

SAMPLE DIGITAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This document describes the process used by The Lutheran Church of the Resurrection (LCR), Cincinnati, in developing its Digital Strategy. Written by one of its pastors, Pastor Nicol Kelly, it is graciously provided by LCR as a template for other congregations to follow, as appropriate, in developing strategies appropriate to their circumstances.

Please note:

- *This is the process LCR followed. It is an excellent example yet not the only way to approach developing a Digital Strategy.*
- *The points of view expressed in the document are those of LCR and not necessarily those of the Outside the Box Team or the Southern Ohio Synod.*
- *Approaching any digital strategy is a “team sport.” You are encouraged to partner with OTB and the Southern Ohio Synod.*
- *Names of LCR church members originally included in the document have been omitted for the sake of confidentiality.*

The work of the SOS Outside the Box Team (OTB) is underwritten by The Thrive! Mission Campaign. For more information on Thrive! or the work of the Outside the Box Team, please contact Thrive@SouthernOhioSynod.org.

Lutheran Church of the Resurrection DIGITAL STRATEGY TASK FORCE January 19, 2021

Introduction of the Team

(Note: Team members were listed here but omitted for this sample document.)

Team members briefly describe the giftedness that they bring to the task.

Each member briefly explains why they have agreed to serve on the team.

The Process

1) *Identify LCR’s “brand”*

Church Council has approved this and settled on a “balanced” approach.

Traditional characteristics: Worship, Youth and family ministry, fellowship, Christian Education, Spiritual development, etc.

Distinguishing characteristics: healing racism, immigrant ministry, Reconciling in Christ, (LGBTQ) safe place, Creation care, outreach ministries and partnerships, world hunger, social justice ministries, etc. LCR is a “progressive” church.

The vocal voice of Christianity is the Evangelical/Fundamentalist/Literal Bible interpreting expression. There are a huge number of people looking for a Protestant mainline, progressive expression of Christianity. They are looking for LCR!

2) Establish a Digital Strategy Task Force (DSTF)

Church Council was educated and coached in this by Pr. Corey Wagonfield (*Resurrection, Lebanon, and a member of the synod's Outside the Box Team*). This team will meet with him on January 27. He will provide some “guardrails” that the DSTF can consider in moving its efforts forward.

Questions for consideration: What are the outcomes that the DSFT seeks?

How do we serve LCR members more completely and how do we strengthen existing ministries through digital media?

How do we assure that more non-members will “trip over LCR”?

How and where to we effectively grow our digital presence?

What does a digital congregation look like? (More than watching worship once a week.)

What hardware and software would be needed to support a digital participation along with in-person participation (in meetings, study groups, fellowship, etc.)? (When the mortgage is paid off in 2021, there should be funds to potentially support this.)

How does a worship service support both an in-person and digital congregation simultaneously? (I am enrolled in a webinar that addresses this challenge.)

3) Add a Director of (Minister of) Digital Church to LCR's staff

The congregation is not locked into a decision to provide this compensated position as part of our digital strategy. However, it is my presumption that the members of the DSTF understand the complexity, importance, and scope of this effort and realize that this cannot be done well by a church volunteer. While some members of LCR (I suspect very few) may need to be convinced on this position, it is my presumption from conversations with each DSTF team member, that you are all in agreement about the need for this position.

The DSTF will write a job description and suggest when the position should be filled and the number of hours the position should be to start. It could be that this document is not a final product, but rather a starting place from which the position would evolve.

The Director will take on prime responsibility for the digital strategy. Eventually the DSTF will be phased out or will exist as an advisory body for the Director.

Note: Without wanting to push the effort of the DSTF, it should be noted that the Jubilee Campaign will be introduced to the congregation in April. That Campaign will solicit funds to further LCR's mission (since the mortgage will be paid off by then) by identifying a number of ministry objectives (e.g., purchase of a new HVAC unit for the sanctuary). If the DSTF could have a rough idea of the Director of Digital Church position (final details would not be necessary), we could fund this position (say from July 1 to December 31, 2021) as part of the Campaign. This could give the congregation something to get excited about. Then the position could become part of LCR's operating budget beginning in 2022.

Second note: For the sake of full transparency, (church member) is already working at the very front edge of a digital strategy as he is our liaison with the live stream system installer. He has also done a significant amount of LCR's technology work. If the DSTF determines that LCR should employ a Director of Digital Church, he would be willing to consider that position. For these reasons, it makes sense for him to participate with the DSTF as an advisory member.

Both/And not Either/Or

The digital church will exist alongside of the traditional (in-person) church. There will be overlap and integration. The borders will be permeable. Digital church members may eventually become in-person members, but that is not the stated goal.

The Perfect and the Good

We are in uncharted water and we are on the cutting edge. The work of the DSTF should be considered like "throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what sticks." The objective is to strengthen LCR's ministry through digital technology, not to have a perfect plan. Do not allow the pursuit of perfection to prohibit developing what is good.

Function of the Pastors

Our vision has been explained. We have a very talented team. The pastors will function as advisors when asked, cheerleaders throughout, and "nudgers" if things get bogged down. (Church member) will keep the pastors informed and (church member) will keep the Church Council informed.

The Primary Objective

LCR's digital strategy is grounded in the objective of deepening the relationship with Jesus for existing members and of introducing new people to a relationship with Jesus in the beloved community of Lutheran Church of the Resurrection.

Communication to the Congregation

(Church member) should write an introductory Ramblings article that identifies the DSTF team members and offers a basic description of the process and objective. Ongoing articles can be written as needed.

Digital Ministry Task Force

Overall Goals

To leverage technology and social media

- To communicate clearly/simply/cohesively who we are, who Christ is, and how LCR uniquely walks out Christ's call
- So that people "trip" over us and our message in the digital world
- To help our members connect with one another and foster community
 - Enhancing and building on connections that happen in person
- To provide opportunities for Christian education that can exist beyond physical spaces

Website

- Has some good elements but needs work in others
- The overall message of LCR and LCR's uniqueness needs to be more clear
- It needs to be more user friendly
- Ministries need to be more completely filled out with relevant, current content
- It would help if the website had greater functionality/plugin capabilities across platforms (connection to our Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram)
- Better images of LCR rather than canned content
- Needs to have some information for members, but is primarily "outward facing"
- An overall strategy for how and when the website is updated needs to be established with a calendar for the creation of content
- It could be helpful and advantageous to have an easily navigable place to view (and possibly engage with community?) live worship from the website
- What theological content is needed from pastors?

Facebook

- Facebook is both outward and inward facing; it has information for members and seeks to attract (i.e.: the sharing of content that helps neighbors and friends "trip" over LCR)

- This is currently where our live-streamed worship experiences live -- is this the best place/best technology? Might we also use YouTube or another to make it more accessible to non-Facebook folks.
- It would help to have an overall strategy of how information is shared on Facebook. Specifically, when and what kinds of events are advertised?
- It would help to have a strategy for a balanced approach to how we share about our ministries (i.e. the first Monday of the month we share about racial justice and youth ministries, the 2nd Tuesday we share about Guatemala and hunger issues, etc.)
- What information should be shared in a “story” verse a regular post?
- What kinds of content do pastors need to create or curate? There is a lot of random “Christian content” out there. It is important to have a pastor work with the theological content or with the person who does.
- How might we utilize subgroups on Facebook? I have tried subgroups for youth and children with little success, but maybe there is something missing there.
- The Contemplative Group has its own Facebook page -- how can we more effectively leverage the audiences of each to maximize interaction and participation?

Instagram

- This is underutilized. We occasionally put things on Instagram, but there is little vision for it. (It’s also a difficult platform to interact with for uploading content). Do we continue with Instagram and if so, how?

Twitter/TikTok etc

- We do not have accounts on these platforms. I haven’t seen the usefulness of them in terms of what is required to put in to get anything out. Am I missing something?

Christian Education:

- There are LOTS of opportunities for Christian Education in the digital world. I don’t know that it will be possible to create true community with hybrid classes where some is in person and some is online, but I’d like to see LCR have quality educational offerings each quarter that are both digital and in person once we get out beyond COVID-19.
- Digital educational opportunities allow us to build community from afar and to bring in a more diverse cross section of speakers and leaders.

Contemplative Ministries:

- This is another area where I see A LOT of potential. It is my 2021 goal to grow this ministry, especially utilizing and leveraging digital means. I would love help exploring what this could look like.
- I have spoken with members of the steering group and have gotten a variety of suggestions from increased written content on FaceBook and the website to creating videos of guided meditation/prayer and worship offerings that can stream online. I'm interested in exploring all of these but will need technical help.

In summary, this is a mission field ripe for harvest. The Holy Spirit is busy and at work. We need you all to help us discern the Spirit's movement. We then join the Spirit in her work, helping LCR to utilize platforms and guide LCR toward the necessary hardware and support the Spirit's work.

On a personal note, I am so excited that you all are on board and are helping to make this happen!!

Pr. Nicole

January 19, 2021