



Launching a Digital Church – Catapulted into the Unknown with a Mission for Discipleship

By Rev. Jodi Getson

Alongside my pastoral colleagues, like it or lump it, I found myself catapulted into the digital world of ministry in 2020. I frantically read articles, attended seminars, watched YouTube videos, and furiously scrambled to find my footing in this “new normal.” While attending online training on digital ministry, something was said that stirred deep within me. It was the statement, “Jesus called us to be fishers of men, but we settle to be keepers of the aquarium” (Nona Jones). I felt a raging internal conflict for days. I could not escape the calling of Christ that we are to “go” and make disciples, yet for the most part, I had to admit, we ask disciples to “come” to us. The sad truth that most folks will never come to a church service, coupled with the estimate that 30,000 people per month were searching for “church online,” rattled around within me.

With painstaking love and attention, we care well for the aquarium, no question about it! But was this all Jesus wanted from me, or was He also calling me to “go”? Like most pastors, I was already busy enough, yet the digital mission field was a reality. Was I willing to go? Was my church willing? We began to pray and discuss this idea as a staff and church board. We felt the answer was a resounding, GO! Our hearts were aroused with a burning desire to reach people with the good news, the love and the hope of Jesus Christ, and so we began the process of planting a digital church online.

Online Church is not a Ministry Add-on, It’s a Mission

I need to stress that to launch a digital church is not a ministry add-on. It goes beyond broadcasting our services, calling people to gather in, or sharing information out. It is a church birthed from a deep sense

of mission and calling. It requires intentional pastoral care and a focused discipleship plan in addition to the more obvious technical and social networking skills.

Online ministry requires a deep level of authenticity built into a digital context. We need to continually ask the question, "How do we create an experience that facilitates connection among people?" It is tough stuff! Far more than just sharing a Sunday message, it comes with a desire to integrate a relationship with Jesus into the everyday rhythms and routines of peoples' lives even though there is no physical gathering.

We began to see this happen in our OxNaz Daily Devotional Group. As a small church that was averaging around 110 per week pre-COVID, we began to have 110 people gather around God's Word and devotional thought every day, sharing, engaging, and building relationships. People started to share prayer requests, prayers, and encouragement for each other. God was building His church online! Our church's online ministry has hundreds of people actively building a relationship. We have more than doubled our physical church attendance in online weekly participants.

Marching forward in Faith

There are many new concepts to embrace in digital communications and setting up an identity where the physical church and online church are separate but connected. We have only begun, but I have a deep sense that in the days, months, and years to come, the church's need to "go" will only increase. We follow Christ as He leads us into this unknown digital world, sure to make mistakes at times but confident that He who called is faithful! So, we go!