

How I learned to love worshiping via video call

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On a Sunday morning last December, the FaceTime notification sound chirped on my phone at 9:30 a.m. When I tapped the glass, there was a live view of my church’s sanctuary, beautifully decorated for Advent—but sideways, with the stained-glass windows seemingly on the floor. This sideways view of the sanctuary was alternating with a way-too-close-up view of my pastor’s nasal passages (some things cannot be unseen!) followed by her labored breathing and finally by, “I’m trying to set up my tripod to FaceTime you into worship!”

“The church is upside down and sidewise,” I helpfully volunteered.

“I know!” she shot back, frustrated and already late for the adult forum between worship services.

I’m a chronically ill person. I’ve had almost ten years of chemotherapy, and I have a truly broken, fractious immune system. I’m one of the many people who could die from a simple virus. You know the list: “Infants and children, the elderly, and those with suppressed immune systems.” My ability to be physically among the body of Christ in worship has long been determined by the daily statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Feature

PowerPointless: Video screens in worship

A tacit assumption is that PowerPoint computer presentations are merely a means to an end, a value-neutral tool used for innocent, even noble purposes: enlarging text for the hard of seeing; reducing the demand for printed materials; bringing younger people, who spend much of their lives in front of screens—TV, computer, cell phone, PDA—into worship. But PowerPoint is not value-neutral. As information design analyst Edward Tufte has argued, PowerPoint promotes a kind of cognitive style that routinely disrupts, dominates and trivializes content.

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A screen in a sanctuary used to be a signal that a congregation had taken a side in the worship wars. Now it's just a sign that a church is open and functioning.

by Jason Byassee

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