Migrating and Amplifying Ministry to Online Platforms to Pursue the Great Commission

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in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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The COVID-19 crisis was unexpected by the universal church. The current pandemic revealed that the universal church and many local churches were not prepared for its’ accompanying challenges or to adapt in general. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, churches across America were required to temporarily cease in-person public gatherings and later to reduce the number of participants once in-person meetings were allowed again. This scenario caused many churches to have to adapt to the current circumstances to continue ministering.

The purpose of this DMin research project is to amplify Sonrise Church’s online ministry presence and determine if it garners greater engagement among members and non-members. This project explores the idea that both congregant and public engagement with the church ministry should increase if the church improves and promotes its ministry by actively utilizing and amplifying its website and Facebook page and actively create or curate content. By regularly creating or curating content for the platforms, providing blogs on the website, actively moderating online discussions on both platforms, and actively facilitating online engagement among all participants, the vitality and expansion of the church’s ministry should increase. Doing the aforementioned will also provide the church with a greater opportunity to pursue the Great Commission. Additionally, two surveys were conducted during the project. One was meant to ascertain the prevailing perception and understanding of Christians concerning the usage of online platforms for ministry. The other survey targeted the general populace to determine their interest in Christianity and engaging Christian ministry online.
Acknowledgments

While this list is not exhaustive of all the individuals who have contributed and enriched me and my life in some capacity, which has culminated in attaining a doctoral degree at this juncture in time, there are some that need to be mentioned. First and foremost, I want to express my most profound gratitude to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for this tremendous opportunity and the enablement to earn an MDiv in Leadership and now a DMin in Ministry Leadership. He deserves all the glory and credit. He made me, embued me with the abilities I have, provided for all my needs throughout my life, gave me opportunities, and empowered me to do all that He gave for me to do. With His help, I was just trying to do my best to bring Him honor and glory in my studies and in all things. All praise and glory to Him. May this degree and the knowledge acquired through achieving it be used to advance His kingdom and His purposes.

To my beautiful wife of 18 years, Kaori, and my wonderful children, Gabriela, Daniel, Mikaela, Rafael, and Ariel, who have seen me dedicate the past three years to the pursuit and completion of the MDiv and DMin, I am extremely thankful for all of the love, support, and sacrifice that you have exhibited throughout. I had thought to pursue a master’s in psychology 18 years ago, but the Lord had other plans to bring all of you into my life. For that, advanced degrees were worth putting on hold. I love you all.

To my parents, Duane and Marlene Bagaas, thank you for all of the love, support, and sacrifice over the years as I was growing up. I am here because you two brought me into this world, helped me along the way, and caused me to be introduced to Jesus at a young age by taking my two younger sisters and me to church every Sunday, which culminated in me giving my life to Him when I was 12. A special thank you goes to my mother, who insisted that the public school made a mistake by placing me in special education because they thought I was a slow learner. All the questioning by me due to constantly analyzing and trying to understand the interconnectivity of things probably got me placed in special education. However, my mother was instrumental in me getting out.

I want to thank Dr. Juan Dugan for all his help and guidance along the final stages of my DMin journey as I did the bulk of the writing for this thesis and finalized it. The assistance with the theoretical and theological foundation sections caused me to understand better what was needed and also challenged me to stretch myself more. I also recall the constant need to condense content to reduce page count. I know I can be verbose in my writing, like my speech. Thank you very much for reading through the amplitude of content, offering all of the much-needed feedback, and helping me to not only finish but to finish strong.
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**Abbreviations**

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<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td><em>Coronavirus Disease of 2019</em></td>
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<td>DAU</td>
<td><em>Daily Active Users</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>DMIN</td>
<td><em>Doctor of Ministry</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td><em>Institutional Review Board</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LUSOD</td>
<td><em>Liberty University School of Divinity</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>MAU</td>
<td><em>Monthly Active Users</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>MDIV</td>
<td><em>Master of Divinity</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><em>Uniform Resource Locator (web page address)</em></td>
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<td>WAU</td>
<td><em>Weekly Active Users</em></td>
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<td>WWII</td>
<td><em>World War II</em></td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The pandemic that COVID-19 created has illustrated the need for ministries to return to a more adaptable state, much like the ancient iteration of the church was very adaptable, and it is a reminder that the church community transcends a physical location. The church community is not merely physical; it is also metaphysical, mediated through the Paraclete, with each believer bound together into a spiritual community whose Lord interacts with it metaphysically.

In modernity, one way that the church can be more adaptable and transcend the physical that will assist it in remaining relevant as it continues to pursue the missio Dei with the greatest expediency is that of the digital landscape, specifically online platforms and tools. These represent the greatest potential presently to expand the church’s influence and the kingdom of God. However, many local ministries have fallen behind on leveraging these tools to their fullest extent for one reason or another.

This research project was designed to measure engagement among Sonrise Church’s members and non-members and to expand the church’s influence by leveraging online tools such as its website and social media. The hopeful expectation is that as each local church leverages online tools to their full extent that the universal church will no longer be limited to mainly in-person ministry, but rather while maintaining in-person ministry, accept and utilize online ministry to reach a vast number of people that it would not normally be able to through traditional means.

While Sonrise Church is a community of believers that love the Lord and each other deeply, it is an older congregation that may inherently present some challenges with assisting the ministry with migrating to online platforms or amplifying them. Additionally, it is a
heterogeneous congregation with two distinct languages spoken, which also may contribute to additional challenges. However, by migrating and amplifying more of the church’s ministry online, it may assist in developing more community, provide more channels of communication, and remove any present or future potential barriers to the work of the ministry as the church will no longer be solely reliant on in-person ministry.

**Ministry Context**

Sonrise Church has been around for a little more than 50 years. It was planted in South Seattle at a time when things in life were more stable and predictable than it is today. Media communication revolved around television, newspapers, other printed literature, cassette tapes, and radio. Also, telephones were connected to landlines. Ministry was conducted mainly in-person. The neighborhood that the church is situated in is multi-ethnic. There has been a low-income public housing development across the street from the church that was built after WWII, and another one constructed around the same time located about a five-minute drive or 15-minute walk from the church building.\(^1\)\(^2\) However, around the 1980s and 1990s, “the projects,” as both of them were called, and where this researcher lived from 1987-1990 and again from 1992-1998, were predominately populated with individuals from various Asian countries. Still, the projects were ethnically very diverse. This is important to mention since many of the children in the church’s youth ministry came from the projects during these years.

As this researcher has been a member of this church off and on for a combined 17 years, though knowing the congregants for nearly 30 years, he heard it said that there were apparently

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\(^2\)“Greenbridge,” King County Housing Authority, accessed August 28, 2020, https://www.kcha.org/about/development/greenbridge.
around 100 members at the time the current pastor accepted the pastorate. That was more than 30 years ago. Numerically speaking, the congregation has contracted steadily over the decades. Presently, there are less than 25 congregants, and they mainly meet on Sundays in-person. However, the in-person ministry was disrupted for a few months during spring 2020, when the local government created social distancing restrictions due to the commencement of COVID-19. Though social distancing is still being encouraged as of August 2020, and even though small gatherings of 25 or fewer individuals are allowed, the church began to reconvene in May 2020. So, Sunday morning in-person services have resumed.

Concerning evangelism, various church-wide activities and attempts have occurred in the past. There was a youth group for many years for teenagers. During the time this researcher was leading it, there were approximately 12 to 15 teenagers in attendance at any one time. During the next youth group leader’s tenure, the group expanded for the few years he was there. Around this same time, the church also had Awana meetings at the building, with many elementary students attending weekly. Presently, the church has a Sunday morning Sunday School for the children that attend. As for outreach into the general public, aside from relational or personal evangelism, there are currently no church-wide planned evangelistic events or activities being planned or conducted.

Discipleship, or spiritual formation, since this researcher began attending Sonrise Church in 1989, has primarily occurred within the Sunday morning service, youth group, in a weekly or biweekly Bible study, and when there was also a men’s group. However, the youth group seems

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3Sonrise Church was not convening for Sunday morning services in the building from approximately mid-March to the end of May 2020.

4The church began reconvening in the building about the beginning of June 2020, though prior to that, they had parking lot meetings from mid-May to the end of May.
to have ceased about 10 years ago. The group ceased after a youth group leader left Sonrise to take a paid position at a newly formed Cambodian church, which was comprised of Cambodian members that splintered off during the Cambodian church’s merger with Sonrise church. Then the pastor’s wife subsequently led the group for a while. There was a more recent effort, though, at the end of 2019, which was just a few months before COVID-19 started, to restart a youth group ministry at Sonrise Church by this researcher; however, there was a lack of interested youth and difficulty obtaining some needed personnel to launch. Additionally, with a diminishing number of youth attending, an aging and contracting congregation, there seemed to be more resources and energy needed to establish a new youth group.

In the past, this researcher experienced personal one-on-one discipleship from the pastor of Sonrise from 1992-1998. Aside from perhaps about a year of intensive study of a theological book and handwriting short essays on the readings, most of the discipleship sessions occurred when the researcher initiated contact and elected to go to the pastor’s home and talk. The conversations were not structured but were more free-flowing and wide-ranging. Regardless, they were transformative for this researcher.

Presently, as Sonrise Church currently is conducting Sunday morning services, institutionally-initiated spiritual formation is mainly contained in this timeframe. Prior to the beginning of COVID-19, there was a biweekly women’s Bible study group that met. Therefore, spiritual formation is now primarily prompted during the Sunday morning service and each congregant’s personal alone time with the Lord.

Regarding the church’s resources, specifically its financial situation, it is presently able to maintain its financial commitments. This seems to be due to the weekly tithes and offerings, financial contributions from two congregations that use the church facilities regularly, and a
monthly payment the church receives from a telecommunication company that has a tower on the church property. However, for this research project, there will not be much of a financial commitment by the church as running advertisements on Facebook does not have to cost much, and which tools are implemented into the preexisting church website can be limited to inexpensive options. Also, considering the church congregation is aging and that many work considerable hours outside of the ministry context, human resources in terms of quantity and available time to invest in ministry endeavors is limited.

Concerning the ethnic and linguistic composition of the congregation and other congregations at the church, while the Sonrise Church congregation owns the land and the building, the building is shared with two other congregations, the Burmese and the Hispanic. The Sonrise congregation itself is a composite of Anglos and Cambodians. This present congregational ethnic composition was the result of a merger roughly 25 years ago. Presently, the ratio is approximately 50/50 Anglo and Cambodian. Among the Anglos, most are monolingual in English, while members of the Cambodian contingent are bilingual to varying degrees. This situation presents linguistic challenges that consistently need to be intentionally addressed. However, while there are still gaps in providing consistently needed language support for the Cambodian congregants, and they graciously navigate this perpetually, as with any bilingual or multilingual environment, more could always be done. Considering this present linguistic state in the congregation, communication between Cambodians and Anglos can be challenging and inconsistent at times. Furthermore, even after a piece of information is shared from either a Cambodian to an Anglo, or vice versa, misunderstanding is always a possibility. The most important information that needs to be conveyed either from the Cambodians to the Anglos, or the Anglos to the Cambodians, is translated through one of the Cambodian elders.
This gentleman previously was the pastor of the Cambodian church prior to the merger with Sonrise Church about 25 years ago. He is presently an elder and a current missionary to Cambodia. Overall, though both ethnic groups love each other deeply, communication is a present ongoing challenge between most Cambodians and Anglos in the congregation that both groups navigate with patience, love, and respect.

Generationally, the church is primarily composed of individuals 60 years old or older. This age range places the majority of the congregation in the Baby Boomer generation. As it relates to digital media and the internet, generally speaking, this generation, while not having these tools available to them when they were young, later in life acquired varying degrees of proficiency with them. As with all things, even among groups, there are always exceptions among the members of the group as each individual may be closer to the mean or farther from it. This is also true of the Anglo members of Sonrise Church regarding digital media usage and proficiency. Some may be more proficient, and some less proficient. However, because many of the Cambodian congregants were born and raised in Cambodia during their formative years and came to America in the 1980s, they seemed to have gained access to English and the latest technology later in life. Some appear to have adapted better to English and the latest digital technology than others. This might be due to age differences among members in the group, personality, natural aptitude, opportunities, or desire.

Concerning the history of digital media usage at Sonrise Church, as this pertains to this research project, according to the church’s Facebook page information, it was created on April 24, 2010. The first post that appears in the timeline is dated July 11, 2016. Surveying the

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6Ibid.
Facebook page, July and August 2016 represent a flurry of posts on the Facebook page by the senior ministry leader, though with minimal engagement by members and non-members.\textsuperscript{7} More recently, when this researcher acted as a moderator for the Facebook page during the internship for his MDIV, engagement increased during October, November, and December 2019.\textsuperscript{8} However, since the internship ended in December 2019, and this researcher has no longer been moderating the Facebook page, activity and engagement have been absent on the page.\textsuperscript{9} There have been some individuals viewing the church’s Facebook page over the last eight months; however, the views over that time have occurred sporadically.\textsuperscript{10} Concerning the church’s website, this researcher designed and launched it in August 2016.\textsuperscript{11} However, it is a simple website designed to be primarily informational.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Problem Presented}

Presently, the reality of COVID-19 has enveloped the world in a state of apprehension and uncertainty as to what the future holds, though even more important than merely surviving the present conditions is the need to navigate them to arrive in a more preferable future rather than a dystopian-esque one. The world, its systems both on the micro and macro levels, and all the components that make up each system, including people, are changing. It is in flux; it always has been. It is the nature of life. Thus, there will perpetually be a need for adaptation. The coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, accentuated that point emphatically. However, some

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7}“Page Transparency,” Sonrise Church Facebook Page.
\item \textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{11}Sonrise Church Website Launched Post, Facebook, accessed August 19, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/Sonriseefc/posts/1236869319677830.
\item \textsuperscript{12}www.sonriseseattle.com
\end{itemize}
people and some organizations have handled the abruptness of the necessity for change that was thrust upon them better than others, though it seems that none have been able to traverse the new landscape without absorbing at least some damage or setbacks. In the realm of ministry, it is no different. Church ministries, likewise, have been forced to address the new reality that COVID-19 has created and attempt to formulate a plan for ministering in it. Prior to COVID-19, many churches seemed to rely primarily on in-person ministry, which functioned well because there were no restrictions to meeting in person at the church building. Now that in-person restrictions are the new “normal,” it has created challenges for those ministries that relied on either primarily ministering to their congregants in-person or only ministering in-person. One such case where there had been difficulty navigating the new ministry climate that COVID-19 created suddenly was Sonrise Church. The problem is that Sonrise Church was not prepared for the migration of ministry to an online platform when COVID-19 commenced.

Though this DMin research project examines one local ministry, the stated problem, or challenge, for church ministries was universal. No one was immune. It caught everyone off-guard. Many church ministries were left scrambling to assess the new landscape and quickly determine what they could do or not do. There was much information to absorb, which was overwhelming for many. However, the ministries that appeared to be least affected were the ones that already had an established online ministry presence. While some ministries were hoping and waiting to resume in-person ministry as soon as some of the restrictions eased, many others that did not already have an active online ministry presence, as in they were not actively ministering to their congregants regularly online, were suddenly interested in and attempting to become knowledgeable as to how to migrate their ministries to an online format.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMin action research project is to amplify Sonrise Church’s online ministry presence and determine if it garners greater engagement among members and non-members. Determining congregant and public engagement is vital because it will indicate whether the influence of the local church ministry is increasing, decreasing, or maintaining. Since COVID-19 interrupted the offering of ministry to the church’s parishioners, it demonstrates that not only measuring engagement but amplifying the church’s online presence is essential for the continuation of the ministry and its growth as well in a world dominated by social media.

Furthermore, having a robust online ministry presence helps mitigate potential interruptions in ministering as it improves and amplifies communication frequency and duration and offers more channels of communication. As online ministry has existed prior to the current pandemic, as far back as the early 1980s with an online group on Usenet in 1983 and the first virtual church in 1985, according to Estes and Campbell,\(^\text{13}\)\(^\text{14}\) and it continues to gain momentum due to the virus, it may be logical to infer that online ministry will not go away after the virus subsides. In actuality, a crisis, such as the present coronavirus, appears to have demonstrated the need for ministries to return to the church’s historical roots of adaptability. The church must continue to find ways to adapt to the ever-changing environment that it is embedded in here on earth while simultaneously continuing to disseminate the gospel message unaltered through all available communication channels at its disposal with urgency.

\(^{13}\)Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 25.

Basic Assumptions

Some fundamental assumptions are needed for this research project. The first assumption is that the church community and the ministry leader will allow the DMin researcher to amplify the ministry’s presence through Facebook and its website. Another assumption is that the amplification of the church’s ministry presence through the aforementioned channels will be broadcast to the church’s congregants by the ministry leader and that they will be encouraged to utilize them. A third assumption is that the church’s Facebook page and website will be allowed to be utilized to reach the general public. A fourth assumption is that the ministry leader will assist in content creation or content curating for placement on the church’s website and Facebook page. Similarly, the fifth assumption is that the ministry leader will allow for the placement of advertisements on Facebook to drive traffic to the church’s page and website. The sixth assumption is that the church will assist with the moderation of the blogs on their website and the discussions on their Facebook page. A final assumption is that the church community will engage each other and non-members they encounter on the church’s website and Facebook page.

Definitions

The migration of ministry to online formats or platforms refers to moving or transferring ministry to the online or digital landscape. The conception of migration of ministry to online formats or platforms, more specifically, means that a local ministry is attempting to take the ministry that they conduct in-person and replicate it on the internet using a website, social media, or other online tools.

Amplification of ministry online refers to the expansion and saturation of the ministry’s presence on the internet through the online tools that it utilizes. More specifically, the amplification of the ministry online occurs when the ministry’s presence is broadcast through
more than one online tool, and the ministry creates and curates content regularly, and it utilizes tools that create and strengthen social bonds within a formed spiritual community while faithfully transferring essential components of the biblical church to the digital landscape. It should be noted that the “digital landscape” refers to the entirety of the online world. This term is used much the same way that Lowe and Lowe use it, though they emphasized social media more.\(^\text{15}\)

Online tools are understood as anything that can be utilized by the church to migrate its ministry to the internet or amplify it. This means that any social media platform, such as Facebook or Instagram, and the church’s own website, could be referred to collectively as online tools. The term “online tools” is an amalgamation of the term “tools” as used by Pierce and his reference of them being used in relation to the internet.\(^\text{16}\)

“Moderation,” concerning blogs and other online discussions that occur on the church’s website and their Facebook page, refers to the active intervention of individuals to ensure that the discussions stay on topic and that appropriate conduct and language are used. As it is somewhat related to moderation of discussions, “facilitation” refers to the active involvement of individuals to encourage discussion and increase community engagement. These terms and activities may overlap when one individual is serving in both roles.

“Discipleship” and “spiritual formation” are used synonymously in this research project. The term discipleship necessarily encompasses the concept of spiritual formation. However, the connotation with discipleship is that it may be referring to a set period of time, that the learning is sequential, and that it could be more formal. Comiskey corroborates this understanding in his

\(^{15}\)Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth in Online Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 113.

\(^{16}\)Myron Pierce, *Digital Ministry: Pastoring in a Pandemic* (Independently Published, 2020), Kindle, 40.
definition of a disciple. However, with spiritual formation, it seems to connote the sense of being more broad and perpetual. Issler supports this conception when he discusses a person’s formation, though implying that it is spiritual and illustrates that it is time-consuming and ongoing. Regardless, in this thesis, the two terms will be used interchangeably and be understood to be perpetual, done alone or in a group, and either be structured or unstructured.

**Limitations**

There may be some potential limitations to this research project. Since this DMin research project is being conducted with Sonrise Church, the degree and scope to which the amplification of the church’s online presence and engagement of their members and non-members will be allowed will be contingent on the continuing approval of the church’s ministry leader. It is possible that at any given time, the ministry leader may unilaterally elect to scale back the amplification or ask that the amplification not include certain elements suggested by the researcher or even to terminate the research project prematurely. Similarly, the ministry leader may ask for modifications of member or non-member engagement as it is underway. Additionally, related to the ministry leader and content creation or content curating, it is unknown how much time he may have to either create content or search for content to share through the church’s selected online tools. Therefore, it is difficult to know prior to the research project’s commencement how much content will ultimately be shared on the online platforms.

As Facebook and the church’s website will be employed in the assessment of the member and non-member engagement with Sonrise Church, it will not be possible to predict precisely

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18Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 30, 73.
how many members or non-members will elect to interact with the church. Though some Facebook advertising will be utilized to make the church more visible, it is unknown how many people from the general public will respond or where Facebook will choose to place the advertisements even though the appropriate audiences and interests are selected in the creation of the advertisements.

Concerning the church assisting with the moderation of discussions on its website and Facebook page and its assistance with the overall facilitation of the online ministry, a potential limitation is the extent to which it will assist with the moderation and facilitation. Furthermore, it is presently unknown how many individuals in the ministry will assist and how many hours they may be available to perform moderating and facilitating tasks.

Another potential limitation is the degree to which Sonrise Church’s congregants will engage each other on the church’s website or the church’s Facebook page. Some parishioners are more proficient with technology than others. Also, as was discussed in the ministry context section, as some of the congregants are non-native English speakers, there may be some challenges with language communication. Additionally, the time that congregants have available to communicate with one another online is unknown. Finally, because content is needed to aid in facilitating community engagement, as it provides something to discuss, and it is presently unknown how much will ultimately be shared on the church website and its Facebook page due to the reason previously stated, community engagement may be affected. These variables may all have an impact on the quality, quantity, and frequency of community engagement through the online tools that the church uses.
Delimitations

Considering that the purpose of this DMin thesis project is to amplify the online ministry presence of Sonrise Church among its members and non-members, one of the delimitations of this project will be to measure the online ministry activity of the church’s members through only the church’s website and its Facebook page. Similarly, measurement of non-member engagement with the church will be gathered from the Facebook page and the website. More specifically, the analytical assessment tools will be delimited to Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, and Weebly Insights.

Another delimitation is related to the online tools that will be utilized in this research project. As there are a plethora of online tools available, it will not be possible or even needed to attempt to utilize them all. The online tools that will be used in this project will be the ones that the current church members use or are the most likely to use. Some of the tools that will be employed in amplifying online engagement among the church members, as previously mentioned, are the church’s Facebook page and its website. These are the online tools that most in the church seem to prefer to utilize and are already familiar with.

There are different methods for conducting a survey. However, respondents for the surveys in this study will be acquired through SurveyMonkey. Out of other options, SurveyMonkey was selected due to its ability to ensure that the surveys reach the prescribed number of respondents and for the surveys to be completed within a reasonable timeframe.

Concerning the amount of time to invest in amplifying the church’s website and its social media presence to encourage more engagement between congregants and non-members, it will be delimited. The researcher will dedicate the first week of the research project to amplifying both the church’s social media presence through Facebook and also the church’s website. The
amplification of the aforementioned online tools may consume between 10-20 hours of the researcher’s time. Once the necessary features are in place and the initial advertisements are running, then the next four weeks will be used to facilitate community engagement by working with the pastor to get content uploaded to the online tools that the church has elected to utilize. This work may consume, combined over four weeks, another 40 hours of the researcher’s time.

A final delimitation related to the topic that was selected for the research is that migration and amplification of ministry online was selected out of all other potential topics due to the recency in the urgency to migrate ministry online due to the current ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the present constraints on in-person ministry because of the pandemic, it seemed worthy and important at this time to research this topic.

**Thesis Statement**

Considering the aforementioned realities of COVID-19 and the consequent and subsequent apparent need for online ministry, it seems sagacious to pursue online ministry. Thus, it is hypothesized that in the current local ministry under consideration, if Sonrise Church improves and promotes its online ministry presence, it may increase member engagement and reach a broader audience.

This thesis will explore the idea that both congregant and public engagement with the church ministry should increase if the church improves and promotes its ministry by actively utilizing and amplifying its website and Facebook page and actively create or curate content. By regularly creating or curating content for the platforms, providing blogs on the website, actively moderating online discussions on both platforms, and actively facilitating online engagement among participants, the vitality and expansion of the church ministry should increase.
As the present coronavirus conditions in the world continue, and especially in the geographical context that Sonrise Church is situated, it seems increasingly urgent to not only consider but actively pursue a strategy and implementation of migrating ministry to an online format. Though all hope to return to a former state of normalcy where more in-person ministry may be conducted without concern for health restrictions, an additional component in the formulation of the hypothesis is that regardless of what the future may be, having and actively maintaining a robust online ministry presence is essential for a ministry in an ever-changing world of uncertainty. Without actively employing an online ministry presence in the modern world, as Lowe and Lowe seem to indicate, a ministry may continue to migrate toward irrelevancy as the prevalence of social media and other online platforms continue to become the norm for the newer generations who are accustomed to doing almost everything online, including being ministered to in an online format.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{19}Lowe and Lowe, 114-115.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

While surveying sources on the issue of online ministry, digital ministry, social media ministry, and other derivatives of that nature, it became apparent that five conspicuous themes emerged across many sources. One was an overriding need for online ministry. Another was that though there is a need for ministry to be online, there is resistance and challenges migrating ministries online. A third prominent theme that the sources demonstrated was a theological foundation for online ministry. The penultimate theme was online community and spiritual formation. A final theme identified was amplifying online ministry engagement strategy.

Ministry Needed Online

Many scholars and active ministry leaders on the topic of online ministry concur that ministry is needed in the digital landscape. From researched statistics to experiential knowledge on the matter, they assert the need. Crawford and Lowe and Lowe highlight the pervasiveness of social media in the modern world when they state that over 90 percent of people under the age of 35 are on social media and engaging it throughout the day every day.\(^\text{20,21}\) While there is some differentiation in the estimation of global social media users among sources, Crawford says that 50 percent of the global population is under 35 years of age, as of 2012, and that as high as 96 percent of them are on social media.\(^\text{22}\) Moreover, Lowe and Lowe state the fact that many

\[^{20}\text{Terrance Crawford, Going Social: A Practical Guide on Social Media for Church Leaders (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 32.}\]
\[^{21}\text{Lowe and Lowe, 114.}\]
\[^{22}\text{Crawford, 32.}\]
Christian millennials, 70 percent to be precise, access Scripture digitally, while 50 percent of that generational group access other faith-based online media.\textsuperscript{23} Despite the overwhelming evidence that people, especially 35 and under, are active daily on social media, Wise says many churches are either not on social media,\textsuperscript{24} or they are not actively engaging social media. Concerning the active engagement of social media, the sources demonstrate that it goes beyond merely having a website, a Facebook page, or other social media accounts. It requires frequent and ongoing engagement with participants through these online tools.

Though many churches are not fully leveraging social media and other online tools to minister, it does not diminish the fact that there are many people in the world locally and globally that may benefit from online ministry. Some of the source authors who are actively ministering, such as Pierce and Smith, emphasize that people can be more open in the online world as compared to in person.\textsuperscript{25,26} More candor may lead to more meaningful conversations. Additionally, some individuals who may never attend a physical church may consider and even want to attend an online church. One of those reasons, as Gould observes, might be because an individual, due to a personality trait like being introverted, would be more comfortable engaging others in an online mediated ministry context.\textsuperscript{27} Another potential reason she says for some individuals to forgo attending a brick-and-mortar church is due to disability.\textsuperscript{28} One may include

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23}Lowe and Lowe, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{25}Pierce, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 62-63.
\end{itemize}
other conceivable potential reasons such as social anxiety and a person not living within close proximity to a church or other Christians. So, as Gorrell observes, social media ministry can be helpful and needed for those that may feel marginalized in their milieu, whether in an organization or not, or are alone.29

While some may not readily perceive it, ministering in an online format expands the concept of who one’s neighbor is. As Atkins of Lifeway Christian Resources says, it allows a Christian and a ministry to reach others that they would not be able to reach in their physical environment.30 Said differently by Estes, ministering online allows the church to reach into places that it would not be able to through physical means, thus reaching exponentially more people than it would be able to through traditional means.31 This scenario can happen because there are numerous people in the world, beyond the geographical footprint of the local church, that are online and in need of ministry. As Hutchings says, though referring to online churches, however also applicable to online ministry, “Christians need to build churches in the space of the Internet in order to offer care to those who need it, demonstrate the advantages of the virtuous lifestyle and gradually learn how to share their message attractively.”32 Online evangelism is the new mission field of the 21st century.

However, though the majority of sources surveyed overwhelmingly advocated and made compelling arguments for online ministry from either a theoretical standpoint or an experiential one, some may still disagree with migrating ministry to online formats. One such case is in


31 Estes, 109.

Kim’s newly released book, where it appears that his overall argument is that offline church is needed much more than online ministry offerings. He offers criticisms of social media while uplifting offline church. However, it appears Kim fails to interact with any research or even one other dissenting source when he constructs his argument for going analog. It seems that he had a presupposition that offline church is better and more essential than online church and set off to prove it without considering research that may contradict his presupposition. Furthermore, having research that substantiated his argument for why the offline church is better than the online church would have been recommended, other than only using logical arguments or making inferences. Essentially, it seemed Kim was saying, this is what digital is; this is why it is not as good as the non-digital; therefore, the offline church is better. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is interesting to notice that the church Kim pastors, Vintage Faith Church, is leveraging digital platforms to offer ministry to its congregants. Additionally, while scanning the church’s Facebook posts, it is evident that they just recently, in the past month or two, started migrating their ministry online.

So, while there may be many willing and ready to embrace the frontier of online ministry and continue to leverage it at ever-increasing levels, there are some that may not see the need for ministry online and will resist it, though perhaps reluctantly engage it. In other cases, there are ministries in the world that may be ready and wanting to delve into the world of online ministry, but there are impediments.


Resistance and Challenge Migrating to Online Ministry

Not everyone is thrilled with the idea of change. Some people would prefer to keep things the way they are, even in stable times, maybe especially in stable times. They can become complacent. There may not be any obvious impetus for facilitating change. However, when one’s environment changes, especially suddenly, and it requires an immediate change to attempt to maintain their current situation, or at least mitigate the damage to it, they are forced out of their complacency. This scenario is what is currently happening with COVID-19 and ministries. The universal church, by and large, seemed to be in a state of complacency and lethargy. Then, the pandemic hit. While, as previously noted, some ministries were better prepared, many were not. Many are still grappling with how to do ministry under the current conditions. Though, it is interesting to note that prior to the pandemic, many ministries that were under leveraging online tools and social media were either only or mainly doing ministry in-person. This situation may have been reflective of an underlying resistance to doing ministry in an online format, which may still currently exist within some Christian communities. Alternatively, perhaps other challenges made it difficult to migrate to online ministry. There is a myriad of potential reasons some may resist online ministry.

Though some may not think of it this way, or it may make them feel uncomfortable with the idea because it sounds secular or seems similar to the terminology used for non-church entities, the church is an organization. It is an organized entity with a mission. Furthermore, the lead person at each local church ministry is usually a pastor. So, as it is commonly understood, an organization can only go as far as the one leading it. It is with that in mind that Wise places

the onus on ministry leaders to adapt to the reality of using social media and online tools for ministry. He says that it is essential to adapt for the church to maintain influence, which will aid in its survival, and it will also set up the emerging generation in the church for success.\footnote{Wise, 34, 81.}

A common criticism that Estes, Gould, and Campbell commented on was that many ministry leaders and scholars seem to believe that online ministry or online church is not authentic; it is not real.\footnote{Estes, 35-36.} \footnote{Gould, 5.} \footnote{Campbell, 50.} Part of this is the belief by the critics that the communities online are merely pseudo-communities and that individuals are not really present.\footnote{Ibid.} Lowe and Lowe likewise state, though they are referring to theological education, that most criticism is toward the “supposed inferior status of mediated presence compared to the assumed influence of embodied presence made possible only when persons physically gather with one another.”\footnote{Lowe and Lowe, 72.} This thought seems to parallel the issue of presence in online ministry. Perhaps part of the reason for the preference and strong defense for embodied presence over remote presence is because people are embodied souls and, it is natural to commune in person with others. However, Hutchings comments that a congregant’s body is fully integrated into the online community in more ways than one, such as through video and audio.\footnote{Hutchings, 221.} Regardless, as Lowe and Lowe state, contrary to what some critics say about online engagement, that people somehow leave their minds, bodies, and emotions behind when they enter the online world, “The individual is very much interacting with the medium of technology through the use of the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual
Thus, despite one’s presence being mediated through technological means, they are still very much present and fully engaged. As Estes, Wise, Lowe and Lowe, Campbell, and Cartwright et al. note, the apostle Paul, 2,000 years ago, was using the latest technology, letters, to be remotely and actively present with each of the church ministries he was involved with. Kim does not address this phenomenon when he seems to argue that real social presence cannot be achieved unless people are meeting in person. He does this by equating the digital age with mainly the ability to increase communication, then contrasting it with the thinking that analog offers real presence through communing, which by implication, he appears to be saying that real social presence is not achievable in an online format. He goes on to say that the digital age, specifically social media, causes individuals to become impatient, shallow, and isolated. Gorrell, a proponent of online ministry, says that this is a commonly employed argument by critics against the utilization of social media. Though, in the end, Kim, while he appears to attempt to steer the universal church’s approach to doing ministry back more to offline, and the book’s main tenor is thus, he concedes the reality and need for the existence of some online ministry.

Another potential objection that some people may raise to online ministry or online spiritual communities is the admonishment in Hebrews 10:25 of not forsaking the gathering of

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44 Lowe and Lowe, 107.
45 Estes, 46.
46 Wise, 111.
47 Lowe and Lowe, 75, 110.
48 Campbell, 70.
50 Ibid., 16-21.
51 Gorrell, 41.
52 Kim, 97.
believers, as they may understand gathering to require physical presence.\textsuperscript{53} This criticism associated with the interpretation of Hebrews 10:25 is something that Campbell noted. However, Estes states that this pericope is not about falling away from the faith or maintaining meetings in the traditional sense, that being in person, but rather about staying united.\textsuperscript{54} So, for some individuals, their resistance to online ministry might be rooted in their interpretation of particular pericopes from Scripture.

Lowe and Lowe note a potential criticism for why some people may resist online ministry, thinking that online communities may not assist an individual in being formed or developed in a positive manner.\textsuperscript{55} However, as Lowe and Lowe state, this same thinking can be applied to offline communities.\textsuperscript{56} Not all in-person communities aid in the positive formation and development of individuals. These same individuals may also just believe that negative things happen in the online landscape, such as creating false online personas, as Cartwright et al. and Towns and Mullins remark.\textsuperscript{57}

As Smith and Craig suggest, another possible objection is that some individuals may see online ministry or online churches as a threat to the “real” offline church because they believe ministry should happen in the church building.\textsuperscript{58,59} Gould similarly agrees with Smith and Craig’s inclusion of this possible objection and offers further details for why some may think in

\textsuperscript{53}Campbell, 70.
\textsuperscript{54}Estes, 45.
\textsuperscript{55}Lowe and Lowe, 79.
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57}Cartwright et al., \textit{Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education} (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 55; Towns and Mullins, Chap. 9, loc. 3161.
\textsuperscript{58}Smith, 19-20.
\textsuperscript{59}Angela Lynne Craig, \textit{Online Jesus: A Guide to Community, Discipleship, and Care Online} (Independently Published, 2020), 14.
this manner. She says those that adhere to this argument see the online church as detracting from in-person worship at the church building, which in turn will potentially diminish the “attendance and participation.”

Resistance may also be based on more pragmatic reasons. Concerning the most common reasons for some people not using social media, Crawford says it could be that they are not familiar with it, they are scared that they will lose control, they are afraid of what people may potentially say, and they are worried either about being misunderstood or receiving unpleasant responses in their online conversations.

One final impediment to the migration of ministry to an online format should be mentioned. Though the previous observations have covered the most common objections, there may be one or two more pragmatic reasons for why some ministries encounter difficulty migrating their ministries online. Arthur and Rensleigh cite the reality that some ministries may not have the finances needed to acquire the necessary resources, and in other cases, it may be that there are church ministries that simply do not know how to navigate the new landscape. They lack knowledge and experience.

In the end, considering the information from the literature, perhaps the greatest reason for resistance by many to migrate ministry to an online format may not ultimately be because of finances or equipment. It may be more because of tradition; people generally love the easiest and most familiar. However, some may just need more knowledge and experience. Some ministries may need help from those that are knowledgeable. However, it could be one’s theological

60 Gould, 5.
construct on the issue which informs their ministry philosophy that may cause them to resist migrating ministry online. In this case, many of the sources presented theological reasoning for conducting online ministry.

Theological Foundation for Online Ministry

Many of the sources surveyed for the Review of Literature discussed the theological rationale for engaging online ministry. While some delved deeper and explicated more thoroughly than others, almost all of them demonstrated a belief that it was essential for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Most of the sources cited one or two pericopes that they adduced as their primary argument for biblical support of online ministry. Estes provides the most comprehensive theological argument out of all the sources, as he bases his theological rationale on the understanding of *ekklesia* and various pericopes.

After some deliberation as to what constitutes the *ekklesia*, Estes says that the church should be considered, not in a material sense, a building, but rather immaterial, and that the church is a “localized assembly of the people of God dwelling in meaningful community with the task of building the kingdom.” Furthermore, in his argument for online ministry, or as he calls it, “virtual church,” he adduces Matthew 18:20, John 4, and Acts 2 to demonstrate that Christ is with His followers in a metaphysical sense, worship of God is not restricted to a geographical location, and that *koinonia*, intimate community, occurs within online spiritual communities. Gould also mentioned Matthew 18:20, which demonstrates the metaphysical presence of God with His followers regardless of geography.

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63Estes, 37.
64Ibid., 41-43.
Towns and Mullins, Lazurus, Craig, and Bourgeois discussed the need for the promulgation of the gospel, with some of them referencing the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. Lazurus, referring to the Great Commission, believes that social media is the means through which the current generation can better fulfill it and that social media may be the vehicle through which the present iteration of the church may do greater things than Jesus did while He was on earth.

Perhaps the most interesting theological justification for online ministry, though Cartwright et al. used it for online theological education, is that God has always revealed Himself in an adaptive, accommodating manner that has utilized signs and symbols. Thus, through extrapolation, it would conform to God’s character for Him to embrace online ministry because digital landscapes, such as social media, which according to Cartwright et al., employ various media, is used for communication.

Though it is not necessarily an argument for online ministry, nonetheless, it is applicable. Erickson does address the necessity for the church not to cling to tradition and antiquated methods, but rather to be adaptive to the present culture in which it is embedded. He says as the church adapts to the present conditions in its milieu, it will be imitating what the Lord Jesus did

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66Towns and Mullins, Intro, loc. 50, 60, 69.
68Craig, 11.
70Lazurus, 65, 83.
71John 14:12.
72Cartwright et al., 62.
73Ibid.
when He came to earth to redeem humanity. Though, he continues, while the church is adapting, it will “preserve the basic message with which it has been entrusted and continue to fulfill the major functions of its task, but will make legitimate changes necessary to carry out its Lord’s purpose.”

After considering the theological justifications for engaging online ministry, perhaps Gorrell says it best, “God is with us during our engagement with new media just as God is with us when we engage in physical spaces and activities and use other tools.... [I]ncredible, meaningful things can happen as people use new media - because of God’s guidance, love, and active presence in our new media landscape.” This concept appears to parallel what Campbell and Garner say about God being present in both physical places and non-physical places; He is present in both physical human interactions and in the digital realm. In sum, the sources indicate that it conforms with the character of God to use any means available to communicate with people. However, the gospel message must not be altered as ministries adapt to new methods and vehicles of communication, whether physical or digital, to disseminate it.

Online Community and Spiritual Formation

The overwhelming impression from the sources surveyed is that in the modern digital world, God is online. Therefore, for a ministry to follow the lead of God online, it will require replicating community. The replication of community is vital to achieve because it is within a community that a Christian will achieve greater spiritual formation than attempting it alone.

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75Erickson, 987.
76Ibid., 987-988.
77Gorrell, 12.
78Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner, Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 92.
Bolsinger, Putman and Harrington, and Comiskey concur as they all indicate that a community assists with personal transformation and spiritual maturation.\textsuperscript{79,80,81}

Regarding the relationship between online and offline communities, Campbell observes that, traditionally, community happened around physical gatherings or events where people bonded. However, Campbell says that the same affective component in offline communities is potentially very much a reality in online communities.\textsuperscript{82} Estes agrees and says that some individuals have even experienced a greater sense of community in their online church than in their offline ones.\textsuperscript{83} He indicates that if people are emotionally, mentally, and spiritually engaged in the same online space as others, then they are present, and there is the possibility of having an authentic online church.\textsuperscript{84} The psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of people within an online community that Estes mentions coalesce with Lehman and Conceiç\'ao’s elements of online presence, though they add the social aspect. Concerning the social aspect of presence, the authors state that it involves each of the individuals perceiving others as “real people,” responding, communicating, and interacting with each other.\textsuperscript{85} These actions facilitate a sense of understanding and validate both the group and the individual’s existence.\textsuperscript{86} Where these actions


\textsuperscript{80}Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, \textit{Discipleshift: Five Steps that help your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 184.

\textsuperscript{81}Joel Comiskey, \textit{The Church that Multiplies: Growing a Healthy Cell Church in North America} (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2008), 73-77.

\textsuperscript{82}Clark Campbell, \textit{Trending Up: Social Media Strategies for Today's Church}, ed. Mark Forrester (Springfield, MS: Salubris Resources, 2017), 82.

\textsuperscript{83}Estes, 59.

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., 65.


\textsuperscript{86}Ibid.
occur, which contributes to social presence, is in online environments or spaces. Moreover, that space online that ministry can happen in is on social media, according to Siwajian, who is a digital engagement and communication liaison for The Foursquare Church.87

Concerning the formation of these online communities, Lowe and Lowe say that the process is the same as that of offline ones.88 The formation of the communities occurs because of the individuals within the nascent community. As Howard notes, in a discussion on the need for remuneration, influence, belonging, and significance for developing long-term online communities, it is essential for community members to have a sense of belonging.89 Lowe and Lowe also indicate that each of the individuals in the group must be fully present and give the same amount of effort and attention to their online community as they would with an offline one to facilitate the formation process; there must be reciprocity in the relationships.90 Regarding self-disclosure, as it correlates with reciprocity in relationships, Millington, who operates an online community consultancy website used by major corporations, states that self-disclosure online, over time through discussions that increasingly progress to more personal issues, is how relationships develop online.91 While he discusses self-disclosure as a tactic to influence one’s community better, self-disclosure, as previously mentioned, is a necessary component for facilitating a sense of social presence and belonging in a community. It is social presence, as it appears to be a composite of reciprocity in relationships and self-disclosure, that helps develop a

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88 Lowe and Lowe, 33.
89 Tharon W. Howard, *Design to Thrive: Creating Social Networks and Online Communities that Last* (Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann Publisher, 2010), 7-8, 30.
90 Lowe and Lowe, 84.
sense of belonging, and a sense of belonging aids in the formation of an online community. However, as Campbell indicates, how much each individual feels that they are a part of the online community is entirely dependent on their level of participation in the community. Online relationships are “real” even though they are mediated through online platforms because they are real social interactions.

There are indicators that reveal when an online faith community is forming. Gould says they are when the conversations become deeper, and when participants invite newcomers, welcome and provide them orientation, protect and support the community from those that attempt to undermine community engagement, continue conversations across various social media platforms, “use the community’s hashtags to offer resources and counsel,” and engage in self-disclosure. In a sense, the underlying theme of each of the factors that contribute to the formation of an online community is communication. In his work on leadership and tribes, Godin mentions the necessity and effectiveness of utilizing online tools to facilitate and amplify communication in the community. To illustrate the power of tighter communication through the usage of online tools, he says it increases the speed, emotion, coordination, decisions, and shared ideas, and allows for everyone in the community to be connected. This tighter communication through the utilization of online tools allows for the opportunity to form, expand, and galvanize online spiritual communities.

Many of the sources surveyed indicate that once an online spiritual community is formed, the participants’ spiritual formation is possible. Similarly, multiple sources in the literature

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92Campbell, 49.
93Ibid.
94Gould, 34.
review discussed the reality of spiritual formation on digital platforms. Regarding discipleship,
Estes states that those working in online ministry confirm that people online will ask difficult
questions more freely than one may typically encounter offline. This phenomenon is due to the
relaxation of inhibition, which may better facilitate discipleship than in the offline world.96 He
notes that pastors or any ministry leaders conducting online ministry can just as easily
incorporate spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, fasting, confession, and solitude, as offline
pastors can in their offline churches.97

Care can happen and does happen through online platforms, as Towns and Mullins,
Chiluwa, and Craig state. This concept is essential to note as providing care to one another is
ministering to one another, and this aids in the spiritual formation of those involved. Towns and
Mullins say that people in online churches extend the same care and kindness that they do in
person.98 This understanding echoes what Mullins illustrated in his doctoral thesis when he
relayed a story that demonstrated how care between members from an online community that
began online traversed from that platform and into the physical world.99 Similarly, Chiluwa cites
the reality of online churches in Nigeria providing for their worshippers’ spiritual and material
needs, which primarily seems to be through a cell group infrastructure in which the church
leadership requires their members to be involved.100 Craig, in her 14,000 members’ online
church community, actively facilitates the care of those members by utilizing individuals that she

96Estes, 93.
97Ibid., 113.
98Towns and Mullins, Chap. 9, loc. 3152.
100Innocent Chiluwa, “Online Religion in Nigeria: The Internet Church and Cyber Miracles,” Journal of
Asian and African Studies 47, no. 6 (December 2012): 736, 746.
refers to as “encouragers” to assist in helping, celebrating with, praying with, encouraging, and directly communicating regularly with individuals from within the community assigned to them.\textsuperscript{101}

Though care can and does happen within online spiritual communities, spiritual formation is not accidental; it must be intentional. Regarding this, some of the authors, which discussed online theological education, provide some insight. The sources were consulted due to their parallel with online spiritual formation as they were concerned with the student’s academic development and their spiritual formation. Towns and Mullins also observe the connection between discipleship in online ministry and Christian educational institutions because online tools enable the student to engage the teacher and their peers, which ensures that community and spiritual formation are fostered.\textsuperscript{102}

Cartwright et al. state that there is a need in an online format to move beyond mere information transfer and toward the spiritual formation of the student.\textsuperscript{103} However, as they say, the spiritual formation must be intentional, it needs to be stated as a goal, and the moderator needs to model formation and vulnerability to their students through their communications with them.\textsuperscript{104} Lowe and Lowe similarly emphasize the need for intentionality, along with reflection and engagement, to ensure that spiritual formation is happening.\textsuperscript{105}

As the spiritual formation of online community participants must be intentional for it to occur, some sources addressed more specific methods for facilitating this. In his argument for

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\textsuperscript{101}Craig, 9, 61.
\textsuperscript{102}Towns and Mullins, Chap. 9, loc. 3033.
\textsuperscript{103}Cartwright et al., 99.
\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{105}Lowe and Lowe, 85.
using social media for ministry, Lazurus says that church material should be made available online so that a church’s congregants can access it continually and at any time to aid in the facilitation of their spiritual formation.\textsuperscript{106} To facilitate discipleship, Craig suggests using micro-moments, which means packaging teaching into small bite-sized portions for the user’s consumption.\textsuperscript{107} Arruda concurs with this method of disseminating content because it requires less of a time commitment.\textsuperscript{108} Craig states that this method of packaging teaching into bite-sized pieces increases the retention of information and captures the attention of the user.\textsuperscript{109} Also, as previously mentioned by Estes, the facilitation of spiritual disciplines through an online mediated platform, such as fasting, solitude, and Bible study, by a ministry leader or moderator,\textsuperscript{110} is an essential component in the spiritual formation of an individual as well.

Despite the overwhelming evidence from researchers and active online ministers, there are still some that may deny that authentic community and spiritual formation can occur online. Kim does this by elevating the analog church over the online church by asserting that without analog [offline] church, which he equates with a real community, “discipleship to Jesus just isn’t possible.”\textsuperscript{111} Unfortunately, his unsubstantiated claim is not supported by the sources in the review of the literature.

\textsuperscript{106}Lazurus, 70-73.
\textsuperscript{107}Craig, 47.
\textsuperscript{109}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110}Estes, 113.
\textsuperscript{111}Kim, 21.
Having a community with the intention of facilitating spiritual formation and engagement of its participants and the promulgation of the gospel is not enough. There must be a strategy to ensure that the aforementioned happens. Fortunately, some of the sources discussed specific concepts, methods, and techniques for the creation and amplification of online ministry.

Because online spiritual communities and ministries exist in the digital world, they inhabit social media platforms and utilize online tools. Surveying some active online minsters revealed that Pierce uses Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, and a website; Craig leverages Facebook and also suggests Zoom and the Bible app, while Smith ministers through a website and suggests Facebook. However, the literature indicates the need for each local ministry to assess their own needs based on their situation and select social media and online tools that best fit. A ministry’s appropriate selection of social media and online tools, according to Gould, requires strategic thinking and planning. Though, according to Arruda, the CEO of Reach, a personal branding company used by major corporations, leveraging the medium of video in whatever platform or tool that a ministry selects should be strongly considered because the main way people prefer to consume information is through video, not text.

Before a ministry begins the process of strategically assessing and implementing a social media strategy, Wise says that it is essential to have what he calls a Big Idea, a clearly articulated vision, because it is essential for formulating an effective social media strategy. He believes

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112Pierce, 17, 19, 23.
113Craig, 34.
114Smith, 3.
115Gould, 39.
116Arruda, 138-139.
117Wise, 136-140.
that any kind of online strategy, whether it be for a website, social media, or content marketing, will be ineffective without a clearly articulated vision. Bourgeois similarly stresses the importance of a clear vision prior to developing a digital strategy. Though Williams does not have ministry contexts in view, he also stresses the importance of having a big vision because he believes people respond well to them.

Beyond a ministry needing a clearly articulated vision, Bourgeois, Pierce, and Gould discussed the necessity of understanding the intended target audience. Bourgeois simply says that for a ministry to go where the people are, it needs to know where the people are. Pierce similarly says that if a ministry is going to be reaching the unchurched, it needs to know whom it is already reaching. Out of the three sources, Gould said the most on the issue of knowing the intended audience. She says it is essential to know when and where the intended audience is online. Without a ministry knowing very specifically who the primary and secondary audience is, it may cause undesirable consequences that will require the mercy of the Lord.

When thinking about an audience for an online spiritual community, this implies the need for recruiting individuals into the community. Some authors discuss methods for attracting new members and enhancing the significance of a community. Howard says that sharing a vision through a story, listing members’ accomplishments, participation in other influential online communities, use a custom space to build an online community, connect with leaders on social

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118Wise, 140.
119Bourgeois, 42.
121Bourgeois, 25.
122Pierce, 27.
123Gould, 44.
124Ibid., 48, 68.
media, celebrate celebrities, create video, game, a contest, and mobilize the community’s existing members, increases the significance of the community.\textsuperscript{125} Another method for creating or maintaining community significance is by utilizing the phenomenon of exclusivity. Howard highlights the fact that people want to feel like they are part of an exclusive community.\textsuperscript{126} Retrofitted to an online ministry context, this may be realized as requiring prospective members to read and agree with the online community’s statement of beliefs when they create a member account on the ministry website. It is interesting to note that by creating at least the appearance of exclusivity, as the aforementioned tactic corresponds with the simultaneous inclusiveness and exclusiveness of Christianity represented by welcoming all into the body of Christ with the condition that newcomers have a relationship with Jesus and accept and adhere to the fundamental tenets of the faith, it may accelerate the popularity and growth of the community.\textsuperscript{127}

In a discussion on how an online community can achieve critical mass, the point at which the community takes on a life of its own, Kraut et al. advocate for leveraging early members to improve the quality of the community and recruit more members.\textsuperscript{128} This strategy seems equally applicable to leveraging current members in an already existing community. Regarding ways to leverage early members in a community, the authors suggest having them create content through mediums such as video, blog posts, documents, and audio, and having them recruit new members from their social networks.\textsuperscript{129} Skrob, in discussing the most important step in the process of

\textsuperscript{125} Howard, 187-194.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 168-169.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 170-171.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 186-187, 250.
onboarding new members, echos the concept of content creation by members when he says that they should be invited to post their work in the community as it creates vibrancy and loyalty.\footnote{Robert Skrob, \textit{Retention Point: The Single Biggest Secret to Membership and Subscription Growth} (Tallahassee, FL: Membership Services, Inc., 2018), 110.}

Leveraging early or current members’ social networks involves utilizing the phenomenon of “six degrees of separation.” For community managers, designers, and facilitators, as Howard and Millington stress, it is beneficial to be connected with influential members within the community because they amplify the community’s significance and interconnectedness, and based on the circumstantial evidence, also seem to catalyze or mobilize the community.\footnote{Howard, 175.}\footnote{Millington, 144.} These benefits occur due to the hubs, or influential members, shortening the number of connections or links from six to approximately three.\footnote{Howard, 175.} The aforementioned consideration on how a community could be networked provides more connectivity and quicker dissemination of memes throughout the social network.\footnote{Ibid.} The next consideration after recruiting or attracting new members is the management and facilitation of the online community.

Once the online ministry is engaging an audience, the sources indicate that there are particular behaviors and habits that the online ministry leaders and facilitators need to employ to amplify online ministry engagement among the participants. In dealing with practical issues, Campbell mentions the necessity to make a friend request, comment on participants’ replies, and follow them.\footnote{Campbell, \textit{Trending Up}, 83-84.} Crawford likewise says that it is essential to respond and reply to followers and subscribers, be authentic by sharing on a personal level, and share the love by at least retweeting
a positive post by a follower or subscriber. As the online ministry grows, he says that even though it may not be possible to respond on a personal level, it is possible to do at least something like retweeting the follower when appropriate. Also, Craig discusses multiple items for the facilitation and amplification of online ministry engagement. Some of them are: utilizing Facebook or Zoom for small groups, having a care team that directly engages individuals online, holding off on judging people based on what one thinks that person should be, welcoming people online, asking good questions, and use active listening.

In the end, however, even after a ministry spends the time formulating a clearly articulated vision, solidly identifying the intended target audience, recruiting, and harmoniously integrating the vision throughout their entire social media strategy, Smith suggests not chiding individuals that prefer to be on the fringes of the community to engage more than they want; instead, it is better to identify those that may already want to be more active members. Doing the aforementioned and continuing to move those members that desire to be more active from the audience to the core is recommended.

After analyzing the literature sources, it is apparent that though they cover many aspects of online ministry and consider many themes, they seemed to fail to consider others adequately. One apparent gap in the literature is that though some ministries may be open to migrating ministry online, they may not be knowledgeable on the subject and lack experience. Thus, meaning they may need outside assistance from those that are knowledgeable. Out of all the sources, only one mentioned this. Another potential gap in the data that only one source

136Crawford, 142-143.
137Ibid., 143.
138Craig, 26-38.
139Smith, 99.
discussed was disability and sociological/psychological reasons for why some individuals may not attend a physical church, thus preferring and searching for online ministry options instead.

While the literature demonstrates a clear need and urgency for ministries to migrate to online platforms, one’s theological beliefs, which inform their ministry philosophy, need to be considered. To embrace online ministry and actively and aggressively pursue it, one needs to believe that it is biblical.

**Theological Foundations**

Because the Holy Scriptures are from antiquity, no apparent correlation or statement will be discovered that demonstrates a direct connection with modern technology such as the internet or online tools. Furthermore, no pericopes will be discovered, showing the mediation of an individual with a community that is remote to that person through modern technology. However, there are various pericopes that address principles and concepts that are transferrable across the millennia and are applicable in modernity concerning online ministry. Perhaps the most relevant and applicable pericopes from Scripture that demonstrate concepts or principles that are transferrable to the discussion of online ministry are those related to Paul in 1 Corinthians and Colossians and others found in Matthew and John. These deal with how God’s presence is among His believers, His omnipresence, Him dwelling within Christians, and Paul’s mediated presence. Furthermore, a discussion of Paul and Jesus’ adaptability, letters as an ancient form of communication utilized for ministerial purposes and an understanding of what the church is, how it functions, and its localization should be discussed when considering online ministry.

Jesus communicates a profound truth about God’s nature and how He interacts with humankind in Matthew 18:19-20 and John 4:21-24. In Matthew 18:19-20, Jesus says, “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for
them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Though Matthew 18:20 is related to church discipline, Turner comments that the presence of God, more specifically, the presence of Jesus, is with those gathered in His name.\textsuperscript{140} The main point in the verses is that Jesus is present with His disciples in a metaphysical sense. They cannot see Him and interact with Him the way a physical person can with another physical person. Nonetheless, Jesus is really present, and He and the individuals are communing, the metaphysical or spiritual, with the physical. The communing appears mediated through the \textit{Paraclete}.\textsuperscript{141} This conception of God’s non-confinement to one locale is further revealed in John 4:21-24. After stating to the Samaritan woman that a time is coming when the Father will not be worshipped on the mountain or in Jerusalem, He says, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” In referring to the terms “spirit” and “truth,” Kostenberger says, “Though this may have been too advanced for the Samaritan woman, the present reference, therefore, seems to point John’s readers ultimately to worship in the Holy Spirit. Thus, true worship is not a matter of geographical location….”\textsuperscript{142} Kruse concurs when he says that the worship of God is not localized to a specific location and that, while churches, holy sites, and cities may amplify the reality of our beliefs, one needs to remember the teaching of Jesus about the non-localized


\textsuperscript{141}Andreas J. Kostenberger and Scott R. Swain, \textit{Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 146, 154.

worship of God. Likewise, Blum mentions God’s invisible nature and says that He is not limited or confined to one locale. Considering the aforementioned discussion, evidently, in both pericopes, the conception of God being spirit and, consequently, that communion between Him and His adherents is mediated through the Holy Spirit, physical location is irrelevant.

In addition to the statements by Jesus and John about God being spirit, that communion happens in the spirit, and that geography is inconsequential for this to occur, Paul adds to this theme in 1 Corinthians 10:16 by saying, “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” Paul is intimating that though Christ is not physically present, believers are still experiencing fellowship or koinonia with Him.

While all the previous pericopes demonstrate the omnipresence of God in the sense that He is present among His believers, Jesus states in John 14:17 and John 14:23 that God the Holy Spirit comes to live in each individual that receives Christ as their Savior. The latter half of John 14:17 says, “But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” The Greek word ἐν (en) would be understood in English as the preposition “in.” In the context of John 14:17, this term refers to “inside” or “within” the believer. This understanding means that the Spirit of God resides within the believer. John 14:23, in the second part of the verse, Jesus states, “My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” While Jesus does not use terms that overtly state the location of where He and His Father’s home will be, it is

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146 Ibid.
implied that it is inside the Christian. The term μονὴ (monēn), within the context of the verse, means a dwelling place or residence.\textsuperscript{147} Therefore, Jesus and the Father will reside or dwell within the believer.

Kostenberger, discussing John 14:22-24, says that John 14:23 is “the only place in the NT where the Father and the Son are both said to indwell believers.”\textsuperscript{148} Likewise, regarding the pericope, Blum comments that the Paraclete will permanently indwell the believer.\textsuperscript{149} As Kostenberger observes and Scripture plainly states, in the Old Testament, God dwelled among His people; however, in the New Testament epoch, He dwells within believers as they are His temple. “[B]oth Jesus and the Father will come and make their home in the believer (14:23), this means that in a sense the entire triune Godhead will be present in that individual….\textsuperscript{150} He logically infers this when he says that while the Spirit and the Father remain with/in Jesus, the Father, Spirit, and Jesus remain with/in the disciples.\textsuperscript{151} This conception of God dwelling within the believer is relevant because it illustrates that though believers are apart, the same God that is present among them is simultaneously present within them. This understanding coalesces with the notion of God’s omnipresence.

Similar to God’s omnipresence, in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, specifically in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, he explains that though he is not physically present with them, he is present with them in spirit. In v. 3, Paul states, “though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit.” Likewise, in Colossians 2:5, Paul states that he is present with them in spirit even though


\textsuperscript{148}Kostenberger, John, 441.

\textsuperscript{149}Blum, 323.

\textsuperscript{150}Kostenberger, Father, Son, and Spirit, 71.

\textsuperscript{151}Ibid., 146.
he is not there in the body. Apparently, Paul understood himself to be a part of each of those communities though he was not physically present. Furthermore, he was using letters to mediate his presence in those communities. This understanding coalesces with several sources surveyed for the Review of Literature section that says Paul saw himself as part of each of these communities, used his epistles to mediate his presence in them, and that geography was not a limitation to him participating.\textsuperscript{152,153,154,155,156}

The letter in ancient times was a very effective form of communication. The pericopes that mention Paul using letters or intimating that he did are numerous, with Galatians 6:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:17 showing Paul himself is writing. He routinely used letters to communicate with the communities that he planted and oversaw.\textsuperscript{157,158} Moreover, about half of the New Testament’s canon was written by Paul. The Pauline corpus is entirely comprised of letters, namely Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. Also, most of Paul’s letters were written between 18-19 years after the death of Jesus, and they show his emotions and feelings.\textsuperscript{159}

It may be easy for the modern reader to miss the significance of Paul using the letter as a form of communication. In discussing Paul’s letters, Gray indicates that certain communication mediums are appropriate for different types of content and that more serious conversations are

\textsuperscript{152}Estes, 46.
\textsuperscript{153}Wise, 111.
\textsuperscript{154}Lowe and Lowe, 110.
\textsuperscript{155}Campbell, Exploring Religious Meaning Online, 70.
\textsuperscript{156}Cartwright et al., 47, 103.
\textsuperscript{157}1 Corinthians 16:3.
\textsuperscript{158}2 Corinthians 10:9-10.
\textsuperscript{159}F.F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 16.
better suited to be discussed in forums that allow for more writing.\textsuperscript{160} The implication is that since Paul was often writing for theological purposes and about moral behavior, the letter was a suitable communication medium.

However, though Paul used letters does not mean that everyone was using them or to the extent that he was. Even in the best conditions of the ancient world, the literacy rate was well below 50 percent.\textsuperscript{161} This, along with the expense of writing materials, means that an \textit{amauensis} was needed by many individuals for writing, and though Paul was capable of writing himself, he also utilized these individuals for his letter writing.\textsuperscript{162,163,164} It is also notable that Paul’s letters were much longer than contemporary models, with Paul’s letters ranging from 335 words (Philemon) to 7,114 words (Romans) with an average of 1,300, compared with Cicero, a Roman writer, whose letters ranged from 22 to 2,530 words.\textsuperscript{165} It appears that Paul was a prolific writer of his time.

Carson and Moo state, “[T]he letter was not a typical method of religious instruction among Jews.”\textsuperscript{166} This is important to mention because Paul, like the other New Testament authors, seemed to have broken from traditional Jewish methods and selected the use of letters due to the rapid expansion of Christianity and itinerant missionary work.\textsuperscript{167} Thus, Paul adapted to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bruce, 16.
\item Romans 16:22 shows that Tertius, a scribe, wrote the letter to the Romans for Paul.
\item Lea and Black, 334.
\item D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, \textit{An Introduction to the New Testament} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 331, 334.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
a mode of communication that better suited the environmental conditions of the time, which allowed for communication at a distance.\textsuperscript{168} Carson and Moo, regarding why the apostles elected to use letters to convey their teachings, say, “The apostles… communicated their teaching in letters because it was convenient and necessary…”\textsuperscript{169} Furthermore, the letter was understood in Paul’s epoch as a means of mediating a personal presence from afar, which coalesced with the apostle’s need for pastoring his flock from a distance.\textsuperscript{170} This thinking corresponds with the discussion previously in this section on Paul’s understanding that he was mediating his presence from a distance through his letters to each community. Additionally, scripture shows the apostles utilizing letters for either establishing or maintaining their presence remotely. Acts 15:23 demonstrates how the apostolic council was mediating their presence from afar, and James 1:1 shows James, the half-brother of Jesus, either establishing or maintaining a presence with Jews of the diaspora.

Paul using the letter as a form of communication proved to be very effective and suitable for the purposes it needed to serve. The apostle produced a significant amount of content in a mode of communication that was highly effective for preservation, transmission over a distance, allowed for him to mediate his presence in communities remote from him for the sake of maintaining fellowship and pastoral care, to show his feelings and emotions, and to instruct on theology and morality. Based on the considerations, it seems the apostle Paul would be utilizing social media and other online tools and platforms extensively in modernity as they represent the best current forms of communication for proclaiming the gospel and unifying believers geographically remote from one another. Moreover, modern ministries adapting to current modes

\textsuperscript{168} Carson and Moo, 331.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
of communication by migrating to online platforms and social media will be emulating what the apostles did when they utilized letters for communication in the first century.

A final and highly relevant pericope, 1 Corinthians 9:22, should be mentioned because it demonstrates Paul’s mindset on his efforts to reach the unsaved with the gospel. Paul states, “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” Schreiner says Paul’s inconsistent lifestyle was due to his willingness to be flexible and adapt so that he might bring as many people as possible to Christ, as long as it did not contradict God’s law.171 Thus, Paul is demonstrating flexibility and adaptability. On the characteristic of adaptability, as Erickson observes, Christ also did not hesitate to come to earth, take on the conditions of the human race, and redeem humanity.172 Philippians 2:5-8, and especially v. 7, which says “he [Christ] made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness,” highlights this. One may not traditionally think of the incarnation of Christ as Him adapting. Nonetheless, it is implied since He left His heavenly abode with all of its accompaniments and came to earth to live as a human man. Moving locationally and changing materially from a divine state of being to being poured into a human form, going from incorporeal to corporeal with its accompanying limitations, reflects the ultimate adaptation.

After examining the aforementioned pericopes and concepts, it is essential to consider the biblical understanding of the church. How some understand the nature of the church may lead them to either deny the possibility of an online church or the migration of ministry online, reluctantly acquiesce to the existence and practice of online ministry, or allow for the active

172 Erickson, 987.
pursuit of online ministry. Though before delving into a discussion about the nature of the church, it should be noted that the term “church” is translated from the Greek term *ekklēsia* (call out) and usually means “an assembly” (Heb. *qāhāl*), thus denoting that the church is an assembly of called-out ones or an assembly of Christians.\(^{173}\)\(^{174}\) Thus, in a sense, the following discussion is about the nature of the assembly of the called-out ones.

Concerning the nature of the church, Millard J. Erickson says much about it. He examines what the biblical church is through the images Paul uses. These images are the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Concerning the people of God, Erickson states, the church is comprised of God’s people.\(^{175}\) Perhaps the most important image of the church is the body of Christ, which Paul mentions in Romans 7:4, Romans 12:5, and 1 Corinthians 6:15, 10:16, 11:29, 12:12, 12:27. The pericopes stress the reality that each believer is a part of the body of Christ, with 1 Corinthians 12:27 explicitly stating it in unequivocal terms, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” Erickson states that the image of the body of Christ encompasses both the universal church and the local churches, connection of believers as the church with Christ, Christ as the head of the church, and because each person is bestowed with particular gifts, each member mutually needs the other.\(^{176}\) Furthermore, he says each believer encourages others, there is a fellowship among current


\(^{175}\)Erickson, 958.

\(^{176}\)Ibid., 959-961.
believers and with other believers that transcends space and time, the church is a unified body, there are no social or ethnic barriers, and “the church is the extension of Jesus’ ministry.”\textsuperscript{177}

The final image that Paul uses for the church, according to Erickson, is that it is the temple of the \textit{Paraclete}.\textsuperscript{178} This understanding is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 states that the Holy Spirit dwells within individuals and collectively in the church, while 6:19 states the He indwells each individual. He indwells the church collectively and individually and imparts life to it, which is the fruit of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{179} Furthermore, He produces unity in purpose and action, He produces a sensitivity in the church to follow Christ’s leading and to recall His teachings, and finally, the \textit{Paraclete} makes the church pure and holy.\textsuperscript{180}

A discussion on the biblical church should also mention how it functions in multiple ways. The titles, order, and the number of the church’s functions may vary from one place to another, though in general, there seems to be at least four or five that each church should be performing to be a fully functioning biblical church. Erickson lists evangelism, edification, worship, and social concern.\textsuperscript{181} Warren refers to outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service as the church’s functions, which he calls purposes.\textsuperscript{182} These functions are in accord with Acts 2:42-47, which highlights how the early church functioned. The pericope illustrates the early believers worshiping, fellowshipping, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, serving one another, praying, spiritual formation through teaching [devoted to apostles’ teaching]. As mentioned in

\textsuperscript{177}Erickson, 959-961.
\textsuperscript{178}Ibid., 962.
\textsuperscript{179}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180}Ibid., 963.
\textsuperscript{181}Ibid., 972-979.
the Review of Literature, many if not all of these functions can be done with an online church or a church’s online ministry.

Regarding the localization of the church, it should not be thought of as or equated with primarily a physical locale, despite this being the popular contemporary notion. Though the conception of the church does encompass a physical locale, it also transcends this understanding as the church is knitted together with believers without regard to geographical consideration. Among other verses, Scripture demonstrates this understanding through the combined consideration of Romans 6:15 (the church meets in a home), Galatians 1:2 (churches in Galatia), 1 Corinthians 1:2 (the singular universal church [church of God] meeting in Corinth). Clouse says that the local church exists as a whole wherever it meets geographically, and the universal church is represented by each of its local manifestations. Erickson concurs with this understanding, “The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place.” This concept seems to parallel God’s omnipresence as He is perfectly complete at any given individual point in space-time and simultaneously present everywhere throughout reality in His entirety. It would appear, analogically speaking, that the church is like a living nebulous cloud that is comprised of a vast multitude of individual pieces (people), with some pieces networked together (local churches), superimposed over the entirety of the earth. If this understanding of the nature of the church is correct, as the sources indicate, then it allows for churches to migrate their ministries to online platforms as these tools can amplify the networking of the saints and augment and amplify the scope of evangelistic efforts.

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184 Erickson, 956.
The aforementioned means that, as Geise says, churches need to be more receptive to conducting online ministry as they get back into in-person ministry, as online ministry can help the church with mission and evangelism, and in general.\textsuperscript{185}

Scripture illustrates the need for adaptability as well as the utilization of the most effective form of communication for expediting the dissemination of the gospel. Furthermore, as some of the previous pericopes illustrated, authentic \textit{koinonia} can occur regardless of geography. Geography does not need to be seen as a barrier, and \textit{koinonia} does not need to be limited to only those within physical proximity to one another. God is also present anywhere a Christian is located, whether they are alone or in a group. He is among Christians and within Christians. Similarly, regarding the nature of the church, it is not merely a physical location; though it encompasses this understanding, it also is non-localized. It is a cohesive whole present everywhere and is manifested in its entirety at any given locale, functioning in a multifaceted way. Additionally, though there is a theological argument for conducting online ministry, and it is advisable to engage it, the in-person ministry format will always be needed. Online ministry should not supplant in-person ministry. Instead, they should work together, with in-person ministry taking primacy, as Scripture seems to indicate in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:10-11, and Romans 1:13. Though Paul was communicating from afar with the community in each case, he desired to be with them in-person. In summation, considering the nature of the church and God’s nature, that He is present among believers and simultaneously within each believer, the example of the apostles adopting letters for communicating and caring over distance, the practice of

online ministry is not only permissible but should be actively pursued to minister to the body of Christ more effectively and to reach a lost world.

**Theoretical Foundations**

As Scripture has shown through certain principles and concepts discussed in the previous section, God interacts with His children metaphysically, and regardless of location, a person can participate in a community remotely, and the most effective form of communication was used in the New Testament for the advancement of the gospel. Therefore, it seems apparent that ministries should be utilizing online platforms as they represent the most effective modern form of communication, allowing individuals to participate in a spiritual community remotely, and because God is present there in the online community.

However, perhaps the greatest impediment to the migration of ministry to online platforms, as with many other things, is people. As the old saying goes, “If there is a will, there is a way.” If people sincerely want it to happen, they will find a way to make it happen and continue to do what needs to be done to make sure that it happens. However, sometimes people need to be convinced that what needs to happen, migrating ministry to online platforms, is necessary, and then helped to accomplish the task. One thing that should assist in convincing ministry leaders to migrate their ministry’s to online platforms is that the current global population is 7.8 billion as stated by the Population Reference Bureau, and Crawford estimates that roughly half of the world’s population is on social media, that could mean approximately 3.9 billion people are on social media. However, Statista.com, which major global corporations

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187 Crawford, 32.
use, states that there are an estimated 3.6 billion global social media users.\(^{188}\) When considering the sheer number of people on social media, there are numerous reasons to have more ministry online. Furthermore, using social media nowadays would seem analogous to the Roman road system and letters of the first century, which were the most efficient means available for travel and communication throughout the region and beyond that the early church utilized.

If a ministry leader or church is convinced that there is a need to migrate ministry online, there is assistance. Lazurus and Gould, regarding help with the migration of ministries to online platforms, out of all the sources surveyed, seemed to provide the most detailed assistance. While Gould discusses strategy, content creation and curating, and a brief survey of each of the popular social media options available, among other things, Lazurus offers a more in-depth look at how to integrate social media communications for ministry.\(^{189,190}\) These same sources, specifically Lazurus and to a lesser degree Gould, offer an organized approach to the migration of ministry online or the augmentation of ministry that is already online. However, many sources do not offer a specific systematic approach to migrating ministry online. Many of them discuss principles and things to consider when moving ministry online or augmenting it. Therefore, in general, a synthesis of various principles and concepts inform this theoretical construct. The principles gleaned from various sources in the Review of Literature were mission and vision statements, platform selection, determining the audience to be targeted, recruiting and leveraging new members, content, and facilitation and moderation of the community. After discussing the


\(^{190}\)Lazurus, 99.
aforementioned principles and how they apply, an examination of three examples of how other researchers and experts have addressed the issue of either improving online ministry or migrating ministry to online platforms will be conducted.

Though Gould and Lazurus do not discuss the need for clearly articulated mission and vision statements, other sources do.\textsuperscript{191,192,193} While a mission statement is broad, a vision statement is specific and provides focus or a specific destination for a ministry to concentrate its efforts and resources.\textsuperscript{194,195} Therefore, it would be beneficial for Sonrise to have both solidified. Regardless of the development of the two statements, it is still possible to migrate and augment the ministry online as it is currently.

If one were to accept that ministry can occur unmoored to a specific geographical location, that authentic spiritual community is attainable and individuals can access it remotely, that God, as He is omnipresent, which would also necessarily infer that He is present in online platforms where people meet, then social media platforms become the most obvious choice for the utilization of the latest communication technology for the dissemination of the gospel message and the congregating of Christians that are geographically remote to one another. Apparently, the aforementioned reasoning is why many sources consulted for this project, such as Lazurus and Gould, mentioned social media as the primary vehicle for ministry online. Thus, this project will also utilize social media for the migration and amplification of ministry online and the church’s website. As many sources suggest, the next step is to assess which social media

\textsuperscript{191}Wise, 136-140.
\textsuperscript{192}Lazurus, 87-89.
\textsuperscript{193}Bourgeois, 42.
\textsuperscript{194}Malphurs, 132.
platforms would be the best to select based on the church’s needs, what their congregants already use, and whom they are trying to reach. In the case of Sonrise Church, as mentioned before, most of the congregants seem to prefer and already use Facebook. Additionally, many of them are familiar with websites and use them. Their usage of both online platforms is beneficial as they allow for the formation of online communities.

After selecting online platforms, the sources indicate the need to determine the audience that a church will be targeting with their online ministry. In Sonrise’s case, and for the purpose of this DMin project, the initial primary audience would be the church’s congregants. However, an intended secondary audience is the general populace. Since the audience and platforms are determined, it is next essential to consider content as sources indicate.

As content provides something for individuals to interact with and communicate about with their fellow members, there must be a steady flow of it on the platforms to aid in the facilitation of the community. The content can either be created by Sonrise or curated and placed on the platforms. Regarding the content, while it can be either video, text, blog posts, and images, video is more likely to attract individuals. However, with any type of content posted to

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196 Lazurus, 95.
197 Campbell, Trending Up, 83-84.
198 Gould, 39, 44, 68.
199 Ibid., 48.
201 Lazurus, 89-92.
202 Brown, Trending Up, 42-46.
203 Lazurus, 92-94.
204 Gould, 51-54.
205 Arruda, 138-139.
the website or the Facebook page, the sources indicate that uploading regularly and using bite-sized content is recommended and better for capturing attention and building the community.

Once a platform or platforms have been selected, they need to be populated. Though initially, most ministries will be ministering to their current congregants, they will want to expand their audience to include the general populace to disseminate the gospel message further.

Millington, advocating for actively pursuing community growth, which also would include recruiting, says, “You are responsible for growing the community. Too many community managers wait for members to arrive via search traffic or other serendipitous coincidence rather than proactively growing their community.” Thus, for a church’s online community to expand, they will need to pursue it actively.

One way to actively recruit individuals to the community is through Facebook Ads. This is the method employed in this DMin project. Advertising through Facebook allows for a ministry to reach an audience beyond the current members of the church. Kraut et al. believe that advertising may be a more effective way to attract individuals to an online community when it is new and there is low interest and confidence in it than for an established community. As discussed in the Review of Literature, another method for attracting new members to an online community is by leveraging the current or new members’ social networks.

As a community grows through the active recruitment of new members by advertising or word-of-mouth, it must be actively moderated and facilitated. Otherwise, without the management and facilitation of the community, whatever community that is currently present will, among other things, descend into a state of disorder, lose vitality and cohesion, and begin to

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206Millington, 59.
207Kraut et al., 189.
dissipate. For this reason, multiple sources indicate the necessity of managing an online community well.

Translating the notion of hubs, which were discussed in the Review of Literature, to an online spiritual community, it would seem that it would be those in church leadership. This leadership would include not only the senior leader but also other subordinate leaders. In the case of a church that utilizes small group ministry, the aforementioned networking of an online community may involve each leader being responsible for the management and care of a group of individuals assigned to them. This group’s management and care would be mediated through online tools such as a blog on a ministry website and Facebook.

Assigning responsibility to individuals for the care, facilitation, and management of a church’s online ministry and the people within the community is supported by some of the sources surveyed. Moderation of the community is needed to either prevent or mitigate issues, especially on social media platforms such as Facebook that are open to the public, such as trolling and flaming.\textsuperscript{208} Community facilitators are also essential as they encourage more participation and interaction by all members through initiating, stimulating, and sustaining discussions, guiding the community’s direction, and guiding members’ contributions.\textsuperscript{209} As can be seen, it is vital that an online community have active moderators and facilitators, though, in reality, both roles can and are usually fulfilled by one person, and this individual may just be called a moderator.\textsuperscript{210,211} These moderators or facilitators, as they seem to compare to what Craig calls encouragers in her online church, within an online ministry can provide personal care to

\textsuperscript{208} Smith, 72-76.
\textsuperscript{209} Millington, 111.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{211} Kraut et al., 96.
individuals that are assigned to them.\textsuperscript{212} For the preceding reasons, individuals that conduct moderation and facilitation will be utilized in the DMin project.

Now that the previous six principles have been discussed, it is worth considering what others have learned from experience or research to address the issue of either improving online ministry or migrating ministry to online platforms.

White operates a consultancy that has coached 1,500 churches across North America with their online groups.\textsuperscript{213} Though White does not explicitly state that his book is for the migration of ministry to online platforms, it is implicitly understood due to his mention of the current COVID-19 pandemic causing churches to see that there are people online that can benefit from the church’s ministry.\textsuperscript{214}

In chapter one, White discusses various components that are needed for starting an online group. The items he describes are the purpose of the group, whom to invite, checking-in with the pastor, when to meet, where to meet, curriculum, when to end the group, and gathering individuals to start an online group.\textsuperscript{215} Some of these items parallel what the sources in the Review of Literature discussed. However, as it pertains to this DMin project, White’s discussion about the online group curriculum is of particular interest. Concerning the online group curriculum, White says that there are two ways that most church online groups utilize. One way is to have the group follow the weekend service message, which may or may not have a study guide available for group members to follow during the online group meeting.\textsuperscript{216} Another

\textsuperscript{212}Craig, 61.
\textsuperscript{214}Allen White, \textit{Leading Online Small Groups: Embracing the Church’s Digital Future} (Allen White, 2020), 7.
\textsuperscript{215}Ibid., 9-19.
\textsuperscript{216}Ibid., 16.
method, which White says churches often employ, is to have the group members watch videos from a streaming video service and then follow the corresponding study guide.\textsuperscript{217} Though he does not mention them by name, the video streaming services such as Study Gateway and Right Now Media seem to be the type of services White has in mind. Both methods of supplying curriculum to the groups that will be developed in this DMin project are planned on being utilized.

Crumpton, in chapter six of her DMin dissertation, discusses how to start an online church website. While it is a discussion about online church, there are parallels with online ministry in general. She says that, though there are different ways to construct an online church, ultimately, the structure of the online church will be determined by the mission and vision of the pastor.\textsuperscript{218} Therefore, no online church will look identical to another one. Though Crumpton does not offer specifics on how to execute these items for a church ministry, she does discuss online church structure, branding, effective communication, and content.

Regarding the branding of the online ministry, Crumpton says that it refers to the unique and specific message that the church is conveying.\textsuperscript{219} This thinking appears to harmonize with her brief mentioning of a ministry’s vision. Likewise, concerning effective communication, she also connects it to a central vision for the ministry, in addition to attempting to create a pseudo-real world experience for participants that is more interactive and participatory.\textsuperscript{220} Regarding content,

\textsuperscript{217}White, 16.


\textsuperscript{219}Ibid., 114.

\textsuperscript{220}Ibid., 116.
it must be content that is important to the participants; otherwise, they will not be interested in the church website.\textsuperscript{221} This logic could also be extrapolated to a church’s social media platform.

Though Crumpton seems to primarily be concerned about how to recreate the in-person ecclesial experience online for virtual participants, some of the principles she mentioned are transferrable to online ministry in general. Crumpton’s mention of a ministry vision seems worthy to consider. However, while it is beneficial for a ministry to have a unique and well-articulated vision in which to build an online ministry around, it is still possible to migrate and amplify a ministry that does not have one. Though, without a vision, the church’s online ministry may have a generic feel that makes the ministry appear or feel similar to many other ministries. Regardless, it is for each church ministry to decide whether to develop a unique vision or not.

The other item that she discussed, albeit briefly, that could be beneficial for this project was content. It is important to determine whether participants prefer blogging, video sharing, or another medium and what type of content they prefer (i.e., interactive or informational).\textsuperscript{222}

In a study of Sarang Community Church, Lee examines why the church’s online ministry presence was diminishing and offers ways to have a successful online ministry. Toward the end of his DMin thesis, he discusses five lessons for effective online ministry. While these are directed at the Korean church, they still seem to be very relevant for online ministry in general. The five lessons are: have a user-friendly website that promotes online community, offer meaningful and practical content that promotes spiritual growth, capture the female audience, target the younger audience, and provide tailored services.\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{221}Crumpton, 121.
\textsuperscript{222}Ibid., 118.
As they relate to this DMin project, of particular interest were Lee’s mention of a user-friendly website, content, the female audience, and the younger audience. While most church websites may be reasonably easy to navigate, they may lack appeal, be very text-heavy, and need more images and video on them to attract and keep more visitors. Though it is difficult to ascertain if Lee’s suggestion about targeting the female audience is rooted solely or mainly in Korean cultural habits or not, he does state, “The female members are one of the most loyal and devoted groups in the church. Their low participation on Web sites is not a good sign for any church’s future.”224 One apparent method for addressing this issue seems to be offering and conducting online groups for women. Similar to capturing the female audience, Lee discusses targeting the younger audience. The rationale for actively attracting this group is because “teens and those in their twenties are the most internet-savvy people and avid Web users, and, more importantly, the future of church growth.”225

Some of the most helpful items from the previous three sources that have discussed for either migrating ministry to an online platform or how to improve an online ministry were an attractive user-friendly website, a curriculum that follows the weekend service and video streaming services, capturing the female audience and the younger audience, determining how participants want to interact (i.e., blog or video), and ascertaining if participants want interactive or informational content. While curriculum, which was also conflated with content, was previously discussed in this thesis, it is an important reminder that content needs to be of interest to the participants and that the online group’s curriculum can be either one supplied by a video streaming service or one that follows the weekend service’s message. Also, ensuring that the

224Lee, 121.
225Ibid., 122.
female and younger audiences are targeted, based on Lee’s rationale, seems sagacious. Therefore, offering online groups specifically for each audience appears to be a worthwhile option.

By taking the aforementioned steps to migrate and amplify Sonrise Church’s ministry to online platforms, it will create the possibility for the church’s congregants to access the ministry remotely, to form their own online spiritual community in which they can minister and be ministered to, and for their spiritual formation to be intensified hopefully. Furthermore, they will be actively using the latest communication technology to pursue the Great Commission as they seek to reach the general public more. They can do all this knowing the Lord is present in these platforms and personally with each person as they all experience koinonia. These resultants are all in agreement with the theological foundation of this project.

In sum, the theory behind this project, as demonstrated through a discussion of some steps to be taken to migrate and amplify a ministry online, is to follow some principles that sources have suggested, such as the selection of online tools, audience identification, considering mission and vision statements, content creation or curating, recruiting new members, and the management of the community, though modifying the details to meet Sonrise Church’s context.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Intervention Design

A mixed-method approach involving observation and analyzing data was adopted for this DMin research project. Considering this project’s objective is to determine if further migrating Sonrise Church’s ministry online and amplifying it will increase member and non-member engagement online, the selected design seems best suited for this aim.

Observation of the activity and engagement on Sonrise Church’s website and its Facebook page, along with the analysis of the data that is collected through Facebook Analytics, Google Analytics, and Weebly Insight, seems appropriate to ascertain if or to what degree member and non-member engagement have increased on both platforms.

The following components, participants and setting, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis are all part of the intervention design that will be detailed.

Participants and Setting

The participants will be the church’s congregants and the general populace. Currently, there are approximately 14 to 16 parishioners that regularly attend the church in person. As much as possible, the general populace that will be targeted with Facebook advertisements will be from the greater Seattle area. Performing this action means that the church will be engaging their congregants on the Facebook page and the general populace, while the church’s website will be the platform where they will be mainly engaging their congregants. Thus the setting will be the online platforms of the church’s website and Facebook page.
Instrumentation

The tools that will be used in conducting this research project will be the church’s Weebly website, its Facebook page, and either created or curated content. The website has been in existence for approximately four years, it currently does not have any features that make it possible to host an online community, and the church’s Facebook page, while having been created ten years ago, and eighty-five people follow the page presently, overall it has not been very active. Concerning the content, it will be primarily directed toward the congregants, though made available to the general public.

Procedures

The researcher will submit the research study to the university for IRB approval. Once IRB approval has been received, the researcher will then ensure that consent is gained from as many people as possible by posting an announcement on the church’s website and the Facebook page. Pursuing and receiving IRB approval and consent will help ensure that the research is being conducted ethically. Following the IRB approval and the posting of the announcements, the researcher will begin the process of amplifying the church’s website so that an online community can be created on it and beginning to create and run advertisements to promote the website and the Facebook page.

Data Analysis

Data will be collected from Facebook Analytics, Google Analytics, and Weebly Insight. More specifically, the data that will be analyzed primarily will be related to traffic visiting the website and Facebook page. Also, the number of likes to posts, people electing to follow the
Facebook page, the quantity of content posted to the website and Facebook page, individuals choosing to become members of the church’s website, and the number of comments to the website and Facebook page will be collected and analyzed. These data types will be examined for change to ascertain whether the church’s influence is increasing or not and whether there is an increase in community engagement among the congregants and the general populace.

**Implementation of the Intervention Design**

After sending in the research project for IRB review and receiving approval, the researcher had planned to post an announcement on the church’s website and its Facebook page to inform those that utilize the platforms that by continuing to remain on them, use the features, and engage others on the platforms, that they would be indicating their consent to participate in the research project. However, no announcements were posted on the church’s Facebook page or website because IRB indicated that it was not necessary to use them due to designating the doctoral research project as Non-Human Subjects Research. The project was conducted from January 18th to February 19th of 2021.

The first week of the project was dedicated to amplifying the church’s website by optimizing it so that an online community could be created and grown and making some modifications to the Facebook messaging for the church’s page. More specifically, the page was set to show a greeting when visitors went to it, and some automated messages were created to engage visitors, answer some basic questions, and also promote the church’s website.

The second, third, fourth, and fifth weeks of the project were dedicated to creating or curating content to post on the Facebook page and the church’s website. The content was kept simple and directly related to promoting the church’s website and Facebook page. One new piece of content was posted to both the website and the Facebook page. Additionally, during these four
weeks, the researcher observed the data and activity on both the website and the Facebook page and conducted two surveys, and held meetings with the church’s moderators that assisted with the project.

Concerning the advertisements, they were intended to drive traffic to the website and to the Facebook page. The advertisements were run through Facebook Ads. The plan was to run at least one advertisement a week to increase traffic on the church’s Facebook page. Another advertisement was run to increase traffic to the church’s website. In total, there were two advertisements a week. The operating budget for both advertisements a week was $20 evenly distributed over four days for each advertisement each week. The advertisements were mostly run from Wednesday to Sunday.

The following is an account of the implementation of the research design, observations, and data collection.

First Week (January 18 – January 23)

Twenty-five hours of work were spent on the implementation of the research design throughout the week.

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

1. Three blog pages titled “Sunday Morning Message Blog,” “Weekly Video Teaching Blog,” and “Discipleship Group Online” were added. On all three pages, the following features were added: (1) On the right side of the page, the moderators’ names were added, and space was created to put their pictures. (2) In the page header, a place was created to upload a welcome video. (3) Language translation was added through embedding the Google Translate code. However, for the Weekly Video Teaching Blog, a button was created with a link to the video teaching series “Be Like Jesus” to be used on the blog. There is also a picture above the button that is linked to the video teaching series. The Discipleship Group Online page received a button with a link to the
discipleship video series “Believe” to be used on the blog as well as a picture above the button that is linked to the video teaching series.

2. A landing page was created for the Discipleship Group Online that provides information about the group and how to join.

3. The feature that allows users to create a member account was enabled.

4. Access to see and participate in all three blogs required website registration.
   a. The pastor vocalized concern about potentially attracting negative, confrontational, or hostile individuals toward Christianity or his church to the church’s Facebook page through Facebook advertising. While it was impossible for the researcher to know which individuals would be served advertisements by Facebook, or the political and religious views that they may hold, or their lifestyle choices, which may determine if they would be benevolent or hostile, it seemed, considering the ministry leader’s expressed concern, that it was better to require website membership to view and participate in all the blogs.

5. Three groups were made in the website’s settings to create the ability to provide access to site members to whichever blog they want to participate.

6. The website’s footer was adjusted to incorporate a link to the church’s Facebook page and its email address.

7. A Google Analytics account was created for Sonrise Church, and the unique tracking code that Google Analytics provided was embedded in every page on the church website.

8. The researcher opened an account and subscribed to a church plan that accommodates up to 100 members and costs $49.99 a month.

Wednesday, January 20, 2021

1. A Discipleship Group Registration Form was created.
   a. The form contains the following sections to be answered:
      i. How did you hear about Sonrise Church?
      ii. Name
      iii. Email
      iv. What is your age?
      v. Are you a Christian?
vi. If you are not a Christian or are not sure if you are one, would you like to learn more about becoming a Christian?

vii. Have you been baptized?

viii. Briefly describe how you came to accept the Lord as your Savior.
   a. A large text box was provided for response.

ix. Are you committed to complete the entire discipleship course?

x. Participation in the discipleship group online requires viewing each week's discipleship video and active involvement in the weekly discussions.
   a. Do you agree with the above statement?

xi. Participating in the discipleship group online involves transparency and self-disclosure by each participant to aid in the process of their spiritual formation. Additionally, what is discussed in the group stays among the group members.
   a. Do you agree with the above statements?

xii. All sections except for ii, iii, and viii, were multiple choice. Most sections offered the options of “Yes,” “No,” and some, such as v and vi, when appropriate, offered an “I am not sure” option.

xiii. Opt-In was enabled to allow the church ministry to email ministry updates and contact individuals who submit the registration form.

2. The connectivity and functionality of the website’s features were checked.

3. Another blog called Sunday Morning Message Blog (Cambodian) was created, though it is currently hidden from public view. It is hidden because no one at the time of this writing, who speaks Cambodian, is dedicated to moderating the blog. The blog is for Cambodian speakers only.

Thursday, January 21, 2021

1. Church website member invitations were sent to the two moderators.

2. Through Weebly’s built-in automated registration feature, there appeared to be no way to have the potential site member agree with the church’s statement of faith or gather other pertinent information. Offering a page with a registration form was considered as another
option in lieu of Weebly’s registration feature. However, it was not an automated process. Once the visitor fills out the registration form, it would be sent to an email address. Then, someone would need to act on the email by physically adding the individual’s email address into the website’s back office. These were internal deliberations within the researcher as to the best solution.

   a. In the end, Weebly’s built-in registration feature was selected. Also, to verify if the individual requesting registration is a Christian or legitimately interested in becoming a Christian, an email could be sent to them with a link to the church website’s online registration form and ask them to fill it out. Once the individual has filled out the online registration form and has indicated that they are a Christian or legitimately interested in becoming a Christian, then a website administrator can add the individual as a member to the church’s website.

3. A blog landing page was added to house links to all three blogs. The page contains pictures and text linked to their respective blog pages. The connectivity and functionality of the links were tested.

Friday, January 22, 2021

1. A “Meet Jesus” page was created for evangelistic purposes. The page has three videos. The first video discusses who Jesus is, the second video explains how to become a Christian, and the final video presents the Sinner’s Prayer at a pace so that an individual can pray along. The videos that were embedded on the Meet Jesus page were from YouTube. The videos added were *Who is Jesus?*, *How can I become a Christian?*, and the *Sinner’s Prayer.*\(^{226,227,228}\) All three videos were viewed before embedding them to check theological content.

   a. Below the *Sinner’s Prayer* video, a section titled “Next Steps” was created.


i. The following was written in this section: “If you have prayed (talked to Jesus) and asked Him to be your Lord and Savior, it is now important for you to join a Christian community to assist you in growing in your relationship with Jesus.”

“Some options for joining a Christian community are:

1. If you are in the Seattle area, join us in-person at Sonrise Church on Sundays at 10 AM.
2. Join our discipleship group online.”

“Both options will help you grow in your relationship with Jesus.

Click the following button to learn more about the discipleship group:”

2. A Sonrise Church Website Registration form was created that could be sent to individuals that church leadership or the website administrators do not recognize prior to admitting them as website members.

3. A button titled Learn About Discipleship Online was added on the Blogs page just below the title and picture for the Discipleship Group Online. This button was added to allow individuals who are not already members to access the discipleship group online blog information from the main blog page. Previously they would not have been able to access the Discipleship Group Online blog. The new button allowed visitors or members who do not have access to the Discipleship Group Online to learn more about the group and receive access to the group’s online registration form.

4. Automated responses for the church’s Facebook page messaging were added. Four questions were created that can be automatically answered for visitors. The questions are listed below.

   a. How do I become a Christian?
      i. To learn more about Jesus and how to become a Christian, please click on the following button:

      1. The created button takes the visitor to

   b. How can I grow as a Christian?
i. Connecting with a Christian community is essential for the growth and maturation of a Christian. Connect with us:

1. The created buttons take the visitor to

c. How can I learn more about Sonrise Church?
   i. The created button takes the visitor to https://www.sonriseseattle.com/.

d. Where is Sonrise Church located?
   i. The created button takes the visitor to
      https://www.sonriseseattle.com/contact.html.

5. A Facebook advertisement was created to promote the church website and the blogs.
   a. The following description was written in the advertisement: “Join us each week online for discussions about the Sunday Morning Message and a Weekly Video Teaching from Study Gateway. Also, our Discipleship Group Online starts on February 1st.”
   b. A free Shutterstock image was used of three crosses on a hill with the sun setting behind it.
   c. A Learn More button linked to the church’s homepage was used.
   d. An audience group that the researcher titled Greater Seattle Audience was utilized.
      i. The audience encompasses Seattle and a radius of 30 miles around the city.
      ii. The following terms for individuals’ interests were used: Old Testament, God in Christianity, God, Christian church, Christ, Christian, Son of God, Baptist church, Bible study (Christian), salvation, God the Father, Religion, Bible, New Testament, Gospel, Holy Spirit (Christianity), Jesus, Holy Spirit, Disciple (Christianity), nondenominational, nondenominational (Christianity), Yeshua.
      iii. Facebook Ads said that the audience reach is 1.2 million people.
e. The ad was submitted on Friday, January 22th, and will run until January 26th. The budget per day is $5, and the total four-day budget is $20.

6. A Facebook advertisement was created to promote the church’s Facebook page.
   a. The following description previously written by the pastor was automatically included when Facebook created the advertisement.
   b. The church’s Facebook page banner picture, which was also previously selected by the pastor, was automatically included in the auto-generated advertisement.
   c. The same Greater Seattle Audience that was used in the other advertisement was used for this advertisement.
   d. The advertisement was submitted on Friday, January 22th, and will run until January 26th. The budget per day is $5, and the total four-day budget is $20.

7. The researcher purchased both study guides for the video series Believe and Be Like Jesus. The total cost was $16.49 for both ebooks.

Saturday, January 23, 2021

1. A Disqus account was opened, which comes with a 30 day free trial period. The church received a unique Disqus URL that had to be used on the church’s Weebly website to unlock the Disqus commenting system.
   a. The connectivity and functionality of the commenting system were checked.

2. Each of the three blogs was prepared for discussions that began on the next Monday. Preparation of each blog entailed creating the first post.

3. A pop-up announcement was added to the church’s homepage to inform visitors that the church is offering a Sunday Morning Message Blog, Weekly Video Teaching Blog, and a Discipleship Group. The pop-up also included an action button that took the visitor to the landing page for the blogs.

4. A 2-hour meeting was held with the moderators, and most of the time was spent presenting the website to them and explaining the purpose of each blog, getting them connected to the Study Gateway account, and introducing them to the two videos series that were used in the blogs, showing them the commenting system and how to use it, and
what the role and responsibilities of a moderator are. Additionally, the moderators were asked if they would create introductory content of themselves to place on the website.

Second Week (January 24 – January 30)

Four hours were invested in the monitoring and recording of data throughout the week.

Sunday, January 24, 2021

1. A non-boosted announcement was posted on the church’s Facebook page about the Sunday Morning Message Blog and Weekly Video Teaching Blog starting on January 25th and the Discipleship Group Online starting February 1st.229
2. Both moderators joined the church website as members and the Study Gateway group account.
3. One moderator briefly mentioned some concerns about her privacy related to the spelling of her real name. She then requested that her name be spelled the more traditional way.

Monday, January 25, 2021

1. A Study Gateway New Member Link was added to each blog page to make it easier for new members to access the videos and join the discussion on the page.
2. The pastor created a church website member account.

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

1. The moderators had not yet turned in any introductory material about themselves to post on each of the blog pages.
2. While the Facebook advertisement for the promotion of the church’s website was directing traffic to the site, as of this date, no individuals were coming from Facebook creating new member accounts.
3. At this time, there were four website members.

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4. Based on the researcher’s observations, it seemed a better method for populating the Sunday Morning Message Blog and the Weekly Video Teaching Blog would be by having more church members and parishioners creating website accounts and participating in the discussions.

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

1. An email was sent to the moderators asking them if they would consider creating content to introduce themselves and asking if they have some ideas for populating the blogs with people.

2. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s Facebook page, which ran from January 22 – 26, reached 881 people, generated 22 page likes, 36 post reactions, 66 post engagements, 16 link clicks, 10 post shares, 3 post comments.\textsuperscript{230}

3. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s website, which ran from January 22 – 26, reached 1,927 people, generated 48 link clicks, 3 post reactions, 54 post engagements, and 1 post comment.\textsuperscript{231}

4. The church Facebook page prior to running the advertisements had 82 page likes and 87 page followers.

5. Two new ads were placed today.
   a. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s Facebook page was the same as last week.
      i. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.
   a. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s website was changed some.
      i. The picture used in the advertisement depicts one cross on a hill with the sun setting behind it, creating a colorful sunset.
      ii. While the text in the advertisement is the same, how it was presented was altered a little to make it quicker and easier to read.

\textsuperscript{230} Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Facebook Page, accessed January 27, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=3979622045402530&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.

\textsuperscript{231} Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Website, accessed January 27, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=3979601662071235&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.
1. The following is what was written:
   “JOIN our 3 ONLINE DISCUSSIONS each week:
   1. Sunday Morning Message
   2. Weekly Video Teaching
   3. Discipleship Group Online starts on February 1st. Register now.”

iii. The audience People Who Like Your Page and Their Friends was used.

Thursday, January 28, 2021

1. An introductory text and a picture was received from one of the moderators.

Friday, January 29, 2021

1. The picture and text that was received from one of the moderators were placed on all three blog pages.

Saturday, January 30, 2021

1. A non-boosted announcement was posted on the church’s Facebook page about the Sunday Morning Message Blog and Weekly Video Teaching Blog starting on January 25th and the Discipleship Group Online starting February 1st.232

2. One moderator and the researcher monitored the blogs and left comments.

Third Week (January 31 – February 6)

A total of six hours were spent during the week running the project, making observations, meeting with a moderator, and collecting data.

Sunday, January 31, 2021

1. A one-hour meeting was conducted with one of the moderators. The researcher and moderator discussed the project’s current status and some data generated from

Google Analytics and Weebly Insights, which shows more people are engaging with the ministry online through its website and Facebook page. We also brainstormed ways to accelerate and increase the population of the church’s website membership and the number of participants on the blogs. The moderator suggested and offered to talk to some people at church next Sunday to ask if they would participate. We also discussed the possibility of trying to find someone to moderate the blog in Cambodian. The moderator said she would ask one of the elders that are Cambodian or another Cambodian church member to moderate the blog.

2. The moderator and researcher concluded that people might not be registering for the discipleship group due to their lack of familiarity with the ministry, even though some people are visiting the registration page.

3. The moderator and researcher also discussed the potential reasons why people may not be creating member accounts on the website. It appears it may be because people are unsure if they want to get involved in the community because it is not familiar to them. To participate in the blogs or view them, it is necessary to create a member account. Necessitating the creation of a member account before accessing the blogs was decided as an appropriate method for protecting privacy and entrance into the church’s online community. Therefore, if one were to create a member account on the website, it may be seen as the equivalent of becoming a member of the local church in people’s minds. Thus, the researcher and moderator determined that the best method, and this appears to coalesce with the findings in the research, that leveraging the current ministry members and their social networks would be the best method for increasing the population of the church’s online community.

Monday, February 1, 2021

1. The posts in each blog for the week were checked for accuracy. No one has registered for the discipleship blog.
2. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s Facebook page, which ran from January 27 – January 31, reached 937 people, generated 29 page likes, 39 post reactions, 64 post engagements, 16 link clicks, 6 post shares, and 3 post comments.\textsuperscript{233}

3. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s website, which ran from January 27 – January 31, reached 1,060 people, generated 8 link clicks, 12 post reactions, 22 post engagements, and 2 post shares.\textsuperscript{234}

Tuesday, February 2, 2021

1. One moderator created a website account for her spouse, and she also informed her father of the church’s new efforts in conducting online ministry so that he could join. The moderator’s father had left the church and moved to Florida.

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

1. Two new ads were placed today.
   a. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s Facebook page was the same as last week except for using a stock image this time. The previous image that was used of three crosses depicting Jesus and the two thieves hanging from them, which is also on the Facebook page and was selected by the ministry leader prior to the commencement of this research project, seemed very dark. Thus, a lighter alternative image was selected, though still depicting Jesus and two thieves hanging from the crosses. The thinking was that a brighter image might make the advertisement more appealing to viewers, thus, more likely to engage. Therefore, a brighter image of three crosses was selected for the advertisement.
   i. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.
   b. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s website was changed some.

\textsuperscript{233}Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Facebook Page, accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=3993860600645341&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.

\textsuperscript{234}Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Website, accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=3993941853970549&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.
i. The picture used in the advertisement depicts one cross with a red cloth draped around it on a hill with the sun setting behind it with mountains and clouds in the distance.

ii. While the text in the advertisement is the same, the discipleship group’s start date was changed since the previous start date had passed.

1. The following is what was written:
   “JOIN our 3 ONLINE DISCUSSIONS each week:
   1. Sunday Morning Message
   2. Weekly Video Teaching
   3. Discipleship Group Online starts on February 22nd. Register now.”

iii. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.

2. Two SurveyMonkey surveys were created and started. One is designed to survey Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian. The other is designed to survey the general populace, which will also capture responses from non-Christians.

Thursday, February 4, 2021

1. The survey titled “Individuals that Do Not Attend Church” was completed today.

Saturday, February 6, 2021

1. A non-boosted announcement was posted on the church’s Facebook page about the Sunday Morning Message Blog and Weekly Video Teaching Blog, and the Discipleship Group Online.235

2. The researcher and one of the moderators left comments on the blogs and monitored activity on them.

3. To date, one of the two moderators that said he would assist in this project has not participated or assisted much. There appeared to be difficulties for him with

availability and processing some information regarding how to moderate and perform other moderator actions.

Fourth Week (February 7 – February 13)

Three hours and thirty minutes were dedicated to gathering data, running the project, making observations, and conducting a meeting with the moderator during the week.

Sunday, February 7, 2021

1. The moderator, who had not been assisting much during the project, asked if he could discontinue his participation in the project. He cited previous responsibilities and what sounded like potentially additional responsibilities at church as reasons for his need to desist from the project.

2. The researcher met with the remaining moderator and discussed the current state of the project. She indicated that the online ministry that was created by this project is being discussed at church. Another topic that was discussed was the need for having more original and uniquely created content by Sonrise Church, such as videos, text, and pictures, as they could help website visitors gain a more accurate and fuller comprehension of what the ministry is like and become more acclimated with the leadership of the church. At this time, there was not much content on the website that provided this.

3. There was also a discussion toward the end of the meeting about what would happen once the doctoral research project is completed on February 19th. Two options were discussed. The first is if the church elects to continue to pursue online ministry actively, then the researcher will step aside and turn over the entire operation to the church for it to continue. The second is if the church elects not to continue to pursue online ministry at this present time, then the researcher could place a simple post on the church’s Facebook page informing whoever visits the page that the recent activity was associated with an exploration of online ministry and that it may or may not be continued in the future.

4. The post for the Sunday Morning Message Blog for the current week was created.
5. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s Facebook page, which ran from February 3 – February 7, reached 800 people, generated 21 page likes, 36 post reactions, 47 post engagements, 4 post shares, 4 link clicks, and 3 comments.\textsuperscript{236}

6. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s website, which ran from February 3 – February 7, reached 1,969 people, generated 63 link clicks, 15 post reactions, 81 post engagements, 2 post comments, and 1 post share.\textsuperscript{237}

Monday, February 8, 2021

1. The post for the Weekly Video Teaching Blog for the current week was created.

Thursday, February 11, 2021

1. Two new ads were posted today.
   a. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s Facebook page was the same as last week except for using a different stock image.
      i. The picture that was selected depicts three crosses on a hill with the sun setting behind them and the night sky appearing from the left of the image.
      ii. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.
   b. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s website was changed some.
      i. The picture used in the advertisement depicts a person’s hands held up and together with a cross made up of sunlight shining through and between the hands.
      ii. The text in the advertisement is the same.
         1. The following is what was written:
            “JOIN our 3 ONLINE DISCUSSIONS each week:

\textsuperscript{236}Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Facebook Page, accessed February 9, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=4013862318645169&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.

\textsuperscript{237}Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Website, accessed February 9, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=4013810118650389&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.
1. Sunday Morning Message
2. Weekly Video Teaching
3. Discipleship Group Online starts on February 22nd. Register now.”

iii. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.

2. Website members are holding at five.

Friday, February 12, 2021

1. The ministry leader registered for access to the Study Gateway account that the researcher set up. He also left three comments, one in the Sunday Morning Message Blog, one in the Weekly Video Teaching Blog, and one in the Discipleship Group Online.

2. The followership of the church’s Facebook page had a little more than doubled since the beginning of the research project and its efforts to amplify the church’s online presence. As of this date, the church had a virtual audience of 168 people for its Facebook page. Thus, the church’s scope of influence and presence has doubled.
   a. Throughout the project, the researcher invited individuals who had liked either one of the church’s Facebook advertisements to like the church’s Facebook page. This activity has resulted in the previously mentioned expansion of the church’s Facebook audience.

Saturday, February 13, 2021

1. The ministry leader’s wife created an account on the church’s website.

2. At this time, almost all of the church’s influential members had an account on the church’s website. The only ones that were missing were two elders that represent the Cambodian members of the church.

3. Blog activity was monitored, and comments were left on them by the researcher and one of the moderators.

4. During this time, the researcher continued thinking about the requirement for visitors to create an account on the website to view and comment on posts that were discussed in a meeting on January 31st with a moderator. The thought was, for future reference, it may be better for a ministry to find a commenting system or website builder that
allows for comments to be visible to the general public but require visitors to create an account to leave a comment.

Fifth Week (February 14 – February 19)

Throughout the week, six hours and thirty minutes were spent running the project, collecting data, making observations, and meeting with a moderator.

Sunday, February 14, 2021

1. The researcher met with the moderator to discuss the current state of the research project. Some of the things discussed were: (1) some of the current statistics from the project (2) the ministry leader is getting more involved on the church’s blogs and his wife just created an account on the church’s website (3) it appears that the most influential English speaking members of the church now have accounts on the church’s website (4) the Cambodian members, to date, are still not present on the church’s website (5) the moderator and I concur that there needs to be a Cambodian member that will assume responsibility for moderating the blog in Cambodian so that Cambodian members are able to join the church’s online community (6) the church should decide this week if it will actively pursue online ministry by continuing what the research project created, or suspend the online ministry (7) the moderator said that she believes that the church as a group needs to discuss what they will do with the online ministry that the project generated and that she will send an email to the pastor (8) the moderator stated that the ministry leader has not discussed the project formally from the pulpit during Sunday services, though he has discussed it informally during fellowship time (9) the need for the church to be more outward focused, and to at least use promoted Facebook page posts to generate open discussions with pre-Christians on the Facebook page so that the church is involved in online evangelism.

2. The post for the Sunday Morning Message Blog was created.
Monday, February 15, 2021

1. The post for the Weekly Video Teaching Blog was created, and the questions for the week were posted.

2. SurveyMonkey estimated that the Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian survey would be completed by February 8th. However, now SurveyMonkey is stating the survey completion is delayed. The total responses are currently frozen at 87, meaning that 13 more responses need to be gathered to complete the survey.

3. To date, the first post on the church’s website welcoming visitors to join the online discussion on the church’s website, which occurred on January 24th, reached 33 people and received one engagement. The second post on January 30th reached 23 people and received one engagement to date. The third post from February 6th reached 14 people and received three engagements. The fourth post was posted today, and its statistics will be checked on the final day of the project, which is Friday, February 19th. All of these posts were not boosted. All the statistics they garnered were organic and appear to be showing a trend upward in viewing and engagement over increasingly shorter periods of time.

4. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s Facebook page, which ran from February 11 – February 15, reached 781 people, generated 23 page likes, 45 post reactions, 55 post engagements, 1 post share, 5 link clicks, and 4 comments.

5. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s website, which ran from February 11 – February 15, reached 1,667 people, generated 47 link clicks, 9 post reactions, 62 post engagements, 4 post comments, and 2 post shares.


6. A non-boosted announcement was posted on the church’s Facebook page about the Sunday Morning Message Blog and Weekly Video Teaching Blog, and the Discipleship Group Online.\(^{241}\)

7. The researcher sent an email to the pastor asking if the church would like their Facebook page and website returned to their pre-project state or left with the improvements that the researcher created for the project.

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

1. Two new advertisements were placed today.
   a. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s Facebook page was the same as last week except for using a different stock image.
      i. The picture that was selected shows a cross in a field with the sun setting and birds flying behind it.
      ii. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.
   b. The Facebook advertisement to promote the church’s website was changed slightly. Only the picture changed.
      i. The image that was selected depicts a man in a white robe standing in water and holding his hands out with water pouring down between them.
      ii. The text in the advertisement was altered slightly.
         1. The following is what was written:
            “JOIN our 3 ONLINE DISCUSSIONS each week:
            1. Sunday Morning Message
            2. Weekly Video Teaching
            3. Discipleship Group Online
            iii. The Greater Seattle Audience was used.

Thursday, February 18, 2021

1. A non-boosted announcement was posted on the church’s Facebook page about the Sunday Morning Message Blog and Weekly Video Teaching Blog, and the Discipleship Group Online.242

2. Engagement and people reached with the non-boosted Facebook page posts steadily increased throughout the research project. This observation is noteworthy as the number of people reached and the engagement appeared to accelerate in correspondence with the growth of the page’s number of followers. Essentially, this equates to more free advertising from this point and into the future. Moreover, it also means that the church’s presence and influence are expanding exponentially. At a minimum, sustaining this momentum will require the church ministry to post on the Facebook page often and actively manage it.

Friday, February 19, 2021

1. The moderator that had been assisting throughout the entire research project relayed some observations that she made and observations that a friend made. Overall, the moderator liked the content and resources that the research project placed on the website. She also really enjoyed reading comments from others, posting questions, and in general, having blog discussions. She wants the blog discussions to be a permanent feature of the ministry. One area for consideration for improvement that she indicated was the necessity for individuals to sign into the website account, then sign in to Disqus to leave a comment on a blog, then sometimes an individual needs to click on the word comments to see the comments. She thought this process was too cumbersome for leaving a comment. Though the commenters on the blogs had usernames, the researcher asked her about anonymity. She thought people need to have a username because it helps hold people more accountable and responsible, though each individual should be provided the ability to create a username of their liking.243

243Email from moderator, email received February 17, 2021, accessed February 19, 2021.
2. The moderator said her friend looked at the website and said she would prefer to have the ability to see the comments before needing to create an account. It seems, essentially, she would like to be able to window shop before going into the store and making a purchase or opening an account. The moderator’s friend said if she created an account on the church’s website, she is essentially choosing to become a member of that online church community and saying she is comfortable sharing personal contact information with them. This concept was briefly mentioned on January 31st during a meeting with the primary moderator as a potential reason why website visitors may not be creating accounts and in an email received from the same moderator.244

3. When the pastor was reminded on February 15th that the research project was nearing completion, he offered some of his observations. He was glad that one of the moderators participated in the project. He appears to like and prefers the Sunday Morning Message Blog over the other blogs and believes it has potential. One reason for the preference might be because he has stated that he believes that biblical discipleship must be done in-person, not online. He said he would like to find a way to make it easier for individuals to create accounts for the website and the video service provider. However, in the researcher’s estimation, creating accounts for both the website and Study Gateway was quick and easy for visitors, and there appears to be no other way to simplify the process. The ministry leader also intimated that new people gaining access to commenting on the church’s website is too cumbersome. He also stated that he liked the video teaching that was selected and utilized in the research project. However, it seems he would like to use the video teaching not for discipleship but for ministry in general.245

4. Some of the concerns or areas of improvement that the moderator and pastor mentioned appear to be somewhat associated with the functionality of Weebly. Weebly was used for this project because it is the website builder and host that the church is currently using. However, after examining Weebly more and considering its strengths and weaknesses, it may not be the best-suited website builder for

244Email from moderator, email received February 19, 2021, accessed February 19, 2021.
245Email from ministry leader, email received February 15, 2021, accessed February 19, 2021.
developing a website that primarily is for an online community. There are better options, such as Wix and Ning, for making websites that mainly want to focus on creating and maintaining an online community.

6. The church’s Facebook page, at the end of the project, has 189 likes and 195 followers. At the beginning of the project, the church Facebook page had 82 page likes and 87 page followers.

Post-Project Meeting and Data Collection

Two and a half hours were spent collecting the final data from the project and having a last meeting with the moderator.

Sunday, February 21, 2021

1. The researcher and moderator conducted a final meeting to discuss the research project and any observations or impressions she had about the project. Most of what she mentioned were reiterations of previous thoughts and observations.

2. During the discussion, the researcher had the idea that a blog page could be created on the church’s website that is visible to the general public and utilizes the Facebook commenting system that Weebly offers. The blog page would be primarily used as a vehicle or method for engaging the general populace on the church’s website for answering questions and allowing visitors to determine if they would like to join the church’s online community. By realizing this idea, it would appear to address a number of concerns and areas for improvement that were presented at various times throughout the project. The moderator concurred with the idea.

   a. The moderator said that the church is planning to discuss the topic of online ministry on Sunday, February 28th. She also said that she really enjoyed being part of the research project and would like to see the church continue to pursue online ministry.

   b. The non-boosted post that was placed on the church’s Facebook page on February 18th reached nine people and garnered one click.
c. At this time, the researcher had still not received a reply to his email from February 15th that was sent to the pastor concerning keeping the improvements to the website and Facebook page or undoing them. Therefore, the researcher, by default, opted to leave everything the way it is.

Monday, February 22, 2021

1. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s Facebook page, which ran from February 17 – February 21, reached 863 people, generated 11 page likes, 31 post reactions, 42 post engagements, 3 post shares, 3 link clicks, and 5 comments.\(^{246}\)

2. The Facebook advertisement that promoted the church’s website, which ran from February 17 – February 21, reached 1,649 people, generated 36 link clicks, 4 post reactions, 43 post engagements, 4 post comments, and 3 post shares.\(^{247}\)


\(^{247}\)Facebook Ad Results for Promotion of Church Website, accessed February 22, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/ad_center/manage/?boost_id=4052504891447578&entry_point=www_ad_center_overview_ad_cards.
Chapter 4

Results

Upon completing the fifth week of the project, the researcher began the process of analyzing data from Weebly Insights, Facebook Analytics, Google Analytics, and both surveys. These analytic tools were recording activity on both platforms continuously. The data gathered from the analytics will be presented as graphs. While the analytics and observations that were noted during the project that appeared to be significant will be presented toward the end of the section, the surveys conducted during the project will be discussed first.

Surveys

During the project, one survey was conducted to gain an understanding of the prevailing perception, understanding, and usage of ministry on online platforms by Christians. Another survey was conducted to ascertain the degree of interest in Christianity among the general populace and its interest in engaging online Christian content and online ministry platforms. Both surveys were conducted through SurveyMonkey and sought to gather 100 responses apiece. Furthermore, the results of both surveys are presented in Appendices A and B.

Survey #1 Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian

The survey titled “Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian” targeted individuals who identify as Christian, Protestant, inter-denomination, or non-denominational. Additionally, both genders, ages 18 and older, and all income levels were included. Geographically the United States was the only region targeted. The survey gathered 92 responses, and by the end of the project, the remaining responses were still delayed and three weeks overdue. Considering the
timeline for writing this paper, the researcher decided that the 92 responses would be utilized even though eight responses were missing.

A total of 10 questions were asked to individuals that identify as being a Christian or attending a church. There were a few surprises. However, most of the responses seemed predictable. The results of this survey are presented in Appendix A.

While it seemed that fewer people would be attending church in-person, the fact that more people stated they are attending church online, according to question 1, was logical considering the restrictions in place due to COVID-19. However, in question 2, 60 percent of the respondents did say that they would engage their church’s online ministry if it had an active one.

Regarding question 3, though it was expected that most people would prefer in-person ministry, there were a significant number of respondents that stated they would prefer online ministry, with 50 percent saying they would prefer either online ministry or both types of ministry.

Concerning what type of platform respondents would like to hold religious conversations on was the focus of question 4. The second most selected answer was “Other” for the question. At first glance, this was perplexing. The prominent explanation for the 31.5 percent of respondents that selected Other for the question was the term “no.” Apparently, using logical inference, this meant that they would not want to participate in a religious discussion on either a church’s Facebook page or its website. More respondents, however, indicated they would converse about religious matters on a church’s website. Combined, the majority of individuals (70 percent) revealed that they would have religious discussions on either a church’s website, Facebook page, or both, though leaning more toward a website.
It was surprising that there was not a more significant difference between both responses to question 5. The question asked the respondents if they would participate in online study groups of discussions if their church or another church had them available. However, only 6 percent more selected “yes” than the 47 percent that said “no.” Perhaps those that chose “no” may prefer to engage a church online passively by watching, reading, and listening to content instead. Regardless, more individuals seemed to be interested in an active participatory experience than a passive one.

The Bible and Christian Living being chosen as the two most popular options in question 6 in that order, which pertain to the type of ministry content the respondents would like to access on their church’s or another church’s website, seemed expected. The more interesting result of this question was that Discipleship and Explore Christianity and Its Claims were selected the third and fourth most, respectively. Evidently, a significant number of Christians or church attenders would like to be discipled more and learn more about apologetics through a church’s website. That the respondents seem interested in apologetics is because exploring Christianity and its claims would necessarily involve apologetics, though not necessarily at the graduate level. Marriage and Family content was selected the fifth most, with Men’s Issues and Theological Training each receiving the lowest responses at 14 percent.

The results for question 7 represented some of the least surprising. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they consume 1-5 hours of Christian content online weekly. Twelve percent stated they engaged said content 6-10 hours a week. Therefore, combined, 91 percent indicated they were either watching, reading, or studying Christian content online between 1-10 hours a week.
Initially, the option of None of the Above Scenarios in question 8, seemed surprising. However, after examining the abundance of respondents who selected it compared to the other options, it did not appear surprising. The three other options asked the respondents if they would attend two different churches in any online or in-person combination. Thus, it appears that many respondents selected None of the Above Scenarios as a way to reveal that they would attend one church either in-person or online.

The overwhelming majority of respondents, 87 percent, in question 10 indicated that pursuing online ministry is vital for sharing the gospel with the world. Likewise, a significant number of respondents, 80 percent, in question 9 said that online ministry needs to be pursued in conjunction with an in-person ministry. These results seem logical since most people have at least one social media account, regularly engage others on it, and that many of the respondents either currently engage Christian content online or demonstrated a pro online ministry stance throughout the survey.

Survey #2 Individuals that Do Not Attend Church

Like the previous survey, 10 questions were asked for this one. This survey also targeted the general populace as this appeared to be the best way to include those that do not attend church or profess to be Christian. Again, both genders, everyone 18 years or older, and all income levels were included. The United States was the only country selected. One hundred responses were sought, but 103 were received. All the questions and results of this survey are presented in Appendix B. Also, as with the Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian survey, there were some surprises and some expected results in this survey.
Question 1 did not necessarily reveal anything especially significant since it was expected that most people are interested in some form of spirituality. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents said that they were either interested or very interested in Christianity and religion. Though the term “religion” was incorporated in the question together with the term “Christianity,” still 59 percent indicated they were either interested or very interested in Christianity or spirituality in general. This result apparently, aids in explaining why almost precisely half of the respondents in question 2, stated they were considering attending or visiting a church, which was a higher percentage than anticipated. Even though approximately half of the respondents were considering attending or visiting a church, 74 percent said they are not currently watching, reading, or studying any religious content online, according to the results from question 3.

The results from questions 4 and 5 were a surprise. Sixty percent, in question 4, stated they would prefer to attend a church in-person for their first-time experience. Question 5 revealed that 44 percent of the respondents would prefer to ask the tough questions about Christianity in-person rather than online. It was expected that these numbers would be lower. It seemed, based on some of the research in the Review of Literature section, that most individuals would prefer more anonymity for this sort of activity. Though very close behind the 44 percent that would prefer the tough discussions in person, 39 percent said they would do it on the church’s website. However, when considering both the church’s Facebook page and website, 56 percent would have the tough conversation online.

Interestingly, regarding question 6, 59 percent of the respondents indicated they would prefer to participate in an online religious discussion on a church’s website. Overall, what was most interesting, when considering the responses from questions 6 and 10 together, was that the general populace seemed to prefer exploring Christianity or having a religious discussion on a
church’s website instead of on Facebook. The expectation was that the general populace would be more comfortable having these discussions in a more public forum such as a Facebook page. Therefore, based on these results, it seems conceivable that fishing for and funneling individuals from Facebook, or maybe any other social media platform, to a church’s website for religious discussions is a viable method for evangelizing.

Similar to question 6 in the “Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian” survey, individuals were asked in this survey what Christian content they would like to engage. Question 7 revealed that the top five in order were, The Bible, Explore Christianity and Its Claims, Christian Living, Marriage and Family, and Women’s Issues. The Bible received more votes, 50 percent, than Explore Christianity and Its Claims, 40 percent. Initially, it was anticipated that Explore Christianity and Its Claims would have been selected more by the general populace due to the overall skepticism in the milieu toward Christianity. However, based on The Bible, Explore Christianity and Its Claims, and Christian Living being the first, second, and third most selected options, it may mean, and in accordance with the majority of individuals being interested in Christianity and religion, that individuals are seeking to find meaning for their existence and the meaning of life.

In an attempt to go beyond assessing the survey taker’s feelings toward Christianity and online ministry, question 8 attempted to ascertain the receptivity of the respondent’s social network toward Christianity. Unsurprisingly, the most selected answer to the question that was asked was “no.” However, 33 percent said that they did have family or friends that were interested in Christianity. This number demonstrates, based on this survey’s findings, that for nearly every 55 people out of 103 interested in Christianity or religion, according to the results from question 1, 33 percent of those same individuals personally know someone interested in
learning more about Christianity. According to the previous calculations, this amounts to 18.15 individuals out of 103.

The results from question 9 seemed to harmonize with the results from question 5. According to question 5, 44 percent of people indicated they would prefer to ask the difficult questions about Christianity in person, and question 9 showed that 41 percent of the respondents’ family and friends would be more comfortable visiting a church in person as their first-time experience. However, according to question 10, if the respondents’ family or friends preferred to learn more about Christianity online, 66 percent of the respondents indicated their family and friends would be more comfortable doing that on a church’s website.

Throughout the “Individuals that Attend Church or are Christian” survey, the respondents revealed that while they engage in in-person ministry, they regularly access online Christian content, and most would access content on their church’s website if their church had an active online ministry presence. Furthermore, many people are already comfortable with engaging church’s online and would also seem to be interested in participating in online religious discussions on a church’s website, and to a lesser degree, its Facebook page. Thus, there appears to be great potential for local churches to engage and help their congregants grow more if they would provide their congregants with a robust and active online ministry.

One of the most salient overarching themes discovered in the “Individuals that Do Not Attend Church” survey was that many individuals in the general public would be willing to ask the tough questions about Christianity in an online environment, specifically on a church’s website. The survey also suggested that though there are many in the general populace not currently engaging Christian content, there are more of them considering attending a church in-person than online. Thus, it seems that while the general public leans toward the online
environment, such as a church’s website and Facebook page, to ask the difficult questions about Christianity, a little more than half are interested in visiting a church in-person, with a still significant number of them interested in attending online.

After analyzing the results from both surveys, which provided insight into the perceptions, needs, and beliefs of both target groups concerning online ministry, the analytics will be discussed next.

**Analytics**

Analysis of the data gathered from Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, and Weebly Insights will be limited to the dates of January 21 – February 19. January 21st was selected as the initial date for analysis due to it coinciding with the placement of the first Facebook advertisements. They were placed on January 22nd. So, January 21st represents one day prior to the placement of the advertisements and thus provides a comparison of the church’s online ministry condition pre-project and how it changed once the research project’s results started being collected.

**Google Analytics**

The below graph depicts the top 10 most visited pages on the church’s website according to Google Analytics. Somewhat surprisingly, the top page visited was the Sunday Morning Message Blog page. It seemed the Blogs page would have been the most visited because it was the page linked in the Facebook advertisements. Most of the visited pages seem logical, considering that the blogs were promoted. Another page listed that was surprising, though mildly, was the one for Schedules and Events. It seemed that the Meet Jesus page would have
maybe appeared in the top 10 before Schedules and Events. Regardless, as figure 1 illustrates, there were many views overall, specifically of the top five pages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page title and screen class</th>
<th>+ Views</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>New users</th>
<th>Views per user</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70,057</td>
</tr>
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<td>1 Sunrise Church - Sunday Morning Message Blog</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Blogs - Sunrise Church</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sunrise Church - Home</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sunrise Church - Weekly Video Teaching Blog</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Discussion about Colossians 3:15-25 (January 25-29) “COMMENTS” TO COMMENT - Sunrise Church</td>
<td>CLICK ON</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Discipleship Group Online Info - Sunrise Church</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Sunrise Church - Discipleship Group Online</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Discussion about Colossians 3:15-25 (February 1-5) “COMMENTS” TO COMMENT - Sunrise Church</td>
<td>CLICK ON</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Welcome to “Be Like Jesus” video series (Week 1: January 25-29) CLICK ON “COMMENTS” TO COMMENT - Sunrise Church</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Schedule and Events - Sunrise Church</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.778</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Top 10 most visited pages on the church’s website

![Figure 1: Top 10 most visited pages on the church’s website](image1.png)

Figure 2. Traffic acquisition during the research project

![Figure 2: Traffic acquisition during the research project](image2.png)

As figure 2 shows and was expected, most of the traffic to the website was generated by Facebook, based on the direct sources. That the majority of the traffic came from Facebook is
apparent due to the users clicking on a link that took them directly to the website. However, the second leading source for traffic was by directly entering the web address. Considering that 7 users visited the website by directly entering the URL, it would appear to indicate that most of these users were from the church.

Figure 3. Average time per engagement, engaged sessions per user, average time per session

As the above graph illustrates, the average user accessed the website approximately four times for about 11 minutes each time throughout the project. This fact signifies that the intervention was beginning to develop increased interest by users due to their duration of engagement with the church’s online ministry.

Figure 4. User stickiness
Perhaps one of the most important graphs, along with figure 3, to discuss concerning user engagement with the online ministry and retention is user stickiness. DAU, WAU, and MAU, respectively, mean daily active users, weekly active users, and monthly active users. Over the entirety of the project, the DAU/MAU ratio of 5.7 percent in figure 4 signifies that the average user visited the website nearly six days a month. Twenty-five percent of average users visited the website 1.75 days a week, according to the DAU/WAU ratio. The WAU/MAU ratio of 22.9 percent means that the average user visited the website just below one week (.916) a month. As the graph illustrates, the highest percentages of retention and engagement are at the beginning of the project, which is most likely primarily attributable to the researcher’s implementation of the intervention during the first week of the project, thus meaning that the data from the first week is skewed. Overall, it seems that the average user was on the website approximately a quarter of the total days during the entire research project. Considering that the website was mostly dormant prior to the project, this result appears to be significant and directly attributable to the addition of the blogs, which allowed for the possibility of establishing and maintaining an online community.

Figure 5. User acquisition overview
For the most part, user acquisition was spread out evenly over the entirety of the project. According to the graph in figure 5, the only anomaly was in the middle. Most days, two to four users migrated to the website.

Figure 6. User retention overview

The discrepancy in figure 5 between users and new users appears to be due to the researcher. As the chart in figure 6 demonstrates, out of the 34 new users to the website, 8 were returning users. While the intervention resulted in 34 new users visiting the website during the entire project, and out of the 8 returning users, 6 were from the church, it can be deduced that there were 2 users from the general public that appeared to return more than once.

Weebly Insights

While some of the graphs from Weebly Insights parallel Google Analytics, they differ some. For instance, the Weebly Insight graphs illustrate how much the intervention augmented engagement with the ministry on their website by showing the increase in percentages. The graph below is of the 10 most visited website pages during the research project, January 21 – February 19.
Like the similar graph from Google Analytics, figure 1, the top five pages are the same, though in a slightly different order, specifically the first and second pages.

The above Weebly Insights Overview graph, figure 8, illustrates the total unique visits and page views throughout the research project. Additionally, it shows the average amount of pages viewed per visitor over the same period. The percentages in figure 8 demonstrate that the intervention’s efforts to drive traffic to the website and create greater engagement were successful. The most notable instance in the graph of the intervention’s success is illustrated with a 1,987 percent increase in unique visits over the pre-project activity on the website.
Concerning unique visits, figure 9 shows the unique visits and page views daily over the course of the project. Toward the beginning of the project, the first week, the graph depicts more activity, overall, than many of the other days. This phenomenon was due to the researcher’s activity of modifying and augmenting the website for the project. Generally, the visitor activity and page views were steady during the remainder of the project, with unique visits being approximately 5 a day and page views being around 46 a day.

Figure 9. Line graph of total unique visits and page views

Facebook Analytics

While Google Analytics and Weebly Insights monitored the church’s website activity, Facebook Analytics tracked the church’s Facebook page activity. The following graphs illustrate the project’s intervention results from advertising with Facebook Ads to garner more engagement with the general populace and increase the ministry’s presence.
The peaks in figure 10 correspond with each paid advertisement’s launch and represent the amount of Facebook users reached per advertisement.

Despite a few prominent peaks and valleys in figure 11, overall, the church’s Facebook page garnered a steady amount of visitors throughout the project, with approximately 6 people visiting a day. According to figure 12 below, most of the visitors engaged the church’s Facebook home page. The second most engaged section on the page was the photos. Most likely, the
photos were second due to some being used in the advertisements. Also, a few individuals engaged the page through the about section.

Figure 12. Where views occurred on the page

Figure 13. Total likes of church’s Facebook page

The church’s Facebook page had 82 likes at the start of the project and, according to figure 13, reached 183 by the end of it. The dramatic increase was due to the weekly advertising done from weeks two to five.
As shown in figure 14, all of the likes were generated from paid advertising during the project’s entirety. Unsurprisingly, according to the following graph, figure 15, many of those likes correspondingly took place through the advertisement. The likes happening through the advertisement and the church’s Facebook page represent the vast majority of the likes. Again, all the likes were directly attributable to the paid advertising.
The church’s Facebook page had 87 followers prior to the commencement of the project. By the conclusion of the research project, as figure 16 demonstrates, the page totaled 188 followers. During the project, there was nearly a direct correspondence with the number of followers and the page likes despite the slight difference between their numerical values. As figure 17 illustrates, similar to the page likes, all the new page followers were gathered through the research project’s paid advertising.

Figure 16. Total page followers

Figure 17. How page followers were obtained
Figure 18. Where page followers were obtained

Figure 18, similar to how figure 15 shows the church’s page gathered likes, shows that individuals decided to follow the page through the advertisements or on the page. It is important to note that many of the follows occurred in response to the researcher intentionally inviting individuals who liked the page to follow the page. This process is critical to mention since it means that the church has expanded its presence and potential influence through its Facebook page. Furthermore, it means that the church now can engage and potentially provide ministry to a larger audience online.

Figure 19. Page reactions, comments, and shares
While it is unsurprising that reactions to the posts were higher than comments and shares, figure 19 demonstrates engagement was steady and in some ways increasing as the frequency of comments and shares appeared to escalate toward the last three weeks of the project.

![Reactions Graph]

Figure 20. The ways people reacted to the page’s posts

Figure 20 shows that most of the individuals reached through advertising positively engaged the advertisements. There were also a few angry and sad reactions, however. It is difficult to determine if the sad reactions were due to the individual seeing the images of the cross and feeling sad that Jesus had to die for them, or if the individual may be antagonistic toward Christianity and was sad to see advertising from a church. It seems that it may be the former since the advertisements were directed at an audience that was either Christian or interested in Christianity, as the audience tags in chapter 3 demonstrate. Regardless, most people positively responded to the church advertisements.

By aggregating all of the information gathered from the three analytic sources, it demonstrates that with intentional effort and a plan, the church amplified its online ministry presence and began to garner ever-increasing levels of engagement. This was evident by
comparing the pre-project combined 3 visitors to the church’s Facebook page and website that they averaged daily to the approximately 9-10 visitors that those same platforms combined daily throughout the project’s duration. While the level of engagement was slow initially, due to the pre-project stagnation on the church’s two platforms, with consistent effort and execution, it was possible to generate activity and initiate momentum, which translated into increasing levels of engagement by users.

Overall, most of the intervention plan yielded predictable results. Perhaps the one manner in which it deviated from the anticipated results was the lack of website visitors being converted to members. While an exact number was not preconceived, it seemed that there would have been more than one individual from outside the church community that would have created an account. However, in retrospect, it is not very surprising considering the requirement for a visitor to create a website account before they could even glimpse into the community before making a decision to join. It should again be noted that the decision to require account creation by visitors prior to interacting with the blogs was to assuage the ministry leader’s concerns about potentially attracting individuals online who may be critical to the church or Christianity.

After presenting the surveys and analytics, it is important to discuss some observations from the project and evaluate pre-project anticipated results with the actual results.

**Observations and Evaluation of Results**

At the end of the project, it was apparent that perhaps the church’s best way to begin the process of populating the online community on their website would be to leverage the social networks of their parishioners. To actualize this idea, it would necessitate church leadership intentionally advocating for the online ministry and encouraging their parishioners to join the church’s website and its discussions and invite their friends and family.
Similarly, concerning methods for enlarging the community, once the project was completed, it was realized that to increase the possibility of website visitors, which were funneled there from the Facebook advertisements, creating an account, it was necessary for there to be an option where the visitors could look into the community without needing to commit first. This option could be to create a blog page that is visible and accessible to the public without needing to create a website account. Doing this would allow website visitors to sample or try the community without any obligations prior to creating an account, which people may consider parallel to choosing to be a member of the church’s community. The idea of having a publically accessible blog page on the church’s website may be similar to the concept of having a booth at a fair where people wander around and momentarily stop at a booth to hear about or see something without feeling the need to commit beforehand.

As noted in the final week of the project, it became obvious that the church’s website, which was built with Weebly, may not be the best type of website builder to utilize for constructing a website that is primarily designed for hosting an online community. It would be advisable to consider other website builders, such as Wix or Ning, because they offer more functionality for online community creation and management.

One anticipated outcome of the intervention was that the in-person-centric focus of Sonrise Church’s ministry would at least migrate to more of a dual focus on in-person and online ministry. Considering the overall age of the congregation, the general overall adoption, understanding, and usage of social media, and the dual-language challenges present within the current ministry context, an expectation of a complete adoption of online ministry with heavy online community engagement was thought to be beyond the realm of possibility or expectation. This prediction was reasonably accurate. While there was some initial movement toward
adopting online ministry by the church when the most influential English-speaking members created accounts on the website, some of them did not participate in the online community through the blog discussions throughout the entire project. Out of the six individuals, five from the church and the researcher, two consistently participated in the online discussions on the website, and the ministry leader left a few comments one time. Though the congregation did not fully migrate to the adoption of online ministry, there was increased interest and discussion among them about it. Additionally, the primary moderator went from being hesitant to a full supporter and advocating for online ministry. It should also be mentioned that an additional thing that kept the church from migrating further into online ministry was that the Cambodian constituency of the church’s congregation was unable to engage the online ministry due to a lack of language support.

Prior to the project, it was thought that the intervention might reveal that the success of migrating a ministry online and its subsequent ability to increase its overall presence and influence may have more to do with the people involved than the technology, know-how, and resources. Most of the resources needed to migrate a ministry online are readily available to many people and affordable, especially in Western contexts. Knowledge about how to migrate and amplify a ministry online presents more of a challenge, which seems to be associated more with the congregation’s overall generational age group, though it may be more dependent on the ministry leader. If the ministry leader, congregation, or both, are unwilling or unconvinced for whatever reason that it is essential to migrate and amplify their ministry’s presence online, then it will not occur, or if it is done, it will be done with hesitation, inconstancy, or reluctance. Therefore, it would ensure that if their ministry ventures into online ministry that it will not be as effective as possible.
Throughout the research project, there appeared to be a reluctant engagement or ambivalence of online ministry by the ministry leader. This is mentioned based on various communications and observations noted during the project. The ministry leader simultaneously expressed support for the project and said the project concept is great, but that he believes biblical discipleship must be done in-person, not online. He also mentioned the possibility of deleting the church’s Facebook page at the end of the project. Furthermore, during the research project, it was reported that the ministry leader had not discussed the church’s online ministry during the Sunday morning service before the congregation. It was discussed during informal conversations during fellowship after the service. This topic is being discussed as part of the results because the apparent reluctant engagement of online ministry seems to have potentially hindered further congregational engagement of the online ministry, which could have potentially improved the vitality and sustainability of the church’s online ministry.

While it was thought the intervention might demonstrate the initial stages of online community engagement trending upward, its sustainability is another issue to consider. A successful intervention’s sustainability may be contingent on variables other than material resources such as money and tools. It may lie more in the realm of personnel and desire to continue the intervention. Though determining the intervention’s sustainability was not able to be completely determined during the intervention, making a better determination of it would lie with the continual observation of the data beyond the research project’s intervention period. However, while there was an initial upward trend of congregant engagement with some individuals registering for a website account and leaving comments, the momentum did not continue to ensure sustainability. Again, this may have something to do with the aforementioned
discussion in the previous few paragraphs concerning public advocacy by church leadership and lack of linguistic support for the Cambodian members.

To this point in the results, the discussion has been about the adoption, vitality, and sustainability of the online ministry by the church. Though, another aspect of the project was to determine if the online ministry would increase engagement among non-Christians. Prior to the project’s commencement, it was anticipated that the intervention would create an opportunity and enable the ministry’s congregation to engage the general populace more as the church collectively than it has in years. Unfortunately, the collective church has not been engaged in any group evangelistic activities for quite a while. It is difficult to determine with precision how long it has been. Regardless, the utilization of social media platforms, such as Facebook, provides the opportunity to engage pre-Christians outside the church building and in a space that they are familiar with and comfortable. This activity and opportunity were to represent the beginning of bridging the gap between the church and its people with a broader array of pre-Christians as online ministry appears to be the newest and largest mission field and opportunity currently. While the use of the Facebook platform and the utilization of Facebook advertisements did begin the process of reaching into the general population and more individuals did begin to migrate to the church’s website, the engagement with the general populace was suppressed some due to the requirement for people to create a website account to access the blogs. Concerning engagement with the general public on the website, many individuals visited it and accessed multiple pages, with an individual creating an account. Engagement with the public also took place on the church’s Facebook page with the gathering of more likes and followers and some individuals leaving brief comments to posts. Overall, there appeared to be an upward trend in public
engagement on the Facebook page, demonstrating that the advertising and invitations to individuals to like the page was creating a larger virtual audience for the church on the page.

Regarding the recognition of an increase in online community engagement, which would include the congregants and the general public as a whole, another hoped-for outcome of the intervention was to witness the initial stages of an upward trend in online community engagement by analyzing the data and correlations of various variables that would be recorded. The idea was if the analytics record positive numbers that certain variables indicate an upward trend, then it should demonstrate that if another ministry replicated the same or a similar intervention, they might experience similar results. As demonstrated in the analytics section, there were indications that the initial stages of an increase in online community engagement were beginning to emerge.

Overall, most of the project was considered a success. Though, perhaps one of the most successful aspects of the project was the increase of Facebook page followers from 87 to 188 by the end of the project. In a short amount of time, the church’s Facebook page, which was pretty stagnant prior to the project, accumulated 101 followers. Another thing that was considered a success was that the combined number of three daily visitors to the church’s website and Facebook page pre-project increased to a daily average of 9-10 visitors during the project. A third success was the increase of activity on the website from one visitor and 8 page views one day prior to statistics from the project appearing to a daily average of about 5 visitors and 46 page views throughout the project. This success, combined with the second success mentioned above, demonstrated another success, activity and momentum were being generated, and engagement with the church’s online ministry had increased. While this next element did not directly involve individuals, it was considered successful. The functionality of all the
components related to the blogs for the facilitation of community development was considered a success. The blog pages, along with their corresponding Study Gateway video sign-up link and study video link, worked very well and allowed individuals to find everything they needed to participate in the community discussion in one place.

What would be considered a minor surprise was that one individual from outside the church congregation registered for a website account. While a specific number of hoped-for registrations was not preconceived, it did seem as though at least a few more would have registered. However, as mentioned before, how the website was constructed and the decision to require website registration to see and access the blogs appeared to be a limiting factor in the acquisition of more website members from the general populace.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The universal church, which is comprised of each local church ministry, is the greatest thing on earth, as it was conceived by God and is the instrument that He has chosen to use to reach the world with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church’s continuation is necessary, and its expansion and increase in influence are essential for all humankind. While the following is not intended to reflect on any one individual but rather is a discussion concerning the entirety of leadership of all local ministries, as ministry leaders manage each local ministry, it may be necessary to explore said leaders’ effectiveness. While a ministry leader’s effectiveness may not be measured only quantitatively, perhaps a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods could be utilized. However, this begs the question: What is to be done if a ministry leader is determined to no longer be ministerially effective?

Malphurs says that older ministry leaders may need to be replaced with younger leaders to help the church stay relevant. 248 At least a ministry leader, regardless of age, needs to maintain a posture of continuous learning, 249 adaptability, 250 and desire to continue to grow holistically: spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. 251,252 They should be a person that is desiring to want to advance personally and to advance the church. In a sense, they need to be an individual that is not content with where they or the church are currently, though, while grateful,

250 Bolsinger, 38-41.
they want to press on for what is next. However, this may not describe many people in general or ministry leaders.

Each church, and the universal church as a whole, might be missing something. Perhaps one possible solution to the lack of adaptability and forward-thinking among the current iteration of churches, which the current COVID-19 pandemic helped reveal, is that of apostolically gifted individuals. In modernity, these individuals are considered to be multi-gifted and talented, charismatic, visionary, and entrepreneurial in mindset. The application of apostolically gifted individuals does not necessarily mean that hierarchically speaking, that the apostle’s office needs to be reinstated. That may be a discussion for another time, as it is farther outside the scope of this paper. Regardless, at present, the universal church seems to have been attempting to utilize the solution of providing apostolically gifted individuals to the church in various, seemingly inconsistent ways that resemble a patchwork methodology of application. Some of the methods appear to be through executive pastors, denominationalism, multi-talented and multi-gifted pastors, and church or ministry consultants. However, perhaps if a more intentional and cohesive framework that utilizes the apostolic gifts of specific individuals for the universal church was formulated, implemented, and maintained perpetually, maybe the whole church would be better prepared to weather a crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic and other future crises. Not only weather them but perhaps be adaptable and forward-thinking enough to anticipate potential crises and opportunities and be out in front leading rather than leading from behind.

Everything discussed to this point in the conclusion may be the ultimate reason why many local churches were caught off guard and unprepared for the current crisis, and it may also be the solution. This conception may be the ultimate underlying principle that could be derived
from the entirety of the research, the churches’ response to the current pandemic, and its possible answer to the problem now and into the future.

Therefore, conducting research into the identification of potentially apostolically gifted individuals and exploring methods for how to partner them with local churches by creating, implementing, and maintaining a type of network or system, might be worth considering. Somewhat alternatively, if the prior research suggestion is not feasible, then surveying current executive pastors that exhibit apostolic type gifting, multi-gifted and multi-talented pastors, church or ministry consultants, and leaders within denominational headquarters would be advisable. It would be worth employing spiritual gift assessments and surveys that ask about the natural talents of these leaders. Once that data is gathered, assess the ministry context of each leader prior to their arrival, the current condition of the ministry now, and then compare the before and after for similarities, dissimilarities, and changes. The next step would be to analyze the data for potential correlations between the leader’s spiritual gifts and natural talents.

Additionally, looking for correlations between a crisis event, such as COVID-19, the decisions the surveyed leaders made because of it that were implemented, and the subsequent results may be a way to ascertain to what degree an apostolic type of individual may assist a church prior to and during a crisis. A potential drawback to this research would be that it could take many months to gather the necessary data. Analyzing it would take quite a while also. However, the potential benefits for the universal church may be extraordinary, especially if it were to receive the findings and make the necessary adjustments. Though, acceptance by the universal church may not come quickly or easily as the findings may suggest the need for a type of reformation, to some degree, of the current iteration of the church. As Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky note, and extrapolated and applied to the local and universal church, though a system may seem to be in
need of reformation, those within the system, and especially those with the most leverage, like the system the way it currently is, thus they, along with others in that system contribute to it becoming self-reinforcing, hence resistant to change.\textsuperscript{253}

The previous discussion was related to the potential overarching problem and solution to the present crisis and future crises from the entirety of this work, which could present a possible path for the universal church to pursue. However, concerning the results and observations from the project and how they could provide assistance for ministries in the current pandemic seeking to utilize online platforms for ministry, there are some noteworthy ones to mention.

The surveys revealed a few interesting results that seemed significant and worthy of mentioning. In the “Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian,” a combined 70 percent stated they would have religious discussions on either a church’s website, Facebook page, or both. Additionally, many respondents indicated they were interested in discipleship and exploring Christianity and its claims. Considering that it appears that there are still many churches that do not currently offer online discussions and material for the two subject matters mentioned above, it seems like a tremendous oversight by them. Conversely, churches have a tremendous opportunity to offer all three options to their parishioners to assist them in their spiritual formation and improve community communication, cohesion, and vitality.

Similar to the aforementioned missed opportunities, the “Individuals that Do Not Attend Church” survey revealed opportunities that the universal church does not appear to have seized entirely. The survey revealed that 56 percent would ask tough questions about Christianity online. Furthermore, of the 55 respondents in the survey that said they were interested to very

interested in Christianity, 33 percent know of family and friends interested in Christianity. Thirty-three percent of 55 is 18.15 individuals. Combining 55 and 18.15 equals 73.15 pre-Christians that are interested in Christianity. Using these calculations, it means a church reaching roughly 100 people may encounter approximately 55 individuals interested in Christianity and potentially an additional 18 family and friends of theirs interested. While some churches may be actively pursuing online ministry with the intent to reach the general populace, there appears to be great potential for the universal church to cast a wider net and possibly reach many people interested in hearing and learning more about Christ. However, as it presently stands, overall, it seems that both surveys indicate that most churches are not giving their congregants and the general populace what they need or are seeking online, or for some ministries, maybe not enough of it.

Other than the surveys, the project also revealed the need for an online community to be correctly paired with an appropriate online platform. Better options for creating and managing an online community exist with website builders like Wix and Ning. Weebly demonstrated limited capacity in this regard. While Weebly did offer the blog function, thus enabling the possibility of creating and sustaining a community through blogs, if a ministry were wanting to have a more robust and larger community, it would need more and better functionality, and a different website builder should be considered, such as the aforementioned ones.

The project also revealed that for a ministry to be effective on online platforms, the ministry leader needs to be fully committed and engaged with the efforts. All organizations, including a church, will only go as far as the leader. They will reflect the leader in many ways, including, but not limited to, their education, strengths, weaknesses, interests, personality, talents, and spiritual gifts. The degree to which the church or organization is reflective of its
leader seems proportionate to the number of leaders in the organization, leadership structure, and decision-making model, which refers to how decisions are made and who is making the final decision most of the time. Thus, if a ministry has a vertical leadership structure with few leaders and almost all decisions are made by one individual, there is a greater probability that the organization or church will more closely resemble that person. Following this logic, this means that if the leader, out of their ministry philosophy, believes that online ministry is not that important or is unsure and remains unsure, the church will most likely not pursue online ministry or reluctantly and inconsistently engage it. If this scenario occurs, the church’s online ministry will not reach its fullest potential. It might be akin to someone giving a half-hearted effort at doing something.

The apparent reluctant engagement of online ministry due to ministry philosophy appeared to be present during the project. While this project did not examine the ministry philosophy of a ministry leader to ascertain the degree of correlation that philosophy had on the design, vitality, and sustainability of the online ministry, there was a correlation, and it did have an influence. Perhaps generational attitudinal patterns, which could be influencing the ministry philosophy, manifested in the vocalizations and actions that may have hindered the attainment of greater expansion, vitality, and sustainability of the online ministry. This phenomenon between a ministry leader and their philosophy, how it impacts the local ministry they lead, and how their implemented ministry philosophy either assists the ministry in being adaptive, forward-thinking, overall, for seeing and preparing for what is next, or how it hinders the ministry, seems profitable to research.

While the ministry philosophy appeared to be an impetus for some of the ministry leader’s vocalizations and actions, which may have hindered the online ministry some, concerns
about the unknown may have also contributed. This idea was mentioned briefly in the literature review and appeared to present toward the beginning of the project when the ministry leader vocalized concern about possibly attracting individuals online who are antagonistic toward the church or Christianity. It is difficult to determine if the concern vocalized by the ministry leader in the stated case is merely limited to the unknown individuals in the online environment and their reactions, or if the concern is indicative of general concern, worry, or fear of the unknown, which may manifest in a comfortableness with the status quo and preference to maintain it. To research this in ministry leaders it may require psychological evaluations and personality assessments to find answers. Researching current ministry leaders’ personalities and conducting psychological assessments to ascertain the correlation between them and how the leaders conduct the ministry may be fruitful.

The project also revealed that, depending on how the ministry decides to allow admission into their online community, perhaps the most effective method for initially populating the ministry’s preferred online platform or platforms is to encourage the current congregants to join and also to invite their social network of friends and family to join. While it seems logical, it may get overlooked as a church may become more focused on reaching others out in the general populace. However, if each congregant were to register for an account on their church’s website, become active in the online community, and invite and encourage their friends and family to join, though the momentum may be slow initially, especially for smaller congregations, momentum will exponentially accelerate. Additionally, this population growth model would follow an inside-out pattern, centrifugal movement through concentric circles of relationships, which would feel more natural, as everyone within the community is being brought in by someone they know personally. Doing this does not mitigate the need to utilize tactics and tools,
such as advertising through Facebook, to attract and funnel individuals from the general populace into the church’s community. However, populating the online ministry should start with the individuals who are current members or attenders because this helps create a positive network effect and evokes social proof that attracts others.

Another consideration for creating and growing an online community is how individuals can engage or interact with the online community. While this project explored creating an online community through blogs, it is also possible to help create and sustain a community through other means such as video. With the blogs, the individuals in this research project engaged each other and the community asynchronously. However, if a church ministry were to employ both blogs and video conferencing options such as Zoom or Facebook Messenger, then the ministry would be offering its visitors the option to engage the community either asynchronously or synchronously. With both options, a visitor could conceivably engage the online community either way or both. Offering this appears to be an excellent method for garnering more engagement quantitatively from more individuals because it offers more engagement flexibility. While some visitors may be content and more comfortable engaging the online community asynchronously through blogs, others may prefer to engage synchronously through video. Considering some individuals may be introverts or experience social anxiety, or have a schedule or timezone different from the ministry’s or facilitator’s hours of availability, it seems an asynchronous option for online community engagement should always be offered.

As Facebook advertisements were utilized throughout the project, they proved beneficial for increasing the ministry’s exposure to new individuals, with many of them, when invited, choosing to like and follow the church’s Facebook page. Therefore, based on the aforementioned understanding and the findings from survey 2, it appears that a viable method for online
evangelism is to fish and funnel individuals from Facebook and maybe other social network platforms to a church’s website to have religious conversations. However, to make this online evangelistic method more effective, it would be advisable to provide an option for website visitors to view and interact on a blog or something similar prior to creating an account. This idea is suggested because the correlation between visitors creating a website account and their perception of that action signifying that they are joining the church community was revealed during the project. The researcher and moderator theorized this, and the moderator’s friend confirmed it.

As was alluded to in the previous paragraph, the idea of having a page or space, such as a blog, on the ministry’s website or online platform for the general public to visit, view, and leave comments without needing to create an account was conceived. This idea, which the literature that was reviewed for this project did not mention, seems worthy to attempt in ministry and also for further research because the conception, if implemented, may result in higher user engagement, thus a greater chance of online ministry growth, vitality, ministry presence, ministry relevance, and most importantly, potentially more individuals giving their lives to Christ.

The intervention design utilized in this research project can be employed by any church ministry that desires to engage their congregation more and reach individuals that are not currently part of their community. As intimated at the beginning of this chapter, the results one gleans from the application of this research design in their own unique context may have more to do with the individuals than with other factors. While it is the Paraclete who ultimately builds the church, those human agents that are entrusted with the care of the church by the Lord need to have a ministry philosophy that allows them to actively and intentionally pursue online ministry for the effort to achieve the maximum results possible. This conception may be akin to one
needing to be actively studying and meditating on Scripture so that there is a storehouse for the Holy Spirit to draw from when the individual is ministering. There is a human component to this dynamic. It is a partnership, with the ministry leader and church doing their part and God doing what only He can do. The implementation, growth, and thriving of a church’s online ministry will necessitate the active and intentional effort of the church and its leaders, with God, as just stated, building up the church and blessing the efforts according to His will.

It is theoretically possible that any church ministry, even a small rural one, with a complete commitment to online ministry, could eventually acquire a multitude of visitors and online parishioners that regularly engage the ministry through its online platforms. It will take time to achieve significant results for an online ministry implementation, as this research demonstrated. In the beginning, it will be slow and require more effort with fewer results. This fact will be especially true with a ministry that has either no current online presence, minimal online presence, or presence on a platform or two though not actively managed. However, the intentional efforts to grow the church’s online ministry should eventually reach a point of critical mass where the online ministry will take on a life of its own. Though, a strong desire, plan, intentionality, and aggressive pursuit are required to achieve the greatest potential outcome for each church ministry that pursues online ministry with the intent to engage their congregants more for their continued spiritual formation and to reach a lost world in need of a Savior.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Survey #1 Individuals that Attend Church or Are Christian

Q1 Do you attend a church in-person, online, or both?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>34.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>38.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>27.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2 Would you engage in your church’s online ministry if they had an active one?
**Q3 Would you be more comfortable or prefer attending a church online or in-person?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>48.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>31.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentage of responses:**

- Yes: 59.78% (55 responses)
- No: 40.22% (37 responses)
Q4 Would you participate in an online discussion about a religious topic on a church’s website, Facebook page, or both?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>38.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, website</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Facebook</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>23.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, website and Facebook</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>31.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 92

Showing 29 responses
2/19/2021 8:08 PM
In person

2/11/2021 1:51 PM
No

2/10/2021 4:33 AM
No

2/9/2021 3:42 PM
no, that's stupid

2/8/2021 12:56 PM
No

2/6/2021 10:57 AM
no

2/6/2021 9:27 AM
I don't go to church

2/5/2021 3:08 PM
No

2/5/2021 2:23 PM
no

2/5/2021 12:33 PM
No

2/5/2021 8:46 AM
no

2/5/2021 4:17 AM
none

2/5/2021 4:11 AM
None
No, I just attend Sunday Service, Wednesday Night Bible Study, and Podcast for the chosen topic of the day by my Pastor for Bible teaching.

Probably not

Other, not-Facebook or a church’s, platform. One that has meaningful privacy measures in place.

no too private

none

Zoom

In person

Unsure

maybe

Unsure. Depends on the participants

would not participate

no
Q5 Would you participate in online study groups or discussions throughout the week if the church you attend or another church had them available?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q6 What kind of ministry content would you engage if it were available on your church’s or another church’s website? Please select all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explore Christianity and Its Claims</td>
<td>31.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>32.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Living</td>
<td>52.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Issues</td>
<td>14.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28
29
47
50
13
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES-</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Issues</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and Family</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological Training</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Responses</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 90

Showing 20 responses

None
2/10/2021 4:33 AM

Also stupid
2/8/2021 12:56 PM

none
2/6/2021 9:27 AM

Less fairytales more science!
2/5/2021 3:08 PM

no
2/5/2021 12:33 PM
In person or not at all
2/5/2021 12:27 PM

Modern scripture
2/5/2021 12:05 PM

none
2/5/2021 4:17 AM

none
2/5/2021 4:11 AM

Spiritual renewal
2/4/2021 8:28 PM

Future of Religion Discernment
2/4/2021 6:41 PM

None
2/4/2021 4:30 PM

None
2/4/2021 12:02 PM

none
2/4/2021 7:53 AM

Discernment
2/4/2021 7:51 AM

History
2/4/2021 7:32 AM

Relationship
2/4/2021 7:26 AM

social and international issues
2/4/2021 7:09 AM
Q7 How much time do you spend watching, reading, or studying Christian content on the internet currently?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 hours a week</td>
<td>79.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 hours a week</td>
<td>11.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 hours a week</td>
<td>5.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 hours a week</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 hours a week</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 hours a week</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+ hours a week</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q8 Would you attend one church in-person and another online or two different churches online or two different churches in-person?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of the above scenarios</td>
<td>57.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One in-person and one online</td>
<td>28.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two different churches online</td>
<td>8.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two different churches in-person</td>
<td>5.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q9 Should a church be pursuing both in-person ministry and online ministry or just focus on in-person ministry?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursue both in-person and online ministry</td>
<td>80.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue only online ministry</td>
<td>9.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue only in-person ministry</td>
<td>9.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q10 Do you think that online ministry is important in sharing the gospel message with the world?

![Bar chart showing the response to Q10]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>86.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Survey #2 Individuals that Do Not Attend Church

Q1 How interested are you in Christianity or religion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>33.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>19.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
<td>27.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>19.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2 Are you considering attending or visiting a church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSWER CHOICES-</td>
<td>RESPONSES-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Yes</td>
<td>49.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No</td>
<td>50.49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 103

Q3 Do you currently watch, read, or study religious content online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES-</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Yes (Please list what kind of content)</td>
<td>26.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No</td>
<td>73.79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 103

Showing 27 responses

Bible Studies electronically
2/4/2021 7:14 AM

Bible Ap
2/4/2021 5:30 AM

Our church is online
2/4/2021 4:24 AM
Preaching and teaching Kenneth Copeland, Billye Brim

2/4/2021 4:14 AM
The bible

2/4/2021 3:25 AM
online mass

2/3/2021 10:41 PM
Bhuddism

2/3/2021 10:23 PM
All kinds

2/3/2021 10:14 PM
bible

2/3/2021 9:54 PM
Bible app, YouTube

2/3/2021 9:43 PM
Google/Twitter

2/3/2021 9:41 PM
christian content

2/3/2021 9:37 PM
Lance Walnue

2/3/2021 9:35 PM
The 700 Club

2/3/2021 9:35 PM
jw.org

2/3/2021 9:34 PM
Grace to you

I like to watch sermons such as Steven Furtick fro [sic] elevation worship

Sermons

Various religions in school

Bible, sermon, studies

146
Q4 If you were to attend a church for the first time, would you feel more comfortable attending church in-person or church online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>60.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>39.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5 Would you feel more comfortable asking difficult or tough questions about Christianity in-person at a church or on a church’s website or Facebook page?
### Q6 Would you participate in an online discussion on a religious topic on a church's website, Facebook page, or both?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>43.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church's website</td>
<td>38.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church's Facebook page</td>
<td>7.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church's website and Facebook page</td>
<td>9.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Website: 59.22% (61)
- Facebook page: 16.50% (17)
- Both: 24.27% (25)
- TOTAL: 103
Q7 What kind of Christian content would you like to engage if it were available? Please select all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Christianity and its Claims</td>
<td>39.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>23.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Living</td>
<td>36.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible</td>
<td>49.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Issues</td>
<td>22.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSWER CHOICES</td>
<td>RESPONSES-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>26.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Issues</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>28.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and Family</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>22.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership training</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>20.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological training</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)

Total Respondents: 103

Showing 13 responses

None

2/4/2021 7:03 AM

none

2/4/2021 6:58 AM

none

2/4/2021 6:58 AM

Open minded discussions. The world is billions of years old. There was a Big Bang that started the universe. Pardon the following caps. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE IF YOU ARE GOING TO PUT INFO ABOUT YOUR CHURCH ONLINE IN ANY FORM, FB, FB ADVERT, LOCAL ON LINE 'PATCH' TYPE, WEB SITE PLEASE BE
SURE IT IS CORRECT AND NOT OUT OF DATE. ALSO PLEASE UPDATE YOUR CHURCH’S VOICE MAIL, GREETING, & SERVICE TIMES.

2/4/2021 6:21 AM
Social responsibility

2/4/2021 6:16 AM
History of conflicts

2/4/2021 6:03 AM
None

2/4/2021 5:39 AM
None

2/4/2021 5:36 AM
The truth

2/4/2021 2:44 AM
teaching religious education to children

2/3/2021 10:41 PM
Not interested in Christian content.

2/3/2021 9:54 PM
none

2/3/2021 9:29 PM
homosexual questions

2/3/2021 9:27 PM
Q8 Do you have non-Christian family or friends that would be interested in learning more about Christianity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q9 Do you think that your family or friends would be more comfortable, as their first experience with church/Christianity, to visit a church in-person or a church online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>40.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

152
Q10 If your family member(s) and/or friend(s) would prefer to visit a church or learn more about Christianity online, would they prefer to do that on a church’s Facebook page or a church’s website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES-</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Online</td>
<td>32.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Both</td>
<td>27.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES-</th>
<th>RESPONSES-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Website</td>
<td>62.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Facebook</td>
<td>11.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Both</td>
<td>26.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Online Ministry Facilitation and Moderation

Legend
FB = Facebook
Mod/FCLTR = Ministry Moderator/Facilitator engage or facilitate action (can be ministry leader or congregant)

Select weekly study video from Study Gateway (8 Session Be Like Jesus)
Assigned mod/FCLTR:
1.

Promote weekly study on FB with FB Ads that encourage website visits (Wed-Sun)
Assigned Mod/FCLTR:
1.

Moderators for weekly study discussion on church’s website blogs
*blog discussions run Mon-Fri

Moderators for visitors on church’s FB page
1. answer visitor questions
2. facilitate discussion
3. encourage visitors to visit church website
4. encourage visitors in Seattle area to visit the church and website
Assigned Mods/FCLTRs:
1.
2.

Online Ministry Community Facilitators
1. Email members ministry updates and invitations to blog discussions
2. Post ministry updates to FB and website
3. Engage FB visitors and website members

Weekly Study Gateway Blog Discussion
*utilize Be Like Jesus Study Guide (includes group discussion questions)
Assigned Mods/FCLTRs:
1.
2.

Sunday Message Blog Discussion
*discussion questions provided by mods/FCLTRs
*discussion based on Sunday service message
Assigned Mods/FCLTRs:
1.
2.

Discipleship Study Blog
Curriculum: Believe (30 Sessions)
Set start date
Closed group
Assigned Mods/FCLTRs:
1.
2.
Legend

+ = Successful outcome

FB = Facebook

Mod/FCLTR = Ministry Moderator/Facilitator engage or facilitate action
(can be ministry leader or congregant)
Appendix E

Research Project Permission Letter

November 20, 2020

Daniel Bagaas
1201 S. 237th Lane #1804
Des Moines, WA 98198

Dear Daniel:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Migration and Amplification of Ministry Online to Pursue the Great Commission, we have decided to grant you permission to access, modify, and amplify our website and Facebook page to conduct your research project, as well as invite our congregants to participate in it.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☑ We grant permission to promote the church ministry through Facebook Ads.

☑ We will assist in the selection and/or creation of content for the online ministry.

☑ We will assist in the facilitation of the online ministry.

☑ We will assist in the moderation of the blogs on our website and discussions on our Facebook page.

☑ I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

James C. Pelland
Pastor
Sonrise Evangelical Free Church
610 SW Roxbury Street
Seattle, WA 98106
SonriseSeattle.org
Appendix F

IRB Approval

December 22, 2020

Dan Bagaas
Joshua Dugan

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-373 Migrating and Amplifying Ministry to Online Platforms to Pursue the Great Commission

Dear Dan Bagaas and Joshua Dugan,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

IRB Mentor: Dr. Joshua Dugan