

Canopy of Prayer Summer Special

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Author

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Canopy of Prayer



Dear Prayer Partners in Europe

When we face challenges in life as individuals or as a church, what should our reaction be? All through the Bible our creator God inspires us. When Jehoshaphat was facing the challenge of war, he sent out the worshipers ahead of the army; Moses, simply by using what he had in his hand, was used by God to lead a nation; and David, when faced with a challenge, sang a new song, Psalm 40:3-5 "He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the LORD". Is this a time for the church to allow God to do a new thing in our midst?

The post pandemic church

As lockdown restrictions ease and churches begin to reopen, the question is, what should the church look like in this 'new' season?

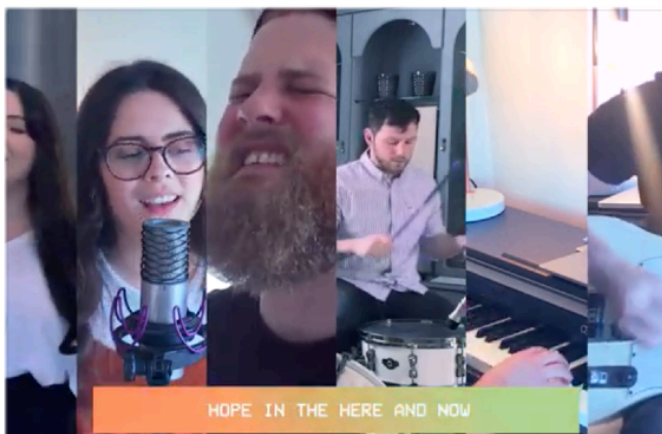
In early March, all churches across Europe, and indeed the world, had to close their doors and look for new ways of interacting with their congregations. This posed another problem; how does the church reach out to those it is seeking to engage, when the doors are closed and social distancing is the norm?

Astonishingly, as church began to adapt to looking for new ways to 'do church' and started to go online with services, increasing their presence on social media, they found a growing number of people were watching. To gain insight as to how this may affect the church in the future, I spoke to Pastor Steffan Jones of 21st Century church in Llanelli, South Wales and his media team. The challenge they face is only one example, and how they aim to meet it is only one expression, but it is an example of how the church as a whole will need to adapt to face the 'new norms of the future'.

Two years ago when writing a mission statement for the church that would mark the start of his role as senior pastor, Steffan wrote "I see a church that seeks to be world class in its use of creative media to communicate a message. A church that constantly innovates in seeking to reach the wider world through film, media and technology". As a pastor in Wales, Steffan has taken inspiration from those who led the revivals of the past. They were radical in their time and often used unorthodox ways to get their message across. Preachers in Welsh revivals often preached to crowds outside in the fields, and Wesley, the well known English evangelist, put the words of his hymns to the tunes of the drinking establishments. Perhaps we too in the 21st century need to look for radical ways to engage with a lost world looking for answers in the midst of a pandemic and beyond for a different way of living.

Inspiration from the past

Like the preachers of the past who broke the rules, who took the word outside the church and preached where the people were, we need to go to where the people are today. Those who would never usually enter a church are in the security of their own homes and on social media. But the challenges of our times are causing them to search for answers online. One thing is clear; Therefore the message needs to be Jesus' message - we must not change it or liberalise it. So this requires courage to present biblical truth without compromise in an often hostile atmosphere of political correctness.



Seb Osbourne, the leader of the media team, has identified the need for lots of content, but what does this mean? Church services have traditionally been provided in fixed blocks: a meeting on Sunday and perhaps another one mid-week in a house group or for bible study. For the younger generation this is not the way they interact; they need continuous access to input; videos that are recent, new and exciting, interaction via social media, Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and others. Contact and personal messaging needs to be instant but this takes time and dedicated staff. Even weekly or daily devotional slots live on Instagram will include lots of messaging, asking questions and discussing challenges. This requires the production of lots of locally relevant material. It won't be

good enough just to direct people to a pastor from somewhere miles away with no connection to their daily experience.

One of the biggest challenges will be that this all needs to be to the highest standard, to match what they are used to in the secular world. Church will need to adapt its priorities, not just bible school but training in media too. Media can no longer be an auxiliary team but perhaps needs to become a foundational ministry.

'Go and make disciples'

Of course the aim must be to attract these new believers over the threshold of our newly opened church buildings but what they might experience there may be very different from what we were used to before this pandemic. Perhaps some churches have faced the challenge of lockdown by simply meeting the needs of their existing congregations. This could be a missed opportunity to discover what it might look like 'to go and make disciples' in the 21st century and beyond. Let us not forget that many a revival started outside the church and was only later embraced by the church.



One final thought; if you had the impression that this is just about young people, let's not forget that one thing this pandemic has done is to introduce the older generation to Skype, FaceTime and Zoom, which has helped many who live alone at home or in care to feel less isolated.

In writing this article I have tried to encourage us to open our eyes, to enable us to pray for the church in this new season. These are not the words of an

expert, and to be honest there probably aren't any experts in this area as none of us have experienced a pandemic before. Some have described this as a war but I'm not happy with this depiction. War is a time when the human desire is to come together to defeat the common enemy. This too can be the way in which we as the body of Christ can react in what we see as an increasingly hostile society. It also appeals to what we believe is a fundamental of the Christian message, which is that church is all about building relationships to worship together, pray together and do good together.

A God-given opportunity

These things are of course important but if at the end of this pandemic, which we hope will come sooner rather than later, we simply retreat back into our church buildings, we will have missed a God-given opportunity. This pandemic has in some ways seen elements of that wartime community spirit but it has also seen many retreat into their safe places and show the selfishness of the survival of the fittest.

Fear has caused many to search for different answers. They have turned to the internet and searched for God in online services and social media. If we miss this opportunity to engage with them where they are, we may never be able to invite them into our community, whatever that may look like, in the future.

What I have shared is only one thought, one example, and each individual, each church will have to seek God to discover what He is asking of them. One thing is certain; God is giving His church an opportunity. As Pastor Steffan says, "We have thrown out a new net - and there are so many fishes!"

Let's Pray

1. Give thanks for the increase in online views of church services during lockdown.
2. For church leaders as they face the challenges of finding ways to engage with those seeking answers in our complex modern world.
3. For ourselves, as we adjust to new practices in church life.

This is the last issue before the summer break. Trusting you have a blessed time and we will see you again for our next issue on 18th September.



World Population

A report this week highlights the fall in fertility rates in many countries around the world. By the end of the century, some countries, including Italy, Spain and Portugal, could see their populations halved.

The world is ill-prepared for the global crash in children being born which is set to have a "jaw-dropping" impact on societies, say the researchers.

While this may be good for the environment, it raises important questions:-

Who pays tax in a massively aged world? Who looks after the elderly and pays for their healthcare? Will people still be able to retire?

"I think it's incredibly hard to think this through and recognise how big a thing this is; it's extraordinary, we'll have to reorganise societies." says one leading scientist.

Additional Prayer Points:-

1. Pray for the EU heads of state who are now resuming face to face meetings but who have the huge challenge of agreeing on post pandemic measures.
2. Pray for the mental health of those most affected by the pandemic: front-line health workers, bereaved families, isolated and lonely people, children deprived of education etc.

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