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A Learning Path for Church Digital Transformation

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A Learning Path for Church Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is the process of reimagining what we do and how we do it given what is possible with new and emerging technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic forced churches to shift from primarily physical to predominantly digital activities, and churches will need to sustain some form of this digital transition for the foreseeable future. As churches continue to cultivate their digital presence, church leaders have an opportunity to explore the best ways to prioritize digital engagement over physical encounters. However temporary this “digital first” approach may be, it promises to enrich the life of the post-pandemic church. Once we were pre-digital, and in the future we will be post-digital: Instead of viewing digital technologies as something separate from or simple substitutes for physical interactions, we will see these technologies deeply integrated into our lives and world.

The resources below, created by the [Church Digital Transformation Project at Seattle Pacific University](#) with funding from the M. J. Murdock Charitable Trust, were created to help church leaders reflect on how present digital transitions may become digital transformations.

Module 1: Navigating the Digital Turn

What is the difference between digital transition and digital transformation?

- Heidi A. Campbell, “The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online,” [presentation](#) (from 12:25 to 55:45) and [slides](#) from [COVID-19 and the Digital Transformation of the Church Summit](#)

How might digital transformation advance the mission of the church?

- [Strategies for Church Digital Transformation](#) (28:48): Michael Paulus (SPU) and Chris Lim (TheoTech) discuss what the "post-digital Church" might look like and how we can respond to that future. We cover a bit of history, three kinds of responses to digital disruptions, and how to develop counter-formative practices to fulfill God's purposes for digital transformation.
- Focused clips
 - [Responses to Digital Transformation](#) (1:21): We have three main options when confronted with technological change: rejection, critical acceptance, and proactive design. What is your approach?
 - [Protecting Attention](#) (1:18): Our attention is a very precious resource. So many tech companies are aggressively vying to captivate, capture, and commoditize it. What counter-formative practices can help protect attention?
 - [What Churches Can Learn From Libraries](#) (1:18): Libraries once did everything on their own, but today they work through networks to share resources so each library can focus on its local community. How can churches learn to think local and act globally? How can your church serve as a portal into the larger community of faith?

Module 2: Engaging with Church History and the Bible

How might the history of the church help us think about the future of the church?

- [Pandemic Precedent: Learning from Church History](#) (24:03): Doug Strong (SPU) shares stories from church history of how Christians have responded to pandemics in the past

and what we can do in the present. He also discusses the need for local churches to prepare for serving others in the midst of pandemics and the impact of digital technology on what we can uniquely do today.

- Focused clips
 - [New Challenges Posed by Digital Transformation](#) (1:16): How does our Church Digital Transformation project create space to discuss the big challenges posed by the pandemic, racial tensions and digital disruption? What theological questions are important to you in this season?
 - [Ready for Service Pandemic Preparedness](#) (1:00): We've had many pandemics in human history. To serve God's purpose amidst these crises, we must be prepared. How can your church prepare for pandemics and other crises?
 - [A Tale of Two Pandemics](#) (7:23): Two stories from church history of how followers of Jesus responded to pandemics in their day. The first is about Lutheran Pastor Martin Rinkert who served refugees during the Thirty Years War and had to face the bubonic plague. The second is about African American Pastors Richard Allen and Absalom Jones who organized their congregations to serve Philadelphia in the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793 despite discrimination against them.

How do we engage digitally with the Bible?

- [Digital Bible Engagement](#) (25:20): Laurie Brenner (West Side Presbyterian Church) and Michael Paulus (SPU) explore what our shift to digital bible engagement means for our lives and our church communities. What we gain and lose when we move from print to digital? How we preserve How can we reinforce the positive traits of the codex and scroll in our digital formats? How do take advantage of good digital affordances?
- Focused clips
 - [Scripture Requires a Dance Partner](#) (1:18): Laurie Brenner traces the ways different media--scrolls, books and digital Bibles affect how we receive Scripture's authority. How do you experience Scripture's authority differently through digital media?
 - [Engaging Text in Community](#) (1:11): What are the dangers of fragmenting Scripture? Laurie Brenner shares her concerns about taking Scripture out of the context of community. How does your church digitally engage with Scripture in community?
 - [Friction Helps You Learn](#) (1:07): To learn things well we need to slow down and practice deliberately. Laurie Brenner reminds us that friction helps you learn and describes how frictionless digital experiences can get in the way. What kind of friction helps you engage with Scripture? How do digital tools help or hinder your learning?

Module 3: Youth and Digital Culture

How are youth managing the digital turn?

- [Digital Native vs Digital Savvy](#) (0:58): Being digitally fluent does not mean you prefer it. Young adults may be able to help churches go online, but it may not align with their gifting or passion. In this clip Martín Jimenez (SPU) reminds us that people from any generation can become digital savvy and that we ought to help people live into their gifting. How does your church serve and empower digitally diverse people?

- [Church as the Third Space](#) (1:08): A third space is where people feel safe, make friends and build community. As the pandemic lockdowns took away these third spaces, young people have been seeking to recreate them digitally with greater authenticity. How has church been a third space for you and young adults?

How can churches digitally engage with young adults?

- [Raising up Youth Voices in the Church](#) (1:22): Daniel Herron (The Robloxian Christians) discusses raising up youth voices, especially in ministry. As we move forward into this new time of technological change, churches absolutely need the voices of young people- they won't exist without it! Instead of dismissing young people as inexperienced, how can we adopt an experimental mindset that truly includes and empowers youth?
- [How Young Adults Move Relationships Online](#) (1:09): Even though young adults are fluent in virtual culture, moving relationships online remains a struggle. In this clip Martín Jimenez (SPU) notes that young adults who were already part of committed groups pre-pandemic remain committed to each other amidst the pandemic. How is your church providing committed community for young adults?
- [Mental Health during COVID](#) (0:58): Young adults are especially concerned about the impact of COVID on their mental health and that of their friends. In this clip Lauren Pattie (SPU) shares how inviting spiritual directors to teach spiritual practices can be helpful during this time. How are you digitally supporting people's mental health?

Module 4: The Limits of the Digital

What equity issues does the digital turn highlight?

- [Sitting in the Tension: Digital Equity and Abundance](#) (25:49): Derick Harris (SPU) and Michael Paulus (SPU) discuss digital equity and how faith in God enables us to sit in tension and approach challenges with creativity and imagination. Amidst digital transformation, how can churches reduce existing inequities and not create new ones? In responding to the pandemic, how can we think creatively from a God given abundance? How are you able to see God working through tension?
- Focused clips
 - [Seeing God in Tension](#) (1:22): How are we being complicit to inequity and how is God inviting us to participate in change? In this clip Derick Harris reminds us of how God's abundance invites us to sit in places and questions of tension in order to experience the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - [Participate Creatively](#) (1:01): God's abundance means the resources we need are already available. Instead of feeling limited by what we think we have or can do, we are invited by Christ into creatively participating in God's dream of the Kingdom. How does God's imagination inspire you to participate creatively?
 - [From Grief to Life](#) (1:28): Derick Harris reminds us that death, loss, and grief are part of life and our online presence must authentically reflect the fullness of life individually and in community. How are you extending your digital (and physical) spaces to embrace more of life?

What about the sacraments?

- [Digital Communion? Questions to Consider About the Sacraments](#) (9:19): Matt Sigler (SPU) teaches the theology behind Sacraments and offers several questions to consider before choosing to take the Lord's Supper virtually.
- [Fasting from Sacraments](#) (0:59): There have been times in history when Christians have fasted from partaking in communion. What can we learn from their experiences and how should we respond?

Module 5: Exploring Creativity and New Church Modalities

How can churches turn a crisis into a creative opportunity?

- [Digital Fatigue: The Church's Call to Creativity](#) (3:20): How can our churches continue to foster creativity amidst digital fatigue? Tyler Gorsline (A Seattle Church) shares how his church responded to the pandemic and why now is the time to unleash the creativity and gifts of every member.
- Focused clips
 - [Staying Creative without Margin](#) (0:55): "It's hard to be creative without margin"; Tyler Gorsline sees firsthand how digital fatigue is sapping people's energy and making it hard to stay creative. How can we help each other stay creative?
 - [The Backlines of Ministry](#) (1:13): What if we viewed church activities as the backlines of ministry and the daily work of the saints as the frontlines? How does taking the lead of our people enable us to adapt and innovate? How can churches be a platform to support your frontline ministry in the world?

What does the next generation church platform look like?

- [Going Hybrid: The Next Generation Church Platform](#) (): Daniel Herron (The Robloxian Christians) and Chris Lim (TheoTech) discuss how churches can integrate effectively virtual and in-person experiences to fulfill their mission. They also discuss how can the next generation of young people be empowered to use their gifts in this season.
- Focused clips
 - [The Building Is Not the Point](#) (36:47): Chris Lim discusses how God is shaking up our conception of church and sending us into the virtual and physical world. Church buildings served the purpose of being a platform. Digital transformation means churches can continue to be platforms in new and unprecedented ways. How can our churches continue to be platforms to unleash people's gifts for God's Kingdom?
 - [Zacchaeus and How God Is Sending Us Into the Digital World](#) (1:04): Daniel Herron discusses how the way Jesus treated Zacchaeus shows us how God is calling us into the digital world.

Module 6: Ministry in a New Context

How can churches live into a culture of experimentation and adaptation to thrive during our unprecedented time?

- [Ministering in Unprecedented Times](#) (44:35): James B and Renee Notkin (Union Church Seattle) discuss how digital technology is flattening the hierarchies of our church, removing artificial borders and turning churches into platforms that unleash the gifts of every saint to bear witness to the Kingdom of God.

- Focused clips
 - [Church Culture of Experimentation](#) (1:21): Why is humility critical to experimentation? How can we view failure as success? In this clip James B Notkin shares about the heart behind creating a church culture of experimentation. How is your church encouraging digital experimentation?
 - [Seeking the Welfare of the Community](#) (1:38): What is Church really about? What is God's bigger purpose for us? And how does seeking the welfare of the community connect us with God's purpose? In this clip James B Notkin talks about what makes for a meaningful community to belong to. What makes your church experience meaningful amidst the pandemic?
 - [The Role of Pastoral Leadership](#) (1:29): How has the pandemic and digital transformation changed the role of pastors? In this clip James B Notkin shares ideas for how pastors may become curators and facilitators more than producers or preachers. What unique role can pastors play amidst the pandemic?
 - [Digital Equalization and Equipping](#) (0:53): How has "Zoom church" changed the relationship between clergy and laity? How has digital resulted in a new sense of equality between saints? In this clip Renee Notkin shares about how the shift to virtual worship has helped people recognize that they are sent by God as ministers. How is your church equipping and unleashing saints?

Next Steps

- Join the conversation: Discuss these resources and related ideas in the [Forum for Church Digital Transformation](#)
- Explore the [Church Digital Transformation Plan Template](#)