

Is the Digital Church Really the Church?

Some call it the digital church.

Others call it the internet church.

In either case, it refers to people joining worship services, and even groups, virtually or digitally. They are not physically present.

I am watching this trend closely via hundreds of churches, and I am seeing more and more chatter and a lot more disagreements about the nature of the digital church. Let me share with you some of the major shifts taking place.

- **Any church can have digital worship services with technology today.** There are many options for churches today, most of them free. Facebook Live is the most common option, and it is free for the churches that use it. Just a few years ago, only the large churches with greater resources could livestream their services. Now any church with an internet connection can do so.
- **More church leaders are asking if the virtual or internet attendance should be counted.** The question they are really asking is: Is a virtual attender the same as a physically present attender?
- **The theological debates about the digital church are increasing.** There are some really strong opinions being articulated. And since we Christians tend to love a good theological debate (fight?), I anticipate the discussion will grow more heated.
- **Some churches are reporting a decline in physical attendance as they provide virtual attendance venues.** There are church members who are beginning to view attending church virtually as just another option,

much like they can choose among multiple worship services where they would be physically present.

- **Churches are reporting mixed results about giving among virtual attenders.** Though the information is anecdotal for now, church leaders report some pretty decent offerings among the virtual attenders if they give them the opportunity to give. But they are also reporting a decline in per capita giving when a member shifts from physical attendance to virtual.
- **This issue will be generational to some degree.** Millennials and, even more so, Gen Z, see virtual communities as real communities. Some of them can't understand why churches can't have vibrant virtual communities in lieu of being physically present.

Though this issue is not new, it seems to be approaching a tipping point. I will continue to keep you updated on developments regarding the virtual church.

In the meantime, let me hear from you. I suspect some of you have a strong opinion or two. {eo}

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