**DISCOVERING CHURCH IN THE NEW NORMAL**

**August 2020**

**INTRODUCTION**

Covid has certainly turned our world upside down!

It has been, and still is, difficult and challenging on many levels, but a lot of positives have flown from it too – it has gifted us time to reflect, time to think about things differently and time to connect with people in new ways. The pandemic has opened up a whole new platform of operating and post-lockdown one wouldn’t just want to slam this door shut, in fact one would want to grab hold of this opportunity and build on it.

It is remarkable how the various NELCSA congregations reacted almost overnight to the challenges the pandemic presented, with online services, bible studies, devotions, reflections, teaching, youth services, youth camps and even e-bazaars and a brass festival. As one reads through this list of ministries, it is clear, that some ministries are relational and need personal interaction to function optimally, but other are more content-based and can function successfully on an online platform going forward.

**EXTERNAL AUDIENCE**

The Internet offers such an information overload, that it can sometimes be quite overwhelming – many Christian perspectives vie for attention and the voices of the “Theology of the Cross” and the “suffering Christ” are often drowned out. As technology brings the suffering from around the globe and the questions related to that, right into our living rooms, this voice is becoming more and more important. What is our response to all the suffering and injustice in the world? The Theology of the Cross is a helpful platform from which to grapple with these big and very real questions. Without a doubt, there is a lot to be learned from many churches, but NELCSA too, has a wealth of information that should be easily accessible on the online Christian landscape, to add to the richness that is the world-wide church.

**INTERNAL AUDIENCE**

Many NELCSA members have a deep understanding of the Lutheran understanding of faith, but many do not. Making information more accessible online, would help congregation members understand their faith better and give them the confidence to add their Lutheran voice to the voices of their Christian sisters and brothers from other churches and so add to the richness of Christian perspectives.

Online NELCSA resources would also be of great value to under-resourced congregations and congregations without a pastor.

QUESTION: How can we promote existing NELCSA online material more effectively, both externally and internally?

**MINISTRIES**

Firstly, it is important to say that online development is only there to augment face-to-face interaction, not to replace it.

Secondly, it also goes without saying that not all congregants have access to limitless data and it would therefore be up to the leadership of each congregation to decide how they would use online information, where it is not easily accessible to all congregation members. Consideration could be given to using it in small groups, incorporating it into services, music development etc.

Thirdly, it is clear, that not all ministries lend themselves to an online platform. Below is a list, for discussion, on what could be considered for online development, because it is predominantly content-based; what could be an online/relational combination and those ministries that are totally relational and therefore not suitable for online development.

**CONTENT-BASED MINISTRIES**

#Co-worker Courses

#eQuip

#Home Group Material

**CONTENT/RELATIONAL MINISTRIES**

#Confirmation Classes

#Music Festivals

#Youth Material

#Children’s Church Content

#Bible Study Material

**RELATIONAL MINISTRIES**

#Counselling

#\*Preaching

#Congregational Camps

#Church Camps

\*Although preaching is dependent on relationships and on an understanding of the situation one is preaching into, consideration could be given to an annual “Summer Series” and “Winter Series” by the bishop. The worship services would run as normal, but the sermons would be viewed online. In this way congregations benefit from hearing the bishop preach and he becomes a visible presence in every congregation regularly and the local pastor could use the annual “sabbatical from preaching” for want of a better term, for other congregational work and self-development.

**GIFTS & TALENTS OF PASTORS**

The annual “sabbatical from preaching” could present an opportunity to harness the gifts of each pastor more effectively. Pastors could use such a period to also reduce other congregation activities and focus on developing their area of gifting. This would mean that, over time, they could become “specialists” in certain areas and subsequently there would be pockets of expertise and excellence throughout our church.

Practically it could look like this - online modules could be developed by different pastors who have a specific gifting in a specific area, say for example, in confirmation lessons, bible studies, co-worker courses/Lutheran theology or music. They would use their “sabbatical from preaching” to develop these inputs. Access to this information, could free up pastors who don’t see their gifting in these areas and, in addition, they could use their “sabbatical from preaching” to focus on their areas of gifting, for example counselling, camps, outreach work, community projects, connecting and partnering with other local pastors…

In this way each pastor doesn’t need to feel that she/he has to be everything to everybody. This would probably lead to greater job satisfaction and less likelihood of burn-out, because when we operate from a place of gifting, it energises us.

QUESTION: Where do I see my area of gifting? What would I do with my “sabbatical from preaching” time?

**POSSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

**Instagram:** in a great for reaching the young. Mainly for simple messages that fit into a picture. And a one sentence.

**Facebook:** for multiple uses. Same as Instagram, but also good for longer messages, debate, and a great platform to promote videos, such as services, short thoughts etc.

**YouTube:** a video platform great for longer thoughts, such as messages, bible studies and services.

**Twitter:** a place to start debates. Often controversial and I would avoid. Also only for thoughts that fit into a short sentence.

**SMS:** sometimes this is the only form of communication with congregants who have limited or no access to data.

**e-mail:** e-mail remains an accessible and familiar communication tool.

**Whatsapp:** effective to communicate with groups that have something in common/a reason for being on a group together.

**Websites & Drives:** suitable for longer inputs & papers, but where these websites are to be found, has to be effectively communicated.

Online interactions can even become personal when congregations use online material from a pastor and then meet her/him personally at a later stage. The interaction can quickly become personal, because they have met that pastor through what he/she offered online. This underlines that fact that we are all part of a bigger body and are connected in this way.

QUESTION: From you experience, which are the most effective social media tools?

**WEBMASTER**

For online development on various platforms to be successful, it is vital for someone to take ownership of the project and to manage it with suitable content that is regularly updated. In addition, it is vital to communicate with NELCSA congregations regularly, so that congregations are aware of what is out there and are encouraged to make use of these resources.