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A6-1: Communication Technology in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

All evidence points to a present and rising technological age in the twenty-first century. Technology has evolved from inventions such as the wheel and electricity in the past to artificial intelligence and advanced platforms in the present. There is no ignoring the increasing use of technology, as well as the human population's growing reliance on the services that the internet provides. For example, one paragon is the use of communication technology as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. With governmental regulations such as social distancing, quarantining, and restricting numerous forms of in-person interactions, individuals across the globe heavily relied on technology, the internet, and being online to continue daily communications or preserve connections. This affected many spaces, such as the workplace, businesses, schools, and, as this paper will specifically examine, *churches*. The pandemic has certainly changed how churches view technology, and with it, many benefits as well as dangers must be carefully considered in reflection of the online world and digital technology.

What Happened During the Pandemic?

The COVID-19 lockdown lasted from the beginning of 2020 and only began diminishing in late 2021. The public health emergency of international concern only officially ended in the middle of 2023. In this global crisis, the world was forced to embark into new virtual environments and learn how to navigate the internet, online resources, and technology. This required developing a new way of thinking and creating an approach to communication unlike

any other. In a report by The Network for New Media, Religion, and Digital Cultural Studies, a research project was launched to investigate the role technologies played in churches during the pandemic: “Specifically, it studies how digital media use shaped the worship, outreach, and the outlook of congregations during this time” (“When Pastors put on the Tech Hat...” 2).

Because of the global lockdown, this required church services to have an online shift, causing pastors and those in leadership roles to set up equipment and learn how to start livestreams for congregations to watch. Many church leaders felt inexperienced, underprepared, and overworked with the various roles required to take on a feat such as navigating the Zoom platform or learning how to upload a video onto YouTube. There were several communication challenges found by churches during the pandemic, particularly how to assist the elderly with technology, choosing the proper equipment to purchase, navigating copyright for worship songs, starting from the ground up, and handling live technology issues that arose during services.

With a demanding environment and certainly many learning curves experienced, the church tightened its embrace of technology to maintain a connection between believers in the body of Christ. Despite being separated from society and forced to be in the isolation of one’s own home, churches were determined to comprehend communication technology and get the hang of being online. During such pressing times, churches around the world understood how much the people needed support, faith, and hope. And this was the driving factor to study and implement resources from the internet, thus developing a virtual/online church in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How Have Churches Changed Since the Pandemic?

Two years later, in 2025, communication technology is still largely being used by churches for the purpose of spreading the Gospel and maintaining this mission. In the final

section of the report, it states, “A major question and theme among church leadership is how to balance, in the long run, both in-person and livestreamed services. One church pastor identified this as his greatest challenge for the church (“When Pastors Put on the Tech Hat...” 21). Whether to remain fully online, fully in person, or maintain some kind of hybrid version of the two combined was a major concern for churches as the world began to “open back up” again. Two years later, most congregations meet fully in person; however, technology continues to hold a new and prominent place in churches.

For example, many churches now, as a direct result of the pandemic, have their own websites, online services, social media plug-ins, advertisements, and virtual outreaches available to the public. Though there were initial challenges in starting up online services, such as setting up the camera or maintaining a stable internet connection, the result of the efforts from volunteers, church leadership, and pastors is evident.

While there are several different opinions in response to the questions of what should stay or what should go following the pandemic, “In-person services consistently ranked higher and of greater importance than online” (“When Pastors Put on the Tech Hat...” 22). Without a doubt, the coronavirus pandemic changed churches from 2020 to 2021 and, as a result, has impacted how churches run things in the present day. Perhaps every church now has digital resources and utilizes communication technology to keep things running, parallel to how the world is living in an increasingly more digital/technological age. But the ultimate question remains: Is this truly a bad thing or a good thing? This is the question the remainder of this paper will delve into.

The Online World

In an article by Chris Crane titled “The Dangers of Online Christianity,” he states, “Living in the 21st century, we have become overwhelmed with the advances of technology and

how literally every part of our lives now seems to be using some sort of technology that wasn't available 10 or 20 years ago." He further goes on to state that while a wonderful and good gift that grants access to connections across the world and provides information fast, it can also become a danger and threat to traditional, even liturgical Christianity.

In the wake of the technological world and especially resulting from the pandemic, the online world brings information and access to the user of technology extremely fast. Simply reflect on any individual's screen time or observe how one relies on technology for daily living, and this fact will be clear. Conduct a personal study on any individual and note how often they check their phone, use the internet for information, communicate via technology, or even "doom scroll" for entertainment. Humans consume information from technology incredibly quickly, and while helpful by connecting users across the globe fast and making life more convenient, many significant dangers come along with it.

For example, Crane points out a few in his article, such as having an individualistic or lone wolf Christianity by staying exclusively online, social media being a major time consumption, and how interacting with more people online neglects relationships with people offline. While communication technology has connected people around the world more than ever before and provided access to resources unknown to humanity just a few decades ago, going too deep into this rabbit hole of the online world causes many major concerns physically, mentally, and especially spiritually.

Face-To-Face

The coronavirus pandemic played a major role in implementing more technology in churches, especially in creating online churches, but this is *not* to replace or dismiss the importance of in-person, face-to-face community. The Bible is clear in its outlines for the body

of Christ and in creating a community of believers in the church. One excellent example is found in Acts 2.42-47 (*NLT*):

“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.”

Christianity is a religion that is deeply rooted in a relationship with the Lord and with other believers. In this model for the church, all the believers would gather – face to face – and experience wholehearted fellowship. They would worship God *together*, share meals *alongside one another*, and praise God in the *company* of other like-minded Christians.

This passage has magnificent applications for how the church today should respond to communication technology: While it is an important tool and additional resource that can be used for the benefit of the Gospel mission, in-person services and face-to-face gatherings should be upheld first and foremost. Certainly, there is a special grace for those who are sick and truly unable to attend in person, but meeting in person, if one can and has the choice to, should always be the priority. The Christian life was not designed to be lived alone. The Lord saw it fit that His people would live together and enter into His kingdom of heaven as a body, and this begins with loving one’s community of believers here on earth.

Conclusion: The Church in a Technological Age

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, several helpful technological developments contributed to the way the church approaches online topics today, such as providing new software, developing websites and social media platforms, reaching out to the youth of today,

and reaching out to people from long distances or out of the country. For a time, the online and virtual church was a game-changer in connecting the body of Christ during a fragmented period and a major health crisis across the globe. Most churches now view technology in a positive light; however, this also must be studied with careful consideration of the possible negatives. Online opportunities are helpful indeed, especially for those who are sick and physically unable to attend in person. For this category of believers, there is a special grace anointed over them. However, for the rest of the church, there is no replacing the face-to-face gathering of other Christians in the body of Christ. There is nothing like sitting with another Christian over a cup of coffee and having a deep conversation, or engaging in a close small group, or exhorting and even challenging other believers to focus on the Lord. Fellowship in person was God's original design for His children. Thus, the church in this technological age must do everything it can to preserve this pillar of community despite the ever-increasing demands of a fast-paced, isolated, instant gratification, and "convenient" world.

Works Cited

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