. Shows an illustration of the percent of size in congregations that use technology. The three groups identified are Email, Websites, and Facebook congregational users. The groups are identified with 50 or less attendees, to those congregations with over 250 attendees in faith communities, as reported in 2010. The illustration also shows a significant gap between small and large congregations, who use technology. Accessed from <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Technology-Internet-Use.pdf>

APPENDIX D

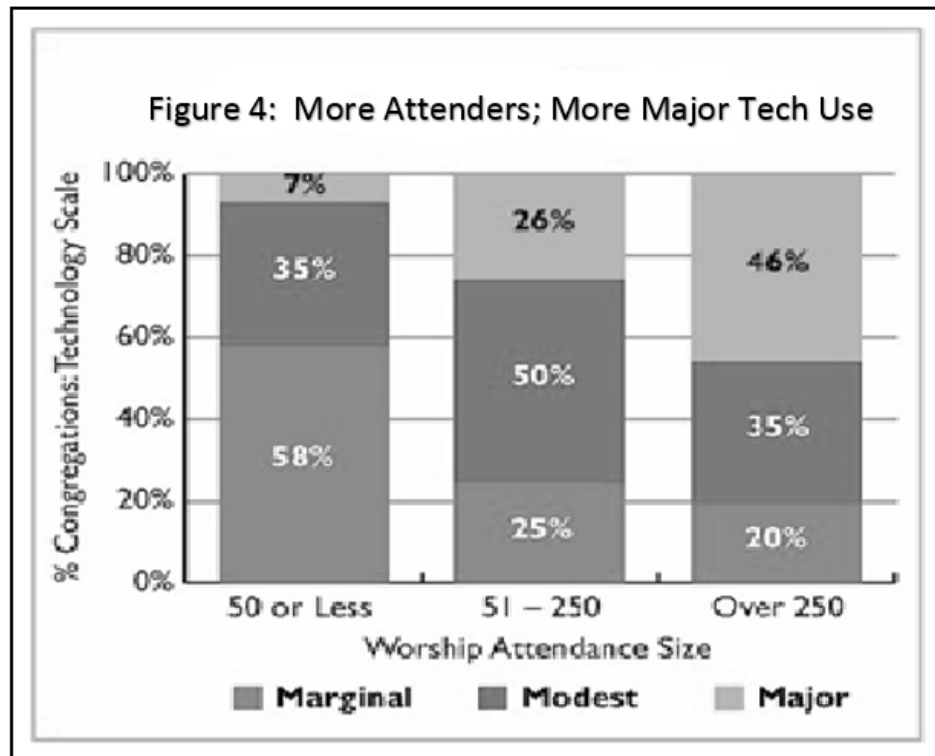


Figure 4. Shows an illustration of the percent of Congregational Technology Scale (level of technological advancement), with the Worship Attendance Size, from Marginal, Modest, and Major attendance, since 2010. The Figure also shows the three-point technology scale, which demonstrates the impact of size on technology use. More than half of small congregations listed in Figure 4 are not technology savvy, and oppose the use of new technology, while almost half the congregations with over 250 attendees are major technology users. Accessed from <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Technology-Internet-Use.pdf>