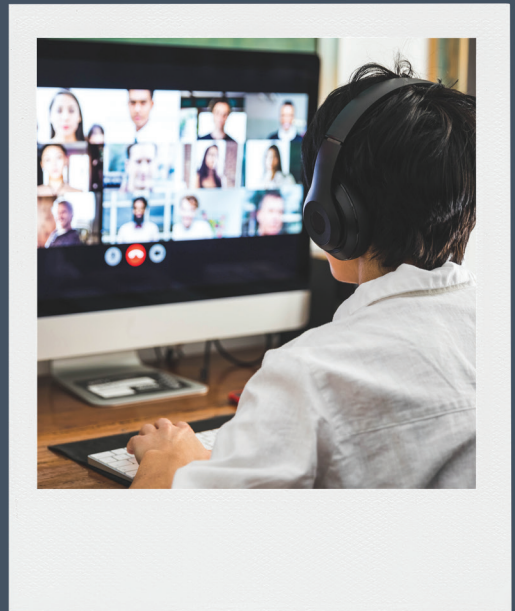
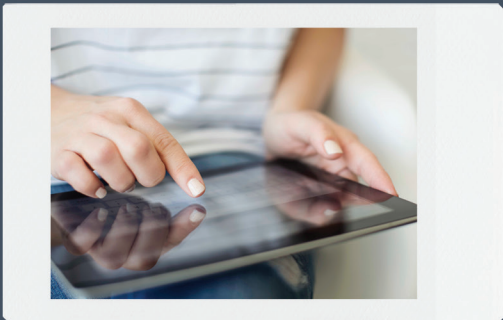
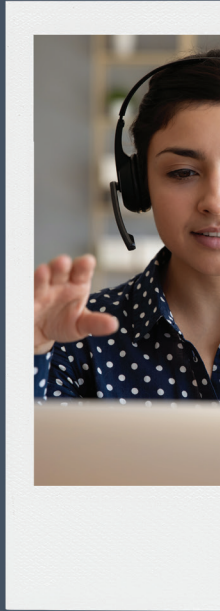


Online Discipleship

By Jeff Campbell, Rachel Gilmore, Scott Hughes, Kevin Johnson, Diana Sanchez-Bushong, Ken Sloane, David Teel, Bryan Tener, Derek Weber, and Chris Wilterdink



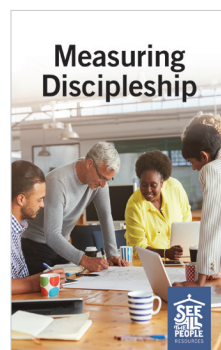
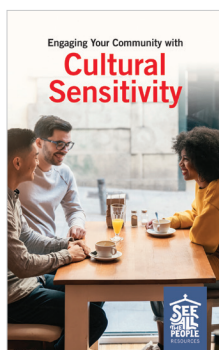
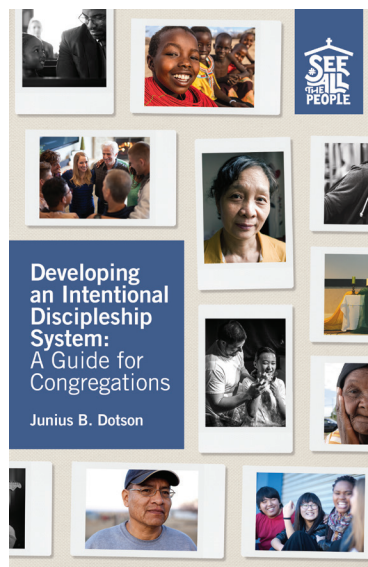
#SEE ALL THE PEOPLE

RESOURCES

We encourage you to begin with *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations*, available at annual conference gatherings and at SeeAllThePeople.org. (Also available in Spanish and Korean.)

Other supporting booklets for intentional discipleship systems are:

- *Basics of Faith Formation*
- *Disciples Living Generously*
- *Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People*
- *Engaging Your Community with Cultural Sensitivity*
- *How to Start Small Groups* (available in Spanish)
- *Intentional Discipleship Systems for Children*
- *Intentional Discipleship Systems for Youth & Young Adults*
- *Making New Disciples in New Places*
- *Measuring Discipleship*
- *New Member/New Disciple Orientation*
- *Prayer Practices for Disciples*



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By Jeff Campbell, Rachel Gilmore,
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If you would like to learn more about the resources of Discipleship Ministries please visit us at UMCdiscipleship.org and SeeAllThePeople.org.

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Introduction

Jeff Campbell, Associate General Secretary

What comes to mind when you hear the words *online discipleship*?

Perhaps you immediately think of recording a worship service and sharing it through web or other social media options. More and more churches are beginning to add an online presence, specifically with worship in mind. But just as discipleship entails much more than just in-person worship, online discipleship should entail much more than just online worship.

Over the past few years, Discipleship Ministries has been trying to help churches and annual conferences re-focus on our mission—making disciples who transform the world. We believe any conversation about discipleship should begin with a conversation about discovering or rediscovering our “why” for being disciples and making disciples. Understanding our why for discipleship is then followed by establishing a more clear “what” and “how”—this is an intentional discipleship system or pathway.

Your online discipleship should be a reflection of your intentional discipleship system.

What is an intentional discipleship system?

Does your church know and understand how a person seeking Christ enters the sphere of your church, is introduced to Christ, grows and matures in faith, and begins living out their faith in their communities and the world? What elements of faith and growth are personal, and what elements are the responsibility of the church? To give some clarity to these and other questions, we offer a guided discussion in the first book in the See All The People series, *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations*. (Available as a free download at SeeAllThePeople.org.)

But an intentional discipleship system or pathway does not stop at the exits and parking lots of the church. It extends beyond into the community and the world. Once we develop an intentional discipleship system, and followers of Christ grow and mature in their faith, they are unable to remain internally focused (self-centered). As one grows closer to Christ, one begins to see the world and people differently; our hearts begin to break for the things that break God's heart. We begin to turn outward daily. How does the church equip and empower disciples to engage their communities and the people they encounter every day with the love of God in Christ? The second book in the See All The People series, *Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People* helps with these questions. Pick up this resource to equip your disciples for engaging your community and extending your discipleship system beyond your walls.

Discipleship Ministries has also created supporting resources for your discipleship system:

- *Forming Disciples Through Worship*
- *Disciples Living Generously*
- *Basics of Faith Formation*
- *How to Start Small Groups*
- *Developing an Intentional Discipleship Systems for Children*
- *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Youth Ministry*
- *Making New Disciples in New Places*
- *New Member/New Disciple Orientation*
- *Prayer Practices for Disciples*

(These are available as free downloads at SeeAllThePeople.org.)

Establishing or clarifying your intentional discipleship system will help you create a balanced online discipleship strategy.

The questions for your intentional discipleship system become the same questions as you create your online discipleship strategy: How does a person seeking Christ (online) enter the online sphere of your church? How are they introduced to Christ (online); how do they grow and mature in their faith (online), and begin to live out their faith in

their communities and the world (and in online communities)? How does the church reflect on the part we play through online discipleship for the growth of the individual? As disciples grow and mature, how does the church equip and empower disciples (online) to engage their communities and the people they encounter every day (that's right, often online) with the love of God in Christ?

We offer this resource to help you and your leaders think through a more balanced online discipleship strategy. Use this resource to strengthen what you are currently doing and expand your online discipleship based on your intentional discipleship system.

The final question we will address in this resource is, "What comes next?" How will your online discipleship become an integral part of your overall intentional discipleship system? Some disciples joining you from other parts of your state, your country, or beyond from around the world, will be a part of your discipleship system solely online, but they will engage their communities locally as an extension of your online discipleship. Some will live and grow as disciples in person, in your locale. Others will choose a hybrid of both in-person participation and online discipleship. We, as church leaders, can either try to fight this new reality, or we can embrace it. Regardless of how disciples are formed, whether mostly online, solely in person, or some hybrid, the real question is, "Will we, as leaders, do everything that we can to do our part in making and forming disciples for the transformation of the world? Will our approach be balanced, helping to invite and shape the next generation of disciples?"

Our prayer is that you will become more intentional about discipleship and community engagement (whether online, in person, or some hybrid variation) in your church.

***“Your online
discipleship
should be a
reflection of
your intentional
discipleship
system.”***

American car executives were visiting the assembly line in a Japanese auto manufacturer and at the end of the line, the doors were put on the hinges, the same as in America. But something was missing. In the United States, a line worker would take a rubber mallet and tap the edges of the door to ensure that it fit perfectly. In Japan, that job didn't seem to exist. Confused, the American auto executives asked at what point they made sure the door fit perfectly. Their Japanese guide looked at them and smiled sheepishly. 'We make sure it fits when we design it.' In the Japanese auto plant, they didn't examine the problem and accumulate data to figure out the best solution—they engineered the outcome they wanted from the beginning. If they didn't achieve their desired outcome, they understood it was because of a decision they made at the start of the process.¹

— SIMON SINEK, *START WITH WHY*

A Quick Review: Intentional Discipleship Systems

For those who have not yet read *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System* (we encourage you to do so with key leaders), we wanted to provide in this chapter a brief overview of intentional discipleship systems.

¹ Simon Sinek *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (Portfolio, 2009), 14-15

Why Systems?

Whether you know it or not, you already have a discipleship system in place in your church. Your current system produces exactly what it is designed to produce. Once we begin to think about our church as a system, we can start to think intentionally about what our system is producing. Intentional discipleship means we know and have planned out the many ways that people new to the faith enter into our church's discipleship system and move through it on their way to growth and maturity. We then clearly communicate the opportunities that disciples have through the church, and offer ways to self-assess and reflect upon the next steps for their spiritual journey. Our hope is that as churches and conferences think intentionally, we will begin to chip away at discipleship by osmosis—"We don't really know: people show up, things happen, and somehow, disciples are formed."

Once we begin to think about our church as a system, we can start to think intentionally about what our system is producing.

Context, Language, & Ownership

As we go through the basic principles of an intentional discipleship system, we invite you to take it and make it your own. Each church and ministry setting has a unique context. Your setting has language and terms that work best for you. Please feel free to edit accordingly! It is only by making these basic concepts and language your own, that your disciples will be able to own the system that you have created. Our purpose is not that you adopt this specific system, but that you become intentional about your system. Since the publication of *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System*, Discipleship Ministries has been collecting sample discipleship systems from across the connection. These may be viewed at SeeAllThePeople.org. But again, do not take one of these samples and try to apply it to your church. Work through this material with your leaders and create a system that works for your context, using the samples as examples.

Developing An Intentional Discipleship System

To illustrate the basic elements needed for an intentional discipleship system, we use a chart adapted with permission from the work of Phil Maynard, founder of EMC3 Coaching, and author of several excellent books on discipleship including *Shift: Helping Congregations Back Into the Game of Effective Ministry*, and *Membership to Discipleship: Growing Mature Disciples Who Make Disciples*. The chart we will be referencing in the following steps is found in Figure A at the end of this chapter.

STEP 1: Bring Clarity to “What Is a Disciple?”

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Keep it simple. People intuitively know how to define a disciple. You want to give language to the people in the pews that is accessible and easy to remember.

You could use the Wesleyan understanding of a disciple according to the General Rules of Discipleship:

A disciple is a witness to Jesus Christ in the world who follows his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²

A couple other examples we offer:

A disciple is one who knows Christ, is growing in Christ, serving Christ, and sharing Christ.

A disciple is a grace-filled follower of Jesus who puts faith into action.

This language may be tweaked for your context. The main thing is that you take the time to develop and clarify your definition of a disciple.

² The General Rule of Discipleship is an adaptation of Wesley's General Rules. (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*—2012, ¶ 1117.2)

STEP 2: Articulate the Characteristics of a Disciple

Based on your definition of a disciple, now articulate the characteristics of a disciple that you will emphasize in your context (see Figure A, far left column). What are the most important characteristics for a growing maturing disciple? For our example we have listed the following characteristics:

A disciple **worships**,
 is part of a **community**,
 commits to **spiritual formation or practices**,
 is **generous**, & **serves**,
 is seeking to be **Christ-like**

In your context you may decide to use different variations of these characteristics that match the language used in your ministry setting and correspond to the maturing disciples you hope will be formed in your system.

STEP 3: Determine the Stages of Growth

STAGES OF GROWTH (listed across the top of the chart in Figure A)
 Across the top of the chart list the basic stages of growth that your community will recognize. For our example, we are using: “Searching, Exploring, Beginning, Growing, and Maturing.” Another example would be: “Believing, Behaving, Belonging.”

Using Phil Maynard’s model, these stages are defined as:

Searching: Seeking to make sense of our life: asking questions like, “What gives my life purpose, joy, and fulfillment?”

Exploring: Attend but not belong: may not be committed to follow Jesus; wrestling with God’s presence in our life

Beginning: Beginning to understand and put into practice our new-found faith; excited about faith but still have doubts

Growing: Eager to be identified as a follower of Christ; taking personal responsibility for our growing relationship with Jesus; beginning to integrate our faith into life in a holistic way and looking to Jesus for help

Maturing: Moving toward surrender of our lives to Jesus; longing to know, love, obey, serve and be with Jesus as a disciple; begin to make disciples

STEP 4: Create Descriptions for Each Characteristic Following the Stages of Growth

We suggest beginning with the end in mind. Start in the far right column (see Figure A). What do you hope a maturing disciple will look like as they journey through the ministries of your church? Create a few sentences that best describe a maturing disciple for each characteristic. This is what you believe disciples should be striving toward as they live and grow in your context.

EXAMPLE:

Characteristics of a Maturing Disciple

Worship – Begins to worship everyday, including the Sabbath, inviting others

Community – Builds relationships with others, and shares with them the life and community that they have found in God and their faith community

Spiritual Formation or Practices – Enjoys and practices spiritual disciplines, and begins to show others how to use them to grow in faith and be drawn closer to God

Generosity & Service – Tithes and gives beyond a tithe as God leads, and restructures their life and resources to join Jesus in service to others

Christ-like – Partners with God and invites others to explore the life and teachings of Jesus

Now go back and create descriptions of what a disciple looks like at each stage of growth. How does a disciple learn and grow in each characteristic moving toward maturing?

Take a Moment

Spend time taking these principles of a discipleship system and making them your own:

1. What will your stages of growth look like?
2. What is the definition of a disciple in your context?
3. What do you hope will be the end result of a maturing disciple in your ministry context?

Figure A

DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM SAMPLE (adapted from the work of Phil Maynard)

	Searching	Exploring	Beginning	Growing	Maturing
Worship	Searching for something more.	Invited by a friend to attend worship. Attend sporadically.	Begin to worship regularly; becoming more aware of God in each day.	Attend regularly and begin to recognize daily moments of worship.	Begin to honor and worship everyday in work and play; inviting others to worship.
Community	Searching for genuine community.	Begin to feel strangely drawn to these followers of Jesus and feel warm acceptance by them.	Move from receiving gracious hospitality to offering it to others in every day life.	Begin to look for ways to love, accept, and relate to others in the same way that the church and God lovingly welcomed you.	Seek to build relationships with others and share with them the life and community that you have found in God.
Spiritual Practices	Wonder about the Bible and if there are ways to experience God.	Feel drawn to the story of God's love and begin to explore scripture.	Begin to pray and read scripture regularly; being open to God.	Move to exploring spiritual disciplines; drawn closer to God on a daily basis.	Enjoy and practice spiritual disciplines, and begin to show others how to use them to grow in faith and be drawn closer to God.
Generosity & Service	Wonder if there is more to life than making money and selfish gain.	Begin to give occasionally in worship and try a service project at church. See other people making a difference in the lives of others and seek to be a part of that.	Begin to give regularly of money, time, and talents; understand Christ's invitation to serve others and discover how God has gifted you to do this.	Try tithing my resources, time, and talent to God through the ministries of the church; exploring ways to use one's gifts, talents, and passions.	Tithe and occasionally give beyond when led by God; begin to restructure life and resources to join Jesus in mission to others.
Christ-Like	The life and teachings of Jesus are intriguing.	Exploring the life of Jesus on my own by reading the Bible and attending my first Bible study.	Accept the call to follow Jesus and commit to the church; seek to become like Jesus and serve others.	Begin to daily apply the teachings of Jesus in everyday life.	Partner with God and invite others to explore the life and teachings of Jesus.
Prevenient Grace			Justifying Grace		Sanctifying Grace

“How do we entice an online audience to participate in worship beyond simply watching?”

¹⁸ Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? ¹⁹ I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

– ISAIAH 43:18-19 (NRSV)

Online Worship

**Derek Weber, Director, Preaching Ministries &
Diana Sanchez-Bushong, Director, Music Ministries**

That everything is new is beyond question. The debate is whether God is in the midst of it. For people of faith we launch into new worlds confident that God is with us, and we engage in online worship that not only honors God and the name of Jesus Christ, but also continues to make disciples through formation and encouragement.

A key element to this formation is engagement in our online worship. Though observation is an element of formation, one isn't shaped as a disciple simply by viewing. The question becomes, "How do we entice an online audience to participate in worship beyond simply watching?"

One method of encouraging audience participation is by suggesting ritual actions. Provide ample time at the beginning of online worship, or in the pre-worship information emails or posts, to prepare the space where worship will take place. Bring a candle and make room for simple movements. By engaging in these ritual behaviors, the viewers become participants and enter into the worship experience.

There are a variety of ways to adapt liturgy for online use, depending on the platform used. Some formats allow for scrolling words across the screen as they are spoken by the leaders; some provide a way to switch to a text-based screen with the shared liturgies printed in easily readable form; some might accept a video dropped in to be viewed

with the words or images that suggest the themes of the prayer or litany. If the technology is too difficult, then emailing the text or texting the prayers or responses ahead of time allows participants to be active participants in worship.

One ritual act which is at the center of worship is the sacrament of Holy Communion. Whether to offer online Communion is currently a highly debated topic with strong arguments on both sides (see link below). Many bishops and conferences have affirmed the value of online Communion, and others have suggested the Love Feast as an alternative. The Love Feast is a good alternative and is a means of grace for the congregation. The Love Feast becomes another way of participating together. It has historical precedence, even though some churches are unfamiliar with the practice. Whether you choose to offer online Communion or the Love Feast, the key is offering an engaging online experience that informs and forms disciples.

Singing is essential to any worship experience, but it can be more challenging for online worship. The first challenge is to make sure copyright rules for sharing content online are followed. (Follow guidelines from publishers; see link below.) A second challenge is determining the best way to encourage singing for online participants. If you are able, always make sure the words are listed during each song. Doing so will allow both those who choose to sing, and those who prefer to simply listen, an opportunity to contemplate the meaning of the song and grow in faith. Even in online worship, worship leaders should encourage folks to sing at home, joining together in heart and mind with the greater church community. Periodically, remind those who are hesitant in their singing skills that the act of singing is itself praise, regardless of the quality of the sound. Singing aloud helps release our hesitations and reduces the sense of distance as we become one online community.

Another important element for making disciples through online worship is continuing the conversation introduced in the sermon and liturgy; this is true whether face to face or online. Finding ways to open lines of communication with those who are participating in online worship is crucial. This can be done by offering questions during the livestream, asking participants to share prayer concerns, or giving participants

questions to discuss within their households after worship. Inviting online worshipers to participate can also be done ahead of time by including them in pre-prepared short videos, greetings, scripture readings, or leading in prayer. Including online participants broadens the circle of online worship, connecting and shaping disciples.

Finally, don't forget to capture who was present! Find ways for those who participate to register their attendance and make sure that your leader has a plan for following up with them (see Online Hospitality).

What are the next possibilities for online worship? As you assess the number of folks who have been participating in online worship, you will find a whole new mission field that you will not want to lose when you return to-face-to-face worship. We hope you will continue both online and face-to-face worship, so that you can reach new people in new places. We also hope that you do not treat the online community as simply an “add-on” that watches the “real” worship in the sanctuary. Consider including disciples from your online community in the in-person worship experience—reading liturgy via video or offering a song. How will you regularly invite the online community to be an active part of the entire worshipping community?

Resources

Worship Matters Podcast – Online Worship

www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/worship-matters-special-response-episode

Information about Copyright Law

- Worship Matters Podcast Episode 13 - Copyright
www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/worship-matters-episode-13-copyright-questions-from-the-field
- www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/online-worship-music-resources-for-livestreaming
- www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/piano-accompaniment-recordings

Online Attendance Tips

www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/online-attendance-tips

The Online Communion Dilemma

www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/the-online-communion-dilemma

Piano Accompaniment Recordings

www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/piano-accompaniment-recordings



Take a Moment

1. In what ways will you engage the online worshiping congregation to be more than observers?
2. How might you engage participants to keep the conversation going beyond the sermon?
3. How will you intentionally connect online worshipers with the rest of the worshiping community?

Hospitality is simply love on the loose.

– JOAN D. CHITTISTER

Online Hospitality

Rachel Gilmore, Director, Recruiting, Assessing, Training for Church Planters

Hospitality matters because hospitality will determine if someone feels seen, engaged, and welcomed into the life of the church. Hospitality may be the first step in your discipleship system, introducing someone to the community of faith.

How do you know if you have first-time visitors in church? For in person worship you might record their presence in a pew pad, identify them at a welcome booth, or offer them a small welcome gift. If you are intentional about hospitality, the welcome does not end there. Designated leaders might connect with visitors during fellowship, finding out more about them (and their families) and connecting them with other key leaders in the church during the conversation. After their visit to the church, a pastor or lay leader might call or visit them in their homes to see if they have any questions about the church or have any pastoral needs. Now think about these approaches as they relate to online hospitality.

Hopefully, you already had a hospitality plan in place in your church to welcome new people. Now apply the same ideas to your online presence. How can you connect with first-time guests in an effective and intentional way? An online hospitality plan might include consideration of the following questions:

- How will you know when first-time visitors attend? What online tools will you use to help you identify them?
- How will you engage with them during and after the online service?

- How will you get visitors' information? How do they prefer to communicate?
- How will you connect virtual visitors into the life of your community? Through a virtual small group? Virtual coffee with a leader?
- How will you share with online visitors what it means to be a disciple in your church?
- How will you help online visitors grow in generosity and service?
- When do you invite them to an online class for new members/new disciples?
- Where do they go if they have questions or have pastoral needs?

Now create the team that can help implement your online hospitality plan. If you are not sure about the answers to some of these questions, ask churches in your area, or call your conference office for help.

Here are a few specific examples of how churches are welcoming people online:

- Some online platforms offer “chat” and “connect” features. Use the “chat” function during online worship as a tool for engagement. Ask online guests to hit the “connect” feature if they want to know more about the church. Make sure you have a person monitoring for first time visitors, their questions, and follow-up. If you use a Zoom-type platform, consider splitting attendees into groups and pausing during the sermon to allow people to chat back and forth, reflecting on what they heard and getting to know first-time visitors.
- Some churches host “pajama services” that are family friendly and focus hospitality towards their younger members (see resources below).
- Text-in-Church (https://go.textinchurch.com/umc_discipleship) is an app churches are using to improve their communication with existing members as well as new people. This app helps churches reach out electronically in a variety of ways.

- Attend to your website and social media accounts. Keeping content fresh with updated service times and discipleship opportunities, is an important way to increase your hospitality to potential guests.
- Invite existing members/disciples to create positive buzz about your church on their individual social media accounts—with new people in mind.
- Ask your members/disciples to host a watch party during your next online worship service.

If hospitality, online or in-person, is simply “love on the loose”, then our world is craving hospitality right now. Find creative and compassionate ways to welcome and engage new faces as well as regular disciples in the life of your church.

Resources

Podcast

Church planters discuss using social media to connect with new people online:

www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/field-preachers-a-church-planting-podcast-episode-22

Text-in-Church Information

https://go.textinchurch.com/umc_discipleship

More info on “pajama services”: “Gathering Kids”

<https://gatheringnow.org/gathering-kids>



Take a Moment

1. How do we know when someone visits us online for the first time? Why is it important for us to know?

2. How do we invite a first-time online visitor into the life of the church? Into a small group?
3. How will we hear and respond to the spiritual needs of first-time online visitors?

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

– MATTHEW 13:16-18

Online Generosity

Ken Sloane, Director, Stewardship & Generosity

Stewardship is a great word. Some people have stopped using the word, believing it has become too narrowly focused on a church's annual campaign. In fact, its implications are as broad as the whole world: we are called to be stewards of time, talent, money, natural resources, and the people who are placed in our care. The apostle Paul says "...we are stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1, NKJV). Can a word get any broader? Generosity is a word that is sometimes substituted, and it too is a wonderful word. While we often use it in the context of writing a check or making a gift, generosity is a gift in life that God has made available to all. It is an essential characteristic of being a follower of Jesus Christ and a key benchmark of where we are in our maturing as Christ's disciples. Living generous lives comes from who we are as disciples. Will we live lives in scarcity or in the abundance of God's love for all humanity? Jesus speaks about this generous way of living (about money and possessions) in many places in the gospels. In eleven of his thirty-nine parables Jesus teaches about our money and our stuff. Jesus wants his followers to know the joy of living generous lives, free from the desire to accumulate more and more.

Does your online discipleship help disciples grow in generosity? Will you give them opportunities to reorient their lives and their resources toward the mission and the ministries of Jesus? Do you regularly communicate the importance of generosity in the life of a disciple?

Just a few years ago, I was pulling together a webinar to talk about congregations that had been successful in doing stewardship in a new way—that were growing generosity among their disciples. I talked about a number of congregations that were letting go of “the way they had always done it” and embracing new ideas. One new idea was embracing digital technology for online giving.

An important step toward growing generous disciples is making the online giving more convenient and less challenging. Here are several factors churches should consider when choosing a vendor for online giving.

Automatic Recurring Giving:

Providing the opportunity for disciples in your congregation to schedule regular giving to the church is the best model for ensuring a dependable source of support for the church’s mission and ministry. The company you choose should not only provide this service but should provide maximum flexibility to your donors to select when and how frequently they give.

Mobile Giving Made Simple:

The greatest area of growth in online giving is being able to use smartphones. A mobile giving app makes it easier for disciples to be generous. Obtain a demonstration of the mobile giving app and test its functionality before you make a final selection. Make sure it is user-friendly and available on all phone operating systems.

Text-To-Give Apps:

Another good reason to use a robust online giving platform with mobile giving capabilities is the ability to offer text-to-give apps. Text-to-give apps make it even easier to connect online giving to specific ministries.

Security of Sensitive Information:

Your vendor should be able to provide information about the security of your donor’s information. Ask the vendor about security protocols, PCI compliance (level 1 is best), and 256-bit encryption. (Read more about security in the article below from *Resource UMC*.)

Interface with Your Contribution Database:

If your church uses computer based or cloud-based software for recording contributions, inquire about whether your electronic donations can be imported to your database automatically. (Without this, you may have to enter donations by hand.) Many vendors provide good integration with software packages. As an example, check out Vanco Payment Solution Integration list (more information below). If you are having a hard time finding an electronic giving vendor that integrates with your contribution software, explore if exporting to an intermediary platform (such as Microsoft Excel) will allow you to import the vendor's giving records into your database.

Your Giving Portal Should Look Like the Rest of Your Website:

When people go to your website to learn more about your church's mission and ministry your giving page should look like it is part of your church's website. Some vendors may be able to match the look and feel of your website on their landing page. Doing this helps raise donor confidence that their giving is secure and their gifts are going for the intended purpose. Simplicity in navigation of the site—with a way for folks to sign in so account information only needs to be entered only—will make donors more inclined to give in a variety of situations.

Does online giving produce more generosity for mission and ministry than traditional giving? The answer seems to be yes. Those who set up automatic recurring giving online wind up eliminating the gap between what people pledge and what the church receives. E-giving vendors often survey their clients to identify differences between traditional giving and e-givers. E-giving vendor PushPay published *Digital Giving Trends 2019* (more info on giving trends below) with data from churches it serves. The report notes that e-givers gave 33 percent more than traditional givers. This might seem dubious coming from a company promoting its own product; however, the independent Network for Good's giving data (see link below) puts the number at 42 percent (e-giving higher than traditional giving).

Online giving also increases the frequency and ease with which disciples may choose to give. When limited to in-person worship and giving opportunities, disciples often give once a week, and only to the general

church. Adding online giving, means a disciple, if moved, could give at any time during the day or week. With the rise in the use of social media, churches can now connect disciples to specific mission experiences. In one church, youth working on a local service project posted videos of the work and were able to include a link for disciples to give to that project. In another church, a picture of the church's food pantry in action invites members to make a gift of \$5, \$10 or \$20 to help keep the pantry stocked. In still another setting, news shared about a natural disaster (flood, tornado, fire, etc.) includes an opportunity for people to make an instant gift to help in relief and recovery efforts.

I began this chapter with a scripture quotation from the Gospel of Matthew. This passage reminds me that previous generations did not have the tools that we have to tell the story of God's amazing love for us. In Old Testament times, people had the books of law and the writings of prophets and psalmists. Then Jesus came, so that we might understand God's love for us at a whole new level. After Jesus, we had the Gospels and epistles. For many years, scriptures were copied by hand; then Gutenberg's printing press changed that, and more people had access to God's word. With the invention of radio and television, more and more people were able to hear the good news. Today, we carry phones that connect us to the internet and deliver stories of God's amazing grace and love wherever it happens in the world. And with this, we share our own church's story and ministries. We share stories of lives that have been transformed by the church thanks to the faithful generosity of our disciples. I can't imagine a more exciting time to be Christ's church in the world!

Resources

Article from Resource UMC

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/understanding-the-safety-of-online-giving-without-getting-too-geeky?>

Vanco Payment Solution Integration List

<https://www.vancopayments.com/egiving/integrations>

“Digital Giving Trends 2019”

<https://grow.pushpay.com/rs/592-KPW-150/images/Pushpay%20Digital%20Giving%20Trends%20R4%20%281%29.pdf>

Network for Good’s Giving Data

<https://www.networkforgood.com/lesson/why-recurring-giving-matters>

Paper from the Federal Reserve in Philadelphia

<https://philadelphiafed.org/-/media/research-and-data/publications/working-papers/2012/wp12-12.pdf>

Afire with God: Becoming Spirited Stewards by Betsy Schwarzentraub. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007

Ask, Thank, Tell: Improving Stewardship Ministry in Your Congregation by Charles Lane. Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2006.

Not Your Parent’s Offering Plate by J. Clif Christopher. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008.

Propel: Good Stewardship, Greater Generosity by Clayton L. Smith. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.



Take a Moment

1. In an article from the Federal Reserve in Philadelphia (see link in Resources), the end of the use of paper checks is predicted to happen before the end of 2026. What steps will your church need to take to offer or improve your online giving options?
2. Many churches report that older members are “not comfortable” with digital tools. How could your church help educate and equip your members with the skills they need to navigate the new realities of finance and online discipleship?

3. How can your church improve or increase the sharing of stories of impact from your ministries through social media, video, and online tools in order to inspire generosity among your disciples?

Each of us is gifted in unique ways, to the measure of grace given us by God; the gift of prophecy (speaking God's word) in proportion to one's faithfulness; the gift of servanthood, in service; the teacher, in teaching; the one who encourages, in encouragement; the giver, in generous stewardship; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in sacrificial kindness.

— ROMANS 12:6-8
(CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATION FROM THE GREEK BY DAN R. DICK³)

Online Spiritual Gifts

Ken Sloane, Director, Stewardship & Generosity

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

Spiritual gifts are attributes given to Christian believers for the building up of the whole body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13 (NRSV) says,

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are not talents or skills.

³ Contemporary translation from the Greek by Dan R. Dick, <https://spiritual-gifts-discovery.constantcontactsites.com/blog/post/30303/scripture-translations>

These fruits and gifts are not of our own achievement. They and others are the outgrowth of the Spirit's work in us, by grace, through our faith in Jesus the Christ. And they are not given for personal gain. Through these fruits and gifts, the Holy Spirit empowers us for ministry in the world.⁴

Where Do Spiritual Gifts Come From?

In Acts 2:38, Peter responds to the people who ask what they must do to be followers of Jesus. He says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In this statement, we find a fantastic promise: When we give our lives to Jesus Christ, we receive more than forgiveness and eternal life; we are also filled with the Holy Spirit, whose role in our lives is to provide us with guidance and power for living. As a result, we are given spiritual gifts that allow us to find our place in God’s community of faith. As we employ these gifts in daily living, we find fulfillment and purpose in our relationship with God and with others.

How Do I Discover My Spiritual Gifts?

Discipleship Ministries has created an online *Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool* (see link below) to assist disciples in discerning their God-given spiritual gifts. The assessment tool consists of eighty statements. Participants are asked to respond whether a statement describes themselves in seven possible responses from “Never” to “Always.” Once completed, the assessment provides an on-screen recap of the three most primary spiritual gifts, as well as three supporting gifts. This final recap may be printed or downloaded directly. A listing of the definitions of all twenty spiritual gifts used in the assessment

⁴ *United Methodist Member's Handbook*, Revised by George Koehler (Discipleship Resources, 2006), 84-85).

along with other resources on the Discipleship Ministries website may be found below.

Once you discover your spiritual gifts, you then need to have those gifts confirmed by the community of faith to see how your gifts might benefit the whole community.

Finally, you should try out your gifts. Putting your God-given gifts into practice is where the energy and passion for ministry comes from. Growing communities of faith offer people multiple opportunities to find where their gifts best fit in order to build up the whole church and community. (See Bryan Tener's article "Living into My Spiritual Gifts," - see link below). The more you learn about your gifts, the better able you are to use them. During this process, you may discover those gifts that do not fit you. Being aware of those areas that are not your gifts will reveal that you need the spiritual gifts of others to fulfill the mission of your church.

It is important for faith communities to regularly help disciples discover, affirm, test, and put into practice their spiritual gifts. Sometimes others within our faith community will recognize our gifts before we do. Here are three important statements about how spiritual gifts affect the whole community of faith:

1. The use of spiritual gifts provides life and vitality to individuals and to the congregation. By using your spiritual gifts, you are contributing to the spiritual health of the church.
2. When someone neglects to use his or her spiritual gifts, the whole community suffers.
3. When an individual is doing ministry in an area he or she is not gifted for, this leads to dissatisfaction and hurts the whole community of faith.

In your online discipleship we encourage you to regularly use the *Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool* to help disciples discover and explore their spiritual gifts and begin to offer those gifts in service to the greater community.

Resources

Online Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory>

Definitions of All Twenty Spiritual Gifts

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/spiritual-gifts-definitions>

Living Into My Spiritual Gifts

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/living-into-my-spiritual-gifts>

Take a Moment

1. When have the spiritual gifts of disciples gone unnoticed and unrecognized in the life of your congregation? How can your church improve the emphasis on disciples discovering and offering their spiritual gifts?
2. What are some ways that you can make discovering spiritual gifts a churchwide emphasis periodically during the year?
3. What is the relationship between the gifts of clergy and other church staff and the gifts of the laity? How might your church better use and empower the spiritual gifts of laity?

³⁵ This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.

– JOHN 13:35 (CEB)

Online Service & Community Engagement

Bryan Tener, Director, Contextual Evangelism & Church Planting

They will know we are disciples when we offer love...but what are ways we as the church can use technology and online platforms to share our love?

So far, we have explored worship, hospitality, generosity, and spiritual gifts and how these might be developed online. A life of discipleship is also characterized by service to others and engaging our communities. The use of online technology can enhance, deepen, and even begin new relationships that invite more people into a loving relationship with God, offering a place to belong within a faith community. As disciples, we are invited to grow in our love of God and love of neighbor; and in so doing, we use what is available to us to best form connections to build and engage the community around us. So how do we encourage disciples to serve one another and their communities online?

We begin by using online platforms to teach the importance of service, equipping disciples to engage both their online communities and their actual communities. Although many elements of discipleship

can have an online strategy, the application of our online discipleship should also include serving and engaging our local communities as we follow God's call.

Equipping disciples for service and community engagement can be done using Zoom or other video conferencing platforms. Book studies and Bible studies are excellent, but for deeper community engagement, consider starting with training opportunities that prepare disciples for deep listening and in-depth learning about their communities. Topical studies that highlight societal issues will help disciples get to know their communities better and create space for discerning where God might be calling them next. Another solid approach is to provide asset-based community development techniques. This approach attempts to map the experience, skills, and resources within the community in order to discern needed actions for development. Online tools such as *MissionInsite* can also help your disciples better understand the demographics of the community. Whichever studies or tools you use, through these online events, ask, "How can we equip disciples to daily serve and engage the people in their communities?" (Also see section *Equipping Online Disciples* by David Teel.)

Another important aspect of online discipleship is equipping disciples to engage their communities as Jesus would. What we as disciples say in our online conversations is just as important as what we say in our in-person conversations. Have you ever been in a Facebook conversation that spiraled into angry, unhealthy rhetoric? It is a cliché response, but in these moments, not enough disciples are asking "How would Jesus respond?" In a digital age, it is particularly important to offer online discipleship focused on spiritual disciplines that will help disciples be more loving and mindful in interactions with others. How will we equip disciples for online engagement by offering links, posts, and information that call attention to injustice, lift up acts of compassion and service, and highlight troubling issues in the world? How might we equip disciples to leverage their online connections and create opportunities to make a difference in their communities?

Equipping disciples online for community engagement can be a starting point for service and engagement in our actual communities.

As a church leader, encourage disciples to identify and reflect upon the many relationships in their everyday activities. Who are the people on their block, at work, in membership groups (clubs, gyms, hobbies, etc.)? One pastor, Rev. Luke Edwards, wrote a letter introducing himself and his family to the neighbors on his block. In the letter, Rev. Edwards offered his contact information and an offer of support for neighbors who might be in need. (An example of this letter is included in the article “Love One Another,” listed under Resources below. Invite your disciples to engage with their neighbors using the letter as a starting point.) For wider community engagement, encourage your disciples to think about where they work and how they might live out their discipleship in service in those places. Teachers, school administrators, community workers, hospital staff, city leaders have relationships that create opportunities for your church to be in service to the wider community. Consider putting together a Zoom meeting where a few key disciples invite community workers together to ask good questions and learn more about ways that the church might support their work. Whether it is a disciple engaging their neighbors on their block or a church engaging the broader community, find ways to equip and empower disciples to listen for where God might be calling them to serve next.

Resources

Junius B. Dotson, *Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People*. Nashville: Discipleship Ministries, 2018. (Available at SeeAllThePeople.org)

Giovani Arroyo, *Engaging Your Community with Cultural Sensitivity*. Nashville: Discipleship Ministries & the General Commission on Religion and Race, 2020. (Available at SeeAllThePeople.org)

Check out an extended version of this discussion here:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/love-one-another-ways-to-engage-your-community-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>

Take a Moment

1. What are some ways that you can increase your online emphasis on service and community engagement?
2. How might we equip disciples to represent Jesus better in online communities?
3. Consider doing individual prayer walks in your community to help disciples practice deep listening and seeing people with fresh eyes. Afterward, gather in an online platform to reflect on the experience. Ask, “What did you learn? What did you see? Where is God calling you?”

¹⁸ Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.

– MATTHEW 28:18-20 (CEB)

Online Evangelism & New Online Faith Communities

Bryan Tener, Director, Contextual Evangelism & Church Planting

Relationship and transformation are at the heart of the Christian faith—relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the transformation of lives and communities. An integral part of that relationship is the call to share the good news so that others might come to know God’s love. There is so much going on in the world that often makes hope and good news hard to find. And yet, as Christians we are grounded in hope—hope amid the significant challenges before us and hope that gives us good news to share. Now is the time to stretch our wonder and imagination, to share our assurance of new life, and to share our faith in Christ Jesus, so that, by our sharing, the fruit of justice, peace, love, healing, hope, and abundant life might be born.

Intentional evangelism and starting new faith communities through online platforms can expand our ability to reach new people and

create new spaces, so that more people have the opportunity to experience the love of God in Christ. How might we create safe online spaces where participants can explore Christianity and spirituality together with those who seek to follow Jesus?

Online Evangelism

We should begin by equipping disciples for evangelism through online learning and teaching sessions focused on humble engagement and deep listening as we read in the chapter, Online Service and Community Engagement. Now we turn to the authentic sharing and witness of our own faith stories about the ways that we have experienced God at work in the world and in our lives.

It can be intimidating and overwhelming to share our faith with others. When was the last time you reflected on your faith story? When was the last time you thought back to why you became a follower of Jesus in the first place, or why you consider yourself a disciple today? As disciples, we must first answer these important questions because we cannot share what we do not have. (If we don't know why we ourselves are disciples, why would we invite others to follow Jesus?) Being able to share our faith in an authentic way, begins with reflecting on our faith and taking a first step to articulate it. Some people, when doing this hard, reflective work, will come to realize they don't know their faith story; they have not reflected on it in a long time. Create online studies and discussion groups that encourage disciples to discover (or rediscover) and share their own stories of faith with one another. One helpful exercise is to create a faith journey timeline, inviting disciples to make notes of important events when they felt God's presence eb and flow in their lives. Invite disciples to share their timelines with others in the group. If there are a large number of people in the discussion group, create smaller Zoom discussion rooms to offer group discussion and sharing.

Another practice for helping disciples share their faith stories is through social media. Articulating and sharing our faith stories is an important part of our discipleship. How might you encourage disciples to periodically reflect on what it means to be a disciple? How might

we share how God is at work in our lives through online platforms? What examples of God's love have you seen and how can you tell those stories? Periodically, ask prompting questions on your church's social media platforms, inviting disciples to comment and share their stories. Online bulletins, newsletters, and websites, are more than just for sharing information. They can be effective places for sharing the story of God's love at work in and through the life of the congregation.

Encourage disciples to think about their social media platforms, what they use, whom they connect with, and what they post that might offer opportunities to engage in faith conversations.

Here are some examples and resources for approaching online evangelism:

- **The Alpha Course:** This course offers space to wrestle with questions of purpose and meaning, asking questions such as, "Where is God in this?" The Alpha Course is one way to equip your disciples to engage others who may be exploring the big questions in a safe no-judgmental environment. (See Resources below.)
- ***A Disciple's Path: A Guide for United Methodists***, by Justin LaRosa and James A. Harnish. This resource walks disciples through the baptismal commitments of prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness.
- **Active Listening:** Discipleship Ministries has developed this resource for training and equipping disciples to practice active listening.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/communicating-for-connection-model-and-teach>

New Online Faith Communities: Creating New Spaces for New Faces Online

By equipping disciples, empowering them to lead, and sending them out to engage their online networks, new faith communities can be formed. From online book discussion groups, to prayer groups, to those who organize around social justice work, people are gathering online to learn, grow, and take action. Offer a list of suggested books, movies, or other materials that could be used by disciples as a starting point to invite friends. Are there needs within the community that an online group could support (dealing with grief, financial uncertainty, racial reconciliation)? What struggles, needs, and longings have you heard through conversations and listening within the community? As a leader, make sure you are spending time with your disciples to encourage, support, and help them grow in their leadership as they start these new groups.

A few important questions to answer with your leadership:

- Who is God calling us to reach?
- Where is God calling us to start something new?
- What will constitute a new online faith community? What are the characteristics?
- How will it reflect our intentional discipleship system? How will the faith life of this new community be nurtured for long term discipleship growth?
- What online platforms will we utilize?
- How will we measure progress? What are we working toward? Will this new group be started with the intention of becoming a new online church, a fresh expression (see more info on Fresh Expressions below), or a small group related to your church?
- How much time will we spend to develop leaders for this new online faith community?

Here are some examples of how some are using apps, websites, and other platforms to form new faith communities online:

- **Houseparty** is an app that allows for video chats, playing games, and building a social network with up to seven other people at a time. Church planters are able to meet friends of people they know through this app and create an opportunity to start a new relationship.
- **Zoom** is an online meeting resource that allows for the creation of break out rooms for smaller group discussions as part of a larger meeting. A church planter in Georgia uses Zoom to host biweekly “Conversations that Matter” that are open to everyone in the community. The conversations are advertised on Eventbrite and meetup.com; topics range from dealing with anxiety to managing finances.
- **Facebook Live.** Churches can offer a wide variety of Facebook Live sessions, including yoga, daily devotional readings, and other disciplines that connect people to one another seeking to create community online.
- ***The UpperRoom Daily Devotional Guide*** contains guided questions for group discussion. This resource has helped church planters form small groups.
- **Social Media and Neighborhood Apps** are being used to connect disciples with their neighbors to share information about upcoming events, highlight community needs, and invite their neighbors into the life of the church.

The use of online platforms can be a powerful way of experiencing God at work in the world, connecting with others, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, and forming new online faith communities.

Resources

Alpha Course

<https://www.alpha.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Alpha-Online-Overview.pdf>

Fresh Expressions

<https://freshexpressionsus.org/distributedchurch>

New People New Places

A resource from Path1 to help local churches equip disciples to deepen their faith and begin to reach out to share the good news with others through their existing spheres of relationships in order to start something new.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/new-people-in-new-places-training-laity-to-work-with-clergy-to-start-something-new>

Using Upper Room Devotional to Start New Faith Communities

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/how-a-simple-devotional-guide-can-fuel-new-virtual-faith-communities>



Take a Moment

1. Reflect on why it can be hard to share our faith story. How can we help disciples get better at this?
2. What is more important: listening or sharing? How are the two connected and how can we equip disciples to be better listeners?
3. The DNA of the church should include reaching new people and creating new communities of faith. What often keeps us from starting new things or creating new spaces? How can we overcome these obstacles and what will be the first thing God is calling us to try?

⁸ You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. ⁹ It's not something you did that you can be proud of. ¹⁰ Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

– EPHESIANS 2:8-10 (CEB)

Online Faith Formation & Small Groups

Scott Hughes, Executive Director, Congregational Vitality & Intentional Discipleship; Director, Adult Discipleship

Faith formation, whether facilitated through in-person or online gatherings, has a purpose, a goal. Said simply, the goal of faith formation is to instruct and equip Christians in becoming maturing disciples of Jesus Christ. This is a lifelong endeavor, not an individual activity. Church leaders should be mindful of engaging and equipping disciples through digital formats (video conferencing, curation of videos, PDFs, podcasts, and other resources).

When done intentionally, being formed in Christian faith enables individuals and communities to understand their place and role in God's story. More specifically, faith formation guides individuals and communities to receive their identity (as God's beloved), know their purpose (love God and neighbor), and experience belonging (within the community of faith). Church leaders should be attentive to the disciples who are being engaged online, equipping them to ground their identity, vocation, and a sense of belonging.

The reality is we are being formed (and de-formed) all the time. Thus, the question for disciples of Jesus Christ is, “What will we give our attention to?” Our attention determines the inputs or messages we receive. These form our thoughts, character, habits, desires, and soul. Helping our in-person and online participants be aware of all the inputs that are forming their souls, especially in the age of 24-hour news cycles, social media, and smartphones, can aid them in establishing healthy boundaries.

In these unprecedented times, the church has an obligation to help people foster deeper connections with God and one another. Since we are created in the image of the Triune God, we are designed to be in relationship with others. Digital media are becoming more user-friendly and widely accepted with the introduction of applications, such as FaceTime.

Digital technologies, such as video conferencing, can be a beneficial service to small groups, Sunday school classes, youth groups, and other formational groups. There are tools, such as Zoom, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, and others that can be used to maintain and grow relationships with people in small groups.

Faith formation leaders should be clear about the goals and expectations when connecting with participants online. The primary goal could be focused on relationship building, sharing of experiences, or both; but we should attempt to go beyond simple connection and try to move participants toward deeper compassion and intimacy.

Here are a few suggestions for churches to foster best online practices and brainstorm ways to maintain relationships through faith formation:

- Realize that using an online platform might be initially awkward for some. Expect less from the first meeting as participants become familiar with the technology.
- Without the normal cues that are evident when we are face-to-face, people are more likely to talk over one another. For those who are new to these platforms, take the time to teach them the tools.

- Ask participants to mute and silence possible distractions. Give a minute at the beginning of each meeting to allow participants to look around the room for potential distractions.
- Early on, focus on building relationships and sharing experiences before moving to a lesson or curriculum.
- Consider using a flipped classroom method, where content is given to participants to read and study before the online gathering. The online gathering then focuses on application and discussion only. This will maximize your group time for conversation.
- Find ways for participants to engage with the material and with others. Refrain from monologues or lectures. For fun, have participants share what's around them in the room -- share photos of friends and family, pets, and so on.
- Make time for silence. Before spoken prayer, offer time for silent prayer and centering. After asking a question, ask the group to hold off answering for thirty seconds to one minute to give everyone time to reflect. Such practices can help participants experience the difference between isolation and solitude.
- If your small group does not already have it, set up a closed Facebook group or another private way of sharing stories, experiences, crowdsourcing, best practices, and so on as a way to continue being in relationship with one another between meetings.
- If your church does not already have resources and platforms in place and cannot afford them, check with your district and conference for assistance.
- Finally, continue to adapt. If the online gathering did not go as hoped, make adjustments. Communicate with the group that this is an experiment and a learning opportunity. Keep in mind that the main objective is to maintain and build relationships.

Resources

How to Start Small Groups Teachable Course

<https://discipleship-ministries.teachable.com>

Basics of Faith Formation PDF

<https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/basics-of-faith-formation>

Using Digital Technologies for Faith Formation Webinar

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/using-digital-technologies-for-faith-formation>

Digital Disciple: Real Christianity in a Virtual World

by Adam Thomas. Nashville, TN; Abingdon Press, 2011.

Take a Moment

1. What are some ways your church can experiment with digital technologies to encourage participation in a faith formative activity? [Have small groups meet through video conference, create a podcast of the sermons, curate online resources for families, etc.]
2. What resources could your church develop to guide facilitators and groups for online learning?
3. How can in-person gatherings (such as worship) include and lift-up what groups and families are doing for faith formation online? [Have a family record the reading of the scripture passage for worship. Record a testimonial for a participant in an online group.]

Please think of the children first. If you ever have anything to do with their entertainment, their food, their toys, their custody, their day or night care, their health care, their education—listen to the children, learn about them, learn from them, think of the children first.

– FRED ROGERS (2003)⁵

With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.

– UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL BAPTISM LITURGY ⁶

Online Children's Ministries

Kevin Johnson, Director, Children's Ministries

Children relate to Jesus because Jesus grew as children grow. It is important to remember that Jesus loved and honored children. Parents brought their children to be blessed by Jesus, not just by his presence, but also through his touch. Jesus publicly claimed children as models of pureness of heart and joy inherent in the kingdom of God. Jesus reminded us that we are to tend graciously to our children and warned us of the consequences of being a “stumbling block” in our children’s growth and development (see Luke 18:15-17).

⁵ Fred Rogers cited in Hilda Jackman, Nancy Beaver, Susan Wyatt, *Early Education Curriculum: A Child's Connection to the World* (Cengage Learning, 2014), 4.

⁶ From “The Baptismal Covenant II,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, Copyright © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This mission, which reflects Jesus' Great Commission, reminds each of us, like Mr. Rogers, to *think of the children first*. Faith formation for children is not optional, and as we think about offering children's ministries online, church leaders will need to embrace innovation and look toward the future with an imaginative lens. We invite you to assess your current children's ministries and think about what might be needed to offer online discipleship.

In *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Areas and Generations* (Lifelong Faith Associates, 2015), John Roberto writes about eight faith-forming areas that support a person's growth in faith:

1. Caring Relationships

Creating online relationships with children allows children to speak and leaders to hear; this should connect the adult and child in ways that can be healthy and encouraging. Children's leaders' primary formational tools are communication and building relationships. Help children actively build relationships with peers, family members, and the gathered community of Christ by establishing weekly accountability groups. A good resource for elementary-aged children and leaders is *Growing Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Children* (see below).

2. Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

It is important to teach children about the liturgical seasons of the church. With each season, children are introduced to important historical events in the life of the church and the Christian faith. Each season can lift up important elements of discipleship. Without the sights and sounds of the sanctuary, it can be hard to notice liturgical seasons in online settings. Find ways to include and project liturgical symbols during online meetings. Create a background that resembles the sanctuary to reinforce familiar sights and imagery during online worship. Talk with children about the reason for each season, what events make them special, and why we celebrate the season.

3. Celebrating Rituals and Milestones

Milestones are markers that celebrate spiritual growth in the lives of our children. It is important for congregations to celebrate these accomplishments together, showing signs of unity and support for each child. Consider creating rituals for each online event, such as selecting a child or family to offer a greeting and welcome at the beginning of online worship. Make sure you incorporate important milestones involving children, such as school graduations, promotions, and Bible presentations, with the same attention that you give other aspects of online worship.

4. Reading the Bible

Learning to read is a cognitive milestone but learning to read the Bible adds the element of spiritual growth to a child's development. Always read passages from an age-appropriate Bible (Deep Blue Bible from Cokesbury is an excellent example). Consider incorporating age appropriate translations into the online worship service. Periodically, invite a child to read the scripture passage for weekly worship in a pre-recorded segment.

5. Learning Christian Traditions with Life Application

Traditionally, this element is found in a Sunday school format. Children still need to learn the traditions and age-appropriate life applications. Online Christian education will resemble a small-group format where children gather and create relationships. Video calls, including breakout rooms (monitored by adults), provide opportunities for children to grow both individually and collectively. Resources such as *Cokesbury Kids* (<https://www.cokesburykids.com>) offer innovative ways to engage children. Rev. Dr. Leanne Hadley, an elder in The United Methodist Church, offers exceptional faith formation resources on her website (<https://www.leanne-hadley.com>). Rev. Hadley has spent years creating the *U-Shaped Model* of faith formation for children, as well as the technique of *Holy Listening. Go! Curriculum* (<https://www.gocurriculum.com>) is another resource that helps children read through the Bible in one year. *Go!* may be used in a variety of settings, including online Sunday school, online VBS, and online children's church. These resources bring faith formation to life, engaging

children in exciting ways through online platforms. The only things missing are the snacks!

6. Spiritual Formation through Prayer and Devotions

“Teach us how to pray,” was the disciples request of Jesus. Children learn about prayer by watching others (witness) and by trying it themselves (practice). Consider incorporating children in online worship with opportunities to lead prayer. Invite parents to model and teach prayer at home through family devotions. Take the practice of prayer with your children to the next level; periodically, get children involved in calling church members to let them know they are praying for them.

7. Serving Others and Introducing Social Justice

Children learn about service and social justice as they participate with parents, guardians, or church leaders. Find ways for children and their families to serve in the community. Couple that experience with age-appropriate theological reflection on why social justice work is important in the life of a disciple. Match children with senior adults in the congregation to nurture intergenerational relationships and help with social isolation and loneliness among shut-ins. Help senior adults obtain and learn how to use devices that enable text messages or video calls.

8. Online Worship

Find ways to include children in all aspects of online worship. Look at your online worship through the eyes of the youngest children. How might you offer online worship that is intergenerational? Don't forget to include a prerecorded children's message and make it interesting! Think of one of your favorite children's shows, or look at current children's television programming. Consider using visual props to make the children's message more engaging.

Does your intentional discipleship system include children? It is important for children to see youth, young adults, and adults modeling what it means to be a disciple who is engaged in life-long learning. Make sure your online discipleship strategy for children is a reflection of your intentional discipleship system for children. Don't forget to assist

and equip parents and guardians in ways that they might support and encourage the discipleship development of their children. Share with them that one of the best ways to assist childhood discipleship development, is to strengthen and model their own faith development. Make sure parents and guardians are aware of the online tools available to them for their own discipleship and their children's discipleship. Encourage families to hold daily family devotions as they grow in discipleship together.

How will you ensure safety and provide support to online ministries that include children? Providing a safe space for children has always been a critical need of effective children's ministry. Make sure you provide and reinforce Safe Sanctuaries® guidelines when providing ministry to children. Provide safe virtual spaces for children and adults. Remember, children learn best in a secure environment. Be aware of any lifestyle and technology concerns that would exclude a child or family from being fully engaged in the ministry.

The Fred Rogers Center reminds us that there are six necessities for child development that we believe congregations need to remember when establishing an online presence:

- **A Sense of Self-Worth** - It's important to remember the uniqueness of each child. Self-worth helps a child to see value, not only in themselves, but in others as well. When you help children know that every person is worth protecting and loving, you are setting them up for a lifetime of learning and healthy relationships, which is the very definition of "discipleship."
- **A Sense of Trust**- Trust is key to any healthy relationship. Be ready to listen and allow the child's voice and feelings to be heard. Talking with children about your own feelings can continue to build their sense of trust.
- **Curiosity**- Children are curious about what is happening in the world around them. Remind them that you are there to keep them safe, allowing them to continue to be curious, even during ever-changing times.

- **The Capacity to Look and Listen Carefully** - The online world is very fast-paced. Children need to look and listen carefully as they participate in the online world. Help children slow down while online by asking questions about what they notice before they click the mouse. What can we learn about ourselves when we slow down?
- **The Capacity to Play** - “You can discover more about a person in one hour of play than in a year of conversation” is a quote attributed to Plato. Play is a child’s work. Play is crucial to child development, as it allows children to work out problems, find solutions, create new ideas, and discover the world. Allow space for play. Embrace children with the opportunities and space to play. Give yourself the same space.
- **Times of Solitude** - Even though we seem to have an abundance of solitude due to technological advancements, we also feel that we must fill every quiet space with activities and lessons to stimulate the children. When children can pause and be alone with their thoughts, they will be able to learn more about who they are. Only then will they be ready to learn about others and the world. Too much screen time can overstimulate and overschedule a child. Offer children times of solitude to experience the holy.

Resources

Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages and Generations by John Roberto. (Lifelong Faith Associates. 2015).

Cokesbury Kids (<https://www.cokesburykids.com>) is the UMC provider for Christian resources that nurture the hearts and imagination of children. This brand new website provides curriculum, resources, blogs, and even an online children’s church.

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth by Joy Thornburg Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008). <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/safe-sanctuaries>.

Developing an Intentional Discipleship System for Children (<https://www.seeallthepeople.org/develop-a-discipleship-system>) by Kathy Pit-tenger is a free downloadable booklet providing practical guidance to congregations establishing an intentional faith formation system and creating relationships with children within their community.

Growing Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Children, by Melanie C. Gordon, Susan Groseclose, and Gayle Quay. (Upper Room Resources, 2016). <https://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/DR695/growing-everyday-disciples.aspx>.

A Guide to Transforming Faith Formation for a New World (Version 1, June 2020) (https://media2-production.mightynetworks.com/asset/11406142/Guide_to_Transforming_Faith_Formation_for_a_Changed_World_V1_.pdf) written by John Roberto of the Vibrant Faith Catalyst is a new resource that offers a fresh approach to ministry and provides a resilient, flexible, and adaptable form of faith formation with age groups, families, and the whole community (inter-generational) in an online world.

Seven Things John Wesley Expected Us to Do for Kids by Christopher Miles Ritter. (Nashville, TN; Cokesbury. 2016).

Take a Moment

1. Reflect on your current children's ministries. What do you do well? What is a growing edge?
2. As you shift to online children's ministries, what are the most important things to keep doing? What will translate best online?
3. How might your church embrace intergenerational worship and ministry?
4. How are you recognizing the uniqueness and the love of God in each child?

"How can you translate such concepts as a warm welcome, personal connections, and a friendly platform into your online youth ministry?"

⁴³ *Follow me...*
– JOHN 1:43 (CEB)

Online Youth Ministries

Chris Wilterdink, Director, Young People's Ministries

The earliest of Jesus' followers began to discover life in Christ because of a two-word invitation—"Follow me" (Matt. 4:18-22; John 1:35-43). Humorously enough, that same phrase is behind the success of many modern-day influencers. *Influencers* are individuals who have the power to affect the decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. In the context of discipleship, I think we could agree that we would like youth to see Jesus as an influencer...someone to emulate, affect their decisions, and ultimately affect their behavior as youth transform into spiritually maturing world changers. Churches that leverage and create opportunities for online discipleship could take lessons from influencers, particularly those who actively engage their followers, building relationships, and exposing them to new, challenging, and exciting topics.

Discipleship is a way of living that follows the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Online, youth have access to an incredible amount of information, but they are just beginning to develop lenses to help them understand and process what they can access. With this access to information also comes access to misinformation, malicious sites, and interpersonal connections with friends, families, and strangers. Online Discipleship with youth must include tools that help youth connect with and rely on the influence of their friends and mentors in the

congregation, in addition to the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, church leaders should consider the system and offerings used to connect and explore faith with young people. They should consider how the online discipleship opportunities equip young people to serve as influencers online. This provides youth the opportunity to put their faith into action through online interactions with others not yet connected to the church.

The core process for making disciples is stated in ¶122 of *The Book of Discipline*. Consider each of these five processes as you create online opportunities for discipleship.

“We make disciples as we:

- proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather persons into the body of Christ;
- lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;
- nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley’s Christian conferencing;
- send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and
- continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.⁷

The basics of relationally-based youth ministry are well established in resources such as *Growing With* and others listed at the end of this section, but we are not here for a rehash of the basics. We are here to take the leap from in-person ministry to online youth ministry. You, in concert with youth, parents, and volunteers in your ministry, should

⁷ Paragraph 122 The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016. Copyright © 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

discuss what things are enjoyable and valuable about in-person youth ministry in your church, then lean on the voices and experiences of youth to help translate those things to online platforms.

Settings

When youth come through the doors of a church, what and whom people encounter determines whether or not they will want to return. A warm welcome, a personal connection, a setting that feels comfortable and inviting, and a reason to make a second trip are critical to making a good first impression. How can you translate such concepts as a warm welcome, personal connections, and a friendly platform into your online youth ministry? Avoid creating new online platforms if possible; instead, engage youth where they are already active. Create groups within popular social networking apps and maximize your ministry's presence within those apps to increase the sense of ongoing connectedness and support. Use images and language that create consistency for your ministry (have a youth ministry logo—use it!). For teaching-learning settings, ask your youth which platforms they use at school. Invite them to guide you as you learn the benefits and limitations of different presentation and connection services. Consider limiting how many spaces you maintain (focus on two to three platforms and apps) in order to maintain a high level of energy and activity, striving to be responsive and engaged with your youth.

Safety

Include adaptations of existing Safe Sanctuaries® policies to fit online interactions in order to reduce the risk of abuse. The same standards for transparency and reporting apply to online interactions with youth. Issues of power dynamics, confidentiality, ages, and opinion-sharing can become magnified online because of the ease and speed of sharing commentary. Train adults who are leading online gatherings to follow appropriate procedures and ensure familiarity with any online behavior policies that your church develops. (A helpful post with eleven considerations is listed at the end of this section.)

Parents

Consider parents' involvement as you organize online discipleship with youth. Yes, you will host regular and special online gatherings for youth, but you should also host periodic informational and educational opportunities for parents. Conversations with parents online can help inform the direction and topics you address in online youth ministry. Create a publicly accessible calendar in a freely accessible app (like Google Calendars) that parents can subscribe to. Help parents understand what, when, and why you are doing what you are doing in your online discipleship plans. Parents cannot be everywhere that you, or their youth will be, but keeping them informed can be a key to success. Additionally, parents may just need some venting or processing time with other parents of teens. Create spaces where they can support one another.

Learnings

Intentional opportunities for study are a necessary component in any ministry setting. Traditional methods like Sunday school, youth group, or small groups can continue to be meaningful online; however, you are no longer limited by traditional meeting times or places. Discover what works in your context and explore a variety of curriculum, learning styles, and leadership practices. Since technology and accessibility are at the core of online interactions, get input and help from youth about the devices, platforms, and applications where they already enjoy spending time. Set up online prayer stations, virtual care walls, and devotional hubs for regular connection and reflection. Use *Netflix Party*, or similar apps to watch and discuss films in real time. Host an in-house photo or video scavenger hunt. Share leadership with youth and have them pre-record a devotion or lesson to discuss on video calls or chat rooms. For more in-depth learning, create ongoing family groups (smaller groups) with regular check-ins and patterns of sharing joys, concerns, and challenges to living as faithful disciples. (This is modeled on the concepts of *Covenant Discipleship*; see link at the end of this section.) You may be able to have incredible discussions while everyone is building something together in *Minecraft* or

working on the same island or village in *Animal Crossing*. You are not limited to Zoom; any device that connects to the internet and allows for person-to-person communication is an opportunity for online ministry! Organize a tournament in a racing game and have devotions before and after the race. Even adults in the corporate world are using video games instead of Zoom for their meetings. (Cowboys around a campfire in *Red Dead Redemption 2* have replaced weekly check-in meetings!⁸)

Go Beyond the Numbers

Attendance patterns will work differently from in-person gatherings, so it is important to determine what success looks like with your youth leadership team, volunteers, and church staff. Yes, track attendance patterns and who shows up to which opportunities but go beyond that. Track the growth of students' understanding of topics, familiarity with scripture, and ability to articulate and practice their faith, along with how often they check in to a group meeting, or chat with you online. Communicate with church staff and parents about the growth you expect to see; measure that growth, and celebrate with those who grow because of your ministry. Tracking this kind of growth, in addition to attendance, will help guide your responses to those who thrive in online environments as well as those who struggle.

Community Building

Fostering intentional connections with one another provides further opportunities for bonding and spiritual depth. In online discipleship, an intentional balance of purely fun, fellowship activities, and learning opportunities will build connections within your group of participants. Consider offering regular ongoing small-group meetings in addition to shorter-term topical or curriculum-based groups. Consistency of leadership, time, and platform are more important than any particular day or timeframe.

⁸ <https://screenrant.com/red-dead-redemption-2-work-meetings-zoom-alternative>

For thoughts on helping your youth connect with their communities, read the earlier section on Online Service & Community Engagement by Bryan Tener. Bryan points out that the purpose of developing community must not solely be internal, but that development of disciples should engage and impact their surrounding communities. As you become more familiar with the platforms and apps that you use in online youth ministry, consider the questions at the end of that section. How can you encourage youth to look around their online communities and mobilize themselves to transform those communities for the better?

Essential Elements

Online discipleship with youth should include mechanisms to recognize spiritual growth and maturity, opportunities to demonstrate the Great Commandment, and space to practice theology. These three elements are key to empowering youth in personal discipleship and empowering your congregation in community discipleship.

Mechanisms to Recognize Spiritual Growth and Maturity

Help youth recognize and assess their own growth and maturation. This element will also help other church members recognize and celebrate spiritual growth and maturity in their companion disciples.

Opportunities to Demonstrate the Great Commandment

Provide opportunities and guidance to show love for God and neighbor. Wesleyan traditions often call these opportunities “works of piety” and “works of mercy”.

Create Space to Practice Theology

Encourage youth to practice what is preached, linking action and belief. Spend time reflecting on the ways that they put their faith into action; focus on and give witness to the transformation that you see in each youth. Help them reflect on how living out their faith makes a difference in their communities.

Resources

Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: a Guide for Youth Ministry by Chris Wilterdink. <https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/developing-an-intentional-discipleship-system-a-guide-for-youth-ministry>

Safe Sanctuaries: Supporting a Shift to Online Youth Ministry Meetings by Chris Wilterdink. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/safe-sanctuaries-supporting-a-shift-to-online-youth-ministry-meetings>

Why Socially Distanced Small Groups Don't Work (And How to Fix It!) by Jeremy Steele. <https://youthworkercollective.com/why-socially-distanced-small-groups-dont-work-and-how-to-fix-it>

Growing With: Every Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future by Steven Argue and Kara Powell (Baker Books, 2019).

Smaller Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem! by Brad Fiscus and Stephanie Caro (Abingdon, 2016).

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth by Joy Thornburg Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008).

What's Right About Youth Ministry: Six Values Great Youth Ministries Embrace by Mark Oestricher and Kurt Johnston (Youth Cartel, 2018).

Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation by the Barna Group. (Barna Group, 2018).

Cultivating Teen Faith: Insights from the Confirmation Project by Richard R. Osmer and Katherine M. Douglass (Eerdmans, 2018).

Teaching Teenagers in a Post-Christian World: Cultivating Exploration and Ownership by Jake Kircher (The Youth Cartel, 2014).

Take a Moment

1. How does the setting and culture of in-person youth gatherings affect a young person's willingness to connect online? Why would a youth join online only or in-person only?
2. What is the "why" behind the influence of your church with young people? How do you want to inspire and encourage spiritual growth in youth by what you offer online?
3. Could youth find themselves more easily in leadership positions via online discipleship? As digital natives, young people often navigate online platforms and interactions with greater ease than do older generations. Are there opportunities for interaction between generations with youth serving as mentors and connectors for more established members of the congregation?

¹⁹ In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors who represent Christ...

– 2 CORINTHIANS 5:19-20 (CEB)

Online Young-Adult Ministries

Chris Wilterdink, Director, Young People's Ministries

A larger and larger percentage of young adults do not have church homes or active faith lives that relate to a church. Often, those who have grown up in youth ministry become less interested in church involvement as they get older. They may leave church altogether for education or career opportunities. Young adults may be single, married, divorced, partnered, working, studying, parenting, or some combination thereof. Lack of a connection to a faith community does not, however, preclude young adults from spirituality online, exploring religion, or engaging in meaningful development on a variety of platforms. Indeed, communities like Reddit, Facebook, Discord, Craigslist and a variety of others offer opportunities for people to ask philosophical and religious questions through their forums. Some young adults even encourage the development of relationships and connections to pursue shared interests. It is into this rich landscape, where young adults may already be very active, that the church must work to create online discipleship opportunities. Strategic involvement in existing platforms where young adults are active, and investment in relationships should be the pillars of online efforts with young adults. The relationships formed should provide opportunities for young adults to determine and revisit answers for the three basic questions of maturity: identity, belonging, and purpose.

Identity: Who am I anyway? In online settings, young adults are often very adept at crafting an identity that may or may not be consistent with their in-person self. Offering online opportunities to increase their understanding that they are a child of God, an ambassador for Christ in this world, and a beloved disciple of your faith community, can affect a person's sense of self-worth and their ability to connect to online discipleship opportunities.

Belonging: How and where do I fit? Offer a wide variety of strategic online connection points where young adults might explore where they belong in your faith community. These could be ongoing discipleship or covenant groups, short-term topical study groups, book clubs, classic Bible studies such as *Disciple* (<https://www.beadisciple.com/disciple-bible-study>), or groups organized around social justice and community outreach.

Purpose: What meaning can I create through what I do? Online discipleship should also include opportunities for action. Assist young adults as they show interest in supporting local movements and organizing to support advocacy or education efforts in the community. Make participating in such activities as simple and straightforward as possible. With geography not a limitation with online discipleship, let the creativity run wild. (Research together the most economically challenged part of the world, learn about it, and together develop a plan to make a difference in some way.) Also don't forget to create opportunities for young adults to discover their spiritual gifts, connecting their passions with service to others (see Online Spiritual Gifts section).

Millennials and Generation Z entered young adulthood during the emergence and spread of terrorism, both foreign and domestic, the proliferation of mass violence, the age of social networking and rapid technological evolution, and the rise of divisive rhetoric, relative truth/alternative facts, extremism, and now COVID19 and Black Lives Matter and racial injustice protests. In constant technological connectedness, some young adults report feeling an increased sense of isolation and loneliness. Create opportunities and spaces where young adults can build relationships and become established members of a community. Offer regular opportunities to check-in and process current events—perhaps something like a virtual coffee hour. Many young adult min-

istries have experienced success with “Theology on Tap” or “Virtual Happy Hour” experiences. Groups like *Brew Theology* have created in-person and online communities following that model.

Finally, consider these five suggestions for effective ways of connecting with young adults from *Growing Young*:

- Make room for meaningful relationships. Influence is a function of trust, not volume, and online relationships function differently from in-person communication.
- Provide opportunities for cultural discernment. Culture is not the enemy—it surrounds the lives of young adults and demands cultural exegesis.
- Prioritize mentoring, both from and for young adults. Let them guide your faith community in today’s “digital Babylon”—the nature of actual content in online discipleship with young adults is much less important than the act of sharing itself.
- Embrace vocational discipleship. Connect the richness of your faith community to the unique work a young person is called to. Young adults may offer the gifts to help push your faith community into meaningful online discipleship!
- Facilitate connection with Jesus. Online discipleship must be a place that fosters a deeper sense of intimacy with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. That intimacy will translate to better relationships and continued connections with the faith community.

Resources

How to have a Courageous Conversation with a Young Adult

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/how-to-have-a-courageous-conversation-with-a-young-adult>

Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a 22nd Century Church Movement by Lia McIntosh, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Smothers. (Abingdon 2019).

Benedict on Campus – Eight Spiritual Disciplines for Collegiate Ministry by David E. MacDonald

<https://www.gbhem.org/publishing/publications/benedict-on-campus-eight-spiritual-disciplines-for-collegiate-ministry>

Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church, by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin (Baker Books, 2016).

The Awakened Life: an 8 Week Guide to Student Well-Being by Sarah E. Bollinger & Angela R. Olsen

<https://www.gbhem.org/publishing/publications/the-awakened-life-an-8-week-guide-to-student-well-being>

Take a Moment

1. How does your congregation's mission or vision statement inform your young-adult ministry? What scripture passages ground your young-adult ministry?
2. Is your church leadership ready to embrace online young adult discipleship? Why or why not? In what ways can we offer rich online discipleship experiences similar to what we might offer in person?
3. How will your church celebrate the growth of young adults? How might you encourage young adults to use their digital gifts to mentor other disciples in the congregation and improve your online discipleship?
4. How might vocational discernment become a centering point for online discipleship with young adults? How is your congregation equipped to connect faith life with work life? How might vocation translate into community outreach?

You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. . .but that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given [their] own gift.

– EPHESIANS 4:4-13 (THE MESSAGE)

. . .all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free.

– *BOOK OF DISCIPLINE*, ¶ 128

I want you to be all love. This is the perfection I believe and teach.

– JOHN WESLEY FROM *THE WORKS OF JOHN WESLEY*, VOL 27: LETTERS III, 1756-1765

Equipping Disciples Online

David C. Teel, Director, Laity & Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership begins with discipleship, and discipleship begins with relationship. Relational discipleship actually *is* leadership development. If all are called to scriptural holiness, to be “all love” until all love God, then our best discipling efforts—in-person, online, or a seamless hybrid of both—will nurture spiritual leaders (disciples) who are empowered to recognize and respond to their vocation through healthy virtual connections. Every online effort, like every in-person ministry, must connect calling and mission. Discerning calling presence means participating in sacred work.

In the previous sections, you have discovered insights and excellent resources for extending your church’s missional presence beyond in-person experiences to forms of engagement and discipleship in vir-

tual environments. Rooted in the “why” of God’s faithful love in Jesus, your church’s current intentional discipleship system to nurture spiritual growth and share love can be a context-specific map for fostering a consistent awareness of vocation, and deeper participation in the world-repairing mission of God (*mission Dei*), in-person *and* online.

What does spiritual leadership development look like online? As noted above in the previous chapters, faithfulness is a live performance that can be done online. This means the answer to “How do we equip disciples online?” is not radically different from your in-person strategy. As Jeff Campbell reminds us, our online presence should be an organic extension of our intentional discipleship system. While the connection tools may differ, the task remains: equip leaders creating a culture of call that invites participation into the life and mission of the church.

All Called to Be "All Love"

Disciples make disciples. A key but often overlooked insight for all lay leadership development efforts is the conviction that *all* are called to ministry. In this sense, discipleship = leadership = evangelism, since all who follow Jesus lead others to him. Spiritual leaders are not the ones who are uber-talented, or constantly competent, or even those with the best LinkedIn profiles. Spiritual leaders are those who recognize and respond to their calling by participating in the life of the church and following Christ through acts of piety and mercy. They use their gifts to build up the community of faith and embody and proclaim the good news of abundant life in Jesus.

Lay Leadership & Lay Servant Ministries

In the office of Laity and Spiritual Leadership, we support and challenge lay leaders across the connection through resourcing, training, consulting, networking, and fostering conversations that share best practices for fulfilling our mission. Or more simply, we help local church and annual conference leaders to equip laity to make disciples.

We are the beneficiaries of decades of learning and leadership development processes rooted in:

- the priesthood of all believers,
- a Wesleyan emphasis on lay leadership, and
- the conviction that strong lay-clergy partnerships focused on making disciples can create healing faith communities with the spiritual depth to resist forces of evil with the power of Christ's love.

Lay leaders connect church and community, while *lay members* to annual conference interpret the local church to the district, annual conference, jurisdiction, and the general church (and vice versa). The vocation of *lay leaders* is to interpret, communicate, and link the missional efforts of our connectional church to the specific calling of laity in local churches across the global connection. (See the booklet, *Lay Leader, Lay Member: Connect Your Congregation and Your Annual Conference*.)

Lay Servant Ministries (LSM) is one of the most significant lay leadership development programs available in The United Methodist connection. Through training, support, supervision, and accountability, this equipping and empowering discipleship training system promotes discerned calling and deep growth in God's love, creating leaders committed to making disciples. It offers credentialing with support from the district/conference *committees on lay servant ministries for certified lay servants, lay speakers, and Certified Lay Ministers* (CLMs).

Through in-person and online training, lay servant ministries course offerings reflect an awareness that the "why" driving discipleship—love for God and neighbor—has a learning curve. As a teaching, learning, and mentoring ministry equipping participants to "lead, care, and communicate," lay servant ministries efforts follow a discipleship-focused course of study and leadership development path through lay academies, district and annual conference training events, and online learning opportunities through courses at beadisciple.com, teachable.com, and other facilitator-chosen digital platforms. (See your conference website for more information.)

Beginning with the BASIC course, *lay servants* on this leadership training track grow roots deep in Christ as they discern their calling through an exploration of vocation, spiritual gifts, accountable discipleship in formative small groups, faith's wisdom in the Christian tradition, Methodist polity, spiritual practices (works of piety), transformational leadership, preaching, scripture study, public prayer, stewardship, evangelism, mission, and intentional discipleship. (Download/view the Lay Servant Ministries online course descriptions/equipping resources catalog).

Calling & Place

What contributes to persons drifting from a desire to make a difference to apathy and disengagement? What passivates people of faith? How does vocation become disconnected from discipleship? There is no simple answer to such questions, but I am confident that part of the solution is fostering rich vocational imagination and embracing the interdependence between vocation and place.

- Randy G. Litchfield, from *Roots and Routes: Calling, Ministry, and the Power of Place*, Abingdon Press, 2018

How can those at every stage of spiritual growth in an online environment (searching, exploring, beginning, growing, maturing – see Figure A: Adapted from the work of Phil Maynard) find the connection between calling and active participation in mission and ministry? In his book, *Roots and Routes: Ministry, Calling, and the Power of Place*, Dr. Randy G. Litchfield suggests that a lack of vocational imagination is to blame for our inability to recognize God at work and the incarnate or “placed” ways we are called to participate in that work:

Discerning the forms of our partnerships with God's work in the world (vocation) and knowing where we dwell and pilgrim are rarely easy...[But] too often, vocational imagination fails because we look for abstract answers for all time, rather than an embedded call for a particular time and place.

Listening to young people in his classes over the years (both lay and the ordination-bound), Litchfield discovered that vocational imagination is often limited by simple but powerful underlying assumptions or myths about our calling:

- Vocation is limited to certain kinds of ministries
- Ministry is limited to clergy and professionals
- Vocation limited to the place of church
- Vocation is limited to one place in life
- Vocation is limited to one form of serving
- Vocation begins after reaching a point of maturity in discipleship
- Vocation is limited to an occupation or one form of serving
- Vocation is static
- Vocation is someplace else, somewhere in the future
- Vocation is based in individual qualities
- Place is [just] a backdrop to vocation
- Vocation is disconnected from place (*Roots and Routes*, 7-10)

For Litchfield, these assumptions lead to a failure to see God at work and hear the call to help (in online and in-person places). They are rooted in a confusion about who we are, whom we belong to (Christ and others), and the specific, zip code places we are called to serve.

This lack of imagination also causes us to dismiss or diminish the calling of young people, people with disabilities, and those who don't fit our portraits of a typical "leader." Because we belong to God *and* the specific places (and relationships) where we are 'planted,' our identity and sense of belonging are at stake when we can't recognize grace at work and the specific situations calling us to share mercy, bear witness, or resist injustice in every place we connect.

What does this mean for online discipleship? We dwell (attend, engage, participate, share) in online spaces. Recognizing God at work in the "web of relationships" where we dwell and interact can be a first imaginative step in hearing God's call in online environments.

Vocational imagination and a culture of call related to the mission of the church can transform every ministry touchpoint into a calling and

leadership development opportunity. While some see ‘culture of call’ only as a strategic effort to identify future clergy, when we begin to see every online contact point as an opportunity to equip disciples to live out their call in their everyday lives, we begin to fulfill the priesthood of all believers tenant.

Missional Participation, Nominations, and Leadership Development

What would it be like if all leaders in a local church knew their gift picture and where it may be pointing them to live their discipleship?

– Christine Harman, from *For the Common Good: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts*, Discipleship Resources, 2021

As Ken Sloane reminds us in the previous section, *Online Spiritual Gifts*, when a congregation regularly assists disciples in discovering, testing, and practicing their God-given spiritual gifts, it helps disciples find their place in God’s community of faith. Using tools like this in your online discipleship strategy will bring a greater spiritual leadership harvest to your church. It will increase missional participation and engagement in the lives and communities of every disciple.

So how can tools like this translate into an online leadership development strategy? What structure might we attach it to, so that we can increase our awareness of, and strengthen our churches to equip disciples? We recommend strengthening the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development. Often, this committee is only used once a year, prior to charge conference, to fill leadership spots. But the responsibilities of this committee involve discovering and equipping disciples for the ministry of the church.

In Christine Harman’s forthcoming book, *For the Common Good: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts* (Discipleship Resources, 2021), Harman connects the importance of discovering spiritual gifts

with the discipleship systems within the church. Harman emphasizes a “gifts-based ministry system” “to identify, develop, deploy, evaluate, and monitor Christian spiritual leadership” (§ 258.1, 2016 BOD; see *Guidelines-Nominations & Leadership Development: Leaders Are the Key to Church Vitality*). Harman suggests “reframing” this year-round leadership discernment team’s work by asking, “What’s our ‘why’/ mission? What’s our discipleship system? Is it producing results? If not, how can we change it?” For Harman, the values of “an effective gifts-based ministry system” are seen in incarnate results: scripturally sound health, unity, and community impact for the common good through shared gifts serving the church’s mission. An effective gifts-based system is user-friendly and integrated into every facet of the church’s life and ministry. Above all, it reflects and serves the church’s purpose and “why”, communicating the role of every gift in furthering the mission through every connection/platform/place the church engages. The implication of Harman’s spiritual-gifts approach to leadership development for online discipleship is this: an effective gifts-based discipleship system calls the *Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development* to the year-round work of leveraging every ministry in the church that engages people beyond the walls through virtual connections. Every ministry should be invited to reflect on and provide guiding feedback to the *Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development*. Every online communication will need to reflect the culture of call (all called to be all love) that creates measurable, trackable opportunities for vocational discernment and participation in the missional “why” of the church.

Recap

How to enhance your church’s culture of call and vocational imagination for leadership development online:

- Make use of online *Lay Servant Ministry*.
- Connect the dots between vocation and participation. Make sure every disciple through your online strategy knows your “why” for discipleship and mission, how to discover their spiritual gifts, and is invited to listen for God’s call.

- Expand your understanding of the role of the *Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development*; make it a priority for this team to focus on leadership development and discipleship, encouraging disciples to find their call and their spiritual gifts, equipping them to live out their call.
- Encourage a “culture of call” by sharing the stories of those disciples who have recently discovered their call. Share these stories online (think Storycorps or the Moth).
- Seek out leaders with experience as career counselors to help shape the way every person in your church perceives his or her call.
- Work with your *Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development* to evaluate and update your church’s online presence to make sure you are connecting the church’s mission to the call for disciples, emphasizing the priesthood of all believers.
- Invite the *Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development* to guide every ministry area through a process of discerning how the spiritual gifts of disciples fit in light of the church’s mission, offering frequent spiritual gifts courses.

Resources

All Lay Servant Ministries Equipping Resources and Course Descriptions

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/lay-servant-ministries-catalog>

Discipleship Begins with Relationship: A See All the People Online Teaching/Discussion Video Series

<https://discipleship-ministries.teachable.com>

The Committee Teaching Series (examine the struggles congregations face as they look toward a preferred future)

<https://discipleship-ministries.teachable.com>

Be A Disciple (<https://www.beadisciple.com>)

See Lay Servant Ministries courses here (check with your local annual conference committee on lay servant ministries if you wish to take one of these courses for credit.)

<https://www.beadisciple.com/lay-servant-ministries>

Guidelines - Nominations & Leadership Development: Leaders Are the Key to Church Vitality

<https://www.cokesbury.com/Guidelines-Nominations---Leadership-Development-1>

Guidelines - Lay Leader, Lay Member: Connect Your Congregation and Your Annual Conference

<https://www.cokesbury.com/Guidelines-Lay-Leader-Lay-Member-1>

Lay Servants as Christian Transformational Leaders by Marc Brown, Kathy Merry, and John Briggs (Discipleship Resources, 2017).

<https://bookstore.upperroom.org/AdvancedSearch/DefaultWFilter.aspx?searchTerm=lay+servants+as+christian+transformational+leaders>

Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God Given Talents and Inspire Your Community, Albert L. Winseman, Donald O. Clifton, and Curt Liesveld (Gallup Press, 2004).

Job Descriptions and Leadership Training in the United Methodist Church: A Leader Development Guide (2017-2020)

<https://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/DR859/job-descriptions-and-leadership-training-20172020.aspx>

For the Common Good: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts by Christine Harman (Discipleship Resources, Spring 2021).

Powered by Storytelling: Excavate, Craft, and Present Stories to Transform by Murray Nossel (McGraw-Hill, 2018).

Roots and Routes: Ministry, Calling, and the Power of Place by Randy G. Litchfield (Abingdon Press, 2019).

Telling the Old Testament Story: God's Mission and God's People by Brad E. Kelle (Abingdon Press, 2017).

Why Mission? (The New Testament and the Mission of God) by Dean Flemming (Abingdon Press, 2015).

The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World by Deanna A. Thompson (Abingdon Press, 2016).

Using Digital Technologies for Faith Formation Webinar

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/using-digital-technologies-for-faith-formation>

Take a Moment

1. How would you assess your church's understanding of the "priesthood of all believers"? How is it lived out in your discipleship system?
2. What does it mean to be a maturing disciple? How will you communicate a compelling picture of an all-in follower of Jesus?
3. How will your church prioritize vocational (call) imagination and improve your culture of call? How can you 'connect the dots' between call and participation in God's mission?
4. Who are the master storytellers of love's work in your church? How will you encourage this skill in online spaces?

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

– *THE WORKS OF JOHN WESLEY, XVIII, 250*

Online New Member / New Disciple Orientation

Scott Hughes, Executive Director, Congregational Vitality & Intentional Discipleship; Director, Adult Discipleship

Many churches are seeing a rise in online engagement since the COVID19 crisis began. One study conducted by the UnStuck Group shows that more people are now participating in online worship than participated in in-person worship before the crisis began. Shifting the church to online ministries has clearly opened the door for new people to participate in discipleship. How will the church share with these new people what it means to follow Jesus and be a disciple within a faith community? How or will your church welcome new members/disciples online? (For tips and suggestions regarding using online platforms, see *Online Faith Formation & Small Groups*.)

As a good starting place, we recommend that you utilize the booklet *New Member/New Discipleship Orientation* available as a free PDF download at SeeAllThePeople.org. This resource will help you prepare

a new member/disciple orientation for your congregation based on your intentional discipleship system, contextualized for your ministry setting. This booklet will help explain the basics of United Methodist beliefs and practices. Other suggested resources are listed below to help all members/disciples continue the work of living into our baptismal and membership vows.

Being a follower of Christ and part of The United Methodist Church is a gift and a privilege. There are more than twelve million United Methodists across the globe. Members of a United Methodist congregation or people in other United Methodist ministry settings are connected through shared ministries and institutional structures that continue the tradition of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Whether through an in-person or online gathering, through new member/disciple orientations we are helping participants grow in their faith, reflect on what it means to be a disciple, consider what it means to be United Methodist, and live out their faith in service to the church and community.

As churches shift to using online platforms, church leaders have a number of logistical and teaching considerations to think through. You might begin with what topics would normally be covered in a new member/disciple orientation. One helpful way to consider how to design such a class is to first consider what you hope participants will take away:

- How much do you hope they will understand about your church’s history?
- How much will you cover concerning United Methodist beliefs?
- What will you emphasize about the expectations of members/disciples?
- How much time will you dedicate to relationship building among the group?

Once you’ve answered these questions, you can assess how many classes will be needed and how often the classes will meet. What platforms and learning devices will be needed? You might even ponder a

hybrid approach, where some classes are done in-person (perhaps a field trip or more challenging concept) and some through an online platform.

As you consider shifting to online learning platforms, there are a few other considerations for which you'll need to plan. Since some participants (and teachers) might be new to online learning, you may need to think through how to maximize participant engagement. There are *asynchronous* (without time) and *synchronous* (with time) ways to promote engagement. *Asynchronous* platforms might be the use of a closed Facebook group or even an email group for conversation. The closed nature of these groups allow for more trust so questions and comments will not be shared outside the group. The fact that participants can ask questions and offer comments when it is convenient allows participants time to reflect and ponder before commenting. Another helpful way to maximize time and take advantage of learning opportunities is to link to helpful videos and online articles that participants can read prior to class. This will allow the class to maximize in-person or online video conference time, as it can be dedicated to dialogue and learning from one another. Shifting to online learning allows the ability to curate from other voices and use a variety of media (videos, podcasts, online articles, etc.). An example of *synchronous* platforms would be Zoom video conferencing. This platform allows for virtual face-to-face conversation, which is important to promote empathy and to build relationships. Also be mindful that a fatigue can set in when people communicate through video conferencing. There are a few ways to combat this fatigue: take breaks; take advantage of asynchronous tools to extend the conversation and learning; break into smaller breakout groups; or shorten meetings.

With the variety of digital tools and platforms, it is easy to be overwhelmed. Start small, maximize the capabilities of online learning, and be willing to try new things as you attempt to further the disciple-making efforts of your church.

Resources

New Member / New Disciple Orientation booklet (free pdf)

<https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/new-member-new-disciple-orientation>

Our Membership Vows in the United Methodist Church

(Available in 6 different languages)

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/our-membership-vows-in-the-united-methodist-church>

The Meaning of Holy Communion (Available in 6 different languages)

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-meaning-of-holy-communion>

The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-meaning-of-baptism-in-the-united-methodist-church>

Take a Moment

1. What are your end goals for a New Member/Disciple Orientation? How do those goals fit with your church's Intentional Discipleship System?
2. What new possibilities does shifting to an online (or hybrid) learning model provide for your church?
3. Which topics or concepts might best be dealt with in-person rather than online?

Connecting Online & In-Person Discipleship

Scott Hughes, Executive Director, Congregational Vitality & Intentional Discipleship; Director, Adult Discipleship

The final question is, “How will our online discipleship become an integral part of our overall intentional discipleship system?” In the twenty-first century, the admonishment for churches to continue meeting together (Hebrews 10:25) can include in-person and online gatherings. We are fortunate that many people—sadly not all—have broadband access that gives them the ability to connect online. While this is especially important during times when physical distancing is required, it is also an important avenue for churches to be in ministry with those who have physical limitations. The mission of the church compels us to meet people where they are, and most people are now digitally connected in some way. Digital platforms have numerous advantages. One such advantage is overcoming the hurdles of geography. Participants can connect across the world with no commute time. Digital platforms also overcome time obstacles. Participants can connect and engage when it is convenient for them, and churches can record events that are easily shareable to be viewed later.

As churches use online platforms for discipleship, the platforms themselves become far more than just for spreading information, but should include intentional means to encourage participation and engagement. As people created in the image of God, we are created to be in relationship. As part of the baptized, we are called into the diverse body of Christ, which is often messy and challenging (both

in-person and online). As church leaders, we must remember that the Christian faith is an embodied faith. The temptation of online connections, and sometimes even in-person connections, is that they can become self-selected communities that affirm our biases. We need the rich diversity of the community, regardless if it is in-person or online. We need to hear and be present with those who are hurting and grieving. Lasting community requires sacrifice and tangible acts of presence, self-giving, and intimacy. We should strive for this idea of community both in person and in our online discipleship.

As you begin or strengthen your online discipleship, don't forget to free yourself and your congregation to experiment and try new things! Some platforms will resonate with some people and not others. Not everyone will welcome or participate in online platforms—ask good questions about why. (It may not be for the reasons you think.) Keep trying and keep perfecting. The bottom line is that there are people who hunger to grow spiritually, who desire a deeper sense of belonging and community offered by the church but who may need or prefer online platforms for various reasons (health or mobility concerns, etc). Whatever we do, let us be intentional and keep the mission of seeing all the people at the center of it all.

As we extend our online discipleship into the future, how will churches with a strong online discipleship presence responsibly handle the discipleship and care of disciples in other parts of our state, country, or world? What should the church do if or when someone who is connecting with us online asks to be baptized? Many churches with permission from their bishops are now offering online Communion. Will online baptism be next? How do we care for disciples who are connected to us online, but get sick and require pastoral care? Funeral services? Will our United Methodist connectionalism be strong enough to connect those disciples with a local United Methodist congregation near them? We shall see.

Examples from Across the Connection

Mississippi Annual Conference

The Mississippi Annual Conference has created a central place where churches can access digital discipleship resources. Check out their Youtube video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzzAteS56tQ&t=10s>

North Texas Annual Conference

The North Texas Conference has shifted its approach to resourcing and supporting the Conference Strategy of Gathering New Faces in New Spaces to Online Spaces. To date, the North Texas Conference is reaching more people online than at any time in history. A series of webinars was developed by the North Texas Conference Center for Church Development to assist churches in the technology and best practices related to doing church online:

Practical Approaches for Online Worship

<https://youtu.be/vkykyKsxJgs>

Engaging Online Worship

<https://youtu.be/9AhiHtVvgM4>

Growing Disciples & Funding Ministries Amid COVID-19

<https://youtu.be/xwm4xEAPmyk>

Tech Talk with NTC Geeks

<https://youtu.be/pt0CyG1P0UU>

While most churches were seeking to minister to their members through online worship, the NTC Center for Church Development sought to focus pastors and congregations on the new faces that were discovering their church online and to help them connect with those faces and gather the information. A “Gathering New Faces” webinar (<https://youtu.be/YM3SV1wuAUM>) was held, and a \$500 grant was offered to churches to turn their attention to connecting with the new faces that were connecting with their church. To date, the Center for Church Development has issued grants to almost a third of North Texas Conference churches, and plans are being developed to continue to assist churches in innovative online ministries, even as churches are making plans to congregate in person. A new era in evangelism and discipleship is here, as new faces are gathering in online spaces.

To learn more, visit North Texas Conference website:

<https://ntcumc.org/new-faces>

Arkansas Annual Conference

This conference has also organized a webpage to support online discipleship. They offer a library of articles and activities from a variety of sources, as well as an excellent selection of virtual games for youth. This page is regularly updated and crowdsourced among those active in youth ministry in the Arkansas Annual Conference.

https://arumc.org/our-ministries/youth-young-adults/youth-workers-network/youth-ministry-while-social-distancing/?fbclid=IwAR3CdBCbIIWyX8XPui1WqK8SnKM_LdRptzjixEC6OFvG7oV52ZfhaNHS4M0

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“As many churches begin to shift adding an online presence, it is important we not neglect vital elements of our discipleship system. You may have added online worship, but what is missing? Using this resource, church leaders are challenged to think through what a balanced approach to online discipleship looks like. We hope you will discover that adding online discipleship to your intentional discipleship system can be accomplished through creative resourcing of your church leaders, supported by this resource. The mission of the church has expanded and now includes online spaces! We are now called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world—online.”

- Jeff Campbell, Associate General Secretary, Programming, Discipleship Ministries



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