



ONLINE CHURCH

*How to Go Beyond
Streaming a Service
to Bringing People
into the Body*

ONLINE CHURCH: HOW TO GO BEYOND STREAMING A SERVICE TO BRINGING PEOPLE INTO THE BODY

*The heart of **Online Church** is reaching people for Jesus and providing a way for them to belong to the family of God.*

As more and more churches have moved into the online space, new questions are being asked around the digital church experience.

These range from the esoteric:

Would Jesus be on Instagram?

Would he upload his messages to YouTube?

To the more fundamental:

How much should our online experience match our in person experiences?

How does online church fit into the broader church's purpose?

As with all things, when considering the functionality of church online, it helps to look at the purposes for which it was made. The five purposes of the Church found in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission are not limited to any venue or platform.

THE 5 PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

- FELLOWSHIP:** Belong to God's family
- DISCIPLESHIP:** Become more like Jesus
- WORSHIP:** Love Jesus
- MINISTRY:** Serve in the church
- EVANGELISM:** Serve in the world and share the Good News



Digging into this foundation of “why” helps us understand the “what” of online church – what do the five purposes of the church look like in a digitally saturated world?

We’ve found online church efforts highlight your strengths and amplify your problems. A healthy church, one that is balancing God’s five purposes for the Church, will be able to extend its vision and values using the internet because it is focused. An unhealthy church will struggle.

The key to online ministry or launching an online campus is zeroing in on your church’s strengths. Don’t replicate what other churches are doing assuming you can quickly build an audience. Church online and online efforts like social media go beyond filling seats or packing out a livestream. Find and do what makes sense for your church, your vision, and the people you pastor.

Think of your online church attenders not just as viewers but as disciples. You need a strategy for how to move the online “watchers” into an intentional discipleship process in your church, a partner church, or maybe a home church. There are three approaches to consider as you think through expanding online endeavors and how to fit all this together, but first, let’s look at some data of what’s been happening with those already streaming their services online.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Is online church important? Will it help or hurt my church’s weekend attendance? Recent data from across the nation has some interesting things to say about the value of an online experience for your church. We highly suggest reading *The State of Online Church* and *What Do We Know About Online Church*, but to save you time, here are three things to consider:

...ONLINE IS YOUR NEW FRONT DOOR. SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT OF CHURCHES SURVEYED IN ONE REPORT SAID PEOPLE ATTENDED THEIR ONLINE CHURCH EXPERIENCE FIRST, THEN SHOWED UP IN-PERSON.

First, online is your new front door. Seventy-five percent of churches surveyed in one report said people attended their online church experience first, then showed up in-person. The unchurched want to know what is going on inside that building you call church. Watching a service from the safety of their home demystifies the unfamiliar experience. The potential visitor is making judgments the same way you and I make decisions for dinner using an app.

Number two, both studies revealed streaming isn’t hurting local attendance for the majority of churches embracing an online approach. It’s hard to understand the real impact of putting your service online, but I find it significant that most churches aren’t seeing a

recognizable negative affect. When people first started streaming, many thought their building would be emptied. Some put up geo fences limiting local watchers, and others just avoided streaming and YouTube altogether.

...STREAMING ISN'T HURTING LOCAL ATTENDANCE FOR THE MAJORITY OF CHURCHES EMBRACING AN ONLINE APPROACH.

This is a fear-based approach not based on facts. People come to your church because of personal relationships, and they stay because of the community and vision. The content from the pulpit is a factor, *but not the main contributor*. The majority of the churches surveyed saw either local growth since launching online streaming or no direct impact

on attendance. Only twenty percent think online streaming is hurting their church locally, but that number has drastically gone down over the last ten years. My suspicion is that for the percentage seeing a negative impact on attendance is that they need to reevaluate their connection strategy (more on that later).

...MANY CHURCHES ARE EMPOWERING YOUNGER LEADERS TO EXPLORE ONLINE CHURCH METHODOLOGY, BUT NOT PROVIDING ENOUGH RESOURCES AND COACHING.

Third, many churches are empowering younger leaders to explore online church methodology, but not providing enough resources and coaching. Eighty-eight percent of US churches see online as a vital part of their future. Still, thirty-nine percent say they lack vision in this area and thirty-seven percent are not sure how to integrate online into their vision.

Your online presence is becoming the most crucial first impression outreach to your community - it needs attention from senior leadership. I hope you find it encouraging that everyone is struggling with how to capitalize and integrate an online paradigm into their local church's vision. If you feel that way, you're not alone, and by the end of this resource will have some guardrails and context to launch an online ministry better.

ONLINE CHURCH DEFINED:

Far beyond simply a replay of a physical church gathering, an enhanced online church experience creates an environment in which to apply 1 Corinthians chapter 12 principles of encouraging, teaching, and building one another up in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

1 Cor. 12:24-27

THE PURPOSE OF ONLINE CHURCH:

FOR THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY SEEKING, YOUR ONLINE CHURCH SERVICE MAY BE THE FRONT DOOR TO YOUR CHURCH LONG BEFORE THEY STEP FOOT ON YOUR PHYSICAL CAMPUS.

Online Church provides a way for those not able attend a local congregation to actively join a church body from anywhere. Additionally, offering church online allows for new believers to grow in maturity and if a local church body arrives in their area they will have grown in their understanding of Scripture of the value of attending a local church body. For

those who are spiritually seeking, your online church service may be the front door to your church long before they step foot on your physical campus.

PURPOSE DRIVEN MODEL OF THE CHURCH: LOOKING AT ACTS 2:42-47

God designed the Church to fulfill five purposes found in the Great Commandment and Great Commission, and echoed throughout the rest of Scripture: bringing people in to the family of God through membership, growing them to maturity, training them to serve the body in ministry, sending them out on mission to love their neighbor, all for the glory and magnification of God's name. Churches become healthy when they balance all of these purposes - and church online is no different!

YOUR CHURCH'S ONLINE EXPERIENCE CAN WELCOME PEOPLE IN AND THEN HELP SHEPHERD THEM THROUGH AN INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS.

Online church can go far beyond simply a replay or a streaming of your church's physical service. Your church's online experience can welcome people in and then help shepherd them through an intentional discipleship process. A great example of how to approach this process is found in the table below, utilizing the purposes of the church as exemplified in **Acts 2:42-27**:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

PURPOSE	TASK	ACTS 2:42-47	OBJECTIVE	ONLINE APPLICATION
Outreach	Evangelize	"...added to their number daily those who were being saved."	Mission	Invited to Online Worship Service
Worship	Exalt	"They devoted themselves to... breaking of bread and prayers... praising God."	Magnify	Online Worship Service
Fellowship	Encourage	"...devoted to the fellowship... all the believers were together... they ate together."	Member	Online Small Group
Discipleship	Edify	"They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching."	Maturity	Online Discipleship Classes
Service	Equip	"They gave to anyone as he had need."	Ministry	Serve at Online Worship Service or in Online Small Group

For more on balancing the purposes and structuring your church for health, visit [PD.church/getstarted](https://pd.church/getstarted).

PLATFORMS FOR VIRTUAL CHURCH

The early church in the book of Acts modeled what the church was all about. Specifically, in Acts 5:52 it says, *“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”* In this verse we see that different types of meetings have existed since the very first days of the church to achieve different goals. These meeting types and goals can be replicated in an online experience:

Scripture	Local Church Expression	Virtual Church Expression
“Temple Courts”	Worship Service	Online Worship Service
“House to House”	Small Group Ministry	Online Small Group Ministry
“Never Stopped Teaching”	Classes, Courses, Curriculum	Online Learning Platform, Zoom Gatherings
“Proclaiming the Good News”	Social Media Platform & Ads	Social Media Platform & Ads

It’s important to remember Jesus was always more focused on the people he was reaching than his mode of communication. Jesus, and later the apostles, leveraged the Roman Roads and other “technologies” that would have been considered modern for their day and age. Can a specific platform help accomplish your mission? Most social networks and online tools can potentially be leveraged to reach your goals, but there is no “one size fits all” recipe. You’ll need to figure out what works for your church.

Being on every platform won’t automatically grow your church. It takes a well thought out strategy aligned with your vision for it to work. It’s also helpful to note that in online church as in all church endeavors, it helps for you to know the people you are shepherding. What platforms are your community and members engaged with? Perhaps your target demographic is on one platform more than another. Knowing your sheep will help you know where to find them online

PROCESS OF VIRTUAL CHURCH

Jesus worked through a process with individuals moving them increasingly into deeper levels of faith and deeper fellowship with himself and other believers. We see in the New Testament, Jesus first asked the disciples to “Come and see,” then asked them to “come and follow,” and after a few years asked them to “Come and die” to themselves. This gradual approach built peoples’ faith through an incremental approach we term as *crawl*, *walk*, and *run* steps.

Below are eight steps for Online Church to ultimately produce fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Invitation or Online Advertising

A spiritually seeking person is invited to watch a service online or sees a targeted advertisement and clicks on the ad to learn more

Online Worship Service

The person attends online worship service and completes response card to talk with the pastoral team to get connected

Online Facebook Group

The person joins large Facebook Group to learn more about the Christian faith, but (more importantly) to see who else is like them and if others are asking similar questions

Online Learning New Believer Course

New believer completes online course about what it means to put Jesus first in your life, belong to a church family, and getting into biblical community

Online Small Group

New member interacts with a weekly Facebook live event in the large Facebook Group. That experience encourages them to start a private Facebook group with close friends, people they met in a large Facebook Group, to allow for more private discussion. Private small groups will start off primarily via text-based interactions, move to audio calls after a few weeks, and hopefully turn into regular Zoom or Facebook video calls as trust is built within the group. Together the group can study the Bible and support each other spiritually.

**Online Learning
Growing Deeper
in Faith Course**

Completes course about learning spiritual disciplines of reading God's Word, prayerful lifestyle, and giving back to God with time, talents, and treasures

Ministry Team

Joins an online ministry team to help with online worship service, small group ministry, or social media ministry

**OPTIONAL:
Local Church or
House Church**

Those who don't have safety concerns are encouraged to assimilated into local church or start a house church with others by creating Online Church viewing experiences in community

FIVE COMPONENTS TO LAUNCHING VIRTUAL CHURCH

Online Worship Service:

As you design your online worship service, here are some needs to consider:

- Effective Biblical teaching
- A website designed for engagement with your targeted persona in mind
- High quality video production
- Real-time community interactions
- A pathway for next steps (email for new believers? Etc.)
- Pastoral follow up

Social Media Ministry:

Your church's social media presence can function in tandem with your online church service to draw people in and continue the conversation. Here are needs to consider – and roles to mobilize members to – in the social media space:

- Content creation team
- Engagement team
- Marketing plan to grow your reach and presence

Small Group Ministry:

Small groups are a key to retaining those who are attracted to your large group gathering (your online worship service). While there may be safety for the spiritual seeker in the anonymity of the online worship service, the quicker they can get connected to an online small group, the sooner they will have the opportunity to discover relationships with other believers, as well as spiritual support and discipleship.

As you grow your online small group ministry, you will need a team focused on building up a large Facebook Group community with real-time Facebook live events and overseeing a smaller group of individuals who meet privately for deeper conversations. Small Groups can use video and/or texted based curriculum to guide individual meeting times over streaming platforms like Zoom. Additionally, training courses will be needed to help raise up small group hosts and teach them to be well rounded groups focused on being healthy.

Classes for Online Learning:

Creating an intentional discipleship process that grows believers to maturity will require rethinking how your church delivers discipleship programs. If you have programs like Bible studies, how can these experiences be streamed or offered online for your online members?

One longer term solution is an online learning system that will allow members to access classes on demand at their own pace. For a learning system your church will need multiple well thought out on-demand course tracks breaking down the basics of following Jesus with dynamic video teaching in an interactive way.

Pastoral Care Team:

As you build your online church experience you will want pastoral oversight to care for specific issues that arise within the community. This team can also help address any care needs that arise above and beyond what can be handled in the small groups. Leadership should be continually adjusting the vision to better move new believers to become fully devoted followers of Jesus. The Pastor Leadership Team needs to be fast, fluid, and flexible with an always changing world of online church.

THREE APPROACHES FOR A HEALTHY ONLINE CHURCH

There are three approaches for online church or expressing your church's paradigm using the internet. Your church should consider all three strategies when making decisions from investing in a social media presence or why to launch a stream on Facebook. It all needs to connect to your church's goals, and high-level conversations with leadership need to happen for success to clearly be defined.

1. The “Nearby” Approach: Engage with people locally using the internet.

Your church can use the internet to reach people in your community and drive them to your church location. In this scenario online church becomes your “front door.” Examples include Facebook Live, Church Online Platform, and/or YouTube, in which streamed services invite people to attend the next weekend in-person.

This approach also leverages the internet to help your members engage with the church's paradigm while not at your church. For example, online church can provide ways for people who are sick or in a restricting season of life to attend. It can also allow them to engage to complete discipleship material in their ideal learning preference and/or be part of an Online Group.

2. The “Anywhere” Approach: Engage people through the internet to participate in your church's paradigm by starting a location in their city.

For the first iteration of this approach members participate in the church's paradigm online only (ex. Online Groups). As they develop, they are then encouraged to begin expressing the paradigm locally with others in their city. (ex. A House Church)

3. The “Hybrid” Approach: Engage people through the internet to participate in your church's paradigm by attending your church's location OR starting a location in their city.

In this approach, your online church can function as both an entry point for your community's in-person attendance while also creating community among those farther away who may want to begin a church expression in their region.

Carefully consider all three approaches when thinking about launching a weekly stream on Facebook or providing a robust interactive online church experience using the Church Online Platform.

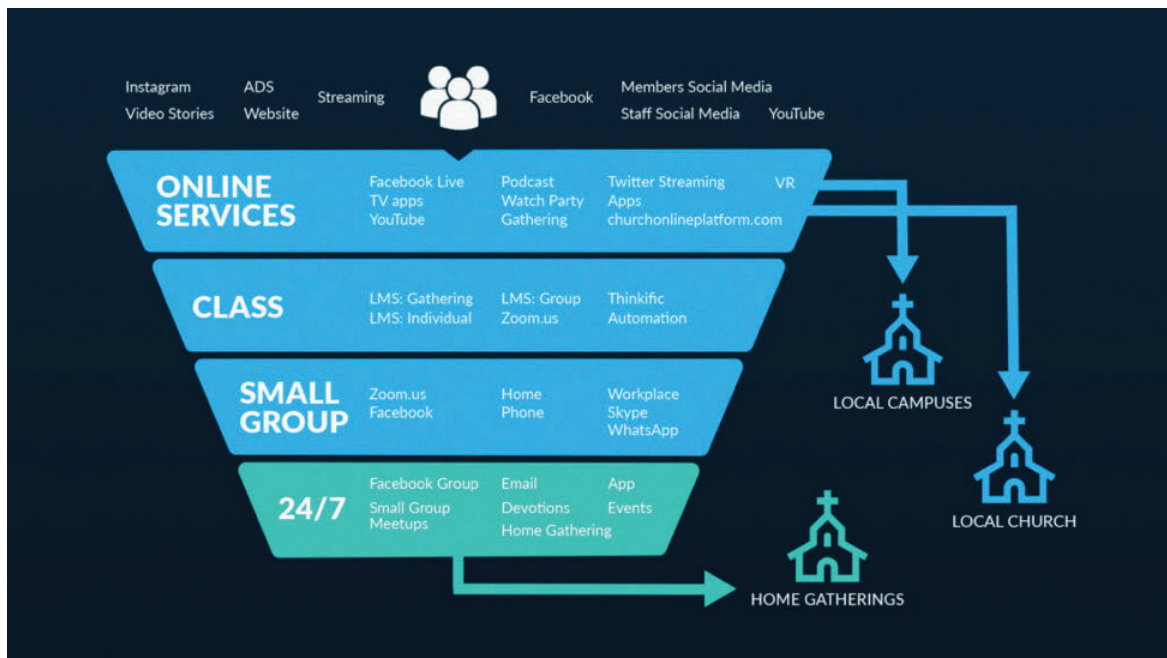
Which method works best with your church's vision? The approach defines the goals. If you're using the Nearby Approach, then make sure during the live stream to invite

people online to visit your church the next weekend and provide an easy way for the watcher to complete a connection card. If the Anywhere Approach is your choice, then provide a way for watchers to engage in your church remotely. For example, problem-solve so online attenders can take your classes online using a Learning Management Software (LMS), access small group material digitally, or attend other part of your church's paradigm online.

So, what's your next step?

I suggest you have a real dialogue with your leadership about the pathway in which you bring people into your church and build them to maturity. Bring up all three of these approaches and draw a clear line of what you want to try to express online. At what point do you want to drive people to a local church or in-person experience?

Sample Pathway:



Talk openly about the approaches. I highly suggest starting with the first approach. Once you have begun to explore online church in your context and your leadership team understands the wins, then you can build towards broader goals.

For example, in the Nearby Approach, the “win” is figuring out how to move someone from a stream to attending in-person. So the questions become:

- What are the barriers to moving someone from watching online to sitting in a seat the next Sunday? Who oversees the online experience?
- Does a tech role or pastor play point person of the online service?

- How do people online complete a response card?
- Who is handling the follow up on response cards?
- What do you measure weekly for attendance?

All these questions have more clear answers once the approach and pathway are decided.

Staffing for Online Church

As you develop a more robust online presence, here are four online pastor job descriptions to consider in your sourcing and hiring:

1. Online Host Pastor

Focus: Coordination & Assimilation

Location: 30 mile radius of church address(es)

Hours: Volunteer or Part-Time

Description: Oversee online church service, coordinate details for the weekly stream(s), manage volunteer ministries associated with online church service, monitor metrics for online church service, and create/manage the strategy to move watchers of online church service to attend in-person church service.

2. Digital Outreach Pastor

Focus: Coordination, Assimilation, & Digital 1st Impressions

Location: 30 mile radius of church address(es)

Hours: Part-Time or Full-Time

Description: The Digital Host Pastor does everything the Online Host Pastor does plus creates compelling digital experiences for unchurched people in your community to discover what your church is about. This could be through Facebook Ads, special online events, Zoom connections, and/or social media strategy focused on moving watchers to attend in-person.

3. Online Campus Pastor

Focus: Coordination, Assimilation, Digital 1st Impressions, & Community

Location: Anywhere

Hours: Full-Time

Description: Everything the Online Host Pastor and Digital Outreach Pastor does plus oversees online small groups and online video courses associated with your discipleship pathway focused on moving watchers to attend in-person or get connected to a nearby partner church in their area.

Optional: Experiment with having online watchers start small groups in their home to see if interest exists to launch microsites associated with your church through online services.

4. Church Anywhere Pastor

Focus: Coordination, Assimilation, Digital 1st Impressions, Community, & Church Planting

Location: Anywhere

Hours: Full-Time

Description: Everything the Online Host Pastor, Digital Outreach Pastor, and Online Campus Pastor does plus oversee watch parties where small groups host a church service in their home, which can develop into a microsite/campus of your church if nurtured.

Optional: Church Anywhere Pastor can oversee the entire strategy or partner with a full-time Microsite Pastor, which the Church Anywhere Pastor would cultivate leads through watch parties and handoff to the Microsite Pastor.

Record and Celebrate Successes

Find and document stories of success throughout your testing period to prove the potential of further investing in your online paradigm. We've provided many data points around what online church can do, but the stories from your own church are most powerful.

IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING RELEVANT, BUT ABOUT BEING PURPOSEFUL WITH YOUR TIME AND RESOURCES.

The internet provides a tremendous opportunity to fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission, but wisdom is needed. It's not about being relevant, but about being purposeful with your time and resources. Pick an approach for six months. After the trial period, regroup, and talk about what worked, what didn't work, and dream about phase two of the experience.

GETTING STARTED

11 Steps to Embracing Facebook and Youtube Streaming of Your Service

1. Focus on how to move "watchers" to "attenders" and think through your intentional process.
2. Welcome those online personally on video during the service and drive viewers to complete a response form, send email/text, or DM the page.

3. Put in place a chat host (kind of like a digital greeter) who can say hi to those online and answer questions during the stream.
4. Launch an online follow-up team to handle response forms, emails, texts, and DMs. Care for people one-on-one and connect back to a physical location.
5. Empower a volunteer to oversee your stream. Consider someone who owns their own business because they tend to be social media savvy.
6. Launch a Facebook Group for those online to be in the community during the week. Think of your Facebook Group as a patio experience digitally.
7. Explore launching online groups if people desire to gather, but can't meet in-person [VIDEO COURSE: How Online Small Groups Work].
8. Get classes up online with a Learning Management Software (L.M.S.) like Teachable.com, YouTube.com, or Thinkific.com.
9. Dive into "Insights" on Facebook and "Analytics" on YouTube to see what is happening during your stream. Zero-in on retention metrics. Don't get wrapped up in how many people viewed your content, but how long did they watch and figure out how many people engaged during the service.
10. Tell stories of moving people from online-offline and share stories of assimilation with your leadership. Get your leadership excited about what is possible online, which will help in enhancing your digital experience.
11. Expand your online experiences by exploring churchonlineplatform.com.

About the Author:



Jay Kranda is the Online Pastor at Saddleback Church. He oversees an online community with online small groups, home groups, and local gatherings around the globe. Jay is the co-author of the free ebook "State of the Online Church". He loves NBA basketball and cold brew coffee. Jay is married to his wife Jody Kranda, and together they have 3 children-- two boys and a girl.