

Online Church: A Framework To Help You Consider Your Next Steps

Frameworks help us think about issues so we can have meaningful conversations with our teams about future directions.

A big question coming from clients is: What does the future hold for Online Church?

The following frameworks describe three predominant streams. There will be some space in between these, but here are three ways to look at the issue:

Stance/Staffing	Philosophy/Theology	Audience Target	What is online
<p><i>We don't</i></p> <p>We put less than 5% of staff time, energy, attention to this.</p> <p>No staff focus.</p> <p>(Though may do digital marketing via social)</p>	<p>We strongly believe that it is only the gathered physical community that is church.</p> <p>A limited few also believe in only ONE gathering or site. Some have a strong theological stance in this area.</p>	<p>Those that live within the geography of our physical sites or who will travel to our sites.</p>	<p>We may livestream a worship service for those unable to attend due to illness. But it is not church and not a substitute.</p> <p>[but many also have giving online via their website]</p>
<p><i>Permissive Convenience</i></p> <p>We devote between 5-15% of our staff time, energy, attention to this.</p> <p>Between tech, marketing, and pastoral staff do somethings online.</p>	<p>We believe the best expression is physical but we have some things online based on our congregation's needs.</p> <p>Not our preference. A small minority of those involved.</p>	<p>Those that have been a part of the physical gathering but either live elsewhere for a season (like college or job transfer) or seasonal residence elsewhere.</p> <p>In large metro areas, those who can convene digitally for some programs without the travel hassle.</p>	<p>Worship. [mostly livestream]</p> <p>Some small groups for those currently residing elsewhere or who have special needs.</p> <p>Some administrative meetings and special interest groups such as recovery.</p>
<p><i>Digital Campus</i></p> <p>We devote more than 15% of our staff time, energy, attention to this.</p> <p>We see this as strategic to our church and have some staff devoted to this area.</p>	<p>We believe it is possible to be a fully devoted follower and church member through the digital campus and never come onto our site.</p> <p>We want to have a full offering that helps people grow in many ways.</p>	<p>Anyone Anywhere though we often desire people to group up in regional places to have some face-to-face.</p> <p>(This would include those moving toward microsities)</p>	<p>Customized digital experience for digital audience.</p> <p>Includes worship. Small group. Discipleship intensives. Retreats.</p> <p>Even online outreach tools for extending gospel to others.</p>

The biggest shifts due to pandemic are those that went from one category to the other, mostly moving down the chart. Whether they will stay in that mode is an open issue. Some “We Don’t” have allowed for pandemic convenience but will return to original stance. Some “Permissive Convenience” have moved to Digital Campus. Will they return? Depends on strength of Digital Campus and how quickly people join in.

A wave of churches shifted to some version of Permissive Convenience 10 years ago but then went back to “live” because they felt it impacted their volunteer capacities negatively. But now they are moving back to having digital expressions.

While the streams and buckets here are not all inclusive, most churches tend towards one of these. It helps to clarify where we think we are and where we are headed.

A digital campus means that all functions, or 90% of the church can function via remote means.

This can include phone, email, online courses, and live experiences via telepresence. It can still be life-on-life, but mediated not in physical way.

The key question: How can one grow and move from outside the faith to growth in faith and towards completeness in faith through these means?

Here is one way to think about filling in the boxes:

Core Functions	Personal	Corporate or Group
Worship and Teaching		
Prayer and Devotion		
Discipleship experiences		
Care Experiences		

The core experiences need a personal expression that also works with a corporate or group expression.

In this protocol, a single individual could experience benefit from an online course, but would only maximize that if it includes a group, peer or facilitator led experience.

As each era’s technologies have changed the definitions of true discipleship have changed.

Questions for insight and discussion:

- Where are we now and where are we going in this area?
- What are the implications for our staffing, budgeting and execution strategy?
- How are we focused on individual faith journeys and congregational faith journeys?
- Where will we find resources to do this?

Generis has an Effective Ministry Team that can help with these discussions. Check out Greg Ligon and Dave Ronne at Effectiveministry.com and schedule a time for a conversation.

This Generis Framework for May 2021 was written by Dave Travis – Director of Strategic Counsel to Pastors and Church Boards at Generis. Learn more about Dave and his work with [Pastor Smart Succession](#), [StoryCrafting for Strategy and Building Better Boards](#) here.