

Lancaster Theological Seminary

**Cultivating a Culture of
Electronic Evangelism**

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in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Cultivating a Culture of Electronic Evangelism
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Abstract

Small-to-Medium sized United Methodist Churches often struggle with adapting to new technology. Unfortunately, this problem has now become a large obstacle which must be overcome by each individual congregation while trying to spread the message of Jesus Christ. While congregations could be evangelizing through technology, the lack of enthusiasm and/or resources in many congregations has stifled the voice of the Methodist church in the digital world, slowing the dissemination of their message of God's grace and love. Seeking guidance from the growth of Methodism through John and Charles Wesley's leadership, the research proposes a plan for small-to-medium sized churches to evangelize online. The project studies the benefits of creating Audio, Communication, and Technology (ACT) Teams, enabling a new generation of leaders and bringing them together with other United Methodist Congregations to share and then implement technology resources. With ACT Teams, the United Methodist Church can develop itinerant leaders that "go out" digitally to build relationships with people who may not be able or be willing to enter a physical church building. The project also explores the ways leaders can use video to create an atmosphere for viewers to have a transformational experience with God. The hope is that by following the Wesleyan example of evangelism, the United Methodist Church may break through the digital noise to connect to those in a new way.

This is dedicated to my mom,
who always said I could do whatever I wanted to do,
has edited every sermon, school paper, grant proposal,
calmly listened to frantic phone calls,
encouraged me to keep going no matter what,
and given me every opportunity to help me get there.

#grateful

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Chapter 1: We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties

In today's world, Christians are challenged by the roles, rules, and movement of technology. As a Gen-Xer, I grew up with the movement of technological advancement, watching the technology growth rate increase at an unmeasurable pace that led to today's "smart" technology. I remember going to the arcade to play Pacman which turned into an Atari console, typewriters replaced by home computers, and pagers becoming car phones. After entering the job market, I helped companies implement internet access, wireless networks, websites, and production databases. For me, the rapid movement of technology is just another facet of our lives. While I understand this movement of technology, I have been challenged in my role as a pastor by many traditional church leaders who are experiencing uncertainty and anxiety over the changes, and some are even sometimes hostile to the adaptation of technology in the church.

Over the past 20 years, technology has made many changes to the way people communicate with each another. Additionally, the last decade has seen the move from laptop and desktop computers to mobile devices which has created new avenues for people to interact with content. Development of advanced analytical and marketing software tracks the impact of how we engage with one another and how we purchase through traditional web and social media platforms. This technology helps us target our message to those most willing to hear it.

In fact, the change has been so significant that Pew Research Center reported, for adults under 49 in September 2018, that technology use had reached "near-saturation levels."¹ This

¹ Paul Hitlin, "Internet, Social Media Use and Device Ownership in U.S. Have Plateaued after Years of Growth."

shows that technology has been completely integrated into the American life for those who are 49 and younger.

Unfortunately, smaller to medium sized United Methodist churches have struggled with this major societal shift. Some argue that the broken Methodist system has made us technology adverse, which means that we do not adapt to the current technology because our leaders are not able to function in a post-modern society. The truth may be that we are resistant to technology because our congregational culture at times contend that the current technological breakthroughs are unchristian. One of the biggest barriers I believe the church has faced is the pervasive negative attitudes that both church leaders and laity alike have towards technology. For example, during a laity training class in social media, a group leader said to a colleague, “Facebook is of the devil.”

There Is No Such Thing as a Dysfunctional Organization

Those who study organizations and propose an adaptive leadership style explain we are running the church the way we want to. We may call our organization “dysfunctional,” when in fact when we try to address or even name the issue, we are not popular.² This is particularly hard in a church where pastors must find a place of approval in the congregational and denominational structure or face the threat of being asked to move to some remote location which has long been known as the place for ministerial outcasts. For laity, the backlash against change in a congregation can result in giving up without change, leaving the congregation to go to another congregation where change is more accepted, or even worse, staying in the congregation but not participating, being altogether disheartened. To engage in the world of

² Ronald Heifetz, Alexandar Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 17.

technology, we must recognize that we are part of a system that is resistant to technological change.

I believe the struggle is particularly true in United Methodist congregations who are growing older and smaller. A report by Faith Communities Today summarized the characteristics of congregations that were more likely to embrace the technological advances in order to connect with more people.³ Congregations who are more likely to be early adopters in technology typically were:

- Larger, and conversely, if a congregation has fewer than 100 attendees, it is much less likely to use technology robustly.
- Likely to have higher budgets.
- Located anywhere but in rural areas and small towns.
- More recently founded congregations with younger members. There is some positive correlation to having more members in the 18-34 age group, but increased robust technological use is more strongly related to having a sizable percentage of the 35-49 age group.

Opposingly, it is reported that congregations were likely to have a strong negative relationship to tech use if they have a high percentage of members in the 50-64 age group, and even more so if a significant portion exceeds 65 years.⁴

As Elizabeth Drescher states in *Choosing our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones*, "In the place of the kinds of communitarian relationships that might have been found in

³ Sarah Brown, "Becoming a Virtual Faith Community: Applying Past Data to New Ideas."

⁴ Sarah Brown.

churches, bowling leagues, or Elks lodges in the mid-twentieth century, we connect more and more through micro-engagements that count as significant experiences and sometimes aggregate over time into meaningful relationships.”⁵ Congregations that believe the church is a community of faith, and not just a place we go to on Sunday mornings, are able to adapt to not only this shift, but most cultural changes, as people are empowered to do ministry.

I continually draw on the story from the Bible of the Samaritan Woman at the well (John 4:4-26) as an example of why I believe a new tech directive would embrace this understanding of a thriving ministry. In the story, the woman’s experience with Jesus was so transformative that she brought many others to believe in the power of God. If she had lived in today’s society with our technology, she would have spread her message through her cell phone to her Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts, rather than being forced to leave Jesus to run and tell everyone about her encounter. The cultural shift that allows thriving congregations to adapt easily to our changing culture is that for younger generations the electronic message is as powerful as the face-to-face encounter.

For over 10 years, my colleagues and I have intentionally facilitated congregations in learning how to use technology to evangelize, by leading with what we believed were simple steps to communicate more effectively across generations:

- Holding up a cell phone while taking a selfie in service and tagging to Facebook.
#Welcome.
- Prior to the service, asking the congregation to shout out three ways they could use technology to evangelize.

⁵ Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones*.

- Include in the newsletter or bulletin the importance of connecting digitally.
- Sharing with church communities the number of views the online service has experienced.
- Sharing where people have watched the message of Jesus Christ by streaming.

It was through initiating these practices that we learned that there was a large gap between our assumptions regarding what we held as easy ways of reaching out electronically and the difficulty of the tasks as perceived by the non-technological mindset of the parishioners in our churches. We realized that there were deeper issues that were leading our congregations to reject technology.

COVID Informed

One of the surprising positives from the current COVID-19 pandemic is that churches are now recognizing that the technology they had previously rejected is necessary for them to survive. Unfortunately, most of the responsibility for moving from a physical church to a full-time virtual church, or eChurch, in these small to medium sized churches has fallen mainly on the pastors and the staff. For instance, it has been such a mental and physical burden on this group that many church leaders are worried about the health of their pastors. Bishop Laurie Haller of the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church required her pastors and staff to take a mandatory three-day leave. She wrote,

For the past five weeks, our clergy and laity have been working tirelessly to provide vital worship, pastoral care, and hope for our local churches in the Iowa Annual Conference. I also know that many of our clergy, church staff, and worship teams are utterly exhausted in mind, body, and spirit. Therefore, I am requiring those teams to find three days back-to-back between now and

Pentecost Sunday, May 31, to experience rest, renewal, and sabbath.⁶

If the brunt of the work in maintaining an online presence is on the pastors and the staff, will congregations be able to maintain an online presence?

One of the major cultural trends is the continued decline of Christian religious affiliation and church attendance in the United States, including adults who describe themselves as Christians. Affiliation and attendance are down 12% in the last decade, and those who state they are religiously unaffiliated is up from 17% in 2009.⁷ If we compare this data to Pew's recent report on the Coronavirus and an increase in faith, one-quarter of US adults said that their faith had increased during the pandemic. Of those, 46% attend worship at least once or twice a week, one-quarter attend a few times a year, and 11% never attend.⁸

Yet despite the desire to engage with congregations online, the reality is that reaching people on social media technology is difficult for a church to do on their own. Along with platforms that use algorithms to suppress Christian content, former President Trump in May 2020 signed an executive order, using his executive authority to silence social media.⁹ Free platforms have the right to reject any content they do not feel promotes their digital space, but if that includes churches, what do lower funded churches do?

If church attendance is up virtually, how do we bridge this technology gap in medium and small congregations? How do we move the responsibility of implementing technology away

⁶ Bishop Laurie Haller, "An Important Message from Bishop Laurie: Three-Day Renewal Leave Required for Clergy, Church Staffs and Worship Teams."

⁷ Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape."

⁸ Claire Gecewicz, "Few Americans Say Their House of Worship Is Open, but a Quarter Say Their Faith Has Grown amid Pandemic."

⁹ Brian Fung, Ryan Nobles, and Liptak, "Trump Is Set to Announce an Executive Order against Social Media Companies."

from already overwhelmed pastors and staff? How do we reach people who are seeking to know Jesus?

The Break-Up and The Message

In addition to tech adverse congregations, another glaring issue of the United Methodist Church is our current state of flux due to the looming certainty of a denominational split over LGBTQ+ issues. “The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation” will be up for vote at the 2022 General Conference which proposes giving \$25 million to the “traditionalist Methodist denomination” and \$2 million to any other denominations that may form.¹⁰ Many argue that most of this dissension is perpetuated by the Institute of Religion and Democracy, a Republican political think-tank which has been involved in many mainline splits since the rise of social justice movements.¹¹ This leaves an open area amongst more centrist/progressive Methodists who have allowed the conservative voice to dominate Christianity’s message to the world. Evangelicals have taken a “more is better” approach to digital media while the rest of us debate whether the medium is the right choice for talking about Christ.¹² I believe it is beyond time to bring our message of social action and God’s grace to the mainstream, and we can effectively do this through a digital presence and social media.

“The Message” of the new United Methodist Church will be of utmost importance. Smarter people than I have helped to give us an understanding of what will represent the future of the UMC. I myself have been guided by leaders from UMC Next who believe that everyone should be welcomed into “full participation” into the ministry and mission of the United

¹⁰ “The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation,” 4.

¹¹ Steven D. Martin, *Renewal or Ruin?*

¹² Esther McIntosh, “Belonging without Believing: Church as Community in an Age of Digital Media,” 136.

Methodist Church.¹³ They are asking for a streamlined institution seeking to end our systematic injustices so that we can be primarily concerned with making disciples of Jesus Christ. Through this, we are, “reclaiming the spiritual zeal and creativity of our Wesleyan heritage, with its union of both the evangelical and social gospel; this legislation empowers United Methodists to move into the future with new vision, missional alignment, and self-determination.”¹⁴ The hope is that by leaving the toxic division behind, the future church will be a witness to God’s love and grace.

Traditionalists may argue that John Wesley’s pietistic search for holiness would leave anything less than a conservative approach to salvation as being non-Wesleyan. The Wesleyan Covenant Association’s focus on the authority of scripture claims to be essentially Wesleyan and orthodox Christian.¹⁵ Yet Wesley’s pietist mission to the poor, the working class, and those in prison is more in line with a progressive understanding of our American culture (and I would argue with Jesus’ teachings) than is the more rigid moral code of the fundamentalist traditions. In my view, to focus on an individual’s salvation through selected biblical texts, negates the importance of community and social action not only in pietistic practices but in the fullness of the Gospel.

On the other hand, progressives may feel that to be messaged with centrist Methodist, or what we call the “Methodist Middle,” and their invitation for community is catering to a watered-down message of justice. I hope that we will be able to embrace Bishop Will Willimon’s call for us to realize that Jesus will not allow us to pare down to a homogeneous group who

¹³ UMC Next, “Next Generation UMC Legislation.”

¹⁴ UMC Next.

¹⁵ Wesleyan Covenant Association, “About the WCA.”

believes the same thing without our faith development being deeply harmed.¹⁶ With authentic dialogue and commitment, my prayer is that we can learn to worship and grow together in Christ.

For the sake of this project, I will call this message the “alt-Methodist message” which I believe is lived out in Luke 10:27a called “The Great Commandment,” in which Jesus states “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

My Quest

The Methodist Movement was part of a revival that spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout Great Britain and North America in the 18th and 19th centuries and eventually throughout the world. There is no doubt that it has had a lasting impact on not only the people of their day, but on the congregations that have been established since then. In analyzing how John and Charles Wesley brought a new spirit into the church, I believe we can use that same thinking to create a technological evangelistic tool to bring people to Christ in a new way with our message of salvation.

Many scholars and laity alike argue that the use of social media and online space is unsuitable for creating a strong enough relationship with individuals to bring people to Christ. Yet is it possible to transcend the physical in order to create a space that allows for effective evangelism to happen? Technology platforms are not static; therefore, although I will show how the current platforms can be used in ministry, these platforms may be outdated by the time this

¹⁶ Bishop Will Willimon, “A Sad Separation.”

¹⁷ (*New Revised Standard Version*.)

project is completed. We need to develop a ministry that moves beyond any specific platform. We can use examples from today's social media to look to the future.

What is Evangelism?

How do we define evangelism? Biblically, evangelism is derived from the Greek word “euangélion” defined as “good news” and an “evangelist” as one who “preaches the gospel, brings the good news” from the Greek “euangelizô.”¹⁸ Matthew 4:23 is the first instance of this in the Gospels describing, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.”¹⁹ In this passage, we see the connection between going out and proclaiming the good news to the ministry of Jesus. *A Dictionary for United Methodists* defines it as “The winning of persons to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord... evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel to individuals and groups by preaching, teaching, and personal and family visitation.”²⁰ By these definitions, we see the connection between sharing the gospel via our words and the actions of ministry.

Missional Evangelism vs. Attractional Evangelism

As we have moved into churches, we see the rise of corporate evangelism, where churches as a congregation are evangelizing through their presence in their communities. In the 1980's, we saw a rise in attractional evangelism which led to a rise in mega-churches. Mike Slaughter, retired mega-church pastor who founded Ginghamburg Church in Ohio, describes the

¹⁸ Dale Ellenburg, “Evangelist,” 436.

¹⁹ Matthew 4:28 (*New Revised Standard Version*.) The English word “good news” is translated from the Greek “euangélion.”

²⁰ Alan K. Waltz, “Glossary.”

attractional model as enticing crowds of people through catering to the lifestyle of baby boomers.²¹ He compares the attractional church to that of a vacation cruise line, which is thoroughly planned, highly staffed, and is centered around catering to the needs of those who attend.²² The result, he argues, has led to worshiping “the altar of self-indulgence, materialism, and indifference to the poor and marginalized.”²³ Lacey Warner is more forgiving as she believes this model has brought many people into the life of the church with attendees accounting for the majority of Christian church membership.²⁴ However, she contends the problem is that we focus too much on the “go” in The Great Commission as expressed in Matthew 28:16-20 and not enough on “making disciples.”²⁵ The result can lead to an exaggerated emphasis on numbers and not on a deepening faith. While attractional evangelism may be appealing to seekers, it does so through attempting to meet their needs, rather than calling them into a greater relationship with Christ.

On the other hand, missional evangelism concentrates on ministry with the poor. Instead of focusing on a physical building and eye-catching marketing, it calls Christians to deepen relationships to the marginalized. Slaughter uses three biblical mandates to define missional evangelism: The Great Requirement (Micah 6:8) which calls us to work towards justice, mercy and humility; The Great Commandment (John 15:12-13) to love people we have never met, and The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) which calls us to work outside buildings and

²¹ Mike Slaughter, *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus*, 10.

²² Mike Slaughter, 12.

²³ Mike Slaughter, 10.

²⁴ Lacey Warner, “Mega-Churches: A New Ecclesiology or an Ecclesial Evangelism?,” 26.

²⁵ Lacey Warner, 27.

institutions to build disciples.²⁶ Missional ministry focuses on connecting and serving which moves us from self-centered to Jesus centered.

Other Theological Terms

Prevenient Grace – Prevenient from the Latin “preveniens” is defined as “comes before.” Ted A. Campbell argues that we might better refer to it as “preparatory” or “assisting” grace, or the grace that is given to every human being whether they recognize God in their lives or not.²⁷ For Methodists it means the grace we receive before Christ. John Wesley describes it as our “first wish to please God.”²⁸

Justifying Grace – God’s Prevenient Grace leads us to Justifying Grace, where our sins are forgiven, and was often described by early Methodists as not only believing in God, but as the unexplainable feeling that one’s sins were forgiven, or an “assurance of pardon.”²⁹ This leads to the new Christian being “born again, new birth, or regeneration.”³⁰

Sanctifying Grace – John Wesley preached that at the exact moment we are justified, we enter sanctification.³¹ From the Latin word, “Sanctus,” translated as “holy,” Sanctifying Grace begins with our new life in Christ and is where we seek to find the greatest joy in living with God.³² In order to grow in sanctification, Methodist would join together in community to practice the “means of grace, “or bible study, prayer, and the Lord’s Supper.”³³ Sanctification leads us to the

²⁶ Mike Slaughter, *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus*, 17–23.

²⁷ Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, 54–55.

²⁸ John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation (1765),” 488.

²⁹ Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, 56.

³⁰ Ted A. Campbell, 58.

³¹ John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation (1765),” 373.

³² Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, 58.

³³ Ted A. Campbell, 60–61.

goal of “Christian Perfection,” John Wesley describes Christian Perfection as “perfect love.”³⁴

Methodist Bands, Classes, and Societies – Methodist Societies were born from the Anglican religious societies which were organized in a local area.³⁵ Within the societies, classes and bands were developed to encourage spiritual growth. Smaller than classes, bands were formed by gender and were developed for the spiritually mature who were in seeking to increase their holiness in life.³⁶ While bands did not encompass an entire society, classes did and were originally formed for tithing by locality. When these classes came together, the behavior of the members made it clear that the classes needed to encompass more than just a stewardship role so Wesley developed class leaders who would provide a pastoral role to the group.³⁷

Technology Terms

eDiscipleship – Our term for a methodology that includes developing ACT Teams and providing a common platform that would allow congregations to use resources together in order to reach more people online.

ACT Teams – Audio, Communication, and Technology Teams that are formed in local congregations and can connect on a district or conference level to learn and grow.

eChurch – A Christian community that connects, worships, and participates in discipleship formation online.

Platform – Historically, this was an operational system and its hardware such as Windows or Apple iOS. This term has evolved to include gaming systems (Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo),

³⁴ John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation (1765),” 374.

³⁵ Lacey C. Warner, “Offer Them Christ,” 170.

³⁶ Lacey C. Warner, 170.

³⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 118.

databases (SQL), mobile devices (cellphones, tablets), or an internet browsers (Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge).³⁸

Application (App) – A program that runs on a platform.

Content Management System – An online database that stores and catalogues information online in a systematic way for easy access through searches.³⁹

Social Media – An internet application designed for users to interact with other users usually by sharing and commenting on photos, videos, and posts. 40 Examples of popular social media applications are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitch.

³⁸ Techopedia.com, “What Is a Platform?”

³⁹ Techopedia.com, “What Is a Content Management System (CMS)?”

⁴⁰ Techopedia.com, “What Is Social Media?”

Chapter 2: Where Are We?

I am the family videographer. There is one in every family, and it is the annoying person who always has the latest camcorder, cell phone, or any type of current video device wanting to record you at any moment, particularly when you do not want to be recorded. I am blessed that my family also likes to travel, and being a poor pastor, they take me with them. Over the years, we have traveled throughout North America, Europe, Great Britain. After each trip, I have documented our travel experiences by compiling the amazing memories of these adventures into a video recording which we will later watch and laugh at as a family. As the videographer, I have learned some tricks to save me hours of work. When we are travelling from place to place, it can get confusing to go back later to edit and review. I developed a good way of both easy editing as well as introducing the viewer to the next event by picking out whomever was nearest to me at the time and asking them a simple question, “Where are we?” My parents, husband, son, sister, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, nieces, aunts, uncles, and cousins are all highly adaptable, and they usually use this opportunity to pop in with some type of brief history of where we are wrapped in humor. Apparently, this question can also at times wear on people, particularly if you are jetlagged from a red eye flight from Philadelphia to Heathrow, are packed into a taxi to a hotel, and then journey by subway to downtown London. After approaching the grandiose doors of Westminster Abbey, my sister’s response to my simple question, was “I don’t know, some old church with a bunch of famous dead people in it.”

It was funny at the time, but in many ways, she highlighted what people believe church really is. We have moved from being a congregation and place of spiritual growth to an old church with dead people. How can we move into something more meaningful?

Moving Beyond an Old Church with Dead People

In an age where U.S. church attendance and membership are in steep decline, church leaders are seeking ways in which to negotiate culture and their congregations in order to live out the bringing of the good news of Jesus Christ into the world. Pastors often struggle to find ways in which congregations can move into effective online evangelism; there is tension in the church surrounding the issues of developing congregations to be evangelistically focused and whether online evangelism is spiritually sound or are we just caving in to a culture of self.

Many church leaders believe the key to successful evangelism is to ground our congregations in reaching those on the outside. In *Leading Beyond the Walls*, Adam Hamilton says that his church became passionate about ministering to the unchurched and nominally church by recognizing that “Jesus’ driving passion was reaching lost people.”⁴¹ In determining how to evangelize, they changed the language but not the message.⁴² John Flowers and Karen Vannoy argue that church leaders must help the church move from being internally to being externally focused by asking the members, “who are you feeding?”⁴³ In order to deepen the spirituality of our congregations, we must look to whom we are serving rather than how we are served through ministries. The movement into being a more externally focused congregation may lead to congregational change. In *Take the Next Step*, Lovett H. Weems, Jr., argues that congregations do not need to become something totally different to reach out but rather need to

⁴¹ Adam Hamilton, *Leading Beyond the Walls : Developing Congregations with a Heart for the Unchurched*, 30.

⁴² Adam Hamilton, 33.

⁴³ John Flowers and Karen Vannoy, *10 Temptations of Church: Why Churches Decline and What To Do About It*, 62.

draw on the congregational heritage to become more of what they have always been.⁴⁴ Creating a new vision for the church will allow for the revitalization of congregations.⁴⁵

Practices of Evangelism

In researching historical practices of evangelism, Elaine Heath in *The Mystic Way of Evangelism* argues that what is missing from our practice of evangelism is the practice of mysticism, or as she defines it, being in partnership with God.⁴⁶ She believes that evangelism has become too focused on modern market research and programming and that the experience in the presence of holy will naturally lead to a missional outreach that will impact the world.⁴⁷ George G. Hunter III analyzes St. Patrick's evangelism efforts to the Celts in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. He argues that the Christian movement grew in the Celtic world by using the communication of the people they were trying to reach.⁴⁸ They created missionary bands that focused on daily issues as well as religious issues.⁴⁹ This understanding of early evangelistic practices builds on how the Methodists were successful in reaching people.

Wesley's Evangelism

The Methodist Movement was a major evangelistic effort that began in the mid-Eighteenth Century. Of course, John Wesley's own words through his sermons, journals, and letters are a valuable resource for his dedication and purpose to bring people closer to God. To understand the Wesley's and early Methodism in a larger historical and theological context,

⁴⁴ Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Take the Next Step*, 71.

⁴⁵ Lovett H. Weems, Jr., 79.

⁴⁶ Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, 4.

⁴⁷ Elaine A. Heath, 5.

⁴⁸ George C. Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 65.

⁴⁹ George C. Hunter, III, 71.

Richard P. Heitzenrater gives a detailed account of the brothers, John and Charles Wesley, and the rise of the Methodist movement in the 18th Century.⁵⁰ In many publications, but specifically in his book, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities*, Ted A. Campbell attributes this rise of Methodism with Wesley's ties to the larger pietistic movement of the time and its emphasis on the "Way of the Heart."⁵¹ Lacey Warner emphasizes the importance of the scriptural and system for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.⁵² John Wesley practiced evangelism in ways that were scriptural, theological, doctrinal, and challenging social boundaries.⁵³ We can continue this Wesleyan tradition through using Jesus' example of reaching out to people grounded in our understanding that everyone is a child of God.

In *Transforming Evangelism*, Henry H. Knight III and F. Douglas Powe, Jr., take on evangelism through the lens of John Wesley by employing a message which is inviting and full of grace rather than a message of conversion to be a part of the church.⁵⁴ They believe that focusing on "loving God and neighbor" can naturally lead to effective evangelism.⁵⁵ In *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*, Paul Nixon refers to early American Methodism's bold vision of spreading holiness over the land.⁵⁶ In his view, the decline in Methodism has occurred because we have moved from "frontier" to "fortress" mentality.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*.

⁵¹ Ted A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of The Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities*.

⁵² Warner, "Towards a Wesleyan Evangelism," 231.

⁵³ Warner, 231.

⁵⁴ Henry H. Knight, III and F. Douglas Powe, Jr., *Transforming Evangelism*, 9.

⁵⁵ Henry H. Knight, III and F. Douglas Powe, Jr., 77.

⁵⁶ Paul Nixon, *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*, 90.

⁵⁷ Paul Nixon, 89.

In *American Methodism*, Mark R. Teasdale analyzes the early Methodist movement and its relationship with culture. He details how the early Methodists were guided towards evangelism through their circuit riders, their adaptability, and their laity. With special emphasis on Peter Cartwright, Teasdale argues that its stress on denominational loyalty is what allowed Methodism to become so integral to the American experience.⁵⁸

The New Evangelism – Should It Be Digital?

Several authors believe that Christianity is not doing its job of being relevant in this new age and is not endeavoring to reach young people. In *Growing Young*, Powell, Mulder and Griffin speak to the energy and vitality that young people bring to congregations. Their research of 363 congregations provides practical examples of the fact that empowering young people will lead congregations to experience God through more service, passion, innovation, money, and overall health.⁵⁹ In *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons explore the views that non-Christians have on our faith. They speak to how those in their twenties and thirties have become disengaged in church and are looking for the informal versus stuffy experiences will move on quickly if not engaged.⁶⁰ They also indicate that the positive image of Christianity, which was shown in their research in the 1990's, has changed. Now 56% of the nones have a "bad" to "very bad" view of Christianity's role in society.⁶¹ They assert that we must change this image for younger people to be invited into the faith.

⁵⁸ Mark R. Teasdale, "Evangelism and Identity in Early American Methodism."

⁵⁹ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 52.

⁶⁰ David Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*, 21.

⁶¹ David Kinnaman, 22.

Other authors believe that there is an underlying problem which is not related to our reaching young people through different vehicles but is actually related to the spirituality of those who are delivering the message. Andrew Root takes a different view on youthfulness by exploring “the new age of authenticity” in *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*. He argues that our culture became obsessed with youthfulness, even in worship, from the youth movement in the 1960s.⁶² Through this, churches are continually seeking to be relevant, and this has led to the church not depending upon or even believing that the Holy Spirit can save the church.⁶³ While he centers his argument around faith formation, he states that it is applicable to the understanding of evangelism. He believes that the message of youthfulness that the church is spreading will keep us from developing a more powerful message of transformation.⁶⁴

The Barna Group centers much of its research on connecting youth and young adults to the message. In their research from “Faith for Exiles,” Kinnaman and Matlock examine their four groups of Millennials and Gen Z’s: prodigals, nomads, habitual churchgoers, and resilient disciples. They report these groups are dropping out of church at an increasing rate, up 5% from 2011. They also suggest that pastors need to expand their preaching, moving from the stories of “fall and redemption” to what they say is the full story of the Gospel of “creation-fall-redemption-restoration.”⁶⁵

Franz Foltz and Frederick Foltz in their book, *Faith, Hope, and Love in the Technological Society*, counter this assumption of online experiences by arguing that technology is based on our human attempts to overcome our limitations.⁶⁶ Connecting through technology is

⁶² Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), xxii.

⁶³ Root, xxii.

⁶⁴ Root, xxi.

⁶⁵ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, “How Young Adults in Digital Babylon View the Gospel.”

⁶⁶ Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, *Faith, Hope, and Love in the Technological Society*, 12.

actually a breaking down of other essential areas of our existence, including nature, place, time and community.⁶⁷ They believe, while drawing on our virtues of faith, hope, and love, we can learn to use technology appropriately.⁶⁸ In addition, Stephen Ingram believes that we are producing “poor imitations of Christianity,” and that social media is creating a me-centered experience which is replacing the sacrificing message of Jesus Christ.⁶⁹

Adding to that, Trevor A. Sutton discusses “technological determinism” which he defines as how technology drives our societal values and structure.⁷⁰ Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg faced little, if any, repercussions from the Cambridge Analytica data scandal. Based upon this, Sutton questions, if Facebook can change the direction of our voting, then how is it affecting our religious beliefs? He believes that religious leaders should pay close attention to the effect that social media has on our faith.⁷¹

Yet on the other hand, many believe that it is the church’s fault that the richness of the Christian message isn’t being given to its fullest extent. Bruce A. Little describes how evangelicals have struggled to adapt to a shifting culture that is entrenched in what he describes as “anti-metaphysical realism,” or an attempt to have justice without the spiritual.⁷² He believes that evangelists need to pay attention to the growing intellectual movement and aim the message accordingly. He states that technology leads us into the belief that we are God-like and no longer guided by moral responsibility.⁷³ Little believes that it is necessary to use technology to connect initially, but we should then move into personal interaction in order to make long

⁶⁷ Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, 13–15.

⁶⁸ Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, 19.

⁶⁹ Stephen Ingram, *Hollow Faith*, 7.

⁷⁰ A. Trevor Sutton, “How Facebook Is Transforming Religion.”

⁷¹ A. Trevor Sutton.

⁷² Bruce A. Little, “Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society, 4.”

⁷³ Bruce A. Little, 7.

lasting connections for Christ.⁷⁴

Video Killed the Radio Star

In the area of communicating in a digital space, digital video has taken over other methods for businesses. Matt Bowman reports that digital marketing is the new frontier because it leads to greater sales. He states that 90% of customers say that videos help them make decisions about products and that 64% of consumers are more likely to buy a product because of a video.⁷⁵ He argues that, because video is both visual and auditory, it is more memorable than text. He also states that video increases Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, because adding video marketing brings more people to a webpage, leading to the possibility of it going viral.⁷⁶

Pandemic Shift

COVID-19 has accelerated the shift from the physical to the digital at a rapid pace. In the wake of the quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic, Thumma uses past Faith Communities Today research to detail the difficult climb congregations will have to make in order to survive shutdowns.⁷⁷ As I detailed in Chapter 1, while many congregations have access to technology, it has not been used frequently or with emphasis. He believes that the congregations who are most at risk are those with a population of 65 years old and older, as these congregations do not have the infrastructure or training to move to a fully functioning digital church in the midst of a crises.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Bruce A. Little, 9.

⁷⁵ Matt Bowman, "Video Marketing: The Future of Content Marketing."

⁷⁶ Matt Bowman.

⁷⁷ Scott Thumma, "Becoming a Virtual Faith Community: Applying Past Data to New Ideas."

⁷⁸ Scott Thumma.

Yet, a Pew Research study on the state of worship during the COVID pandemic finds that a large number of people have moved to virtual worship. During a survey of 10,139 U.S. adults in April 2020, 46% of those surveyed said their place of worship was closed because of the pandemic, and 84% said that worship was offered online.⁷⁹ Additionally, the persons who attended services often were more likely to say that their faith had grown stronger during the pandemic, and this was particularly true for African Americans.⁸⁰

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Barna reported that 22% of Christians and 52% of Millennials replace online worship with physical worship half of the time.⁸¹ They discuss what it means to have a physical presence including the premise that Millennials prefer a casual worship in a more traditional church setting. In fact, in a survey of pastors who had new church starts, 39% reported that being in a traditional church building increased their credibility with the people in the community.⁸²

It is important for church leaders to examine how we are reaching people without compromising the integrity of the message of the Gospel. We must examine how we can enter the online culture and yet maintain the fullness of our Christian beliefs.

⁷⁹ Claire Gecewicz, “Few Americans Say Their House of Worship Is Open, but a Quarter Say Their Faith Has Grown amid Pandemic.”

⁸⁰ Claire Gecewicz.

⁸¹ Barna, “The Uncertain Digital & Physical Realities of Churches.”

⁸² David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, “How Young Adults in Digital Babylon View the Gospel.”

Chapter 3: What Would John Wesley Do?

My parents divorced when I was young. After my dad remarried, he and my stepmother moved to a little town outside of Nashville, TN, where I spent every weekend. As a child of the eighties, free long-distance calling was not yet available so calling my friends in Nashville was cost prohibitive; therefore, I spent many a lonely weekend in a place where I felt like an outsider. It was here in Ashland City, TN, that I discovered church, and it was a Methodist church to be exact. Since my parents were open-minded about women preachers, they avoided the Baptist churches and the Churches of Christ in the area. I would go every Sunday, leaving my parents to sit alone, moving forward to sit on the second row just to be that much closer to worship. When it was time for Confirmation, I remember being so excited to go every Saturday morning while many of the kids would skip as many of the classes as allowed. I was drawn into the stories of John and Charles Wesley and how their dedication to God led them to lead a transformative movement in the church which brought thousands of people to Christ. Looking back now, I see why I was not the most popular kid in Sunday School. Yet my formative experience steeped in Methodism created in me a lasting understanding of how the church can be a beacon of hope to anyone who needs a place to belong. I still have my confirmation copy of *The United Methodist Primer* by Chester E. Custer on my desk, and it reminds me to look for those spiritual searchers who are seeking a deeper connection to God.⁸³

Methodism was started because the brothers, John and Charles Wesley, recognized the growing disconnect between The Church of England and the spiritual needs of the people. They responded by using often ridiculed evangelism techniques which led to the development of small

⁸³ Chester E. Custer, *The United Methodist Primer*.

groups that were intentionally centered on faith development. During his lifetime, John Wesley traveled on horseback over 250,000 miles and ignored the social norms by preaching many of his 40,000 sermons outside.⁸⁴ It is also reported that Charles Wesley, John's brother, wrote many of his famous hymns to the tunes of secular music to disseminate the message of Christ to those who would not normally hear the Word.⁸⁵ Their background and connection to other evangelists helped propel the Wesley's to develop a clear mission of evangelism enabling them to bring thousands of people to Christ. While it is difficult to pinpoint how the Methodists became so integral to the British evangelical revival of the 1730s, there are some aspects that were working in conjunction with one another that laid the groundwork for this movement:

- Building the kingdom was more important than following the conventions of society and maintaining traditional practices of the Church.
- Developing strong laity commitment through religious societies or bands based on the practices of the pietistic movement was crucial.
- Creating an organized network of these societies and itinerant preaching was emphasized.
- Valuing a conversion experience, or a type of experience that John Wesley called his "Assurance of Faith" became crucial.

I believe these were key elements in allowing Methodism to be transformational, not only for eighteenth century Britain, but also throughout the world. Through their theological foundations and collective experiences, the Wesleys and the Methodists were able to create a dynamic shift that changed the way many in the western world came to know God.

⁸⁴ UM Commission of Archives and History, "John Wesley."

⁸⁵ Dean McIntyre, "Commentary: Wesleys Used Secular Tunes, but Not Drinking Songs."

A Family of Non-Conformists

The parents of John and Charles were Susanna and Samuel Wesley, and they reared their children in a household which was molded in faith. Both Samuel and Susanna grew up in families of “nonconformists,” more radical in their protestant zeal than was emphasized in the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles under the reinstated monarch of Charles II. Samuel’s father, John Wesley, was even brought before the court of Gilbert Ironside, “accused of irregular worship and preaching,” found guilty, and then relieved of his pulpit.⁸⁶ It is perhaps the difficulties of living a dissenter life that led both Susanna and Samuel to return to the Church of England. Yet, there were signs that Susanna’s belief at times strayed from the traditional teachings. Even their engagement was bound in doctrinal disputes; Susanna was determined to marry Samuel after he persuaded her not to follow the Socinians through presenting a wise argument for the orthodox understanding of the Trinity.⁸⁷

While they were ardent in their support of the established church with Samuel being ordained in the Church of England, there were signs of a break with tradition, particularly by Susanna. Although women were not allowed to enter formal education, Susanna was adamant that her girls would be educated, even before they were taught the more customary female skills of the time like sewing.⁸⁸ Another particular argument between Susanna and Samuel occurred when she refused to say “Amen” after a prayer for the monarch because she questioned the validity of the current ruler. This led to Samuel’s extended stay in London which only ended when Queen Anne ascended the throne.⁸⁹ While they were both dedicated to the religious life of

⁸⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 15.

⁸⁷ Patrick Oden, “‘Let Us Not Spend Our Time in Trifling’: Susanna Wesley, a Mother to Her Sons,” 118.

⁸⁸ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 26.

⁸⁹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 27.

the Church of England, it was not unusual for Susanna to forge a different path if she felt it was a calling from God.

One of the most well-known examples of Susanna's nonconformity was her popular "family" devotions. While Samuel was away for the yearly convocation in 1711, he appointed the Rev. Godfrey Inman to care for his congregation.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, many in the congregation found him lacking, including Susanna. In Samuel's absence, she invited the servants to their Sunday evening family prayer, which consisted of her reading sermons and singing hymns, and after a few Sundays, families of the servants asked to attend.⁹¹ When these devotional times started drawing 40 to 50 people, Inman gathered a group of his supporters to disband what could be perceived as an act of worship in a private home, which was illegal under the Act of Toleration.⁹² He wrote to Samuel, who then wrote to his wife, explaining that she was out of bounds to hold these prayer groups as it was not a proper activity for the wife of the rector.⁹³ Her response, which has become a Methodist legend, was her argument that the prayer groups were the result of his leaving Epworth to Inman's incompetency, ending with:

If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹⁴

By the time of the letter, the prayer groups had grown to 200 to 300 people in attendance, and despite its obviously untraditional bent, the groups continued until Samuel returned. It is clear

⁹⁰ Joe Iovino, "Courage and Conviction: A Woman's Leadership through a Difficult Time."

⁹¹ Joe Iovino.

⁹² Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 29.

⁹³ Joe Iovino, "Courage and Conviction: A Woman's Leadership through a Difficult Time."

⁹⁴ Joe Iovino.

that Susanna was an independent woman, dedicated to the spiritual formation of both her children and the people around her. Many scholars theorize that Susanna's strong character, as well as her unconventional views at times about the laity's involvement, led to John Wesley's views on female leadership and lay preaching.⁹⁵ While we can only engage in conjecture as to the exact extent, we do know that they continued their mother's belief in faith development through small groups.

Developing Evangelical Zeal

Interestingly, Susanna's devotionals were rooted in the pietistic Religious Societies both in regard to its laity leadership as well as the tension the laity involvement created in the traditional Anglican Church. Parallel movements in both Germany and England were formed in response to what many believed was a decrease in the moral values of society and the growing rationalism present in scholarly thought. The German version gave the name to what is known as "Pietism."⁹⁶ In his book, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, Richard P. Heitzenrater describes Philipp Jakob Spener's *Pia desideria*, which presented six ways the Lutheran Church could develop spiritual growth in its congregations as follows:⁹⁷

1. Focus on the study of scripture
2. Involvement of Laity
3. Priority given to "Evangelical Zeal" versus debate
4. Emphasis on Christian living rather than scholarship
5. Preaching should point towards salvation rather than instruction.

⁹⁵ Patrick Oden, "'Let Us Not Spend Our Time in Trifling': Susanna Wesley, a Mother to Her Sons," 124–25.

⁹⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 19.

⁹⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 19.

6. Ordination training should be moral and spiritual rather than academic.

Spener's strategy was implemented through small groups of laity who met regularly for prayer, bible study, and mission.⁹⁸

I emphasize the German strain of this movement because of the influence that the Moravians and other German pietists later had on John Wesley's spiritual life, particularly on his difficult voyage to Georgia as well as his Aldersgate experience.⁹⁹ While John was on a ship sailing across the Atlantic, a terrible storm broke out as he was attending the Moravian Evening Service. He was deeply moved by how the Moravians did not fear death, but sang psalms continually, while the other passengers screamed in fear.¹⁰⁰ Throughout his time in Georgia, John continued a relationship with the Moravians which deepened his understanding of their practice of Pietism. After his return to England, while attending the Fetter-Lane Society which was a combination of Moravians and Anglicans, John experienced his transformative assurance of faith and "felt my heart strangely warmed."¹⁰¹ John also claims that his development of the Methodists' small groups (originally called "bands" but later developing into classes) originated from the Moravians.¹⁰² The encouragement of the Moravians had a significant impact on how John Wesley interpreted his faith.

The growth of British Pietism came in response to what was seen as a growing lack of morality after the return to the Church of England from Puritanism. This led to the rise of "religious societies" through organizations like "Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK)," of which Samuel, and later John, would become members. The purpose of the societies

⁹⁸ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 20.

⁹⁹ Ted A. Campbell, "Close Encounters of the Pietistic Kind: The Moravian-Methodist Connection."

¹⁰⁰ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 59.

¹⁰¹ Ted A. Campbell, "Close Encounters of the Pietistic Kind: The Moravian-Methodist Connection," 72.

¹⁰² Ted A. Campbell, 79.

was to promote “real holiness of heart and life,” and were basically developed to encourage one another in personal faith development in the hope of reforming the church from the bottom up.¹⁰³ Samuel started the Epworth Society with those he felt were already developed in faith; he was literally preaching to the choir as they all were choir members. They limited the membership to 12, being very particular of whom they admitted so as not to grow too quickly. They also began publishing tracts.¹⁰⁴ While John Wesley may have systematically developed such groups within the Methodists, it seems plausible that they improved on the Pietist movement from the seventeenth century.

John credits the origins of the Methodists’ development to his college friends. He wrote the rules of the group, which correlated with the SPCK’s emphasis on spiritual development and caring for the poor, around the spring of 1729 during his and Charles’ Oxford days.¹⁰⁵ This group initially began as a study group with friends from Christ Church College. The weekly meetings of John, Charles, William Morgan, and Bob Kirkman were at first intended to meet the challenges of the academics but morphed into something more when Morgan encouraged the group to visit those at Castle prison. They then expanded their mission to include visiting the poor as well as teaching.¹⁰⁶ It was from this point forward that their group changed from a mere study group into a religious society with goals of seeking holiness and mission to the disadvantaged in their community.

As this happened, there were simultaneous conditions which helped form what would become the transformational movement. As the group of young men supporting these missions

¹⁰³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 40–41.

grew, they saw the necessity of providing an organizational structure which supported these ministries to their fullest extent. When John Clayton joined the group in 1732, he encouraged others to join, and through his association with the SPCK, setup the structure to resemble the one at Epworth so that like-minded men could come together for study, mission, and spiritual growth.¹⁰⁷ It was through Clayton's influence that the Methodists grew to include George Whitefield and Benjamin Ingham, who started a group at Queen's College.¹⁰⁸

In addition to providing organizational structure to the societies they formed, John felt compelled to minister to both the incarcerated and the poor, and he recognized that the demands of the ministry were great. As they added to the ministry the city jail of North Gate and later the St. Thomas' workhouse, it became imperative to setup designated schedules to meet the spiritual needs of the people.¹⁰⁹ He also hired Mrs. Plat to take over caring for the children of working families when Morgan was forced to leave Oxford because of illness.¹¹⁰ John was so convicted in his ministry that he himself lived on 28 pounds a year, giving away most of his income.¹¹¹ He was able to create a plan which would allow for maximizing the impact to the people of the community.

Because of these works, the group began to be ridiculed by their fellow students. Their desire for holy living, led to their fellow students labeling them various monikers including: The Holy Club, Sacramentarians, Bible-Moths, Reforming Club, and Supererogation Men.¹¹² Eventually the name that stuck was the "Methodists." This was a derogatory term from a 17th Century theological dispute between Calvinist predestinationists and the Armenians, who were

¹⁰⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 45–46.

¹⁰⁸ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 48–49.

¹⁰⁹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 42.

¹¹⁰ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 41.

¹¹¹ Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker*, 22.

¹¹² Howard A. Snyder, 21.

focused on holy living. The Armenians were called “New Methodists” because the predestinationists believed the Armenians were advocating works righteousness.¹¹³ While in the beginning this seemed fairly harmless, it took a more detrimental turn. When Morgan died in 1732, it was speculated that it was the tedious Methodist mission schedule and pietistic practices that led to his death. In order to defend themselves and their spiritual quest, John preached a sermon at St. Mary’s, in addition to writing to Morgan’s father a letter which became known as the “Morgan Letter.”¹¹⁴ It is during this time that we see John’s ability, like his mother before him, to stand up to societal backlash because he believed that he was doing the work of God.

While John was systematic in his approach to setting up societies and in his own quest for individual faith development, he adapted to the environment and the people. As Heitzenrater states, “...his method was not a static, settled scheme, but rather an approach to life that grew and developed and changed as he confronted different crises, had further insights, and met new friends.”¹¹⁵ Creating a system that was adaptable to the changing environment was what helped it grow and sustain itself through the years. I believe John’s Oxford years show how his experiences shaped his practices and how he then shaped the practices of the Methodist movement. This was a necessary part of developing an evangelism network which was able to reach people who were not ordinarily involved in church and lead them to Christ.

¹¹³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 48. The Morgan Letter was not originally intended to be a public document, but it was secretly published anonymously without John's knowledge and it was used either for or against the Methodists depending on the intention of the person who was using it.

¹¹⁵ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 42.

Heart Religion

After attending Oxford and the death of their father, John and Charles undertook a missionary trip to the state of Georgia in the United States. In John's opinion, this was unsuccessful possibly due to his high expectations of "saving his own soul and to convert the Indians," and also due to a failed romance with Sophy Hopkey.¹¹⁶ On his return to England, John felt that he was lagging behind his friends in the spiritual zeal he desperately sought, and he again returned to the Moravians in the joint Moravian-Anglican Fetter-Lane Society on Aldersgate Street.¹¹⁷ While much is made of John's own experience there, it is interesting to note that his "assurance of pardon" followed Charles' by three days when Charles was overcome with joy on Pentecost Sunday in May 1738.¹¹⁸ The following Wednesday, John experienced his own transformative assurance of faith when listening to Luther's Preface to the Epistle of Romans and "felt my heart strangely warmed... he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."¹¹⁹ While this was a new experience for John, the understanding of a personal experience with God, or religion of the heart, was a hallmark of the pietistic movement. Pietists stressed both the humanity of Christ as well as the repentance and faith that moves beyond an academic understanding of Christ.¹²⁰ The Wesleys taught that, in order to fully be a faithful believer of Christ, one has to have a moment of accepting Christ's grace within their lives.

John Wesley developed a process for us to understand how God works to call us into faith. We now refer to this process as the "Way of Salvation" in which we move through the

¹¹⁶ Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 80.

¹¹⁸ Ted A. Campbell, "Close Encounters of the Pietistic Kind: The Moravian-Methodist Connection," 72.

¹¹⁹ Outler, Albert C., *John Wesley*, 66.

¹²⁰ Ted A. Campbell, "Close Encounters of the Pietistic Kind: The Moravian-Methodist Connection," 69–70.

prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace of God. It is interesting that most United Methodist clergy are trained in Wesley's teaching on this process as a systematic way of understanding faith. However, John's sermons do not provide such a straightforward path towards this spiritual journey. In his 1785 sermon entitled "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," he adds "convincing grace," after prevenient grace which is defined as our need to repent and recognize our need for God's grace.¹²¹ Wesley describes this as being a time when we are self-reflective and a "farther deliverance from the heart of a stone."¹²² This understanding of salvation has been documented many times through the personal experience of believer's conversions. Ted A. Campbell quotes several of these in his book, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of The Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities*, which includes Mary Apess' conversion when a preacher's "words sank deep on my mind; I began not week as soon as he had left me."¹²³ Charles H. Godwin describes how emotive a person could be during the Wesleyan revival period with "sobs, tears, groans, cries of anguish, shouts of joy, falling into a dead faint, violent convulsion, the pounding of fists on the floor, table, chair, pew, and the spontaneous, loud simultaneous praying of several people."¹²⁴ I believe it is important to include the stage of repentance in our understanding of the Wesleyan form of evangelism because it helps us to see that as individuals we have an emotional response to the grace of God in our lives.

A Different Kind of Meeting

Interestingly, it was not only the preaching services that promoted most of these emotional responses, but they were noted also at the class meetings. As discussed with the

¹²¹ Ted A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of The Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities*, 78.

¹²² John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation (1785)," 488.

¹²³ Ted A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of The Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities*, 158.

¹²⁴ Charles H. Godwin, "Methodist Pentecost: The Wesleyan Holiness Revival of 1758-1763," 60.

growth of Pietism, particularly the influence of the Moravians on John, the purpose of these small groups was to come together to build one's spiritual faith. Initially, small groups were not necessarily of Methodist origin, despite having influential Methodists supporting or leading them, but were part of the original societies that were modeled from the Church of England.¹²⁵ As the societies grew with such Methodist connections, bands within the societies arose out of the Moravian style developed. These were divided by gender, age, and marital status, and they were focused on spiritual growth in the grace of God.¹²⁶ However, there was a problem with the bands in that they did not necessarily include the entire society. By 1743, "classes" developed, which were split in geographical regions and included everyone in the society.¹²⁷ Possibly through the connections made with one another at these classes, John wrote that people were often "falling into strange fits" at these meetings.¹²⁸ While we cannot be sure of the specific conditions that propelled people into what was seen at that time as a greater connection to God, we do know that the movement was growing due to the ministry of these small groups.

The World Is My Parish

One reason for the effectiveness of Wesleyan evangelism was the differences between it and the generally accepted practices of the day, which included the practice of preaching outside instead of sermons at a pulpit in a church. As Heitzenrater details, George Whitefield actually introduced John Wesley to field preaching when Whitefield preached to an afternoon crowd of 30,000 people in Bristol in April 1739. Wesley, who had just arrived in the city, decided he could try to overcome the negative judgment of this practice by preaching outdoors himself the

¹²⁵ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 60.

¹²⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 104.

¹²⁷ Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism*, 33.

¹²⁸ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 100.

following afternoon to 3,000 to 4,000 people.¹²⁹ John then started preaching in his travels from Bristol to London in town squares, cemeteries, or wherever he could draw a crowd. Charles was not immediately impressed with the practice until he preached at Moorfields on June 1739 to a crowd of 10,000 people. Thus began the Wesleyan emphasis on itinerant preaching throughout Britain. John believed that the Holy Spirit led preachers to people and not the church as suggested in his famous quote, “The World is My Parish.”¹³⁰

As indicated before, John’s adaptability to circumstances helped to create a strong lay preacher base in the movement. As traveling to the growing societies became too much to support, the Wesleys in 1739-1740 asked lay leaders like John Cennick, Joseph Humphreys, and Thomas Maxfield to take care of the societies when they could not be there.¹³¹ This led to preaching simply because the people who were attending these meetings asked the lay leaders to fill that role, and this was encouraged by John. Later, this lay leadership led to women, such as Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet, leading the groups which eventually led to them preaching. John famously responded in his letter to Sarah, “preach if you must, but do not call it that.”¹³² Lay leadership was obviously going against the accepted societal rules of the day by allowing those who were not ordained, particularly women, to lead and preach.

Growing from the possibilities of lay preaching was the organized system of the circuit riders. Around 1746, Wesley assigned groups of two to three lay preachers, assigning them for a month at a time to one of the seven circuits that contained the societies.¹³³ They did not preach in churches, as the Wesleys encouraged societies to remain within the Church of England, but

¹²⁹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 99.

¹³⁰ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 100–101.

¹³¹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, 113–15.

¹³² Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism*, 36.

¹³³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 162.

mainly met in “preaching houses.”¹³⁴ The system that grew from this practice extended to the Methodists in America and became a prominent part of the growth of the Methodists, even into remote areas.

A Wesleyan Model for Evangelism

In understanding aspects to evangelism that led to the Methodist’s tremendous impact on the body of Christ, I believe we are able to continue to promote the witness of God in this new electronic age. I have focused on four key elements that resonated in the story of the Wesleys and their leadership in this movement:

1. Evangelistic mission versus societal conformity
2. Building laity leadership through small groups
3. Organizational structure for small groups and “itinerant preaching”
4. Allowing for a heart (emotional) experience (repentance / assurance of pardon)

I realize that breaking the Methodist Movement down in such a way we miss the dynamics which were at play at that time leading to an environment of growth in these societies. Yet, as Wesley said himself, “I am persuaded there is at this day more religious zeal in England than there has been for a century past.”¹³⁵ It is in trying to grasp how Methodism grew effectively that we are able to create a model for the future, particularly for evangelism on the internet.

¹³⁴ Norwood, Frederick A., *The Story of American Methodism*, 35.

¹³⁵ John Wesley, “On Zeal (1781),” 467.

Chapter 4: We've Never Done It That Way Before

In October 1743, John Wesley arrived in Bristol to a not so pleasant scene. The vicar was no longer a fan of the Methodists. He, as Heitzenrater explains, so stirred up a riot that it proved to John, like the Christian martyrs who went before him, that God would protect him even in the face of extreme violence. Through the darkness and heavy rain, John was dragged, sometimes even by his hair, by the mob through the rural area outside of Bristol. This continued until another group arrived from a neighboring town, and a fight broke out between the two groups. John believed that God protected him from harm as he was only hit twice, and it did not hurt. After hearing the story, his brother Charles was a bit more pragmatic about it, saying that John was further beaten because he was so short.¹³⁶

What the Wesleys faced was a church that was not meeting the spiritual needs of many, and therefore, they were determined to strengthen the community of faith. Despite their intention of creating renewal within the existing church structure, they faced opposition both inside and outside the church. Fortunately, they did not waver in their commitment because of their mission to build God's kingdom.

Luckily, many of us today will not have to face physical violence to evangelize to people, but in my own ministry, I see the ways in which a digital presence is not encouraged in the church. Many of the church leaders and scholars believe that the online world does not faithfully connect to people in a way which produces theologically sound disciples and therefore discourages pastors and congregations from engaging. Even if pastors and congregations are encouraged to "get online," we are seldom provided the financial or educational resources to do

¹³⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 132.

so effectively. Even still, social media dominates societal conversation, and saying the wrong thing can have repercussions. The mob justice of Wesley's day is a verbal one that can damage not only an individual's reputation, but that of the church. This tends to keep us from fully evangelizing online.

David R. Dunaetz links a reluctance to engage in social media to the "mum effect," or the hesitancy people have in giving bad news or sharing something that could be taken negatively.¹³⁷ He believes that the "mum effect" has hampered evangelism because of the perception that many individuals have negative views of Christianity. He argues that, with the forefront of social media, this perception can be changed by using platforms to reach large groups of people. Studies have shown that over the last 25 years the number of Christians who feel that it is socially unacceptable to share one's faith with others has grown. In 1993, only 33% would avoid discussing their faith with a non-Christian even if they thought their message would be rejected, whereas in 2018 that number had grown to 44%.¹³⁸ In a society that is increasingly focused on acceptance of other religions, we, as Christians, are reluctant to break out of this societal norm.

As discussed in Chapter 2, father and son writers Frederick Foltz and Franz Foltz, describe the issues with our post-modern society and technological advances in their book *Faith, Hope, and Love in the Technological Society*. They challenge us to engage theologically the technological societal belief that technological advancement is in itself a good thing for religious communities.¹³⁹ They argue that technology is breaking our connection to nature, place, and time. Technology is used primarily as a tool to overcome our shortcomings to overcome nature

¹³⁷ David R. Dunaetz, "Evangelism, Social Media, and the Mum Effect," 138.

¹³⁸ Barna, "Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age: How Christians' Approach to Sharing Their Faith Has Changed in 25 Years," 24.

¹³⁹ Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, *Faith, Hope, and Love in the Technological Society*, 22.

which leads us to see the natural world as something we can manipulate for our own benefit rather than something God gives us.¹⁴⁰ Using the internet as a virtual space leads to a superficial message, particularly for televangelists, because Christian practices that are normally held in community, like communion and baptism, do not perform well online.¹⁴¹ Finally, they assert that technology dependence has removed communal sabbath for economic gain, which in turn has led to a disregard of doctrinal traditions, allowing for people to shape their faith to what makes them feel good versus what makes them better people.¹⁴² I highlight these because they are common arguments about how the church should be skeptical in the use of technology, and consider the impact on the practice of our faith.

Pastors like Henry Briton agree that the problem with social media is the way that it creates a “context collapse,” or a one size fits all message that does not allow for connecting with people individually.¹⁴³ On social media, we try to create a message that will capture many rather than communicating in a holistic way. He argues that we are more concerned with adding followers or likes rather than deepening a conversation. Like many of my colleagues, he believes we strengthen our faith through separating ourselves from the world and focusing on God.¹⁴⁴

Beyond religious thinking, while there is disagreement about the true extent to which social media plays a role in spreading disinformation versus traditional media outlets, it is clear that toxic online rhetoric can lead to radicalizing individuals or small groups of people that could lead to violent attacks.¹⁴⁵ For example, media coverage of Al-Qaeda was correlated to increased

¹⁴⁰ Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, 28.

¹⁴¹ Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, 32–33.

¹⁴² Franz A. Foltz and Frederick A. Foltz, 35–37.

¹⁴³ Henry Brinton, “How Facebook and Twitter Undermine Religion.”

¹⁴⁴ Henry Brinton.

¹⁴⁵ Yochai Benkler et al., “Mail-In Voter Fraud,” 10.

popularity of that terrorist organization.¹⁴⁶ The Anti-Defamation League sounded an alarm regarding the rise of online white supremacists whose racist rhetoric influenced Dylann Roof, the man who brutally killed 9 people in 2015 at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. These warnings also led to at least four arrests of individuals planning similar attacks.¹⁴⁷ Whether social media or mass media shapes the discussion is debated, but the effect it can have on beliefs, whether political or religious, should be seriously met by our churches.

Yet to disengage in this space is to ignore the many who are desperate for connection and a place to find meaning. For example, social media had a positive impact for change as we have witnessed how the vicious murder of George Floyd by a police officer led to Black Lives Matter protests all over the country.¹⁴⁸ While I agree that we should be theologically thoughtful in our approach to online media in any form, not to participate in it has led to a void in the Methodist (and possibly Mainline Protestant) understanding of the grace and love of Jesus Christ in our social public theology.

Much like how John Wesley faced angry mobs and vindictive ministers in his day, we need to reach out to those who are not engaged in the spiritual life of the church and those in the margins regardless of the naysayers. I believe there are three main missional messages that will benefit from a large systematic approach to our outreach through the digital world:

1. Fighting Racism
2. Reaching out to disenfranchised evangelical protestants
3. Engaging the spiritually open non-religious

¹⁴⁶ Stephan Lewandowsky, Michael Jetter, and Ullrich K. H. Ecker, "Using the President's Tweets to Understand Political Diversion in the Age of Social Media," 2.

¹⁴⁷ Anti-Defamation League, "Hardcore White Supremacists Elevate Dylann Roof to Cult Hero Status."

¹⁴⁸ Yochai Benkler et al., "Mail-In Voter Fraud," 4.

In a concerted effort to reach out to these communities, I believe we can begin the long journey of evangelizing to those who have been ignored and also changing the perception that the conservative fundamentalist message is the only Christian message.

The Most Important Challenge – Fighting Racism

The role that racism plays in our society including our churches is the biggest challenge that we will need to face in the future. Every denomination needs to recognize that not calling out racism and supporting people of color is destructive to the spirit of our call. Writer Dara T. Matthis explains that many African Americans who attend multicultural churches are experiencing anger and pain at having pastors who remain silent and or who believe that the relationships with fellow congregants will lead to reconciliation instead of calling for systemic change.¹⁴⁹ She referenced an April 2020 tweet by David Swanson, a white pastor who is the author of *The White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity*. This tweet dated a month before the murder of George Floyd called out churches who were not confronting racism:

@davidswanson: A multiracial church which never confronts white supremacy is a white church.¹⁵⁰

Several responses show the harm for ignoring systemic racism:

@creatingcammi Replying to @davidswanson: Your tweet is so profound. I left my “multiracial” church this year. My former pastor is one of the common faces you see at the White House. Many AA members have left but he continues to support and make excuses for the president’s bigotry. Very hurtful experience.¹⁵¹

@ModernMarvelle Replying to @davidswanson: I’ll take it a step further: a church that does not confront white supremacy is not a church.

¹⁴⁹ Dara T. Matthis, “The Church’s Black Exodus.”

¹⁵⁰ David W. Swanson, “A Multiracial Church Which Never Confronts White Supremacy Is a White Church.”

¹⁵¹ Camell Branch-Selby, “@davidswanson @PastorDreHill Your Tweet Is so Profound. I Left My ‘Multiracial’ Church This Year. My Former Pastor Is One of the Common Faces You See at the White House. Many AA Members Have Left but He Continues to Support and Make Excuses for the President’s Bigotry. Very Hurtful Experience.”

You cannot claim to love your brother as yourself and be silent regarding the systemic inequities that have oppressed him.¹⁵²

@ShaylaBGoode Replying to @davidswanson: Years ago, I left a church I really liked, due to the Pastor refusing to dip his toe in the social justice pond. I joined a church due to the Pastor's fearless challenging of all structures that are oppressive including anti-LGBTQIA rhetoric that churches love to stand on.¹⁵³

@itspastorchris Replying to @davidswanson: This is how a white brother is supposed to use his voice and privilege for the kingdom. When black pastors say the same thing, most white Christians quickly reject it or deflect it.¹⁵⁴

Mathis also calls out pastors who are focusing attention on attendance and giving, while ignoring the glaring healthcare and economic disparities which have become even more apparent during the COVID crises, and alienating many of those have been hit hardest in the pandemic.¹⁵⁵ It is important as church leaders that we follow the lead of our sisters and brothers of color and speak out in every way we can to end the evil of racism.

The Church Remnant – Disenfranchised Evangelicals

Many are fearful of the possible impact which President Trump's social media strategy has had on the attitudes of the American population, particularly regarding how it relates to evangelicals. His 2016 campaign proved how social media could be used to dictate an interpretation that benefits him. It has been shown that, when the mass media outlets produce

¹⁵² Modern Marvelle, "@davidswanson: I'll Take It a Step Further: A Church That Does Not Confront White Supremacy Is Not a Church. You Cannot Claim to Love Your Brother as Yourself and Be Silent Regarding the Systemic Inequities That Have Oppressed Him."

¹⁵³ Paula's Daughter, "@davidswanson Years Ago, I Left a Church I Really Liked, Due to the Pastor Refusing to Dip His Toe in the Social Justice Pond. I Joined a Church Due to the Pastor's Fearless Challenging of All Structures That Are Oppressive Including Anti-LGBTQIA Rhetoric That Churches Love to Stand On."

¹⁵⁴ Dr. Chris Williamson, "@davidswanson This Is How a White Brother Is Supposed to Use His Voice and Privilege for the Kingdom. When Black Pastors Say the Same Thing, Most White Christians Quickly Reject It or Deflect It."

¹⁵⁵ Dara T. Mathis, "The Church's Black Exodus."

negative stories about him, he then shifts the narrative with diversionary tweets which has the profound impact of changing the mass media story.¹⁵⁶ There has also been the assertion that Trump uses professional “objective” journalists to push his agenda because to call him out on disinformation would be labeled partisan.¹⁵⁷ Why this is important is the link that Trump has with Evangelical Christians and their social media messaging. It also points to how the media plays a role in shaping our beliefs including Christianity.

Despite our reluctance to get online, Christianity is online without us, and the messaging is not always positive. It is clear that the voice of the Evangelical Christian is a dominant force of Christian messaging on social media and online in general. The merger of the evangelicals with the Republican Party in the 1970’s is now facing a crisis because of President Trump. A Pew Research study released in March 2020 on the relationship between religion and politics reported that 80% of white evangelicals believe Trump “fights for what they believe in,” and 59% believe he has helped the interests of the evangelical church.¹⁵⁸ As for morality, 63% of all Americans believe it is very important for the president of our country to lead a moral life; yet only 15% like the way Trump conducts himself. In contrast, 31% of white evangelicals like the way he conducts himself.¹⁵⁹ This is leading to some difficult friction within the evangelical communities, and I would argue effecting the views of all Christians.

While the normal Republican platform usually adopts anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ marriage policy that is important to evangelical Christians, Trump’s behavior has led to a schism within this normally consistent conservative base. We see this when Mark Galli, the editor of the

¹⁵⁶ Lewandowsky, Jetter, and Ecker, “Using the President’s Tweets to Understand Political Diversion in the Age of Social Media,” 9.

¹⁵⁷ Yochai Benkler et al., “Mail-In Voter Fraud,” 47.

¹⁵⁸ Pew Research Center, Washington, and Inquiries, “Americans’ Views on Trump, Religion and Politics.”

¹⁵⁹ Pew Research Center, Washington, and Inquiries.

conservative publication *Christianity Today*, faced sharpened criticism for calling out the President for abuse of power for personal gain after the Mueller Investigation.¹⁶⁰ President and CEO of *Christianity Today*, Timothy Dalrymple, in defense of the Billy Graham founded publication's position, described two basic sets of responses to the magazine:¹⁶¹

- The first was what he called “the Church Regnant,” or those who may or may not like Trump but believe the Republican policies are tantamount to the Christian way of life. To lose the election means that the country will further fall into immorality, and they will have lost to evil.
- The second are the “the Church Remanent”, or those who believe that the evangelical leaders who are praising Trump without condemning his behavior are tarnishing the witness of Christ. He noted they tended to be younger, more diverse, less likely to have societal power, and would rather see the church lose influence over integrity.

Coming from magazine leaders who would consider themselves evangelicals, I believe we are witnessing an alarm bell that will not only affect the conservatives, but all Christian denominations similar to the Catholic Church's abusive priest coverups which led to mistrust of all of our community. This is also a good depiction about what I am seeing, not just in social media or with my deeply conservative brothers and sisters, but in my own congregation which used to be accepting of fellow congregants who may or may not have the same political views.

Dalrymple's observations are confirmed with studies on youth and religion. In an analysis done by the National Study of Youth and Religion of 3,000 youth ages 13-17 in 2002,

¹⁶⁰ Galli, “Trump Should Be Removed from Office.”

¹⁶¹ Timothy Dalrymple, “Why Evangelicals Disagree on the President.”

who were later reinterviewed in their 20s, 51% said they are not engaged in religious services as compared to 11% when they were teenagers.¹⁶² They also found that 5% of those young adults were moving to mainline Protestantism mainly because they do not see the evangelical beliefs as being consistent with their lived experiences.¹⁶³

A recent example played out in front of me on Twitter when Southern Baptist evangelist and educator Beth Moore tweeted this multi-thread post:

(@BethMooreLPM) Tweeted: (1/3) I do not believe these are days for mincing words. I'm 63 1/2 years old & I have never seen anything in these United States of America I found more astonishingly seductive & dangerous to the saints of God than Trumpism. This Christian nationalism is not of God. Move back from it.¹⁶⁴

(2/3) Fellow leaders, we will be held responsible for remaining passive in this day of seduction to save our own skin while the saints we've been entrusted to serve are being seduced, manipulated, USED and stirred up into a lather of zeal devoid of the Holy Spirit for political gain.¹⁶⁵

(3/3) And, God help us, we don't turn from Trumpism to Bidenism. We do not worship flesh and blood. We do not place our faith in mortals. We are the church of the living God. We can't sanctify idolatry by labeling a leader our Cyrus. We need no Cyrus. We have a king. His name is Jesus.¹⁶⁶

By the time of this writing, replies to these posts totaled 25.9k. The response was similar to what was described by the *Christianity Today* editorial:

¹⁶² Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory, More young adults are leaving religion, but that's not the whole story, say researchers.

¹⁶³ Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory.

¹⁶⁴ Beth Moore, "I Do Not Believe These Are Days for Mincing Words. I'm 63 1/2 Years Old & I Have Never Seen Anything in These United States of America I Found More Astonishingly Seductive & Dangerous to the Saints of God than Trumpism. This Christian Nationalism Is Not of God. Move Back from It."

¹⁶⁵ Beth Moore, "Fellow Leaders, We Will Be Held Responsible for Remaining Passive in This Day of Seduction to Save Our Own Skin While the Saints We've Been Entrusted to Serve Are Being Seduced, Manipulated, USED and Stirred up into a Lather of Zeal Devoid of the Holy Spirit for Political Gain."

¹⁶⁶ Beth Moore, "And, God Help Us, We Don't Turn from Trumpism to Bidenism. We Do Not Worship Flesh and Blood. We Do Not Place Our Faith in Mortals. We Are the Church of the Living God. We Can't Sanctify Idolatry by Labeling a Leader Our Cyrus. We Need No Cyrus. We Have a King. His Name Is Jesus."

(@marvinh32598048) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM):

Multimillionaire preachers and simple facts led us out the door of religion for good. The wonderful and extremely talented singers are the only thing we have missed in all these years. But, music is accessible anytime and anywhere.¹⁶⁷

(@Peony 459) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): I've been saying for quite some time now that it appears you Beth, have been tricked by the evil one. I pray the Holy Spirit opens your eyes. Neither man is a savior, however one has done more to save the unborn than the other. That one got my vote.¹⁶⁸

(@DebbieStaplet15) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): Christian nationalism is the greatest threat facing our nation. It has broken my heart & shaken me spiritually. There are people in my life that I will never look at the same way. Thank you, Beth, for being one of the few brave Christian leaders & speaking out against it.¹⁶⁹

(@rachelquenzner) Replying to (@DebbieStaplet15) and (@BethMooreLPM): Same. I no longer consider myself a Christian bc of this mess and don't want to be associated w/what's happening. I was born & raised Catholic, but we are done with the church due to the complacency of so many leaders in the face of people using God's name for their own purpose.¹⁷⁰

(@TerLowder) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): It's not trumpism, for the first time the people had someone on their side. The rottenness has been exposed and they came after him with a staggering vileness. He hit back and it got uglier than anyone imagined. Now we watch how the left will make Christians pay. Rise up Church!¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Marvin Harrison, "@NickCutrera @artnbarb @RebelTrooper09 @BethMooreLPM Multimillionaire Preachers and Simple Facts Led Us out the Door of Religion for Good. The Wonderful and Extremely Talented Singers Are the Only Thing We Have Missed in All These Years. But, Music Is Accessible Anytime and Anywhere."

¹⁶⁸ Dee Marie, "@cjtruth @BethMooreLPM I've Been Saying for Quite Some Time Now That It Appears You Beth, Have Been Tricked by the Evil One. I Pray the Holy Spirit Opens Your Eyes. Neither Man Is a Savior, However One Has Done More to Save the Unborn than the Other. That One Got My Vote."

¹⁶⁹ DebRenee, "@BethMooreLPM Christian Nationalism Is the Greatest Threat Facing Our Nation. It Has Broken My Heart & Shaken Me Spiritually. There Are People in My Life That I Will Never Look at the Same Way. Thank You, Beth, for Being One of the Few Brave Christian Leaders & Speaking out against It."

¹⁷⁰ Rachel, "@DebbieStaplet15 @BethMooreLPM Same. I No Longer Consider Myself a Christian Bc of This Mess and Don't Want to Be Associated w/What's Happening. I Was Born & Raised Catholic, but We Are Done with the Church Due to the Complacency of so Many Leaders in the Face of People Using God's Name for Their Own Purpose."

¹⁷¹ Terry Lowder, "@BethMooreLPM It's Not Trumpism, for the First Time the People Had Someone on Their Side. The Rottenness Has Been Exposed and They Came after Him with a Staggering Vileness. He Hit Back and It Got Uglier than Anyone Imagined. Now We Watch How the Left Will Make Christians Pay. Rise up Church!"

(@BreadConquerer) Replying to (@TerLowder)

(@BethMooreLPM): Why do you think the left is out to “make Christians pay”? I’m on the left. (FAR the left of Joe Biden.) I want you to enjoy your religion. I just don’t want you using the laws of the state to impose your religious beliefs on me. That’s all the left asks.¹⁷²

(@ArtValley818) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): I always knew you were a false teacher. Thanks for the confirmation.¹⁷³

(@Vance828) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): I used to follow you, read your work. Never again. My God has gifted me with discernment. I know progressive Christianity when I see it. This that you’re putting out isn’t Biblical. I pray you find your way back.¹⁷⁴

(@JessicaWoodlief) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): Trump has been the most pro-life, pro-religious freedom, pro-Israel President in modern history. Stop listening to the media and actually take a look at his policies and decide for yourself if they conflict or align with Christian values.¹⁷⁵

(@andersod) Replying to (@JessicaWoodlief) (@BethMooreLPM): He’s not pro-life. His ego and inaction has led to the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans. He’s just executed more federal prisoners than any other president in decades. There has never been a more evil person to hold the office of president.¹⁷⁶

While these back-and-forth discussions are expected, what I found most troubling were the people who wrote how the current climate in the Christian church had affected their faith:

¹⁷² We’re All Rising, “@TerLowder @BethMooreLPM Why Do You Think the Left Is out to ‘Make Christians Pay’? I’m on the Left. (FAR to the Left of Joe Biden.) I Want You to Enjoy Your Religion. I Just Don’t Want You Using the Laws of the State to Impose Your Religious Beliefs on Me. That’s All the Left Asks.”

¹⁷³ Art TakingBack us, “@BethMooreLPM I Always Knew You Were a False Teacher. Thanks for the Confirmation!”

¹⁷⁴ *HOLD THE LINE-Vance828*, “@BethMooreLPM I Used to Follow You, Read Your Work. Never Again. My God Has Gifted Me with Discernment. I Know Progressive Christianity When I See It. This That You’re Putting out Isn’t Biblical. I Pray You Find Your Way Back.”

¹⁷⁵ Mr. Anderson, “@JessicaWoodlief @BethMooreLPM He’s Not pro-Life. His Ego and Inaction Has Led to the Unnecessary Deaths of Hundreds of Thousands of Americans. He’s Just Executed More Federal Prisoners than Any Other President in Decades. There Has Never Been a More Evil Person to Hold the Office of President.”

¹⁷⁶ **EJ**, “@andersod @JessicaWoodlief @BethMooreLPM He’s pro Life but on Target to Set a Record for Most Executions by a President, the “cocktail “ He and His Cohorts Are Taking for COVID, Are Made from Fetus Tissue. Not Really pro Life. He pro Trump.”

(@RuthProphete) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): The amount of Christians in this thread supporting nationalism makes no sense to me. I want no part of that Christianity. I follow a Christ who loves all people. Who died for 1 people. Who came for the poor and the humble. This rage and name calling is not it.¹⁷⁷

(@kamrielly14) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): Wow Beth I almost skipped this tweet thinking it was endorsement for the evil one! Thank you for sharing and personally bringing me hope! I am struggling in my own faith, as my church endorsed Trump, and am looking for real answers. Please continue to inspire us.¹⁷⁸

(@linfhall226) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): It's so hard watching people who I respect, who taught me about God, who were pivotal in my walk with Christ follow this path. It's really shaken my walk. I feel abandoned by my church. They've put greater emphasis on "freedoms" than protecting people.¹⁷⁹

(@SisterBenes) Replying to (@linfhall226) and (@BethMooreLPM): Watching the bulk of the church who raised me defend trump or remain silent has destroyed my love for the church. I will never trust the institution again. I am barely holding onto Jesus.¹⁸⁰

(@chairoscuroflux) Replying to (@SisterBenes) (@linfhall226)

(@BethMooreLPM): I felt both these tweets so hard. The women I have looked to as spiritual mothers and sisters have become radicalized and are unrecognizable. I feel shaken to the core of my faith and I keep wondering "was I raised in a cult? What if I've been brainwashed all this time?"¹⁸¹

What struck me when reading this was how we are witnessing many people in a sort of theological diaspora. If we opt out of online interactions because we believe it does not engage

¹⁷⁷ Ruth Prophete, "@BethMooreLPM The Amount of Christians in This Thread Supporting Nationalism Makes No Sense to Me. I Want No Part of That Christianity. I Follow a Christ Who Loves All People. Who Died for 1 People. Who Came for the Poor and the Humble. This Rage and Name Calling Is Not It."

¹⁷⁸ kat reilly, "@BethMooreLPM Wow Beth I Almost Skipped This Tweet Thinking It Was Endorsement for the Evil One! Thank You for Sharing and Personally Bringing Me Hope! I Am Struggling in My Own Faith, as My Church Endorsed Trump, and Am Looking for Real Answers. Please Continue to Inspire Us."

¹⁷⁹ Lindsey Hall, "@BethMooreLPM It's so Hard Watching People Who I Respect, Who Taught Me about God, Who Were Pivotal in My Walk with Christ Follow This Path. It's Really Shaken My Walk. I Feel Abandoned by My Church. They've Put Greater Emphasis on 'Freedoms' than Protecting People."

¹⁸⁰ Elaine Benes, "@linfhall226 @BethMooreLPM Watching the Bulk of the Church Who Raised Me Defend Trump or Remain Silent Has Destroyed My Love for the Church. I Will Never Trust the Institution Again. I Am Barely Holding onto Jesus."

¹⁸¹ chairoscuroflux, "@SisterBenes @linfhall226 @BethMooreLPM I Felt Both These Tweets so Hard. The Women I Have Looked to as Spiritual Mothers and Sisters Have Become Radicalized and Are Unrecognizable. I Feel Shaken to the Core of My Faith and I Keep Wondering 'Was I Raised in a Cult? What If I've Been Brainwashed All This Time?'"

folks the way we feel is necessary, we will continue to see a decline in Christianity due to what many see as disconnect between what we say we value versus what we support. Yet we have not done enough to train our laity or pastors to engage people in a way that reveals there are more than the two options of evangelical or no church.

No Religious Affiliation

Probably the greatest opportunity for mainline protestants to reach out are to those who are religiously unaffiliated or the “nones.” As the Pew Research Center States in their update on America’s changing religious landscape report, those who confess to be Christian protestant is on the decline from 51% in 2009 to 43% in 2018, while the nones went from 17% to 23% in the same time period.¹⁸² Interestingly, one-third of democrats are nones and 61% attend church only a few times a year.¹⁸³ Some believe this may be because mainline is considered “the default American norm” religion, but many are not involved or attending worship.¹⁸⁴ However, I believe that a large reason for this is that more moderate to liberal mainline denominations have not made the case for the need to serve both God and the world.

Twitter’s platform began as a place to share what was going in your life, but then developed into a place where users could share and debate politics, entertainment, and, of course, religion.¹⁸⁵ While I find Facebook and Instagram the best social media sites for pastoral care and keeping up with the congregation, I have found Twitter the best place for conversation with those I do not know. It has been where I have found a large gap for alt-Methodist evangelism as well

¹⁸² Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” 3-4.

¹⁸³ Pew Research Center, 19.

¹⁸⁴ Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory, More young adults are leaving religion, but that’s not the whole story, say researchers.

¹⁸⁵ Andrea Rota and Oliver Krüger, “The Dynamics of Religion, Media, and Community,” 110.

as the desire from mainline Christians to have a different message represented. I saw this retweeted and I decided to respond:

@jbmerrifield Tweeted: Christians: "I don't understand how someone can be born female and identify as a man." Also Christians: "God is his own son and also a ghost."¹⁸⁶

@tracymmooney Replying to @jbmerrifield: Not all Christians.¹⁸⁷

@jbmerrifield Replying to @tracymmooney: Gif with "OK."¹⁸⁸

@tracymmooney Replying to @jbmerrifield: I promise!¹⁸⁹

@RavenBluesGeek Replying to @tracymmooney and @jbmerrifield: Agree. It bothers me that "Christian" has become synonymous with evangelical. Clearly, they believe they are the only "real" Christians, so they use this shortcut, but the fact that much of the rest of the country has gone along with it is just wrong.¹⁹⁰

@Crawdaddct Replying to @RavenBluesGeek @tracymmooney and @jbmerrifield: Yes, one reason I love my church, we accept all people who clame the name Jesus Christ as Christians. How you choose to worship and beliefs does matter. We also don't keep anyone separated from God. Sexual orientation or gender identity don't matter.¹⁹¹

@fanboy_casey Replying to @tracymmooney and @jbmerrifield: Fair point.¹⁹²

If I could go back in time, I would have written something that could not be interpreted as confrontational. I also did not see this as the time to preach about the theology of the Trinity.

¹⁸⁶ Commie Decentral, "Christians: 'I Don't Understand How Someone Can Be Born Female and Identify as a Man.' Also Christians: 'God Is His Own Son and Also a Ghost.'"

¹⁸⁷ Tracy M, "@jbmerrifield Not All Christians."

¹⁸⁸ Commie Decentral, "@tracymmooney <https://t.co/KxfETHNa3K>."

¹⁸⁹ Tracy M, "@jbmerrifield I Promise!"

¹⁹⁰ NKC, "@tracymmooney @jbmerrifield Agree. It Bothers Me That 'Christian' Has Become Synonymous with Evangelical. Clearly, They Believe They Are the Only 'Real' Christians, so They Use This Shortcut, but the Fact That Much of the Rest of the Country Has Gone along with It Is Just Wrong."

¹⁹¹ John, "@RavenBluesGeek @tracymmooney @jbmerrifield Yes, One Reason I Love My Church, We Accept All People Who Clame the Name Jesus Christ as Christians. How You Choose to Worship and Beliefs Does Matter. We Also Don't Keep Anyone Separated from God. Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity Don't Matter."

¹⁹² Casey Fanboy, "@tracymmooney @jbmerrifield Fair Point."

This person obviously had some pain around identity and acceptance in the Christian church, and so helping to show that rejection was not the only response might go a little way to help in healing. I believe it is clear that there is a need for more expressions of Christianity in a way that speaks to the love and grace of Jesus Christ, versus a more fundamental biblical view that focuses on exclusion.

These interactions may do a little to change the perception of Christianity; by recognizing the deep need for our alt-Methodist message, it may help us to mobilize our efforts to make disciples of Jesus Christ. What the election of 2016 showed us was the power that social media plays in people's lives and the effect that a message can have. A Facebook executive said that Trump "got elected because he ran the single best digital ad campaign I've ever seen from any advertiser."¹⁹³ While many of us may shrink away at the idea of advertising Jesus, in reality we have one of the most powerful messages which can transform lives for the betterment of our world. Yet, we are losing our campaign. For too long, we have allowed others to handle the message, and it has been either lost or corrupted. We need to start taking the digital world seriously in order to truly fulfill our call.

¹⁹³ McKay Coppins, "The Billion-Dollar Disinformation Campaign to Reelect the President."

Chapter 5: ACT Teams

I first met Travis Smith, Sr., when he was doing a presentation at my church for our Wilmington District meeting. I was newly appointed at Asbury United Methodist Church in New Castle, Delaware, and the person who normally handles our video projection was not informed that she was needed. This left me to figure it out on the fly. Travis was due to present a new initiative called eDiscipleship that he had implemented for Urban Center Ministries. This was a committee specifically setup to oversee the distribution income received from the sale of Silverbrook United Methodist Church in Wilmington.

Travis tells everyone that God gave him the vision of eDiscipleship in 2011. Through his extensive background in both technology and training, Travis desired to bridge the generational gap by bringing together those who had a passion for audio, video, and digital technology through congregational education. He implemented a multi-generational Audio Communication Technology (ACT) Team in his home church of Simpson United Methodist Church in Wilmington. I will go into the details of these teams later in the next chapter, but the ACT Team was comprised of members of the church who led the virtual and technology implementation for the congregation. After this successful experience and with a grant from the Urban Center Ministries in 2014, Travis gathered a team of professionals to develop ACT Teams in seven United Methodist Churches and three United Methodist Agencies, all of which were located in the City of Wilmington. The Project was called “Urban Technology Revolution.”

That day, when he showed me the landing page for the Urban City Ministries site, videos from all of the churches appeared. It was incredible. I immediately asked if my church could participate. The congregations looked active and vital. Ministry was happening.

Unfortunately, my congregation was not able to participate because we were outside the city limits and the boundaries of the grant. But I remembered that project, and when I was asked to be the Chair of Evangelism for the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, I asked Travis to be my co-chair. We were encouraged by the Conference Director of Connectional Ministries to really start fresh and provide new ways for churches to connect with the “unchurched.” Over the past two years, Travis and I have been working on building off of the vision of the Urban Technology Revolution project to offer other small to medium-sized churches the opportunity to build their digital ministries.

Digital Congregational Clusters

The purpose of eDiscipleship is to cultivate a culture of electronic discipleship by developing church strategies for building audio, technology, and communication teams. The original program was designed for a 15-month implementation plan in addition to 5 months of support. There were three major goals of the Urban Technology Revolution project:

- Building congregational Audio, Communication, and Technology (ACT) Teams
- Implementation of a single, unified online digital video and web platform
- Development of a Training HUB, a centralized place for people to learn technology in a group setting

Through this, each team would build its own eChurch ministry within their congregation as well as share their learnings with other churches in the conference.

Successes and Challenges

While much of the project was successful, there were some issues which kept it from moving to full sustainability on the larger level.

1. Initially there was to be a Training Hub located at Neighborhood House, a community center founded by the United Methodist Women's Home Missionary Society in 1927 and located in Southbridge neighborhood in Wilmington. It was also one of the United Methodist Agencies which was to be a part of the project. The third floor had three underutilized technology classrooms with 24 computers, an open reception area, and office space. This space was designated for all churches to learn the eDiscipleship model. Unfortunately, at about the same time that the project was to be implemented, Neighborhood House changed Executive Directors, and this change led to the project not being able to use the facility. The project then had to shift from having a centralized training facility to having to do training in each individual church and agency.
2. In addition, some of the churches and all of the agencies did not have the capacity to fully implement the technology. Travis, who had been involved in active congregations his entire life, was not prepared for congregations that were older and resistant to change.
3. Finally, due to the change in venue, the project left the digital video cluster as the last piece, making it more difficult for congregations to see the purpose of the project.

While there were some challenges, there were also many successes. Travis' home church implemented ACT 10 years ago at Simpson United Methodist Church as a part of the worship experience. The membership had concerns about privacy, cyber-security, access for those who

were not tech-savvy, and the fear that technology might interfere with the worship experience. Within five years, this congregation was utilizing SMS messaging and group calls to have worship services during inclement weather. Today, they are streaming worship services on social media.

The Urban Revolution Technology project is still living at a congregational level. At the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, some of these churches utilized the ACT model to collectively organize outreach activities that fed children and families when schools and community centers closed. Mt. Joy United Methodist Church is one example of the fruit of building a strong, cohesive ACT Team which focuses on generational learning, and they have expanded their mission to integrate eDiscipleship from this project. This team generated excitement and was critical to supporting a new millennial mission called NWM Got Soul, which is a young adult ministry that builds relationships beyond the church walls by meeting and having events in the local community center. They also initiated the Youth Media Ministry which empowers tweens to use ACT skills for their church. This ACT Team also led the District in a technology training event via Zoom during the COVID-19 crisis, helping over 85 people learn ways of working with technology during the pandemic.

Arise Church is a new congregation that has used the ACT model since it was established. Worship services and bible studies have always been streamed online. This congregation was combined with another congregation and is now Arise @ Peninsula-McCabe, serving both a traditional and contemporary community. When the recent health crisis hit, their ability to shift from face-to-face to online worship was easily accomplished.

From hearing this success stories, all of these churches are examples of what can be accomplished by developing ACT Teams on an individual church level. However, I question if

the power can come from using our existing structure within the Methodist system, similar to early Methodist's bands, which were maintained as separate from the church and were comprised of people interested in building their faith.

ACT Team Survey Summary

In order to fully analyze the ACT Team structure and to determine whether it would fit into the Methodist Model for evangelism, I wanted to survey some of the members of the existing teams. I created an online survey on Sogo Survey which contained 22 questions and an area for additional comments. By calling each leader, I asked them to participate and asked them to consider having other members of their team to participate. I received six responses from three different teams. I would have liked to have had more participation, but I found it difficult getting responses since many of the churches were not worshipping in person, and none of the leaders or team members knew me. Since the intent of this survey was not to collect large amounts of data, but to gain insight on how the ACT Teams function within the church, I do feel that I had enough responses to analyze their purpose and direction.

The following includes the results of these surveys. I developed questions that would help determine how much training, development, and implementation these teams have done in the past, how they felt their Teams have helped the church survive COVID, and areas where they could go in the future. The survey can be found on <https://survey.sogosurvey.com/r/jEtfHS>.

Questions 1 and 2 were part of the informed consent form in which all respondents gave consent and signed electronically.

About Each Team

In Questions 3-5, I wanted information about their church's ACT Team and their participation in that team. I summarized their responses in Questions 3 and 4, while giving their exact response in Question 5.

Q3: How long have you been a part of your church's ACT Team?

- There were 2 respondents that had been part of an ACT Team for 1 Year. (One of the respondents clarified that their congregation had just started an official ACT team, but they had been handling the Media/Sound for 15 years.)
- There were 2 respondents that had been participating for 3 years.
- There were 2 respondents that had been participating for 10 or more years.

Q4: What is your primary responsibility on the ACT Team?

- There were two of the respondents were the chairpersons of the committee.
- One respondent who identified themselves as the coordinator.
- One respondent was on the Administrative Team.

Two others were more specific in their duties:

- Produce our Sunday morning worship services and manage our YouTube channel.
- I run the computer, projector, & audio, but more recently I've created video worship services and run the cameras/live streams while handling the social media communication during livestream.

Q:5 How many people are on your church's ACT team?

1. 20
2. 8
3. 5
4. 8
5. 25
6. 4

Software Specifics

In Questions 6-9, I wanted to know what types of applications the teams were using and for what type of ministries. I was interested in how they were using software to engage the congregation as well as livestreaming online.

Q:6 What ministries does your church currently offer virtually? (Please fill in the number per week offered.)

1. Worship: 1, Bible Study: 4, Fellowship Time: 0, Children's Church / Sunday School: 1, Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc): 0
2. Worship: 1, Bible Study: 2, Fellowship Time:, Children's Church / Sunday School: 0, Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc): 0
3. Worship: 1, Bible Study: 2, Fellowship Time: 1, Children's Church / Sunday School: 3, Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc): 5
4. Worship: 1, Bible Study: 1, Fellowship Time: 2, Children's Church / Sunday School: 1, Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc): 1

5. Worship: 1, Bible Study: 3, Fellowship Time: 1, Children's Church / Sunday

School: 1, Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc): 1

6. Worship: 2, Bible Study: 2, Fellowship Time: 0, Children's Church / Sunday

School: 0, Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc): 1

Here is a compiled table view of the ministries that are being offered virtually by these
ACT Teams:

Responses	Sum	Average	Median
Worship	7	1	1
Bible Study	14	2	2
Fellowship Time	4	1	1
Children's Church / Sunday School	6	1	1
Other Small Group (ie-Griefshare, Senior Ministries, etc)	8	2	1
Total Responses	6		

Q:7 What programs / applications does your church use to offer these virtual ministries? (Check all that apply)

1. Zoom, ProPresenter, Wirecast
2. Other (Please specify): I'm not actively involved with my specific congregation's streaming ministry.
3. Zoom, OBS Studio, Switcher Studio, Other (Please specify): Restream, Ring Central.
4. Zoom, OBS Studio, Switcher Studio

5. Zoom, ProPresenter, Wirecast
6. Zoom, Webex, ProPresenter, StreamYard, Other (Please specify): Win Movie Maker and Sony Vegas Pro

To further look at the popularity of a particular software, we can identify the total percentage of the group's software choices:

Software	Percentage of Users
Zoom	86%
Webex	17%
ProPresenter	50%
OBS Studio	33%
Wirecast	33%
Switcher Studio	33%
StreamYard	17%

Q:8 If you stream, which platforms do you stream to (YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, Amplify, Church Online Video, Other)?

1. YouTube
2. Facebook
3. YouTube, Facebook, Other (Please specify): Periscope
4. YouTube, Facebook
5. YouTube, Facebook
6. YouTube, Facebook

To further look at the popularity of livestreaming video platforms, we can identify the total percentage of the group's software choices:

Software	Percentage of Users
YouTube	83%
Facebook	83%
Vimeo	0%
Amplify	0%
Church Online Video	0%
Other	17%

Q:9 What made you choose a particular platform?

1. We started with Zoom but found that the quality of worship experience was enhanced with YouTube.
2. N/A
3. Survey conducted - majority of members were on Facebook - training held for congregation to understand and sign up for Facebook.
4. Ease of use and ability to expand.
5. We chose YouTube because all of our videos can be housed there in one place.
6. We went with what handled our absolute needs and worked within our budget to give us the most options at the best price. We also looked at ease of use and integration capabilities - things that would give us the best options for broadcast and viewership.

Online Evangelism

In Questions 10-13, my aim was to understand how much of the ACT Teams work focused on evangelism in their virtual ministries. Were they mainly focused on those already in church, or did they try to reach new people for Christ virtually?

Q:10 On a scale of 1 to 10, how much of your virtual ministries are currently aimed at reaching new people, with 1 being not at all and 10 completely?

1. 8
2. 10
3. 9
4. 9
5. 7
6. 7

Q:11 What virtual ministries have been successful in reaching new people virtually? How do you measure that success?

1. I would say our worship experience is the only virtual ministry that is thriving at this time, and it is measured by weekly attendance, and also the number of people that are subscribed to our channel.
2. From the Core ACT ministry standpoint, we began with one group of intended churches and organizations in, but (in some ways) surprisingly, ended up with a different group of churches utilizing the ACT model. The loss of some of our original participants was disappointing, but in the end, the group of churches currently using the ACT is refreshing and encouraging. It spans the cross-

generational model as originally intended. There are six churches using this model, but I would call this an overall success!

3. Worship - measurements determined by Facebook metrics - shares, comments and increased weekly viewership numbers 2, Special Events (Jazz Vesper-Family Night etc.) - Develop Metrics to determine outreach and viewership.
4. Our Sunday worship service is the most successful. We measure the success using the Facebook and YouTube analytic information. (reach of audience, page likes, comments, shares, etc.)
5. I believe our virtual Sunday morning worship service has been successful in reaching new people. We are able to measure the success from reviewing our YouTube Analytics, which shows the subscribers, geography, gender and age of people, etc. It provides great data!
6. I'm not sure of the statistics, but I can tell you that the comments section from FB & YouTube each week during livestream has new names - people I don't recognize from my church, and I've been a member all 53 years of my life.

Q12: Do you have a marketing plan for reaching new people online?

1. No, that is an issue we would like to address in way 2021.
2. We do not have a formally written/updated marketing plan at the Core level.
3. Yes, we are continuously refining Communication Plan to include additional social media platforms.
4. We do not have a specific plan. We continuously look at ways to improve our online presence. We discuss community topics and needs so our message is relevant. We continue to hold community events while adhering to social

distancing guidelines. We ask those who congregate or visit us what their needs are.

5. Not yet - but it certainly would be beneficial.
6. I don't know, exactly.

Q13: Do you use any social media or other marketing software to reach new people online?

1. Our social media effort has been on Facebook & Instagram. But there is no real marketing been done at this time.
2. (No response)
3. Postermymwall, Constant Contact, Survey Monkey, Canva, and Mailchimp
4. We use Mail Chimp for email notices and phone blasts.
5. Facebook & Instagram
6. I'm not on a lot of Social Media - I simply don't have time - so I don't know.

Training and Implementation

In Questions 14 – 16, the goal was to know how much training the ACT Teams receive as well as how they implement new technology.

Q:14 Have you received ACT training? If so, what was that training and when did you receive that training?

1. No
2. I have not participated in any ACT training. I've focused on maintaining ACT records.
3. No, but training was provided to team members prior to my onboarding.

4. We requested ongoing training from the professionals who work with our equipment and from those who maintain other act programs at other churches.
5. No - I have not received ACT training but would like to.
6. I haven't had anything specifically called ACT training, but we've worked together, set norms for our collaborations, and grown together as we work on this new venture. We seem to be training as we go.

Q:15 How does the ACT Team implement new technology?

1. We have been blessed to have a team member that is an online technologist, that is youthful and is also an educator. We have also been blessed be to have a complete upgrade of our sound system via a grant from (Peninsula – Delaware) Congregational Development Corporation. The \$37k grant has been a great help, but we are learning that we grossly underestimated the cost of the needs to operate in a virtual environment.
2. (No Response)
3. We provide training to our ACT Team members and our Youth Media Ministry. We also cross train so that everyone can fill into a specific area as needed. Training is held weekly by the coordinator and specialist brought in as needed.
4. One of our members is a computer technology instructor and specialist. She evaluates our need and research equipment or software to determine if it will meet our needs. Then it is introduced to the entire committee and discussed for use and benefit.
5. We use YouTube, Wirecast & ProPresenter for our live-streaming services. We use Zoom for bible studies, meetings & social events.

6. There are a couple members of the team who know a lot more about the tech offerings, they look at what we need and what we want to achieve, they make recommendations, and then we test stuff out. If it works, we commit to it. If not, then we look at other avenues.

Q:16 On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most receptive and 1 being the least receptive, how does the congregation respond when the ACT team implements something new?

1. 8
2. 9
3. 10
4. 5
5. 10
6. 8

Mission of the Church

In Questions 17, I wanted to know if the team members felt the ACT Teams were part of the mission and ministry of the church. In Question 18, as a seasoned pastor, I know that if the church feels that the ACT Team and technology is important to their mission, they will allocate money towards it.

Q:17 Do you believe the ACT Team contributes to the mission of your church? If so, how?

1. Yes, the team has especially during this time of covid 19, we have managed to keep the congregation connected and provide outreach to others who are unable to visit our physical location for worship service, and monthly newsletter.

2. ACT contributes to the mission of the church (regardless of denomination) as a whole by utilizing the technological tools we have at our disposal to share the Word of God. The best part is: it takes the limitations off geography. We can share a bible study happening in Wilmington, Delaware, with our cousin down in Covington, GA. We can attend church service in Claymont, DE, with a friend in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. (It's been done!) The ACT models removes the walls of the church building and gives us a way to follow the words in Mark 16:15 where Christ says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."
3. Yes, our mission parallels to the mission of the church. Our church mission is based on three biblical principles. Worship God (Psalms 100, Witness (Matthew 31-46, and Win Disciples (Matthew 18-20). Our ACT Team guiding biblical principal comes from John 15:5," I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. Our mission and goals are to promote connection in the local faith community, maintain engagement with the congregation (Bible Chat, Bible Study etc., Worship), keep the church Vital and Vibrant and Create a "Virtual" Open Door.
4. The mission of the church is to worship, witness, and win disciples for Christ. We contribute to the mission by using social media to be relevant and get the word out to the masses. We are mandated to bring people to Christ.
5. Yes - we help with the mission of the church, which is The Great Commission of making disciples, just in a new way - globally online.

6. Absolutely! The ACT team stepped up when COVID hit and closed our building.
If it weren't for the ACT Team, I'm not sure how we would be having services, let alone the rest of our activities

Q:18 In your estimation, how much does your church typically spend on ACT Ministries?

(Including software, hardware, audio, installation, training, etc.)

1. \$8000
2. I do not keep track of this detail.
3. \$5,000 (Not sure if this question refers to total spent or annually)
4. 70%
5. 5k yearly; 50k for new equipment this year
6. I don't know, I'm not on Finance.

What have I missed?

In the final set of questions, I gave the respondents the opportunity to express their successes and ideas. Since we were in the middle of worship changing COVID, I was also interested in how they felt their church responded with an ACT Team in place.

Q:19 What successes have you experienced being a part of the ACT Team?

1. I have seen the transition from a small corner in the sanctuary with one camera to a dedicated loft in the church. With our latest grant a major overhaul of sound system, and a system with two mounted cameras, a new sound board, and a fellowship hall with all the bells and whistles. Drop down screen, mini sound system, overhead ceiling mounted project. We are now have a state-of-the-art facility.

2. (No Response)
3. We have a strong and enthusiastic team of members who are committed to serving and bring person to Christ. We have grown both spiritually and professionally. We learn from each other's strength and provide one another an opportunity to glorify God by helping to ensure that His Word is clearly heard, visibly seen and that people are giving their lives to Christ. We have witnessed an increased number of congregants and others attending our online services. The ultimate success is being a witness to seeing and hearing one give their life to Christ and in our virtual environment.
4. Successes:
 - weekly increasing followship on social platforms
 - young adults learning to use the equipment
 - people giving their life to Christ via social media
 - the tools we have made investments in
5. (Listed the following)
 - Online worship services through Zoom, Facebook & YouTube since March 15th
 - Live streaming inside and outside of the church sanctuary
 - Hosted MAP's Legal Reform Symposium 2020
 - Presented for the Black Methodist for Church Renewal Caucus 2020
 - Held a Virtual Worship Retreat with workshops on worship, technology & choir decorum, and a fun choir battle.

- Flipping all in-person activities to virtual - "We Can Virtually Do Anything!" is my/our motto.
6. It's great to see the people communicating during the service, but I have had people from the congregation text me during the week to let me know what they would like to see for the next service or to let me know there was an issue with sound, or the feed - the feedback is incredibly supportive (considering how the congregation reacted 15 years ago when we put in the 1st projector - OY).

Q:20 What changes would you implement to make your ACT Team more effective?

1. Have additional training, so that team members can operate all technology systems.
Upgrade our communication platforms, with emphasis on our website. And have dedicated in-house expertise to maintenance our operation.
2. At this moment, I can't think of anything.
3. (Listed the following)
 - Budget
 - Training on sound, lightening, editing
 - Assistance with social media platform integration
 - Adequate and dedicated space
 - Purchase new equipment - many challenges mixing old equipment with new technological changes.
4. What changes would we implement:
 - better practical working area in the church (build an appropriate audio/visual space in the sanctuary)

- more communication training (members learning how to receive and give constructive feedback)
 - intentional actions that benefit the viewers
5. ACT training
 6. We need "production" manuals for each piece of tech, and more training for our Lay Servers/Liturgists on working with recording and video. We have a lot of laity who talk to the papers in front of them and not to the camera. We could also use better microphones to handle the new, more sensitive audio.

Q:21 Do you feel your church was more prepared to handle virtual church during the COVID shutdown because of your existing ACT Team? How?

1. Yes, we had staff & planned upgrades that made the switch seamless. And a congregation that was accepting of the needed changes to continue to worship.
2. Yes. Yes. 1000 times YES!!!! Although some of the more “traditional” congregations gave some push-back when ACT was initially introduced, they discovered the benefit of having this type of access already in place when the shutdowns began. They did not have to scramble to learn and troubleshoot technology on the fly, while attempting to deliver ministry.
3. Yes, prior to COVID, we had begun to prepare our congregation for the online platform. After surveying the congregation, the results revealed that many were already familiar with Facebook. We then provided training after our morning service to further the education and knowledge of utilizing social media platforms.

4. Yes. We were already doing live streaming before the pandemic completely shut places down.
5. Yes - our tech taskforce had hosted Zoom meetings prior to the shutdown, so when it happened, we were already familiar with the platform and ready to use it.
6. Yes! We already had some basics in place. We have amp'ed up our online presence, but we had no problem stitching together video worship those first couple months.

Q:22 Additional Comments

1. (No response)
2. I could not answer some of these questions because I don't work at the congregational level. (I'm sorry!) As someone who was present at the birth of the ACT platform, I've seen it evolve. We thought it was going to start with 8 churches and 2 community organizations. But ten years later, we have a slightly different set of churches utilizing the ACT model than WE thought ever needed it!! Arise is our model church, using all parts of ACT since its inception, and now joining the congregation of Peninsula-McCabe, they've reinforced the cross-generational connection that the ACT model was intended to bridge. If anyone ever saw ACT as a social experiment, they would have to mark it as a great success.
3. (No response)
4. Not at this time
5. Thank you for the opportunity to complete this survey!
6. I'm anxious to see where we can take this when COVID is no longer an issue.

Reflections from the Survey

Through the survey, I was able to appreciate the challenges and opportunities that exist with ACT Teams and discover ways in which we can more fully develop a Wesleyan Model for online evangelism. There were also a variety of roles represented that gave different perspectives. Here are my observations from conducting this survey:

1. Community – I felt that there was certainly a community that existed through forming ACT Teams. This was evident in areas where I asked about successes, such as Question 19, when Respondent 3 said, “We have a strong and enthusiastic team of members who are committed to serving and bring person to Christ.” In Question 21, where every respondent used the pronoun “we” to describe how the team was able to navigate their congregation through the changing environment due to the pandemic shutdowns.
2. Adaptability – In Question 16, five out of the six respondents felt that their congregation was eight or above in acceptance to new technology with two members even giving their congregations a 10. I cannot determine whether the ACT Team has influenced the congregation in its response to technology or if the church is inherently more adaptable which is why they have an ACT Team. But it seems that most feel their congregation is willing to accept changing environments.
3. Technology and Training - The responses showed most of the teams were using basic streaming software and streaming to known social media sites with little variety. I believe that there is a need for ACT Teams to have training so that they can discover if there are better tools and platforms for them to use.

4. Evangelism – I did not detect that the teams separated online evangelism efforts versus engaging the current congregation. Wonderfully, many use the online analytics to gauge how many people are viewing their online media. In answer to Question 11 concerning how successful the church’s online ministries are in reaching new people, only Respondents 3 and 6 mentioned the comments which makes me question how much the ACT Team interacts with those online. In Question 12, only one knew of a marketing or communications plan. In a future survey to ACT Teams, I would definitely ask how they differentiate between those who are currently attending worship and those who they are trying to reach.
5. Financial Commitment – While it seems that most of the churches do have a financial commitment to technology, I should have asked what the total overall budget of the church is in order to have a more accurate measure in how valuable this is to the church. While many churches probably see the need for virtual ministries since COVID, I also wonder if this will fall away once we “get back to normal.” In Question 15, Respondent 1 pointed out that they received external funding as a grant from the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, but they “grossly underestimated the cost of operating in a virtual environment.” I believe it would be beneficial to explore how to fund technology in congregations.
6. Spiritual Leadership – It is clear that the ACT Teams see this as a ministry as indicated by their responses to Question 17 concerning how the ACT Teams fit into the mission of the church. Respondents 1 and 6 saw the mission being carried out in worship. Respondent 3 spoke to keeping their faith community connected as in John 15:5. Respondents 2, 4, and 5 spoke to reaching people outside of the walls.

In being able to listen to those who participated in the survey, I believe that the formation and sustainability of ACT Teams is part of a vital ministry. The pandemic has certainly shown the need for creating avenues to keep people engaged virtually when congregations cannot meet in person. In addition, I will endeavor in the next two chapters to argue how it can fit well within the framework of a Methodist model for evangelism because of its inherent community as well as its ability to adapt to changing contexts.

Chapter 6: Creating Community

When I think of community, it is usually that idealized community of Acts 4:32-34, where it describes the followers of Christ as:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.¹⁹⁴

This is an idealistic way of living that I have never experienced in a church or otherwise, and it did not last too long in this new community of faith either. We read in the next chapter how Ananias and Sapphira met an untimely demise when they lied about the selling price of their property. God is not happy about deception among people, and while hopefully we have never experienced God smiting members of our congregations, it certainly teaches us how tenuous even the most spiritual of bodies can be when we endeavor to worship with one another.

Merriam-Webster defines “Community” as “a unified body of individuals” that can include a collection of people who have the same interests or goals, or who live in the same area.¹⁹⁵ Methodists formed societies for spiritual growth, and they were based upon the location of each group. This was duplicated throughout Great Britain. Wesley believed that community could be transforming if it both was welcoming and was focused on spiritual growth within the community.¹⁹⁶ After an analysis of the surveys, I believe the ACT Team model was a positive one for the congregation, and with some modifications from the original implementation, a

¹⁹⁴ *New Revised Standard Version.*

¹⁹⁵ Merriam-Webster, “Community.”

¹⁹⁶ Henry H. Knight, III and F. Douglas Powe, Jr., *Transforming Evangelism*, 29.

system of Wesleyan evangelism can be strongly implemented. The ACT Teams themselves are communities within the larger community of the congregation. If they emphasize evangelism, they can also create a “virtual open door” to reach those who are seeking, as one of our survey participants stated.

If we use ACT Teams to focus on technology training, evangelism, and faith leadership, we will be able to sustain and grow while engaging new people and building relationships. Using Travis’ initial project, we have designed a program that would allow our congregations to evangelize on the web in a systematic way:

- Implementation of Digital Platform
- Identify Congregation Change Adoption
- Create Training HUB and Live-Studio Production Facility
- Develop Congregational ACT Teams

By doing this, I believe we can equip teams to go out and build digital eChurch communities which will support the United Methodist Church’s mission of “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” If we use our existing system of connectionalism, we can study the many directions congregations can build digital communities of faith to new generations as they learn and grow together.

Implementation of a Single, Online Digital Platform

As I stated previously, COVID-19 forced churches into a new technology space, straining pastors by forcing them to learn and test various programs including YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, Robocalling, etc. providing churches with a single solution and sustainable model for technology

which will connect to these platforms via video, social media, electronic giving, and digital marketing.

If we design a platform that includes a digital video network and a Content Management System (CMS) it will allow for churches to have a consistent web presence without fear of censorship or negative advertising. We will then be able to professionally market this as one system rather than each church having to individually promote on its own. We will reduce the learning curve for pastors, ACT Teams, lay members, and churches by developing a simple, online solution:

Online Digital Platform

- Implement a dedicated digital video network and CMS platform, giving each church the capability of broadcasting worship services, Bible studies, noon prayers, discussion groups, and all ministries as well as enable a web presence.
- Mobile platform that will allow users to connect via their smart phones and tablets
- Provide easy to read support, metrics and web analytics.
- Provide On-Demand content and Pay Per View.

Branding and Marketing

- Create online branding and marketing for churches to increase the level of visibility online to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Provide professional social media marketing through a professional to promote congregations, allowing them to increase their visibility online and offline via mobile targeting technology.

In providing this system to churches, we give them the opportunity to learn a single technology but also encourage further learning to be adaptable to technological changes. All of this can integrate with their current resources as well as help them develop an online strategy for the future through a centralized solution. This will save congregations both time and money. This system would enable congregations to continue to broaden their outreach and will provide them with greater funding opportunities. (<https://tracyspeaks.net/ediscipleship-training> “Digital Platform” graphic displays how the Digital Platform would work.)

Development of Training HUB and Live-Studio Production Facility

As I stated in Chapter 5, one of the reasons the Urban Technology Revolution Project was unsustainable was due to the lack of a centralized space for training. I believe that it is important for congregations to step away from their normal setting to explore not only new technology but the call of Jesus on our lives and in the life of the church. Optimally, it would be good for congregations to have two different facilities: a training HUB and a Live-Studio Production Facility. These will be open to ACT Teams beyond the initiative. The training Hub will remain as a place where ACT Teams can come together for learning the basic skills. (I will introduce the specific classes in Chapter 5). The Live-Studio Production Facility will be the perfect location for ACT members to practice their new skills. It also gives ACT Teams the ability to create better production quality videos which could establish alternative funding through donations as well as through activities such as pay-per-view musical events, studies, theater, workshops, etc. These two locations are central for ACT Teams to develop their eDiscipleship ministries off-site with the benefit of opening themselves up to the possibilities. (<https://tracyspeaks.net/act-teams> “The HUB” graphic provides a visual of the how The HUB and ACT Teams work together.)

Digital Openness

Another challenge faced in the initial project was the reluctance of many in the congregation to go online at all. Many did not see the value of entering into this space. Barna rates church adults along the “Digital Openness” spectrum.¹⁹⁷ They measured regular church attenders based upon how apt they were to:

- See the benefit of online worship.
- Believe congregations should offer online small groups for spiritual growth and development.
- Want to continue online gathering spaces after the pandemic.
- Believe that hybrid or all digital would be suitable for their church after the pandemic.
- Are willing to continue to build new online activities that are unfamiliar.

What they found was that most members (43%) are moderately digitally open, while 20% were high, and 31% were low.¹⁹⁸

To help us determine which congregations were more apt to benefit and use the technology, I developed a system that basically acts as a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). By using the United Methodist Church’s 2011 Vital Congregations Initiative which helps leverage the church’s statistics and Charge Conference reports to measure their ability to adapt in ministry as well as census data from the community in

¹⁹⁷ Barna, “Five Changing Contexts for Digital Evangelism,” 8.

¹⁹⁸ Barna, 10.

which a congregation is located, we would be able to determine how the congregation would receive and support an ACT Team ministry.

In a SWOT analysis, we look at internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) to determine the direction of an organization and ways in which it can maneuver in the future.¹⁹⁹ In 2011, the United Methodist Church initiated *A Call to Action* for congregations to analyze and set goals to foster vital ministries within the church.²⁰⁰ It is no longer being used on a nationwide scale, but its principles for evaluating the energy in a congregation is still relevant.

According to the UM Call to Action, Vital Congregations:²⁰¹

- worships regularly
- helps make new disciples
- is engaged in growing in their faith
- is engaged in mission
- shares by giving in mission

Using the congregation's statistical data from the past 3 years, we can analyze the active participation and spending priorities to determine if they meet the definition of a "vital congregation" based on the above benchmarks. For example, if we see that the congregation is giving 30% of their income in mission and 35% of their membership is participating in mission, they would meet both the "is engaged in mission," and "shares by giving in mission" criteria.

¹⁹⁹ Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, "Section 14. SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats."

²⁰⁰ The United Methodist Church, "The UMC Vital Congregations Planning Guide: A Strategic Plan for United Methodist Congregations to Fulfill the Mission of the United Methodist Church."

²⁰¹ The United Methodist Church, "Vital Congregations - UMC Call to Action."

After analyzing this information, we can then separate churches into Groups A, B, and C.

(<https://tracyspeaks.net/act-teams> “Selecting Congregations” graphic provides this information in slide form.)

Group A

- Meets 3 or more characteristics of Vital Congregations
- 3-6 people with a passion for ACT ministry
- Pastor and leaders who will support ministry
- Has some existing online ministries

Group B

- Meets at least 2 characteristics of Vital Congregations
- 2-4 people with a passion for ACT ministries
- Pastor and / or leaders who will support ministry
- Has struggled with online ministries but would like to learn

Group C

- Meets 1 or less characteristics of Vital Congregations
- 0-2 people with a passion for ACT ministry
- Pastor has little interest in supporting online ministries
- Congregation has little interest in supporting online ministries

To further study effectiveness, we can mix medium size churches (100-200 in worship attendance) with smaller churches (100 or less in worship attendance). Group A will have team members with the capacity to provide training to their own congregations as well as Groups B

and C. We can identify those who are professional/gifted trainers and facilitators to build capacity and sustainability to develop future ACT Teams.

Another opportunity for us to evaluate the integration of an ACT Team within a congregation is look at external factors that may affect the vitality of a congregation. Using census data, we are able to determine if the community that surrounds a church is hindering growth. For example, if a church is located in a small town that has had little population growth in the last 10 years, the church will not be growing at the same rate as a church in a town that is seeing an influx of new residents. In addition, if a church is located in a community that has a significant number of people below the poverty threshold, the resources of the pastor and congregation may be used for basic needs within in the community. It is important to examine whether the church is hindering opportunities, or if its surrounding area has inhibited the congregation from focusing on ACT ministries in the past.

ACT Team Members – Lay Minister is Key

Each congregation will then identify two to seven individuals who will serve as ACT Team Members. This will usually involve individuals who are currently involved in Audio, Visual, Communication, or Technology as well as enlisting those who may have an interest to serve in this capacity. We will prioritize youth and young adult participation as this encourages leadership development within the life of the church. The Team will include the following:

Lay Minister: In the initial configuration of ACT Teams, a lay minister was a part of the team but not necessarily the leader. When conducting the survey, I found that only one of the teams had a spiritual leader involved. Similar to Wesleyan Classes and Bands, the key person on the team is the Lay Minister, whose primary responsibility is to ensure that the congregation is

cultivating a culture of electronic evangelism. The lay minister should have some training on a district level in theology and education ministries. They can work with those who are part of the social media ACT team to connect on the Web. Additionally, they would meet with the congregation on a regular basis to educate them on the value of the digital space to the overall mission of the church.

ACT Chair: This position does not have to be an expert in Audio/Visual, Communication, or Technology, but they should have the ability to work as an innovative thoughtful thinker and leader.

- Chairs the entire team and has voting privileges on the Administrative Council with an allocated budget with signing privileges for ACT Projects.
- Manages and oversees operations of the entire team.
- Works with pastors to ensure scheduling and overall ACT needs are met.

Audio / Video Team: Focuses on the audio and video that support the vision of worship and other evangelism and disciple making ministries.

Duties:

- Creates and produces media content that supports the vision and mission of the church.
- Secures media production which complements programming.
- Works in conjunction with Technology team to maintain equipment.

Audio/Video Lead: This position will coordinate this team and manage the production of video content.

The Audio/Video Team Positions/Roles: Producers, Directors, Writers, Camera Operators/Photographer, Programmer, Audio Engineer, and Support

Communication Team: This team is responsible for communication strategies, social media management, press releases, and other forms of communication to ensure effective communication for evangelism.

Duties:

- Work in conjunction with A/V team in relation to any design work language, proof reading, etc.
- Manage social media messaging and evangelism strategies.
- Serve as communications analyst for the team by reviewing and interpreting data received from operation of media.

Communication Team Lead: This position is responsible for creating and developing a marketing plan that promotes the message of Jesus Christ through the church.

Communication Team Positions/Roles: Social Media Manager, Social Influencer, Web/Blogger, Writer, Public Relations, Support

Technology Team: This team will focus to ensure all technology is functional and strategize for future technology needs and implementations.

Duties:

- Coordinate and communicate any updates and schedules with team.
- Support operation of media, software, and hardware technology.

Technology Team Lead: This position will maintain and support the technology team. This includes all hardware and software used by team.

Technology Team Positions/Roles: Technology Administrator, Support Analyst, Software Trainer

Additional ACT Team Members - Members-At-Large, Trustee, and Finance member.

As we discussed, Methodism's tradition for evangelism and establishing small groups as within the congregation is the foundation for eDiscipleship methodology. These groups can easily translate to social media technology. As we gain greater understanding of how social media can be intentionally utilized to increase engagement within a small group, we can build relationships that create a congregation without walls using technology to interconnect the people in the group.

Chapter 7: Digital Itinerary

The Peninsula-Delaware Conference is considered the cradle of American Methodism. It is where the first Bishops of the Methodist Church, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, met for the first time on American soil in Barrett's Chapel in 1784. Because it is one of the smallest conferences in the United Methodist Church, our Bishop presides over us as well as the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. The Conference is made up of four Districts: Dover, Easton, Salisbury, and Wilmington, each of which is managed by a District Superintendent. The Conference has 498 churches, covering Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

I have been a member of this conference for 14 years since I first was appointed as a local licensed pastor and then ordained in 2009. I have held several leadership positions over the years including serving on the Vision Team, on the Communications Team, as a representative for the Commission on the Status of the Role of Women, the Conference Committee of Finance and Administration, and as co-Statistician. It sounds like I am perfect for evangelism since I know about God, Jesus the Incarnation of God, the Holy Spirit, the bible, Methodism, and the church and the way it works. Yet, I have a confession to make. I do not know many people who do not participate in one way or another in the life of the church.

I am so entrenched in church that beyond meeting the family member of a parishioner during a hospital visit, or that once or twice a year hanging out with my friends that knew me "before," I sometimes forget that Memorial Day is more important to most folks than Pentecost or that painting a room a different color in a normal work environment does not usually take three contentious meetings and fielding several irate phone calls. I am not the only pastor who has that confession. So, when small to medium sized churches rely on pastors to fulfill their evangelistic needs, it is bound to fail. Many of us even live-in parsonages right next door to the

church so we do not even have non-churched neighbors.

One year, I decided my big outreach would be to throw my son's 9th birthday party in our church's gym. Well, with carnival games and a giant bounce house, it was quite successful in terms of 9-year-old fun. Yet, as a great evangelistic achievement, it fell flat. The few parents that did not just drop their children off and run would initiate our conversations by telling me about their own church. In most cases, the pastor should not be the only source of inviting new people to Christ.

For over 10 years, I have been one of the mentor leaders that helps to support those who are looking to enter into the ministry in one way or another. We spend six weeks discussing what it means to move through the process and what has led them to this space. They are passionate and excited to do the work of God. They may not know the Wesleyan Quadrilateral or the Means of Grace when they walk through the door, but they are equipped to speak about God. They are working and living amongst people who are not churched.

As discussed in previous chapters, the argument against religion in online engagements is that it essentially dumbs down the complexity of Christianity in order to reach people. It becomes a collection of pieces and parts that is co-created by users online in a sort of religious 'wikifaith' aimed for a consumer.²⁰² The tension between the "theologically educated" and lay authority is nothing new. Clement of Alexandria described the dissension of moving from the oral to written word as those argued it would "cast pearls before swine."²⁰³ He believed it was better to be in control of the conversation rather than to allow others to abuse it.²⁰⁴

John Wesley's use of lay people in the itinerancy process was controversial, particularly

²⁰² Musa, Bala A. and Ibrahim M. Ahmadu, "New Media, Wikifaith, and Church Bandversion: A Media Ecology Perspective"; as cited by McIntosh, "Belonging without Believing: Church as Community in an Age of Digital Media," 138.

²⁰³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, as cited by Esther McIntosh, "Belonging without Believing: Church as Community in an Age of Digital Media," 139.

²⁰⁴ Esther McIntosh, 139.

the use of women. Even Charles Wesley was against the practice but capitulated due to the need for more people to reach the Methodists. And let us face it, Jesus himself was an object of suspicion to the religious authorities because he was not trained as rabbi but was treated as such by his disciples.

Whether Methodists agree to engage in social media or not, religious conversation is going on without us on both a national and international scale. As discussed previously, I would like to return to the post by Beth Moore. The evangelical “remnants” feel they have no connection to a church. As much as we would like to support them, sometimes we do not have the right message to support folks that are hurting because they see a disconnection between their understanding of Christ and what they are seeing in their own churches. This is a conversation that spoke regarding our need to reach out in the right way:

(@melaniemomoftwo) Replying to (@BethMooreLPM): It’s been so so so bad. I will never lose my Hope and Faith in my Savior Christ Jess, and I will never step foot in an “evangelical” church again. It churns my stomach to see what they have done and stood for and against over the last nine months. It hurts my heart.²⁰⁵

(@IntentionalKeys) Replying to (@melaniemomoftwo)
(@BethMooreLPM): Same. I left with no plans to go back and not sure what to do next.²⁰⁶

(@jdwhitlock) Replying to (@IntentionalKeys)
(@melaniemomoftwo) (@BethMooreLPM): Um. Find a good non-evangelical church? As in pretty much any mainstream Protestant church.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ melaniemomoftwo, “(@jdwhitlock) (@IntentionalKeys) (@BethMooreLPM): The Thought of a Progressive Church Always Gave Me Pause for Concern Thinking They Weren’t Really ‘Christian’ or Preaching the Gospel. Especially Growing up in a Conservative Mennonite Church. However, I’m Working through Deconstructing My Faith and Rebuilding It through Christ.”

²⁰⁶ Miss Kia USNGSN, “@melaniemomoftwo @BethMooreLPM Same. I Left with No Plans to Go Back and Not Sure What to Do Next.”

²⁰⁷ J.D. Whitlock, “@IntentionalKeys @melaniemomoftwo @BethMooreLPM Um. Find a Good Non-Evangelical Church? As in, Pretty Much Any Mainstream Protestant Church.”

(@IntentionalKeys) Replying to (@jdwhitlock)

(@melaniemomoftwo) (@BethMooreLPM): See I'm trying to find a place filled with love and Gods spirit in my area where I can be involved. I like places where people come at with respect not starting their approach to you with um like I'm stupid.²⁰⁸

(@jdwhitlock) Replying to (@IntentionalKeys)

(@melaniemomoftwo) (@BethMooreLPM): I'm sorry, I could have started that better... but it is baffling to me when people ignore progressive Christianity like it doesn't exist. There is a great Church nearby waiting for you with open arms.²⁰⁹

(@jdwhitlock) Replying to (@IntentionalKeys)

(@melaniemomoftwo) (@BethMooreLPM): If you don't know where to start try United Methodist, PCUSA, UCC, American Baptist²¹⁰

(@melaniemomoftwo) Replying to (@jdwhitlock)

(@IntentionalKeys) (@BethMooreLPM): The thought of a progressive church always gave me pause for concern thinking they weren't really "Christian" or preaching the gospel. Especially growing up in a conservative Mennonite church. However, I'm working through deconstructing my Faith and rebuilding it through Christ.²¹¹

(@jdwhitlock) Replying to (@IntentionalKeys)

(@melaniemomoftwo) (@BethMooreLPM): I am 100% confident that our creator will bless you on that path.²¹²

What if we had prepared @jdwhitlock and other lay people like to him to spread a message of acceptance to those like @melaniemomoftwo and @IntentionalKeys? He seemed to

²⁰⁸ Miss Kia USNGSN, "@jdwhitlock @melaniemomoftwo @BethMooreLPM See I'm Trying to Find a Place Filled with Love and Gods Spirit in My Area Where I Can Be Involved. I like Places Where People Come at with Respect Not Starting Their Approach to You with Um like I'm Stupid."

²⁰⁹ J.D. Whitlock, "@IntentionalKeys @melaniemomoftwo @BethMooreLPM I'm Sorry, I Could Have Started That Better ... but It Is Baffling to Me When People Ignore Progressive Christianity like It Doesn't Exist. There Is a Great Church Nearby Waiting for You with Open Arms."

²¹⁰ J.D. Whitlock, "@IntentionalKeys @melaniemomoftwo @BethMooreLPM If You Don't Know Where to Start Try United Methodist, PCUSA, UCC, American Baptist."

²¹¹ melaniemomoftwo, "(@jdwhitlock) (@IntentionalKeys) (@BethMooreLPM): The Thought of a Progressive Church Always Gave Me Pause for Concern Thinking They Weren't Really 'Christian' or Preaching the Gospel. Especially Growing up in a Conservative Mennonite Church. However, I'm Working through Deconstructing My Faith and Rebuilding It through Christ."

²¹² J.D. Whitlock, "@melaniemomoftwo @IntentionalKeys @BethMooreLPM I Am 100% Confident That Our Creator Will Bless You on That Path."

be willing, but we have not done enough as a church to help our folks articulate a message of hope. With Mainline Protestants generally, and Methodists specifically, there is not a clear voice that presents Jesus' love and grace in a way that is unique.

When analyzing evangelism through technology, Elizabeth Drescher in *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones*, states that her research on those who are unaffiliated with any religion shows that they no longer congregate in churches, clubs, and leagues. She found that they value what she terms as "micro-engagements," which includes both physical and digital experiences, where the sharing of stories and conversation can build into deeper relationships if accumulated.²¹³ The value of a digital experience is dramatically different across the generations.

Almost a quarter of adults who use social media said that they changed their mind on a political or social issue due to something they viewed on the platform.²¹⁴ If we take into account that 90% of adults under 50 use social media, and 68% of American adults overall are on Facebook,²¹⁵ we can see the possibility of what an enthusiastic effort and impact a dedicated group of lay preachers could have on spreading the gospel.

eDiscipleship Learning Phases and Paths

As discussed in the previous chapter, we can identify churches that are most apt to implement these ministries, but how do we support them on a larger basis? We believe this will come through training that brings together all ACT Teams from congregations. We call this eDiscipleship Training. We have developed an initial training program as well as a follow-up

²¹³ Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones*, 213.

²¹⁴ Andrew Perrin, Suite 800 Washington, and Inquiries, "23% of Users in U.S. Say Social Media Led Them to Change Views on an Issue; Some Cite Black Lives Matter."

²¹⁵ Paul Hitlin, "Internet, Social Media Use and Device Ownership in U.S. Have Plateaued after Years of Growth."

training model.

Once the team has been formed, we coach the team to do a detailed Congregational Audio, Communication, and Technology (ACT) Assessment. The assessment will serve as a baseline to measure the current capacity of the ACT Team members, leadership, and congregation including hardware, software, audio and video equipment as well as any online analytics. Each ACT Team will be responsible for entering and maintaining the ACT inventory which promotes connectional ACT resources. This work will serve to direct ACT Team Members into their best eDiscipleship Learning path. As we do this, we will also look into current spending behaviors related to Audio and Visual Technology needs in order to build budgets for the future.

After we have worked together to assess the Audio, Communication, and Technology for their congregation, each team member chooses their preferred learning path which they feel most called to develop:

- Audio/Visual
- Communications
- Technology

These Learning Paths are developed through the “Three E” phases:

- Enable – explore eDiscipleship in context
- Empower – learn new technologies to bridge generations
- Equip – putting eDiscipleship into action

Each of these steps provides the basis for each person’s training. The Enable Phase serves as the foundation for cultivating a culture of electronic evangelism. The Empower Phase provides specific courses according to their competency. The Equip Phase allows for applied learning

from the Enable and Empower Phase. Many of the classes will be taught from the Live-Studio Production Facility. The final class, eDiscipleship in Action, will allow the students to process their overall experience and evaluate the process. Although not every person in the ACT Team will pass through the phases at the same time, the hope is to keep congregational members as close together as possible. (<https://tracyspeaks.net/ediscipleship-training> “Learning Phases / Learning Paths graphic provides a visual for this process).

Classes are half-day sessions which will be taught with our customized audio, communication, and technology educational curriculum. Along with the eDiscipleship Initiative Leaders and ACT Core Team, the classes should be taught by educational professionals, as well as existing ACT Team leaders. Any congregational member can explore a learning path but not be required to serve on an ACT Team.

Enable Foundation Courses – All Paths

Church ACT Assessment - The assessment entails measuring the current capacity of ACT Team Members and leadership of the church / agency in order coordinate and initiate assessment for overall church / agency. This work will serve as the filter to engage ACT Members and Leadership to determine their learning path. We will also look into current spending behaviors related to Audio and Visual Technology needs. (4 Hours)

eDiscipleship Workshop - The eDiscipleship Workshop will enable the ACT Team to continually focus all efforts on the core value of our service to Jesus Christ our Lord: Discipleship! This workshop enables the team to understand the current state and impact of electronics in the world, and how we will lead and enable our organization to continue to fulfill the Great Commission through the use of technologies. This workshop will use the church’s

mission to connect with their ministry of eDiscipleship in order to create a coherent message that will be projected into the technology space. (4 Hours)

Bridge Workshop (Working across Generations) - This course is designed to equip participants with the knowledge associated with working across generations. This will prepare the ACT Team to understand barriers and promote effective electronic evangelism and discipleship methods for different age groups. (4 Hours)

Audio Visual Courses

Empower:

Radio Broadcast - This course is designed to give a basic introduction to fundamental elements of radio broadcasting. This will equip participants with the base knowledge of all components and roles related to radio broadcasting. (4 Hours)

Sound Engineer Part 1 - This course is designed to give a basic introduction to audio sound engineering. This will equip the participant with the knowledge of fundamental elements sound reinforcement. (4 Hours)

Video (TV) Production Part 1 - This course is designed as a basic introduction to video camera operation and recording fundamentals. This will equip the participant with knowledge of video hardware and software components with a brief overview of video techniques. (4 Hours)

Equip:

Live Streaming - This course is designed to give an understanding of the live streaming process and methods to effectively integrate with audio and video. (4 Hours)

Sound Engineer Part 2 - This course is designed to give an intermediate understanding of audio sound engineering. (4 Hours)

Video (TV) Production Part 2 - This intermediate course is designed to provide an expanded view of video techniques. This will equip the participant with knowledge of video recording, editing, and various outputs for video. (8 hours)

Communication Courses Overview

Empower:

Branding and Design Part 1 - This course is designed to give a participant the foundation for graphic design supporting the Vision and Mission of their organization. This course will educate users on how to perform such tasks as making and manipulating selections, images and color, and an introduction to the different tools used in Photoshop CS. (4 Hours)

MS PowerPoint - This course is designed to equip participants with the foundational learning to create presentations, use themes and variants, add media and objects to a presentation, format text, share, present a slide show online, and customize the interface. (8 Hours)

Microsoft Word - This course is designed to equip participants with foundational skills related to creating documents from a template; formatting text using a variety of tools; inserting objects (pictures, videos, charts, SmartArt, and tables) into a document; viewing a document in different ways; sharing a document, and PDF formatting. (8 Hours)

Web Design Part 1 - This course is designed to equip participants with the foundational principles for web Design. This will enable user to build and maintain a basic WordPress website. (4 Hours)

Equip:

Social Media Management - This course is designed to equip participants with a knowledge of social media management. This course will focus on various social media platforms,

functionalities, and generation significance. (8 Hours)

Branding and Design Part 2 - This course is designed to give a participant the intermediate level of competency for graphic design using various app design programs. This course will educate users on how to perform “branding” and design with emphasis on utilizing apps. (4 Hours)

MS Publisher - This course is designed to equip participant with foundation principles for publishing basic flyers, bulletins, and newsletters. (4 Hours)

Web Design Part 2 - This course is designed to equip participant with the intermediate principles for wordpress web Design. (4 Hours)

Technology Courses Overview

Empower:

Church Database - This course is designed to equip the participant with knowledge surrounding database utilization and access. We will help the participant examine the current process for storing membership, donor, and sponsor information in addition to exploring various solutions for their organization. (8 Hours)

I Survived the Internet - This course is designed to equip the participant with principles for internet navigation and searching. This will include terminology such as: domain, hosting, browsers. (8 Hours)

Small Groups eChurch- This course will equip the ACT Team with knowledge to support the church with developing small groups and then to support the current small groups. This course will provide ways to incorporate technology within these groups. (4 Hours)

Equip:

System Support - This course will equip the ACT team with the knowledge of providing support services to the church/agency. This will include support tracking and reporting process in order to measure, record, and report changes for future training and development opportunities. (4 Hours)

24/7 Station Operation - This course provides ACT Team members with skills to support a 24/7 digital television station. This will include management and programming for the station. This will include operating the station to support the church and promoting external advertisements to generate revenue to support sustainability. (4 Hours)

Crisis Technology - This course will provide technology for ACT Teams with the focus on knowledge to support congregations when a crisis occurs. This will include discussion of WIFI, internet, servers, etc. (4 Hours)

eDiscipleship in ACTion

eDiscipleship in ACTion - This simulation will teach the ACT Team, church leaders, and congregation to apply knowledge learned throughout the learning paths, allowing all to connect, worship, and celebrate in a live studio production environment. We will also use this as our graduation ceremony for the program. (2 Days)

ACT ‘n Up

After ACT Team members have completed the learning phases, they will be eligible to participate in the ACT ‘n Up quarterly and yearly session. These sessions are designed for ACT Teams to learn new technologies and share their knowledge, experiences, and learnings with one another.

Through an ongoing multi-generational educational process, we can open the minds of our congregations to demonstrate how relationships are formed through the use of technology. The hope is that the church will be able to communicate and engage people in their communities who may not come physically into a building. I have experienced this change through my ongoing work.

For example, two days after the video of George Floyd being brutally murdered by police was released, my colleague Tyrran Smith and I invited the Wilmington Chief of Police Robert Tracy to appear on our self-produced Facebook live-stream show, *Spiritual Outburst*. This was to discuss the impact of community policing versus enforcement policing. As a result, the Governor of Delaware, John Carney, reached out to Chief Tracy to setup a face-to-face meeting with us because he saw how a relationship could be activated between the police and the community based on that interview. This live stream currently has thirteen thousand views. By providing avenues for connection, we can give voice to the message of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 8: Heart Experience

Probably like most pastors, I have been through countless mandatory trainings and development conferences. Many of them aim to create an atmosphere of trust in order for us to share our experiences hoping for an epiphany that will lead us into spiritual and heartfelt growth. Unfortunately for the leaders and educators of these events, they must chip away at the years of instinctive self-preservation that has shaped the pastor who trusts very few people, much less their colleagues, who may one day either be appointed as their supervisor or jockeying for the same position in a coveted healthy church. Needless to say, most of us come away from these events with our rigid hearts firmly intact and usually complaining that it was a useless waste of time. Surprisingly, it was at one of these trainings that Kent, one of my male colleagues, during an unusual revealing moment of self-awareness, broke down into a loud wailing sob of tears. To be honest, I do not even remember what we were talking about, what the seminar was about, or even what had brought my fellow minister to this moment of healing insight. What I do remember is that this group of pastors, with our years of experience in caring ministries, were all so shocked at the openness of his feelings that we sat there in this semi-circle of compassion wondering what to do. It took the trainer, a senior lay woman who was much more adept at handling the emotional pain of a middle-aged clergy person to comfort him, pray with him, and say, “Tears mean God is near.”

I would like to say that we now have more meaningful experiences at these sessions; however, we do not. But what I do remember was our collective parallelization at the point in Kent’s life when God had dramatically reached down and touched him in a way that not only changed his life, but the rest of us witnessing God at work.

That was my Hannah Cornish moment. She was the woman, as John Wesley described, “(to our no small surprise) cried out aloud, with the utmost vehemence, even as in the agonies of death.”²¹⁶ Thank goodness she was not in death, but was so moved by the Spirit that Wesley said, “We continued in prayer, till ‘a new song was put in her mouth, a thanksgiving unto our God.”²¹⁷ Kent’s moment may have been a bit more subdued, as we were at clergy conference after all. Nor was it due to any fervent preaching on my part, but it was at that moment I realized, despite all my biblical studies, theological discussions, and shelves of books from congregational leadership to liturgical prose, that I was not prepared for episodes when God would break through our mundane existence of an ordinary life to wake us up to a new reality. Even my sometimes ability to weave a sermon into something a parishioner might find insightful or meaningful would not be enough to participate in a revival in our land that would wash through us like wave of possibilities to something more beautiful than we could ever possibly imagine. (Or so as I imagine it must have felt for the Methodists who experienced that historical moment in our collective relationship with God.)

In reality, I may be alone amongst my United Methodist clergy sisters and brothers, but I suspect there are many of us, with all of the pressures of our day in and day out ministry and not to mention all of the division and ugliness in our culture that creates a level of constant anxiety for us to navigate, and we forget that through our tears and emotions, we can sense that God is always near us.

216 John Wesley as quoted by Ann Taves, “Knowing Through the Body: Dissociative Religious Experience in the African- and British-American Methodist Traditions,” 203.

217 John Wesley as quoted by Ann Taves, 204.

Authenticity is Key

Travis Smith, Sr. and I have spoken to many pastors and conference leaders about moving churches into a church cluster digital video platform. Some of the biggest roadblocks are that these pastors worry that coming together on one platform means that the weaknesses in their own churches will be exposed by grouping together with other churches. Beyond a lack of video or sound quality, most pastors are worried about how they “perform” on video, although being ourselves is essential to evangelism. If we are to use a Wesleyan model for digital evangelism as we discussed before, one of the key factors is an opportunity to have our “heart strangely warmed,” or a moment where we seek God’s forgiveness and are assured through the grace of God. Of course, how we do this in a digital environment without being accused of being too shallow or simplistic is crucial to breaking through the current noise. I believe our problem is not the message but the messenger who has simplified the message to make it more palatable to those who are seeking. A digital platform can include a complex message of Jesus’ love and grace.

Our use of video is especially important in creating a space that allows for the possibility of transformation. Even as I speak to embodying the multi-faceted message of the Christian faith, it may seem counterintuitive that I use video marketing models to do that. However, using effective ways of communicating with people can help us focus on the message itself.

There is no doubt that technology has changed the way we purchase products, process information, and how we communicate with one another. Additionally, the move to mobile devices has created newer avenues for people to interact with content. Development of advanced analytical and marketing software tracks the impact of how we engage and purchase through traditional web and social media platforms. This technology helps us target our message to those

most willing to hear it.

Research states²¹⁸:

- 90% of customers report that product videos help them make purchasing decisions.
- According to YouTube, mobile video consumption grows by 100% every year.
- 64% of customers are more likely to buy a product online after watching a video about it.
- 87% of online marketers are currently using video content in their digital marketing strategies.
- A third of all the time people spend online is dedicated to watching videos.
- Video ads now account for more than 35% of all ad spending online.

In addition, Tech for Campaigns 2019 Political Digital Advertising Report found that creative visual style and the message can have a 3.4 times greater impact than micro-targeting to a small group of audiences.²¹⁹

How can we use the information to create a connection with God digitally?

Is a Digital Heart Experience Possible?

Non-Christians are not likely to pop online to see a worship service. While many of us who are church regulars enjoy the music and preaching of the congregation we attend regularly, many new to the faith are not interested in the old hymns or a rousing sermon.

The Rev. Dr. Elaine Heath would probably be horrified to know that I am adding her into the same chapter as video marketing, but her “hermeneutic of love,” takes evangelism from simply being a way of connecting with people to a way of living with people so that everyone we

²¹⁸ Matt Bowman, “Video Marketing: The Future of Content Marketing.”

²¹⁹ Tech For Campaigns, “2019 Political Digital Advertising Report.”

encounter is bound together in the love of Jesus Christ. If we give of our whole selves so that others may experience the changing power of Jesus Christ, who is to say that we cannot create a moment for someone who is not likely to step in a church building but is in need of Jesus right where they are.²²⁰ Heath argues that church growth models market Jesus and makes our faith shallow.²²¹ Here, I am not trying to sell Jesus, but use known video marketing techniques that help break through the technology noise in order to draw people into a deeper meaning and relationship with God. If we truly seek a heart experience, it requires a complexity of the salvation message, as well as engaging the senses through vision and sound. We need a knowledge of both how to attract online viewers as well as how to create the right atmosphere for transformation.

One of the ways that we optimize our opportunities in video and connect to the viewers is by creating an environment that allows for people to experience God in a new way. This requires planning in that it is important to understand what a congregation is trying to capture so that they may create space for people to seek God. Video Marketer HubSpot encourages possible clients to ask themselves the following questions:

1. *What do we want this video to inspire people to do? (buy a product, schedule a call, attend an event, read a blog post, etc.)*
2. *What resources do we have available to create the video? (talent, video editors, animators, equipment, etc.)*²²²

While geared towards businesses, this can help leaders focus on what they are trying to create allowing for the best possible evangelism with the resources that are available.

²²⁰ Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, 115.

²²¹ Elaine A. Heath, 2.

²²² HubSpot, "The Ultimate Video Marketing Starter Pack."

Another question I would add is:

3. Who are we creating this for?

In *Leading Beyond the Walls*, Adam Hamilton says that his church became passionate about ministering to the unchurched and nominally churched by recognizing that “Jesus’ driving passion was reaching lost people.”²²³ In determining how to evangelize, they changed the language but not the message.²²⁴ By establishing who we want to evangelize to, we can create our own vision of how to speak to those who we wish to engage. Is our message to those who are already attending church or for the unchurched? What age group? Are they single or married? Do they have children? Is it multi-cultural? Fortunately, the internet can allow us to create a broader message that can cross age and social barriers better than any physical programs within the church can do but understanding the people we are trying to communicate to, will help us open the door to a relationship with God.

Where to begin?

There are so many ways to communicate online, and at times it can become overwhelming. The problem with writing about technology is that it is probably outdated by the time it is written. The first place to start is to analyze how you are currently communicating and where you want to go. While larger churches may create a professional communications plan, smaller congregations often do not dedicate the resources or time towards analyzing the best avenues for communication. Fortunately, types of software generally remain the same, and no matter if we change from drive based to cloud based, they serve the same function. Here are some examples of communication avenues:

²²³ Adam Hamilton, *Leading Beyond the Walls : Developing Congregations with a Heart for the Unchurched*, 30.

²²⁴ Adam Hamilton, 33.

- a. Mass Emails: Web services such as Mailchimp (www.mailchimp.com) send to everyone on your email list. If your church has a Church Management Software (CMS) such as Planning Center, Servant Keeper or Tithe.ly, they usually link to mass email sites that make for easy communication. If you are planning to reach people outside of your congregation, obviously this is not the best way to reach them since you can only send links to those who have given you their email addresses. (Although, when creating a video, it is often good to have the user provide their information so that you can contact them later.)
- b. Automated calls and mass texts: Many of these allow you to buy credits and send automated calls and texts to everyone on the lists.
- c. Social Media: We can reach many through social media platforms such as (FaceBook / YouTube / Instagram / Snapchat / Twitter), but it is important to know who you are trying to reach. Facebook is one of the most widely used social media sites among adults in the U.S. where 69% say they use the platform.²²⁵ If you are looking to reach younger adults, you want to turn to Snapchat and Instagram, which are used by 67% and 62% of 18- to 29-year-olds, respectively.²²⁶

Types of Online Videos

Cell phones and tablets have disrupted the video market as it creates easy access and gives organizations the ability to promote through different types of “marketing videos.” Modern phones can also be used to create excellent videos due to the ever-improving camera quality and

²²⁵ Perrin, Anderson, and Inquiries, “Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media, Including Facebook, Is Mostly Unchanged since 2018.”

²²⁶ Perrin, Anderson, and Inquiries.

Apps that allow users to add features such as “Lower thirds.” There are actually many types of videos, so deciding the type of content will help to engage users:

- Behind the Scenes: This is a look at what happens in production that normally is not viewed. It helps develop a closer relationship with the viewer in that it is meant to be natural.²²⁷
- Demonstration / Tutorials / How-To Videos: These are detailed videos that go through a product’s Unique Selling Proposition (USP) or the special qualities given to a product, service, or brand. This video explains what the benefit is for the person who is using it.²²⁸
- Event Videos: This is a highlight of an event that was pre-recorded.²²⁹
- Explainers: These videos educate viewers about a whole product and applications.²³⁰
- Interviews: This is a question-and-answer session on a particular topic.
- Live Videos: These are videos that are streamed live to interact with people directly or showcase something important.²³¹
- Presentation / Talks: This is a pre-recorded video with an expert on a particular topic. For example, “Ted Talks” have become a popular form of communicating common business ideas and practices.
- Testimonials: This is a video of people expressing their appreciation or experience for the service, product or company.
- Webinars: These are live video seminars where the internet connects the audience to the presenters.

²²⁷ Pahwa, Aashish, “What Is Video Marketing? [A Detailed Guide For Beginners].”

²²⁸ Pahwa, Aashish.

²²⁹ Pahwa, Aashish.

²³⁰ Digital Marketing Institute, “The Key Role of Video Marketing.”

²³¹ Pahwa, Aashish, “What Is Video Marketing? [A Detailed Guide For Beginners].”

Click-Bait

As discussed earlier, there are many areas where you can post videos, and it is important to choose which one will most fit the people you are trying to reach.

Video Hosting Platforms allow you to post videos to their site. Some of the more popular include:

- a. YouTube: YouTube is currently the largest video hosting platform as well as being only second to Google for search and most visited platform with viewers watching over 5 billion videos a day.²³² One of the downsides of YouTube is that, even though uploading and livestreaming on YouTube is free, advertisements from companies can distract viewers.
- b. Vimeo: Vimeo is not as popular as Youtube, but the videos are generally higher quality and the viewers are more professional. Marketing professionals suggest Vimeo for more artistic content.²³³
- c. Amplify and other Church-Based Platforms: There are several platforms which will host videos as well as provide extras like scriptures and apps. These are generally advertisement free, but leaders will need to link social media and websites to their platform site; otherwise, it will not reach the unchurched.

Social Media Platforms can reach and engage people already connected to the congregation or can be used for reaching new people.

- a. Facebook / Instagram: As stated previously, Facebook is the most used social media platform, particularly for those who are ages 30-64.²³⁴ Owned by Facebook, Instagram is

²³² Collins and Conley, "The Ultimate Guide to Video Marketing."

²³³ Collins and Conley.

²³⁴ Pew Research Center, "Social Media Fact Sheet."

used by 67% of those 18-24.²³⁵ Marketers suggest that when livestreaming or posting videos to these sites, they should be engaging with or without sound since many of those who access these sites do so on their phones or tablets.²³⁶ Facebook uses algorithms that prefer longer videos to post to newsfeeds so longer, but visually compelling content, will attract more viewership.²³⁷

- b. TikTok: This is a newer platform that encourages smaller videos. It is largely young and female, with 66% of its users under 30.²³⁸ TikTok users like “Hashtag Challenges” such as Jimmy Fallon’s #tumbleweedchallenge, which dares users to roll like a tumbleweed set to country music. This challenge had over 8,000 submissions with 10.4 million engagements.²³⁹

There are also several platforms that will allow users to livestream to social media sites including video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Cisco Webex, as well as recording software like Streamyard and OBS. If the content is an interview or a webinar, this will give the viewers multiple ways to engage.

The Sound of Music

If the goal is to create a space where people can have a transformative heart experience, setting the atmosphere is important. Despite the need for a more visual compelling format for Facebook and Instagram, it is traditionally known in television and online production that sound quality is more important than picture quality. If the watcher cannot hear what you are saying, they will move on. Music is great for setting the mood by connecting to a wide range of

²³⁵ Pew Research Center.

²³⁶ Collins and Conley, “The Ultimate Guide to Video Marketing.”

²³⁷ Collins and Conley.

²³⁸ Influencer Marketing Hub, “TikTok Marketing for Beginners - A Marketer’s Guide to Advertising on Tiktok.”

²³⁹ Influencer Marketing Hub.

emotions. Some questions to consider: What type of music will appeal to the viewer with whom you are trying to engage? Do you want “bookend music” at both the beginning and ending to create a tone?²⁴⁰ Being intentional about voice, sound, and music is important for creating an ambiance that moves people into relationship with God.

In addition to audio, we also need to be aware of the setting we are in and our own bodies. We do not have to look perfect or be perfect. In fact, even in advertising, many are turning to more “regular” looking people because it makes it more relatable.²⁴¹ Paying attention to how we present ourselves and our environment can help viewers feel comfortable and open them to something new.

Video Examples

Over the past year, my church has created different examples of videos that hopefully demonstrate ways in which leaders can reach and engage viewers. You can find these videos at <https://spark.adobe.com/page/k4MUufAz5w5wG/>. I have collected these videos in order to show the range that can be done on mobile devices, desktops, laptops, and higher quality cameras and sound. For various projects, we also dedicated resources to professionally editing as well as social media marketing.

1. Awakening "Demonstration" Video: This video was an invitation to join us for a weeklong revival event advertised by social media influencer 360WiseMedia. The Target Audience was multi-cultural, unchurched, and aged 30-64. It was professionally edited by Shany Productions and was recorded with 2 PTZOptics mounted cameras and a Midas M32RLIVE sound board.

²⁴⁰ Collins and Conley, “The Ultimate Guide to Video Marketing.”

²⁴¹ Andrea Cheng, “There’s a Reason You’re Seeing More Curvy Models in Fashion Campaigns.”

2. Fast Forward “Explainer Video” with Pastor Sean Lee: Fast Forward is a weekly two-to-three-minute video segment recorded each week, giving a brief moment of encouragement with the goal of reaching unchurched persons. The Target Audience was multi-cultural, unchurched, and aged 25-44. Switcher Studio was the software used and the hardware was an iPhone 8.
3. Afresh "Live Video" with Pastor Sean Lee: This is the weekly Afresh worship service recorded in the sanctuary. The Target Audience is unchurched, multi-cultural, and aged 25-54. Stream yard software was used and was recorded with 2 PTZOptics mounted cameras and a Midas M32RLIVE sound board.
4. Asbury United Methodist Church "Event Video" with Pastor Tracy Mooney and Gary Hostetler: This is a traditional worship service with the goal of reaching church members during COVID, aged 45+. It features a video by the United Methodist Women as well as virtual Holy Communion. It was pre-recorded with OBS software and edited with Adobe Premiere. It was recorded with 2 PTZOptics mounted cameras and a Midas M32RLIVE sound board.
5. Asbury United Methodist Church "Event Video" with Jordan Tupper performing “Ah, Holy Jesus.” This was one part of a larger worship service but featured music performed in separate recordings in the iMovie software recorded on an iMac.
6. Spiritual Outburst “Interview” with Pastor Tyrran Smith, Pastor Tracy Mooney, and Wilmington Police Chief Robert J. Tracy: As stated previously, this was promoted by hiring 360WiseMedia Social Media Influencer, and it received 13,000+ views on Facebook largely because it was two days after the murder of George Floyd. The Target Audience was multi-cultural and aged 25-54. It was recorded in Webex and livestreamed

to Facebook.

7. Awakening "Live Video": This was a Live event streamed to 360WiseTV through Streamyard. It was promoted by 360WiseMedia and reached 120,000 viewers. From this promotion, we gained followers on our social media pages. It was recorded with 2 PTZOptics mounted cameras and a Midas M32RLIVE sound board.

Chapter 9: Next Steps

My final personal testimony: My son's best friend sits next to him every Sunday in church. They are both "gamers" and during the week they can usually be found talking to one another through a headset while playing video games. When he was 10 years old, my son asked me to see what he was doing. In the popular video game "Minecraft," he and his friend excitedly showed me how they had built a church for me. It had chairs, an altar, and even a cross. Many of the other users were going around this church they made in the village. My son's only disappointment was, "They don't have a female priest in the game, only male." In essence, my son and his friend built a virtual church, minus the female pastor, and were inviting other users who entered their virtual world to attend.

Many of us "church folks" are reluctant or even afraid to see where technology can take us. As someone who enjoys sitting down on a Sunday afternoon and playing video games with my son, I believe we have ministry opportunities that we have not even begun to explore. This new generation can certainly bridge the gap between where we are and what is possible.

From the beginning, I made the assumption that the Wesleys and early Methodists organized in a way that created a "successful" model for evangelism. Understanding the fluidity and history of this movement, I found four key areas to their growth:

1. Evangelistic mission versus societal conformity
2. Building laity leadership through small groups
3. Organizational structure for small groups and "itinerant preaching"
4. Allowing for a heart (emotional) experience (repentance / assurance of pardon)

Of course, there were other factors involved, not the least of which was John Wesley's strong personality, but I believe that, if we use their example, we can spread the gospel of Jesus

Christ digitally throughout the world.

Through the study of the Methodist Movement, I have attempted to create a digital evangelism ministry for the new UMC. I believe that if we are cultivating a culture of electronic evangelism, which equips churches to adapt to the digital world by drawing on our denomination's understanding of evangelism. Through eDiscipleship, we can build ACT Teams in small and medium-sized churches and develop online eChurch communities which expand the message of God's love and grace. The groups will come together on a regular basis to further develop their knowledge and resources that will enable them to grow and adapt to our changing times. This embodies our mission which is to "Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," as it reaches and develops new disciples who might not have ever entered a physical church building.

I certainly have not covered everything in this project since there are many areas of technology that can be explored. For example, I have mentioned gaming where users, particularly boys and young men, livestream their game play to billions of users. What would a youth group look like in that space?

I have worked with computers most of my life, and the one thing that I would like to emphasize is the importance of experimentation. There are some congregations that have a program or hardware that works well for them. Another church may need to do it a different way. One day our internet works well, the next day it does not. Helping our congregations allow for the fluidity of technology, the more we are able to be successful in spreading the message of salvation.

As new platforms are introduced, there are new areas to explore. As Wesleyans, we must be adaptable to the changing contexts of our times. We cannot expect new generations to adapt

to us, we must go and preach (virtually) outside. The gospel message is transformative, but people have to hear it. My hope is that United Methodists will realize the importance of getting our message to the people in the virtual spaces they inhabit every day. John Wesley used unconventional methods to reach people who were often overlooked and ignored. If we use the same innovative approaches with the same energetic zeal, I believe that the Methodists will change lives in new dramatic ways once again.

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