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DigiVangelism: Sharing Faith on Digital Platforms

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Abstract

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Church attendance across the U.S. is declining, and the number of churchless Americans is on the rise. However, the number of people who engage digital platforms, such as social media, continues to increase daily. By underutilizing the digital tools at its disposal, the Church has potentially missed opportunities to build community, extend pastoral care, and ultimately, integrate unchurched and de-churched populations into the community of faith. DigiVangelism is a strategy that attempts to re-package evangelism in a way that re-engages the disengaged and propels the Gospel message on digital platforms. If people are online, churches should be online too. It is incumbent upon the Church to embrace new forms of communication and form 'new house church' in order to give its message greater potential for greater reach.

DigiVangelism:
Sharing Faith on Digital Platforms

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Glossary of Terms

Adobe After Effects

An Adobe software for creating motion graphics. This software is available on both PC and Mac.

DSLR Camera

A DSLR camera is a Digital Single-Lens Reflex camera often used for photography and videography in professional settings.

Final Cut Pro X

A professional video editing software produced by Apple. This software is exclusively available on Apple's desktop and laptop computers.

Point and Shoot

Point and shoot cameras automatically adjust the internal camera settings (i.e. iso, aperture, shutter speed) in any photo or video shooting environment and are consumer-friendly.

I. Introduction

Church attendance across America is on the decline. However, while the number of church attendees drops, the number of the churchless is on the rise. A churchless person can be defined “as someone who has not attended a Christian church service, other than a special event such as a wedding or funeral, at any time during the past six months.”¹ In response to the decline in attendance at Christ Missionary Baptist Church (hereafter referred to as CMBC), this DMin project was implemented to measure how sharing faith on digital platforms could impact and engage the culture, in particularly the unchurched and de-churched populations.

Facebook was selected as the primary platform for dissemination as it houses CMBC’s largest audience with over 6,933 followers. The *60 Second Faith Project*, as it was named, was executed with hopes that it might spark conversation about faith among Christians, both those who are actively engaged in CMBC and other communities of faith and those who have chosen to disengage from the Church altogether.

The *60 Second Faith Project* was comprised of a series of testimonial videos, filmed in interview style, that captured the faith of parishioners from CMBC. To properly execute and implement this project, extensive reading and research was completed on evangelism, the use of technology in the Church, and how ministry might be extended beyond church edifices, reaching to the unchurched and de-churched populations.

Explanation of the context

CMBC, is a community of faith with a membership of 1,100. Located in the heart of the South Memphis community, CMBC has been a vibrant, thriving congregation since 1967. With

¹ George Barna and David Kinnaman, ed., *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, (Illinois: Tyndale, 2014), 6.

only two senior pastors in the history of the church, CMBC has had dedicated, hard-working leadership that was and is committed to seeing the church grow spiritually and numerically.

CMBC was the product of a church split with 37 of its founding members leaving their congregation to form CMBC. They invited Rev. Eddie L. Currie, who was the Senior Pastor of a church in Brownsville, TN, to leave his established congregation and become their pastor. In 1967, the founding members formed CMBC and dedicated themselves to building a community of faith that was committed to God and the service of God's people.

Within one year of its inaugural worship service, the church began to see growth in its membership, but it also struggled to find a permanent space for worship. They would soon locate and acquire a property at 494 South Parkway East, purchasing it for \$115,000. This was a tremendous undertaking and purchase for 39 African Americans with low-wage income in the late 1960s. However, such a purchase would reveal their faith in God and their commitment to see CMBC flourish.

After building a ministry to the glory of God and cultivating a strong community of faith for 26 years, the Rev. Eddie L. Currie died suddenly. His untimely death left a significant void in the congregation because it was now without a pastor. To many of the parishioners, the future of CMBC seemed uncertain following Rev. Currie's death; however, he made intentional investments in securing the future of the church. Five years prior to his death, his decision to license and ordain a woman in a Black Baptist church in the South, and commit to grooming her for ministry, was unprecedented. Following his death, she would become his successor.

In March of 1995, by an overwhelming majority, CMBC elected Rev. Gina M. Stewart as the next pastor of CMBC. This election would make her the first African American female to be

elected as the Senior Pastor of an established African American Baptist Church in Memphis, TN and Shelby County.

The church has experienced exponential growth since Rev. Stewart has assumed the pastorate. Her preaching and compassionate style of leadership has proven to be a tremendous drawing point for men and women seeking to unite with a community of faith. As a result, more than 5,000 people have united with CMBC since 1995.

In 2010, CMBC became one church in two locations. Our satellite location (known as CMBC-East) is located in an affluent neighborhood and the make-up of the congregation reflects it. Juxtaposed to our East location, our South location is located in an urban context that is riddled with crime, violence, and poverty. Although we are located 7 minutes from what is becoming economic surplus in Downtown Memphis, the community surrounding our South location continues to deteriorate. While CMBC has committed to be a beacon of light in the community, in some ways, the community's deterioration has also impacted CMBC. There was a time when CMBC was the 'neighborhood church'. As times, and the culture have changed, people from the neighborhood are no longer uniting with CMBC and active participation from the membership is declining. A survey completed several years ago at CMBC revealed that nearly 80% or more of the congregation commutes 20-30 minutes each week to attend worship. Those who once lived within walking distance of the church, now live in other sections of the city. We assume that this mass exodus towards better neighborhoods have been a result of the crime and violence within and surrounding the South Memphis community.

For several years our attendance in worship and other communal activities was stable. Even though the majority of our congregation was commuting, we hadn't seen a drop in the number of

parishioners who attended the worship services. However, in the last three to five years, we've noticed a gradual decline in worship attendance; in particular at our South location.

Over the last two years, our senior leadership, in collaboration with our media department, have worked to identify solutions that can best address the decline in worship attendance. It has not been easy to accurately pinpoint the reason why CMBC's attendance has declined or fluctuates; however, we have been intentional in evaluating the role technology can play in ministering to and reaching those who no longer attend worship services with any regularity.

The *60 Second Faith Project* served as a method for exploring how the use of digital media could be impactful for a congregation seeking to revitalize its membership and reach populations that otherwise would not enter its edifice.

Statement of the problem

“We're facing one of the largest shifts in human communication in the history of the world. This is not hyperbole. Social media has caused literally every societal building block to adapt. Social media is a small, tip-of-the-iceberg, visible manifestation of the change we're facing.”² Christ Missionary Baptist Church has the necessary resources to enable her to take full advantage of today's latest digital platforms. However, exploring ways to share the Gospel and faith messages in a manner that intentionally engages Christians and the unchurched and de-churched populations, is a challenge still to be overcome. By underutilizing the digital tools at our disposal, we have potentially missed opportunities to build community, help individuals foster a

² Justin Wise, *The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers), 2014, Loc 138. Kindle Edition.

deeper relationship with Christ, and ultimately lead inactive participants to becoming active³ within the community of faith at CMBC.

The purpose of this doctoral project is to create and disseminate a five-part, video-based series which includes faith testimonies from parishioners of CMBC. This five-part video series is designed to be shared on digital platforms with hopes that the content will reach Christians and the unchurched and de-churched populations. By purposefully engaging these populations, CMBC hopes to help them cultivate a deeper relationship with Christ and become active participants in a community of faith or at CMBC. For the purpose of this project, I will refer to the process by which churches can use digital platforms in evangelistic ways as DigiVangelism. This project hopes to expose and bring understanding to the complexities involved with using digital platforms to share faith and the Gospel message.

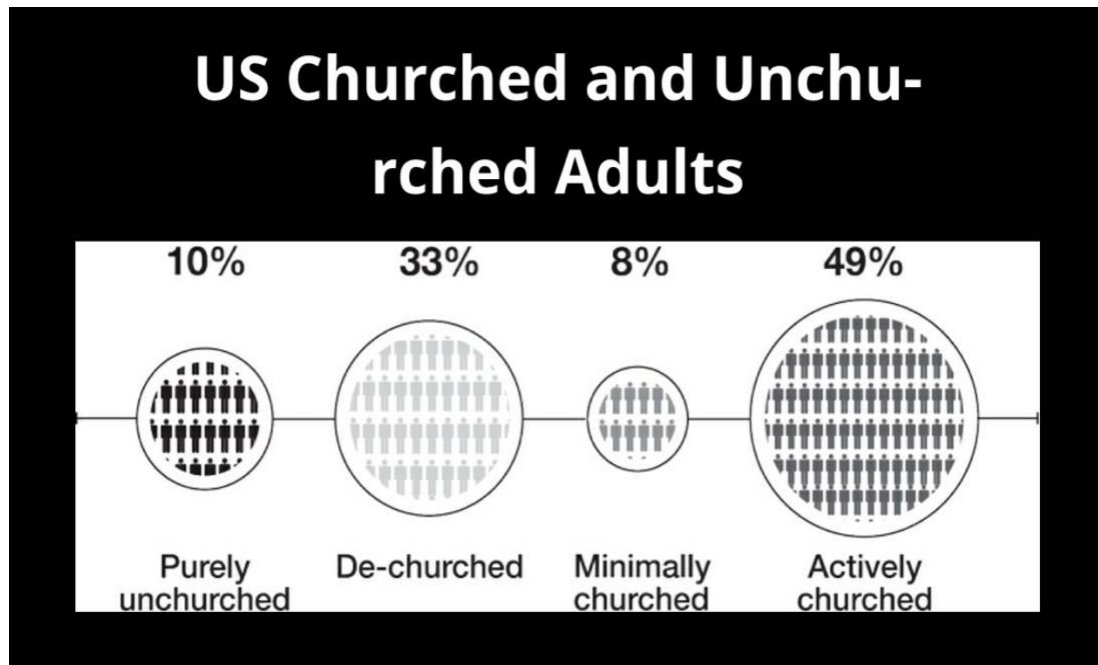
II. A Mass Exodus

CMBC is not the only congregation experiencing a decline in Sunday morning worship attendance. Studies and statistics show that mainline churches and denominations across the U.S. are seeing a decrease in the number of parishioners who align pews weekly. “In the U.S. alone, the Christian population decreased by nearly 8 percent between 2007 and 2014.”⁴ Simply stated, CMBC represents the microcosm of the macrocosm. There is a larger issue taking place in Protestant churches; people just aren’t coming to church. According to the chart below provided by Barna Group, 51% of American adults have little to no engagement with the Church and the number of unchurched and de-churched people is on the rise. In recent years, there have been new words to emerge that give definition to what is happening in church culture. Two prominent

3 An active participant would be one who attends worship service, bible study, and other ministry activities at least once or twice a month.

4 Casey Leins, “Americans Are Becoming Less Religious,” USNews.com (April 2017): accessed December 15, 2018, <https://goo.gl/6r2tYB>.

words that dominate the conversation surrounding the unchurched and de-churched populations, and that seek to give definition to their existence are the *churchless* and the *nones*.



Source: Data adapted from George Barna & David Kinnaman, ed., *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, (Illinois: Tyndale, 2014), 6.

In the next section we will explore how the culture of Church and Christianity have changed in the U.S. by closely examining what leading researchers are referring to as the fastest growing religious groups in America: the churchless and the nones. Thorough examination of what is taking place in the culture will provide context and a framework for how CMBC can, and has begun to, address the decline of attendance in worship on Sunday mornings. Further research of these groups and their trends will contribute to CMBC's adequate engagement with Christians and the unchurched and de-churched populations through the use of digital platforms.

Churchless

The churchless population represents those who are unchurched and de-churched. "The de-churched are those who have been churched in the past but are currently on hiatus. Many of these

people have a history of cyclical church attendance patterns, going through a phase when they are involved followed by a phase when they aren't, and so forth.”⁵ This is becoming a growing problem in churches across the U.S., and CMBC is no exception.

At CMBC, we currently have 1100 giving units (which is used to provide an approximate count of church membership); however, on average, CMBC sees approximately 418 parishioners, per Sunday, between both locations. For CMBC, this statistic alludes to the recent research provided by the Barna Group which indicates that church cycles, especially among the de-churched, do exist. The cycle suggests that some people will engage with the church for a period of time and then, without notice, will take a sabbatical from worship and other church activities. Although 1100 parishioners are actively giving to CMBC via digital giving platforms and in person, less than half of that number are actually attending a worship service on any given Sunday.

This cycle that Barna Group has identified is beneficial when seeking to understand what is occurring at CMBC. Understanding the “why” is just as important as knowing the “how”. That is to say, it becomes imperative for churches to know and understand why people are leaving and then examine how they can be reached again. The population of people known as the de-churched, are not unfamiliar with church culture or Christianity, in fact they often have a history with the Church. The de-churched population is comprised of a group of people who have, for whatever reason, decided to stop attending church. Researchers suggests that it is not easy to pinpoint the exact reason why people leave the church, but there is, in my opinion, one common denominator: life events. “Most of our significant life decisions are driven by a confluence of

5 Barna, *Churchless*, 7.

factors that combine to push us over the edge into a new behavior.”⁶ In many instances, the new behavior that the de-churched population chooses to inherit is to lead a churchless life in order to focus on their personal lives instead.

“Very few of America’s unchurched adults are purely unchurched—most of them, rather, are de-churched.”⁷ The fast paced, modern day culture has been one of the culprits in developing unchurched and, even more so, de-churched individuals. In recent years, people’s personal lives and agendas have gained momentum, their everyday activities have become more demanding (e.g. jobs, kid’s extra-curricular activities, etc.), and they have filled their calendars up with events and engagements that do not involve connecting with God or a faith community. “For some Christians, God is a moving center who no longer takes priority in our lives and can be moved to the periphery based on worshipper’s interest and commitments.”⁸ The God who is meant to hold center stage in our lives, is often forced to abdicate in order that we might fulfill our own agendas.

When thinking about young adults (and adults alike) who have left and continue to leave the church, the Barna Group suggest that they can be grouped into three categories: the nomads, the exiles, and the prodigals. The nomads are those individuals who consider themselves Christian, but who’s church activity has declined significantly. The exiles are comprised of people who feel stuck between church and culture and often struggle to make a decision between the two. While they remain active in the church, they often feel the tug of the culture. The prodigals are those who’ve left the church altogether and no longer identify themselves as Christians. Knowledge of the three categories of adults who often disengage from the church and the complexities they

6 Ibid, 92.

7 Barna Group, “10 Facts About America’s Churchless,” Barna.com, (December 10, 2014): accessed December 18, 2018, <https://goo.gl/8i4sBD>.

8 Gina M. Stewart, conversation with author, January 7, 2019.

provide can assist CMBC and other churches in exploring ways to effectively reach and minister to them.

The Nones: A New Category of Religion

Researchers saw it coming. They saw the trend of church attendance on the decline. Across America, church attendance was on a slippery slope and it appeared as if church leadership could not comprehend how to detract it. Since the early 1990s, the margin between those who attend church and those who do not, has become wide enough to insert a new category of people; they are the religiously unaffiliated. They are defined as individuals who choose not to identify with any religion or religious category. Plainly stated, they don't care about religion or religious matters: they are the 'nones'.

“There is one prediction that recently has been supported with multiple stunning confirmations that few dispute: the future religious landscape of America will be increasingly dominated by the nones.”⁹ If God possibly functions as a ‘moving center’ in the lives of most Christians, one could stand to reason that the ‘nones’ are not concerned with making God the center of their lives. “The culture has changed in a way that makes it easier to say, ‘No, I don’t have a religion.’”¹⁰ Being religiously unaffiliated is becoming increasingly accepted by the culture. Countries such as the United States, which once embraced Christian principles almost exclusively, is now experiencing a new wave of the ‘not so religious’ culture. Understanding the landscape of America’s religious make-up, the question then becomes how can CMBC and other churches put the concept of DigiVangelism into practice in an effort to respond to this new cultural phenomenon?

9 James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 13.

10 “America Becoming Less Christian, Survey Finds,” CNN.com, (March 2009): accessed December 18, 2018, <https://goo.gl/e8364g>.

“In a time when fewer and fewer people are finding their way into the church, it is essential that we intentionally seek out and connect with them rather than waiting for them to show up at our doors—and help them to discover the sacred, not just inside our church buildings, but in everyday places and experiences, honoring the holy in the midst of their daily lives.”¹¹

III. Evangelism

“If adults aren’t being brought into the Church, it stands to reason that our regular methods of evangelism simply aren’t working like they once did. If something has changed in our culture, shouldn’t our outreach strategies change, too?”¹² To engage the unchurched and de-churched populations we must evaluate not only our methods, but also our concept of evangelism. Understanding the methods of evangelism is important for any church seeking to expand its reach and influence.

Evangelism is hard work! It entails talking about God to people who have never heard of God (Jesus) or who have heard about God but have not made a personal decision to accept a saving relationship with Christ. This can be especially difficult for introverted parishioners who find it difficult to engage in face to face conversation with other people. For introverts, the idea of evangelism can be intimidating, and they may find it difficult to share their faith. Evangelism via social media can be an introvert’s way of sharing their faith and making an indelible impact on the lives of others for the Kingdom of God.

As a church implements its plan for evangelism, it must also consider the overall personality of its congregation. “If God designed introverts, doesn’t it make sense that he would want them

¹¹ Keith Anderson, *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in A Wireless World*. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), Loc. 265, Kindle Edition.

¹² Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age: How Christians’ Approach to Sharing Their Faith Has Changed in 25 Years*, (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), 5.

to do his work through that personality? When introverts spend time trying to function like extroverts [and vice versa] they're doing more than just wasting time. They're actually robbing themselves of the very tools God gave them to do his work."¹³ Participating in evangelism via digital platforms is not an attempt to create a false sense of community or pseudo relationships with other people; rather, it gives those who may have reservations with engaging in face to face conversations an environment to thrive in. The Church is at a critical juncture where it must re-evaluate, re-tool and re-think how it does evangelism.

While traditionally the need to be evangelized has been reserved for the sinner or unbeliever, the times in which we live almost require a re-evangelizing or a revitalization of the saint. This means that the Church's evangelistic tactics must also focus on individuals who were once a part of the community of faith but have since disengaged, namely the churchless. Finding ways to engage the churchless is a necessity. "There is talk of evangelism to revive flagging spirits and especially flagging numbers—somehow we need to get people back inside our churches!"¹⁴ Nonetheless, this statement is not to suggest that the Church should resort to using evangelism as a marketing tool to replenish our wooden pews in our steeple topped, million-dollar edifices. No! Instead, we must find a way to counter the narrative of the culture that suggests that having a relationship with God is optional or, even worse, not a necessity at all.

Re-packaging evangelism in a way that re-engages the disengaged requires innovation and carefully guided tactics. However, this must be done in a manner that maintains the integrity of the Church, honors the tradition of evangelism, and produces the fruit of conversion.

13 Mike Bechtel, *Evangelism for the Rest of Us: Sharing Christ Within Your Personality Style*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006) 23. Kindle Edition.

14 Philip Woods, "Reclaiming Evangelism," *International Review of Missions* 105, no. 402 (July 2016): 44.

A Charge to Keep

Matthew 28:16-20 in the New International Version reads:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

The Great Commission is one of the most familiar pericopes in the Bible. Following His resurrection, Jesus meets with his disciples to give them instructions on how to advance and grow the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ charge to the disciples in Matthew 28 was not only a charge for them, but it is also a charge for the Church. Making and ministering to disciples is what the Church is called to do. Since the zeitgeist¹⁵ in which we create and nurture disciples has changed, the tools we use in the discipleship process need also to be re-evaluated.

Jesus said to the disciples, ‘go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’ (Matt. 28:19) The word ‘go’ in the great commission presents endless possibilities for the institution of the Church today. The original disciples did not have the luxurious tools for advancing ministry that we have today. Considering the disciple’s limitations and the age in which we now live, the Church must not shy away from exploring innovative ways to live out its call to recreate Jesus in the earth. With the invention of the world wide web, this process no longer has to entail leaving one country and traveling thousands of miles to

¹⁵ Zeitgeist refers to the spirit, feeling or characteristic of a particular time in history.

another in order to preach about Jesus. Rather, digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram have made it possible to share the message of Jesus Christ within seconds. “Today, with social media and technology, we can go to any place without actually being there in person. Ministers can preach in one location and deliver that message to other nations using technologies like video or audio streaming and live video on social media.”¹⁶

The use of digital platforms is almost impossible to avoid when considering modern day discipling because that’s where the disciples are; they are connected to the World Wide Web via laptop computers, smart TVs and smartphones. They are connecting with the world and with one another in ways that were not imaginable in the past. “With literally hundreds of millions of people around the world using Social Media, it has now become imperative that we use these tools to share the Gospel. When Christ told the church to reach the world, they did not have the tools to make sure everyone in the world heard the Gospel. We do! The church now has the capability to reach everyone in their community and nearly everyone on the planet.”¹⁷ Those the Church is seeking to engage and even convert, are sitting at their work desks, in coffee houses, or in the comfort of their homes with an electronic device at their disposal perusing through digital airspace, and they are doing it all over the world. “In fact, American adults spend over 11 hours per day listening to, watching, reading or generally interacting with media. Digital usage also continues to play a growing role with the adult U.S. consumer. Digital platforms—think computers, smartphones and tablets—have become a major catalyst for this frequent content

16 Natchi Lazarus, *The Connected Church: A Social Media Communication Strategy Guide for Churches, Nonprofits and Individuals in Ministry*, (Natchi Lazarus 2017), 69.

17 Joel Southerland, *Digital Witness: A Social Media Primer for Churches*, (Dallas, TX: Saint Paul Press 2014), 13.

exposure.”¹⁸ Plainly stated, tools used to evangelize, and even disciple, must include the use of digital platforms. Jesus’ commission to make disciples of the world was not only intended for the disciples that stood before Him, but it was a commission for the Church.

A Word on Revitalization

Numbers are not always a good indicator of health. That is to say, just because a ministry is bursting at the seams with parishioners, it does not mean that that particular ministry is a healthy organism. There are many churches with small memberships who do extraordinary ministry in spite of their minimal resources. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that numbers do make a difference in a ministry. Sometimes the greater the membership, the greater the financial budget and the greater the church’s ability is to take the Gospel further into the world. However, ministries that are seeking to revitalize should avoid getting caught up in numbers. “Attendance is generally the most common statistic churches keep track of. The math of tracking attendance ends up being closely connected to emotions. When the sum total goes up, smiles go up; when the sum total goes down, people frown.”¹⁹

While CMBC has experienced a decline in attendance, the ministry is still a thriving and healthy organism. However, as with any establishment that has existed for several decades, CMBC has been faced with the demands to remain relevant in a culture that is constantly changing. Congregations that seek to thrive and do ministry in a culture that continues to evolve must adapt to change. As resources available to the Church changes, so should the Church adapt

18 “Time Flies: U.S. Adults Now Spend Nearly Half A Day Interacting with Media,” Nielsen.com, (July 2018): accessed December 19, 2018, <https://goo.gl/RsEP2m>.

19 Brian E. Nall, *Toward Revitalization: 9 Orderly Steps to Church Health*, (Pensacola, FL: Brian E. Nall, 2019), Loc. 117, Kindle Edition.

as it seeks to do ministry in the world. “If the resources dry up, organizations either move, die, or modify their activities so as to take advantage of different resources.”²⁰

Technology is currently one of the greatest resources that the world has to offer. As CMBC looks to maintain its health but still thrive in an evolving culture, revitalization of the mission, vision, and even the energy of the congregation is necessary. It is not enough for spiritual leadership to be energized about the mission, but laity must be energized as well. The model of DigiVangelism presents the entire congregation with an opportunity to get involved with sharing their faith through new and innovative methods.

IV. Implementing DigiVangelism

In the advent of social media, churches struggled to figure out this new form of digital media. Still today, the majority of churches, including CMBC, use their social media platforms to inundate their followers with announcements and advertisement flyers regarding events for their churches. Social media has presented the Church with a challenge to find a balance between the use of media for ministry; DigiVangelism helps to bridge the gap between media and ministry and create balance. DigiVangelism is an evangelistic, revitalizing, portable model that churches can use on digital platforms to extend the witness of Christ. DigiVangelism invites clergy, and laity alike, to share their faith on digital platforms with hopes that doing so would encourage other Christians and ignite a desire within the unchurched and de-churched populations to want to know more about Christ and unite with a community of faith.

Why Social Media?

There are significant advantages for a church that chooses to make the digital investment. That is to say, when churches make a decision to engage people on digital platforms without fear

²⁰ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 46.

of losing its 'holy' persona or being labeled as demonic, she opens herself up to another world that may not otherwise know she exists. While the over use of technology can potentially be detrimental for any person or entity, with proper use, it can also be fruitful. A Church that uses social media on Sunday mornings and throughout the week, opens herself up to endless possibilities for sharing the Gospel message. One of the primary ministries that can take place on digital platforms is pastoral care. Pastors and ministers have the opportunity to check-in with members and non-members whom they are connected to via social media. "Social media is a set of tools that will exponentially increase your ability to do these key ministerial tasks. Social media is both a stethoscope, magnifying your ability to listen to your congregation and community, and a megaphone, magnifying your ability to proclaim God's word to your community."²¹

The ministry of corporate prayer can also be experienced in digital spaces. In the past, CMBC has experimented with this concept. A social media post that says, "How can we pray for you this evening" can receive an overwhelming amount of responses. In past experiences, people have opened up and shared their prayer concerns, and in turn, offer to pray for one another. "Membership decline across the church has led many ministry leaders to fixate on the shrinking numbers of people in their church pews, which has blinded many of us to how, thanks to digital and mobile technologies, we are connected to more people than ever before. Even as our congregations have become smaller, our networks, and therefore opportunities for building community and sharing the Gospel, have become larger and more expansive."²² This large network of people exist on digital platforms such as Facebook, and the *60 Second Faith Project*

21 Meredith Gould, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015), Location 110, Kindle.

22 Anderson, *The Digital Cathedral*, Loc. 3038, Kindle Edition.

was used as an innovative method for sharing faith, engaging Christians, and reaching the unchurched and de-churched populations in digital spaces.

The 60 Second Faith Project

As CMBC experienced a decline attendance and considered the landscape of Christianity in America, she explored creative ways in which she could engage those who were no longer entering the doors of the church. The primary research and data collected for this project was achieved by producing a five-part video-based interview series that was shared on social media over the course of two months. The videos were shared exclusively on CMBC's public Facebook page which currently has 7,100 followers. Although CMBC is not actually reaching 7,100 people every time it creates a social media post, due to Facebook's algorithm²³, Facebook's platform still provides a tremendous amount of exposure for the ministry.

The leading component that I chose to use as a means of engaging with the unchurched and de-churched populations (as well as all Christians connected to our Facebook page) would come to be known as the *60 Second Faith Project*. This project consisted of five short interview style videos that focused on the interviewees sharing their faith. All of the participants were members of CMBC and were open to sharing their faith on digital platforms. The participants were asked to elaborate on their faith by focusing on the following two statements. 1.) Since I have come in contact with Jesus, my life has changed in the following way. 2.) Being a part of this (CMBC) community of faith has impacted and/or changed my life in the following way. This project was crafted and designed to share two aspects of the Christian faith with viewers: First, how Jesus

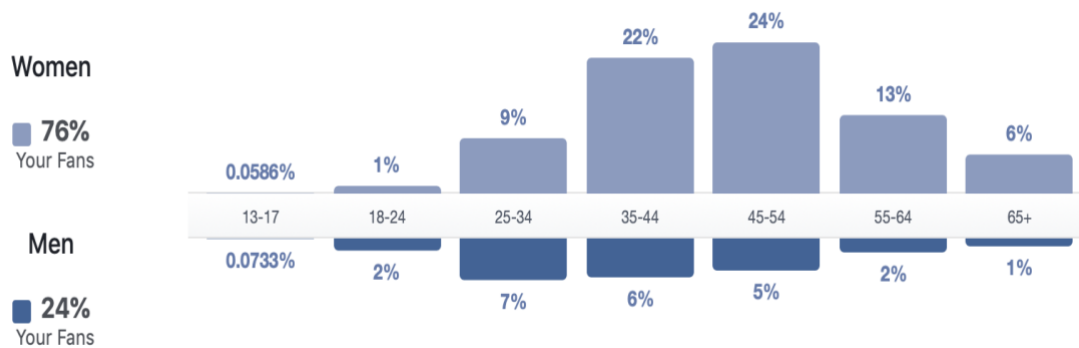
23 Facebook has an embedded algorithm that determines who will see and experience your content. Even though you may have 7,000 followers, Facebook's algorithm will only display your content for people who have showed a consistent or recent interest in your page, product, life, etc.

can and does make an indelible impact in our lives and second, how important it is to be a part of a community of faith.

Facebook Insights

Facebook has a tool called *insights* that allows Facebook page administrators to view statistics relating to how followers interact with their public page. This invaluable tool provides information such as how many men vs. women are followers, their age demographics, and their locations. Out of 7,100 people who follow our Facebook page, 2,154 of them live in Memphis and Cordova, TN. The graph below shows the gender and age demographics of our Facebook audience.

Aggregated demographic data about the people who like your Page based on the age and gender information they provide in their user profiles. This number is an estimate.



Source: Facebook.com

Facebook insights also measure how followers interact with the content shared on our page. For this project, Facebook insights tool was an asset because it provided pertinent information regarding the watch time²⁴ of our videos. The Facebook insights showed that CMBC’s followers spent an average of 7-15 seconds engaging with her video content. Therefore, the video interviews in the *60 Second Faith Project* were strategically planned to be no longer than 60

²⁴ Watch time is a term Facebook uses to describe the length of time a Facebook user interacts with video content on the platform.

seconds in length. CMBC had hoped that aiming for brevity and good quality would make the content inviting enough to spark conversation and interaction with the online audience.

Project Interviews

The interviewees were given one week to ponder on how they might respond to the given questions. They were allowed to reflect on one or both of the questions posed to them. Each interview was conducted in a relaxed environment immediately following Sunday morning worship service. The timing and location allowed for a familiar yet stimulating atmosphere that was conducive for reflection. The next section will entail a brief synopsis of each interviewee's response.

Video Interviewee #1

When interviewee #1 was asked to elaborate on how coming in contact with Jesus had impacted their life, they stated the following:

Having Jesus in my life has helped my life to have direction and purpose. I have gone through depression and the loss of both of my parents. I probably would have taken my own life during those times if I did not have Jesus. But Jesus helped me to re-focus on Him. It doesn't mean that I denied the grief or any of those things that I've experienced in my life, but Jesus walked beside me through those times.²⁵

The interviewee was transparent and real. Her reflections conveyed her heartfelt love for how Christ's power has rested and resided with her throughout the course of her life. When shared via Facebook, this video interview yielded great interaction and results. It received 792 views, 62 reactions²⁶ and at least 284 minutes of watch time. There was a total of six comments which

²⁵ Marilyn Smith, Interview by the author, Personal Interview, Memphis, November 11, 2018.

²⁶ A Facebook reaction includes include likes, loves, wows, etc. that Facebook users are allowed to leave on individual comments.

included the following statement: “Testimonies strengthen others and the person sharing their testimony.”²⁷ This comment reflected what was one of the greatest hopes of this DMin project; that other Christians might be inspired to begin sharing their faith with others, in particular with the unchurched and de-churched populations.

Video Interviewee #2

When interviewee #2 was asked to elaborate on how coming in contact with Jesus had impacted their life, they stated the following:

When I made a decision to really surrender to Jesus, I found a sense of purpose and destiny. Jesus has been an anchor for my life. Jesus has been a sense of stability and security. And this is not to suggest that there are not challenges, storms, and trials, but one of the things that I have discovered in all of these years of walking with the Lord, is that when Jesus is an anchor for our life and soul we will not fall because we are founded on a rock. And that rock is Jesus.²⁸

This testimony of faith was particularly special because it was shared by the senior pastor of CMBC. I understood that her testimony could be viewed, by many, as another sermon or message from the pastor, but I also understood the implications and spiritual fruit that her testimony could potentially produce. Choosing to reflect on both of the posed questions, her interview was lengthy. Therefore, I decided to split her interview into two separate videos (the second video was shared later in the series). The video received significant engagement on Facebook. It was viewed 1,800 times, received 152 reactions, 21 shares and 10 comments. The

27 Glenda Diane Shaw Hill, Facebook post, November 29, 2018 [5:37 p.m.], accessed January 2, 2019, <https://goo.gl/pZ3gX5>.

28 Gina M. Stewart, Interview by the author, Personal Interview, Memphis, November 25, 2018.

majority of the comments simply stated Amen. The engagement from the post suggests that the content was well received online.

Video Interviewees #3 & #4

When interviewees #3 & #4 were asked to elaborate on how being a part of a community of faith has impacted their life, they stated the following:

Interviewee #3: Being a part of a community of faith is important to me because it gives us a grounding. It gives us [the opportunity] to share with like-minded believers.

Interviewee #4: I was really excited when we decided to come to Christ Missionary Baptist Church because this is a community of faith that genuinely shows the love of Christ. When [my husband and I] came here we were starving for the love of Christ and Christ Missionary Baptist Church is definitely the hands, feet, and the heart of Christ.²⁹

I intentionally chose a married couple for this interview. I wanted to show that CMBC was a church that highly esteemed the institution of family. This couple is fairly new to CMBC and had previously shared their testimony of faith with me. I knew that they'd come from a church where they felt unloved and it was a place that seemed to be void of community. Their story was a captivating one worth sharing. Their testimony was not only meant to minister to the unchurched and de-churched populations, but it was also intended to encourage those who were currently serving in a church but didn't feel a sense of belonging or community. On Facebook it received 615 views, 21 reactions, 3 shares and 1 comment.

Video Interviewee #5

When interviewee #5 was asked to elaborate on how being a part of a community of faith has impacted their life, they stated the following:

²⁹ Jimmy and Angela Cooley, Interview by the author, Personal Interview, Memphis, December 9, 2018.

There is nothing like being connected to a community of faith where you are loved and cared for, where you're also held accountable and where you are challenged to become everything that God wants you to become. I believe, for certain, and I can say this without any fear of contradiction, is that one of the reasons I am the woman of God that I am today is because I was connected to a community of faith. I was connected to a people who wanted to see me win.²⁸

This was the second portion of the interview with the senior pastor of CMBC. In this interview she discussed the importance of being a part of a community of faith. While I thought her reflections on this question sounded more sermonical than the previous one, the video received more interaction and feedback than any of the other videos. The video received 2,064 views, 274 reactions, 49 shares and 9 comments. The majority of the comments were in agreement by responding with an Amen. However, there was one comment that was shared that provided a testimony of what it means to have a sense of belonging. It read, "Bless you. This is so true. I'm glad I belong to a community of faith and a wonderful church family at Mt. Ennon Baptist Church."³⁰

Video Interviewee #6

When interviewee #6 was asked to elaborate on how being a part of a community of faith has impacted their life, they stated the following:

Being a part of this community has helped me by helping me to discern what my spiritual gifts are; and one of them is giving, sharing and caring about others. There is a quote that

30 Deborah Baltimore Morman, Facebook post, December 30, 2018 [4:37 p.m.], accessed January 4, 2019, <https://goo.gl/WPj7HM>.

reminds me of that. It says, “people don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care”. My goal is to care about people.³¹

This video interview revealed the passion of the interviewee. She talked about how being connected to a community of faith has made her a better person. She spoke of her aptness to give, share and care about others. Her testimony provided a sure model of what it means to be Christ-like. This video interview received 932 views, 65 reactions, 2 shares and 4 comments.

Filming & Editing

The 60 Second Faith Project was captured and produced using a Canon 70D DSLR camera affixed with a Canon 18-135mm lens.³² In order to achieve a certain quality of sound, a Rode VideoMic Pro was also used. While the equipment used for the interviews was professional grade equipment and requires a certain level of skill and mastery, the interviews could have been captured on the average smartphone. The ability to capture interviews on smartphones makes *The 60 Second Faith Project* a portable and innovative way for churches to share their faith and the Gospel on digital platforms. In fact, it has been my experience that churches often find mastering advanced technology such as DSLR cameras and digital lenses difficult to ascertain. However, the ‘point and shoot’ ability of smartphones removes the barriers that professional camera gear can present.³³

31 Christene Nelms, Interview by the author, Personal Interview, Memphis, November 18, 2018.

32 A DSLR camera is a Digital Single-Lens Reflex camera often used for videography in professional settings.

33 Point and shoot is a concept that implies the camera gear is easy to use for camera operates. Point and shoot cameras are considered user-friendly because the camera will automatically adjust the internal camera settings (i.e. iso, aperture, shutter speed) in any photo shooting environment.

Video editing requires an even more sophisticated approach than filming. This project was edited using Final Cut Pro X and Abode After Effects.³⁴ Due to the brevity of the interviews, less than one hour, per video, was spent editing the interviews in Final Cut Pro X. After Effects was used to create motion graphics for each interview-based video. The motion graphics enhanced videos by providing a more polished and innovative look. Each video retained a professional, yet fun and inviting aesthetic that was intended to capture the attention of individuals scrolling through social media in an attempt to “stop the scroll”.³⁵

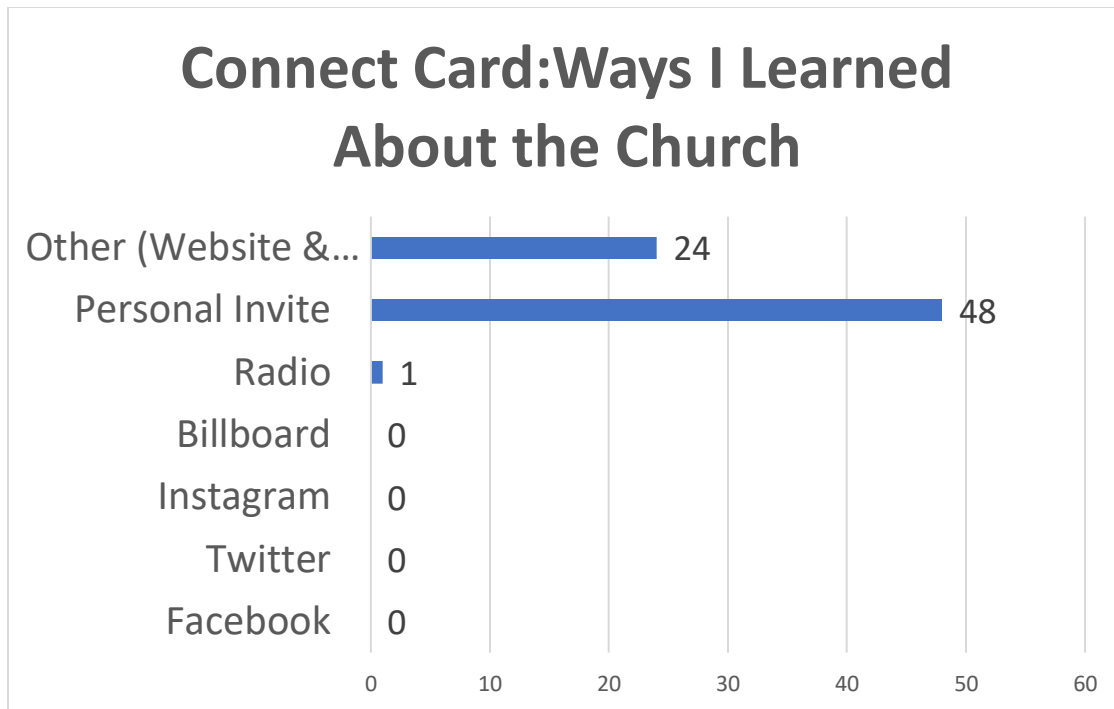
Project Results

One of the ways CMBC measured the effectiveness of this project was by monitoring and reviewing CMBC’s connect cards.³⁶ The connect cards provide pertinent information regarding why visitors visit CMBC. The cards allowed CMBC to gauge whether or not the content that was shared on Facebook was the reason why visitors were interested in visiting CMBC or if individuals were visiting for other reasons. On the connect cards, there is a section called ‘I learned about the church from’ which historically has given CMBC information about the effectiveness of its reach on digital platforms. The categories listed under this section include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, billboard, radio, or other. The graph depicted below displays how each category measured up during the implementation of this project.

34 Final Cut Pro X is Apple’s professional video editing software. This software is exclusively available on Apple’s desktop and laptop computers. Adobe After Effects is an Adobe software for creating motion graphics. This software is available on both PC and Macs.

35 “Stop the Scroll” is a concept used amongst social media strategist to describe how content that is shared online should always grab the attention of consumers.

36 A CMBC Connect Card is the equivalent of a visitor’s card which invites visitors to tell the church more about themselves and how they found out about the ministry.



Over a 6 month period (August 2018 - January 2019), the connect cards reveal that CMBC had 73 visitors, and when asked how they heard about CMBC no one had learned about CMBC via any social media outlets. However, this did not mean that the project was ineffective. While no one appeared to have visited CMBC based on their interaction with the ministry via social media or the *60 Second Faith Project*, based on the comments and interaction with the videos, the project and the Gospel message was well received.

The results speak to the power of an online community. Many of the comments, shares, and likes that the videos received were evidence that the viewers were connecting with the interviewees who were speaking. One comment stated, “I love Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart—I love to hear her preach! Since hearing one of her sermons...my life was forever changed! I’m coming to hear you in 2019 —that’s my prayer! Hallelujah!”³⁷ The project did reveal that content shared on

³⁷ Leslie M. Faulkner, Facebook post, December 30, 2018 [5:32 p.m.], accessed February 26, 2019, <https://goo.gl/WPj7HM>.

digital platforms may not always increase a church's physical attendance, but it can help to cultivate and foster online community and therefore, enabling a church to expand its reach.

With over 6,203 views and 92 shares³⁸, and with the rising number of people who are churchless in the U.S., the *60 Second Faith Project* reached beyond a Sunday morning service; it met people where they are. “A considerable majority of all U.S. adults say they use Facebook (84%). Practicing Christians appear to be especially fond of the platform, with nine out of 10 reporting they use it (90%)—six percentage points more than non-practicing Christians (84%) and 11 more than non-Christians (79%).”³⁹ This project possibly reached a portion of the 84% of non-practicing Christians that are on Facebook. The *60 Second Faith Project* was a seed planted into good soil and “a good seed always produces good harvest. Social media marketing is a seed that takes time to cultivate but eventually produces sweet, abundant and satisfying fruit for all the labor that goes into it.”⁴⁰

New research suggests that Christians are having more and more faith conversations through social media and other digital avenues. “Most encouraging, people who share their faith these days typically feel joy and are energized to share even more. Outreach begets outreach, even in our changing times.”⁴¹ CMBC will continue to innovate and use new methods for evangelizing and reaching beyond the church edifice. The depths of the internet and social media are vast. They reach too far across the world and penetrate too deeply into the lives of people to not be considered as vital tools in a church's evangelistic plan. “That is one of the amazing benefits of

38 A share happens when one Facebook user shares content posted from another source or users page with their friends.

39 Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, 33.

40 Lazarus, *The Connected Church*, 31.

41 Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, 6.

Social Media—it has the ability to connect people anywhere instantaneously.”⁴² People are online, and churches should be online too.

V. Digital Ministry Matters, Right?

The *60 Second Faith Project* did bring clarity concerning the power of a traditional component of evangelism and faith-based community building; that is relationships. Relationships are everything. Evangelism and faith-based community building takes place, and sometimes best flourishes, in the context of real-life relationships. In spite of how tech enthusiasts and social media strategists try to make social media appear as a real place to connect, relationships on social media can be, and sometimes are, formed under false pretense. Cyberspace has a way of luring individuals in and potentially creating fabricated realities.

Douglas Groothuis says this when speaking of *The Soul in Cyberspace*, “the notion of community tends to erode under the conditions of postmodernity. A common social practice called “cocooning” isolates individuals from others by keeping them safe and snug in front of their home entertainment centers and computer screens when they could be playing with their children, talking to neighbors over the fence, or attending musical concerts, houses of worship, or block parties.”⁴³ Although Groothuis comments were prior to the booming social media era, they are still relevant. Social media promises us connections as soon as we log on; however, there are still so many opportunities for people to feel isolated, alone and devoid of community when surfing through cyberspace.

Inviting people to share their faith online, in particular through the *60 Second Faith Project*, was an attempt to merge the traditional model of evangelism with an online experience. “Based on quantitative study, many U.S. adults who have engaged in spiritual conversations in

⁴² Southerland, *Digital Witness*, 13.

⁴³ Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 122.

the past five years report using social media and various other digital means, but face-to-face conversations still outpace them all.”⁴⁴ One would reason that face-to-face spiritual conversations and faith sharing still supersedes experiences that can be created online. As the CMBC connect cards revealed, people visited worship services on Sunday mornings based on a personal connection they already had with someone within the congregation.

Juxtaposed to this notion, however, new research suggests that Millennials believe that evangelism is wrong. “Many Millennials are unsure about the actual practice of evangelism. Almost half of Millennials (47%) agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith [or a non-affiliate] in hopes that they will one day share the same faith.”⁴⁵ This research can create a conflict for churches that are seeking to involve their youth and young adults in their evangelistic efforts. However, innovating new ways of sharing the faith such as what was implemented with *The 60 Second Faith Project* might garner the interest of Millennials⁴⁶ and Generation Z⁴⁷ inspire them to share their own stories of faith.

The *60 Second Faith Project* shared testimonies of real people and sought to create real connections in a real world. Current research is in overwhelming support of face to face evangelism and faith sharing tactics because “[Christians] are more likely to agree that faith-sharing is only effective when they already have a relationship with the other person.”⁴⁸

However, digital ministry is still important and has the power to create community that can lead to authentic, real life connections.

44 Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, 33.

45 Barna Group. “Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong.” Barna.com (February 5, 2019): accessed February 27, 2018, <https://goo.gl/ZJ8cdk>.

46 Millennials were approximately born between 1981-1996.

47 were approximately born between 1997-2012.

48 Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, 23.

The Connected Church

In spite of the flaws that digital platforms can boast, the Church must not cast the digital world aside, but instead find ways to embrace and explore it. When considering how to best engage the churchless and Christians alike, churches must devise a plan that can lead to real, authentic community. The new era of communication demands that churches stay current and relevant. The unchurched and de-churched populations are not going to simply give churches their undivided attention for the sake of being in community; rather, churches must take the necessary measures to reach these populations. “It’s not about a speaker or a message anymore, but rather it’s about the medium that they use for communication.”⁴⁹ For the church, the medium that it uses to convey the Gospel message will never be greater than the message itself, but the medium is important. Social media is a free, powerful medium that provides endless opportunities for building community.

“The world of the twenty-first century, however, finds itself in one of the fastest evolving communication cultures ever; it is known as the digital age. The medium upon which communication within the digital age is conveyed can change in an instant.”⁵⁰ The next big shift in communication is not on the way, but it is already here. A church that is connected via digital platforms is a church that has the capacity to know what is happening in the lives of their parishioners and their parishioner’s families. Social media is a great tool for pastoral care. In fact, it is safe to assume that if Jesus had access to social media and the technology that we have access to, it would have taken His ministry further faster. “So, when we consider using social media for our ministry, it is helpful to imagine what Jesus would have done with social media for

49 Lazarus, *The Connected Church*, 24.

50 Meghan S. Howard, *Digital Jesus: Evangelism in a Digital and Social Media Driven Culture*, (Meghan S. Howard, 2015), Loc. 1341, Kindle Edition.

his ministry.”⁵¹ Without a doubt, there is no greater publicity for one’s ministry than to be God in the flesh; however, social media and other digital platforms such as YouTube and church websites, offer the quickest mediums for Gospel dissemination.

When Jesus wanted to reach people, He went to them, He did not wait for them to come to Him. Jesus often preached the Gospel and healed the diseased in the marketplace, not the synagogue. Social media is a modern-day marketplace where all types of people reside. As the leading statistics on church decline and human interaction with social media reveal, social media is host to people from all types of religious and non-religious backgrounds and those people are in danger of never entering a church again.

According to Barna Group, the data hints at a near future when digital faith interactions will become the standard for spiritual conversations. “As more and more of our communications become digitally mediated, it is all but inevitable. So, in addition to enriching in-person faith conversations, Christians also need wisdom for making meaningful virtual connections that bear spiritual fruit.”⁵² The Church must decide whether or not it is going to sit by the wayside and watch the communication shift continue to grow, or if she is going to be a part of it. The *60 Second Faith Project* (as well as other online content CMBC shares) is CMBC’s effort to take advantage of the communication shift by sharing the faith in digital form in an attempt to foster online community and connections.

From Connection to Communion

While social media can lack a sense of authentic community at times, the digital age brings opportunities for new forms of community. A great addition to the *60 Second Faith Project*

51 Ibid, 37.

52 Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*, 42.

would have been to create an online forum or Facebook group⁵³ for conversation following the publication of the interviews. A more intimate space online could have served as the perfect opportunity to further engage the populations CMBC is seeking to serve. The group or forum would have given us an opportunity to move from connection towards communion.

Adam Thomas, an episcopal priest and millennial, suggests that communion can and does happen online. “Communion happens when we show gratitude for the gifts that we have been given by using them to do God’s work in the world. Believe it or not, this communion can happen online. Even in the virtual world, each small connection carries within it a seed of holiness, a prompting from the Divine to reach out and gather in.”⁵⁴ Thomas believes that community can take place online and when it does, “new house church” happens.⁵⁵

CMBC plans to be intentional about forming new house church in order to reach the churchless population. “The new house church meets when a prayer request goes out via a Facebook status update, and within hours three dozen people are praying for the friend in the ICU. The new house church—meeting on blogs, forums, and feeds across virtual space—connects the faithful to one another.”⁵⁶ Herein lies the power of posting online: a simple prayer request can travel through cyberspace waves quicker than it could through other means of communication. Although we cannot always tangibly measure its effectiveness by looking at the

53 A Facebook group is generally designed specifically for a certain group of people that are interested in a particular topic, category or subject. Facebook groups are sometimes closed and operate by invitation only.

54 Adam Thomas, *Digital Disciple: Real Christianity in a Virtual World*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 28.

55 Adam Thomas uses the term “new house church” to imply the kind of community that takes place when Christians meet online. This is juxtaposed to the ancient church model when people of ‘the way’ would meet in one another’s homes.

56 Ibid, 34.

attendance in worship, without any fear of contradiction, CMBC has made and continues to make efforts to create ‘new house church’ that glorifies God.

Recently, CMBC shared a post on Facebook that read, “how can we pray for you this evening?” The response was overwhelming. The post reached over 1,600 people and received 50 comments. Many of the comments asked for prayer for strength, God’s guidance, etc. However, one comment alluded to the power of social media and how Facebook post, as Meredith Gould would say, can become a stethoscope and magnify the church’s ability to listen.²¹ The comment read, “I have to eulogize a young man who is one year older than my son. Pray for me.”⁵⁷ It was followed by an instant response from our Senior Pastor, “Wow...praying for your strength.”⁵⁸

The above example shows that creating new forms of community requires intentionality and dedication. Results are not always favorable, but the seed is always worth planting. So how does the Church take advantage of the opportunity to grow ‘new house church’? How can the Church move from communion held primarily in sanctuaries to consistent online communion with one another?

Possessing A Digital Strategy

Churches need a digital strategy. Currently at CMBC we have a media team of 11 people. While this may seem like a big team, 10 out of the 11 only work on Sundays. This means that the work required to keep the church relevant during the week and to ‘seize the 167’⁵⁹, falls on the shoulders of one person. The job of the media team is extremely important because they are responsible for making sure that the media and technology required during Sunday morning worship services is available and functions in a manner that makes it possible to share the Gospel

57 Claire A. Henry, Facebook post, January 10, 2019 [8:30 p.m.], accessed February 28, 2019.

58 Gina M. Stewart, Facebook post, January 10, 2019 [8:30 p.m.], accessed February 28, 2019.

59 Seize the 167 is a concept created and perpetuated by Techie and Podcaster Brady Shearer. It is a call for churches to seize the 167 hours within an allotted week outside of Sunday morning.

message beyond the four walls of the church. However, in order to make an effective impact online, CMBC needs to evaluate its digital strategy. She needs a strategy that will focus on reaching those online who may never reach the front door of CMBC. She must also commit to building a social media team that will be specifically called to carry out the mission of fostering online community engagement and sharing the faith of the Gospel.

The average church may not have the budget, or the bodies needed to implement a robust digital strategy. However, the average church does have youth. Young people, in particular Millennials and Generation Z, possess a wealth of knowledge when it comes to technology and digital media. “They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Today’s average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV). Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives.” They are digital natives.⁶⁰ Churches should seek to find and utilize young people who are passionate about media and willing to advance the Gospel message on digital platforms. While they will require supervision at times, they possess the internal knowledge required to navigate online space and even implement creative digital projects such as the *60 Second Faith Project*.

Digital Marketing Consultant, Natchi Lazarus, suggests that there are four core components needed to have an effective digital strategy. The four components are the core, the community, the content, and the channel.⁶¹ The core of any strategy is important because it gives purpose and meaning to the mission. CMBC will use the results from this project to create a core statement

60 Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5 (October 2001), accessed February 27, 2019, <https://goo.gl/WeuKSV>.

61 Lazarus, *The Connected Church*, 86.

that gives definition to why she shares content on social media. By having a core statement CMBC (as well as other churches seeking to implement a digital strategy), will also be able to measure its outcomes and effectiveness in greater detail. The second step for CMBC will be to identify the community she wants to reach. If CMBC desires to focus on the unchurched and de-churched populations, then the content she shares on digital platforms should reflect that. She must also avoid using digital platforms to merely invite people to Sunday worship, but CMBC must find ways to authentically engage people in spiritual conversations that lead to life transformation and real community online. In doing so, according to Lazarus, CMBC will not only help the community attached to her, but she could potentially help the community attached to her followers. “The extended network (friends of followers) also become part of your community. So, the social media community that you will be ministering to could be much bigger than the community that you see and know.”⁶²

Even as churches seek to create online community, it must combat with the realities of real community failing to exist in the material world. Individualism rules the day. “Instead of walking next door to the neighbor’s house to borrow a cup of sugar, we have to hop in the car and drive to Walmart because we no longer know our neighbors. We do not live in community by default anymore. That means most Americans simply do not live any kind of shared community life.”⁶³ Therefore, it can be a tremendous task, in modernity, to create a sense of community among people who may not understand what real community looks or feels like.

The third component of a good social media strategy is content. Content is king. The content that a church shares, is just as important as why a church is sharing. CMBC has been committed

62 Ibid, 90.

63 Richard Jacobson, *Unchurched: Christianity Without Churchianity*, (Unchurched Books, 2016), 167. Kindle Edition.

to posting aesthetically pleasing graphics and videos since the launching of her Facebook page. However, the content has primarily centered on inviting people to Sunday worship services. While this is important too, research indicates that CMBC must engage the audience on a more personal level first.⁶⁴

The final component that Lazarus suggests will aid churches in having a successful digital strategy is the channel. “The most effective communication channel for your ministry is the one in which your audience spends time.”⁶⁵ While CMBC is on the majority of the popular digital platforms such as, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, we devote our energy and digital capital to Facebook because that is where our largest audience resides. CMBC and churches alike must commit to evaluating the components of their digital strategies and targeting key audiences for a chance at creating real community.

A church that is serious about creating a digital footprint and advancing the Gospel message in online spaces, might also consider Google Ad Grants, and Facebook, Instagram, radio and billboard advertisements. Facebook and Instagram advertisements are a great way to target specific audiences with your church’s message. Google Ad Grants gives qualifying non-profits \$10,000 a month in free advertisement on Google. This means that if there is someone in your community searching for a church to attend, Google will show them your church. While radio and billboard advertisements can be cost prohibitive, most radio stations and billboard companies run sales that can fit even the smallest budget.

Conclusion

“Astonishingly, the average person will spend nearly two hours (approximately 116 minutes) on social media every day, which translates to a total of 5 years and 4 months spent over a

64 E.g. creating post that asks, “How can we pray for you”?

65 Ibid, 94.

lifetime. Even more, time spent on social [media] is only expected to increase as platforms develop, and is expected to eat further into traditional media -most notably TV.”⁶⁶ Social Media is the new marketplace for evangelism. DigiVangelism is not a plea to remove traditional evangelistic tactics because as the research proves, face-to-face spiritual conversations are still preferred to digital spiritual conversations; however, DigiVangelism is a call to be intentional about using digital mediums to accompany our ministry and evangelistic efforts.

The *60 Second Faith Project* was met with welcoming reception online. Through implementation, CMBC discovered that online community can be fostered. The interaction through views, comments, likes and shares was evidence that a seed had been planted⁴⁰ in the digital world that will live on forever.

Technology is here to stay, and it will continue to advance. A church that chooses to disavow this notion, is a church that could potentially become irrelevant within the culture. CMBC is committed to staying relevant in this digital era and reaching and ministering to people who may never enter her sanctuary.

⁶⁶ Evan Asano, “How Much Time Do People Spend on Social Media?”, SocialMediaToday.com, (January 2017): accessed January 3, 2018, <https://goo.gl/ooiSFN>.

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