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## Engagement metrics show spread of Gospel

by Tess Schoonhoven, posted Wednesday, April 22, 2020 (5 days ago)

NASHVILLE (BP) -- City Church in Tallahassee, Fla., is reaching people in its community who may never have entered its building.

Ashlyn Portero, executive director for City Church, said church members have shared stories with her about friends who previously would not have been willing to attend church, but now are watching the service from their homes.

"We are reaching people that we probably wouldn't have been able to reach in the short term, or haven't reached yet," Portero said.

In the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, Christian leaders are still finding ways to proclaim the Gospel and many have seen their efforts rewarded with broad reach and high engagement.

Through livestreamed church services, YouTube shows, podcasts, individual phone calls and simply walking down the street to interact with neighbors, the Gospel is finding its way into the hearts of those who, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, may not have been open to hearing name of Jesus.

### Tracking the response

Danny Franks, pastor of guest services at the Summit Church in Durham, N.C., said the church has been tracking its livestream service views, but is more focused on what turns a "view" into a meaningful connection.

"It is far harder to connect people into that meaningful relationship if you are depending on them to always take the next step," Franks said.

Anyone can ignore a text or an email. So, it is essential to make the connections leading to Gospel conversations easily accessible.

Franks' team created a service portal where guests can identify themselves and express interest in having follow-up conversations regarding the message from the livestreamed service.

The highest response through the portal during a service has been 52 guests.

Franks said they also offer a text line where individuals can ask for more information or be connected to a staff member. Response to that line has grown over the past few weeks, but at its highest has reached only a 10 percent retention rate.

One week they had 203 initial responders, a quarter of those went on to the next step, approximately 18 people actually spoke to a staff member and then 11 people made a decision regarding their faith, whether that be a new commitment or a recommitment to Christ. Franks emphasized that a 5-10 percent reach for Christ is still a win.

Micah Fries, pastor of Brainerd Baptist in Chattanooga, Tenn., said his team uses a multiplying metric of 1.9 times the number of views from the livestream service to get an idea of how many people are watching the service.

The average reach is at least 75 percent larger than the church's in-person attendance, Fries said.

And although it is difficult to narrow down what those metrics mean, Fries said by looking at the church's giving ratios and the reports of Gospel conversations from church members, he is able to get an idea of how the church's ministry is still impacting the community.

### Reported engagement

Fries noted that COVID-19 has opened opportunities for individuals to connect with their neighbors.



Like many pastors, Micah Fries of Brainerd Baptist in Chattanooga, Tenn., has been preaching exclusively online the last several weeks. The average reach of the church's livestream is at least 75 percent larger than the church's in-person attendance. Screen capture

"We've seen an increase in intentionality and focus," Fries said. "Our people are paying attention, and they're more intentional about their conversations, and I think what's fueling that is a desire to be around people and have conversations with people."

Portero emphasized how important it is for the congregation to join in the outreach by sharing the church services and other events on their personal social media accounts and maintaining a missional mindset. These behaviors are a major part of the spread of the Gospel during this time and even when the pandemic passes.

"We've seen an increase in our reach," Portero said. "They [church members] won't just get on and watch the livestream, but they'll also share it, and so that's reaching tons of timelines."

City Church is encouraging members to focus on ways the mission of Christ can still go forward. For example, some may have extra time while at home, providing opportunities to foster Gospel-oriented relationships.

"We're saying, 'Hey if you don't know your neighbors, this is a great time to take a walk,'" Portero said, "for the purpose of meeting your neighbors and eventually invite them to watch a broadcast online or come to church when we're able to meet again."

### **Content matters**

Erskine Anavitarte, music artist and evangelist, said the shift in his ability to travel and minister through shows, events and tours has given him the opportunity to begin a daily online show where he discusses topics pertaining to culture, religion and the Gospel.

This new avenue has allowed him to reach individuals he likely would not have encountered previously. One such opportunity was through the Nashville Rescue Mission, which asked Anavitarte to stream his content to the individuals they serve.

The mission experienced a large influx of people during the pandemic and needed more streaming content, which has become an increasingly large part of its ministry.

"Everybody knows that streaming is up during these days, but it's the content that has become of greater value," Anavitarte said. "You're reaching more people, even vulnerable people, than what you realize because you're putting it [Gospel content] on these different platforms."

On a general level, with more individuals going online for all their communication and connections, Anavitarte said it is vital that Christians be aware of the opportunities they may have to preach the Gospel.

"There are more people who are not believers who are tuning in and trying to figure out what's going on in this world," Anavitarte said. "Position yourself so you do have content that's out there, not just to entertain people but to engage people."

Franks believes that on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic, we'll welcome new believers who came to know Christ because Christians faithfully preached Christ in any way they could.

"Six months from now we might be able to look back at the metrics and say 'yeah it was a flop,'" Franks said. "But I think what we'll find is that six months from now there are going to be people that are in the Kingdom that during a time where the world was all experiencing the same thing at the same time and we we're all very fearful, we still had the opportunity as the church to go forward and to boldly proclaim the Gospel."

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