

Speaker 1:

This episode is part three of our five part state of the church series designed to provide encouragement, insight and forward looking tips for navigating the impacts of 2020. In today's podcast, our CEO and founder William Vanderbloemen speaks with a panel of pastors from smaller churches which at Vanderbloemen we call that normal sized churches on managing the switch to a virtual service with agility and open mindedness.

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The panelists includes Reverend Lillian Daniels, senior pastor of First Congregational church in Iowa, Jim Gribnitz, lead pastor at Rockland Community Church in Colorado and John Hagmann, pastor and head of staff at First Presbyterian Church in North Carolina. These leaders all experienced the sudden shift from conducting church in person with little to no online components to operating fully online when COVID-19 hit. Through their trials they now feel their commitment to agility and willingness to focus on what could be done rather than what was taken away has led them to an even stronger place of service than before. They discuss the struggles, fears, victories and hopes that this global pandemic has brought to their unique communities. Walk away with encouragement, hope and a sense of feeling known as these pastors vulnerably share their experiences.

Speaker 1:

Tweet your takeaways from today's show using the hashtag Vandercast and check out today's show notes to join our Facebook group where we post behind the scenes content. We'll even post today's behind the scenes video in that Facebook group. Without further ado, here's William's conversation with Lillian, Jim, and John.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well hey everybody. Thanks for joining us again this week and we're talking about how we're reopening church. One of the things I've said over and over and over is this pandemic for good or bad has accelerated a lot of change that has already been happening in churches. One of those changes is the way church is actually providing worship opportunities for their people. Prior to the pandemic, according to one study that I read recently about 10% of all congregations protestant in the United States were broadcasting their services in a livestream format to the internet. Now it's almost flipped the other way. Roughly 90% of all churches offer some form of online worship now and everybody's had to figure that out in about a six month time frame. I've got some friends today. I'm going to let them introduce themselves. They're all from wonderful churches and they're all from very modern new church plants by European standards but by American standards they're all fairly traditional churches that have had to do some serious agility exercises and all three of them have done a wonderful job so without wasting any more time, Jim would you just introduce yourself and tell people where you're serving and a little bit of background.

Jim Gribnitz:

You bet. My name is Jim Gribnitz. I'm serving here just west of Denver in the foothills we call it in Colorado. I've been here about five years. I'm at Rockland Community Church and we've had streaming and we've had some technology we've really done for years before I got here. It was really the piece meal type approach instead of really holistically looking at how we actually do streaming. We technically did used to stream. It was very much just a starting point focused on our community and our people and now we've really had to adapt just because it's lots of people are just looking for a church online so

there's a lot more are tuning in but I think I said I've been here about five years now so six months of that or whatever it's been COVID.

William Vanderbloemen:

You've been here four and a half years and then seven years after that?

Jim Gribnirz:

What?

William Vanderbloemen:

You've been here for four and a half years and then since March or the last seven years.

Jim Gribnirz:

Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, exactly. I've aged a lot in the past six months I guess is what he's saying. I really have.

William Vanderbloemen:

Lillian, introduce yourself.

Lillian Daniel:

I'm the senior pastor at First Congregational Church in Dubuque, Iowa and we are sort of your classic historic downtown mainline Protestant church. Unlike what people think when they hear about Iowa, my setting is very urban. It's also very hilly. We're in the drift less region on the Mississippi but the church was founded in 1839. Very much an urban environment downtown. We do a lot with feeding the hungry and serving the poor. Our members though would come from all around us to come to this sort of downtown church. They tend to be folks who would probably drive by a lot of churches that would be more convenient to attend so they have that commitment to be a church for the heart for the city.

William Vanderbloemen:

Lillian's done a cool thing during this shutdown. I've been watching. I actually get paid to stalk for a living so I watch all of you and Lillian's been doing all of these, "Hey, check out this part of the building you've never seen and it's been really cool. I never knew so much about your church building.

Lillian Daniel:

Yeah, we're on part 23 of the coronavirus church tour and that's what I call it, coronavirus church tour is I started it in week one and initially it was just going to places in the church that people missed. Stained glass windows and stuff but then the comedian in me got busy and so there's some in the men's room or in the mechanical closet and there's even been some that have gone to me working at home having staff meetings with my cat and that kind of thing.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's great, that's great. John, round it out for us. Introduce yourself and tell us about your background.

John Hagmann:

Yeah, my name is John Hagmann. I'm the senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Morganton, North Carolina in the western part of the state and so right in the mountainous area there. Beautiful place to serve, beautiful people to serve. Our church was founded prior to 1797 and we are a Presbyterian church USA congregation. Yeah, this is my first ordained call. My one year anniversary of service was our very first service online so that was awesome and just trying to keep up as best we can.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's great. For those who don't have context, I'm from western North Carolina. The unfortunate chapter of history there is Trail of Tears so really anything before the 1830s is really old for there so 1790s is super duper old and been around a long time. Fantastic all three churches. Let me start with John because you may not know this. I hope you don't know this but you have been my anonymous example of, "Oh my goodness, what do you do?" I've said on a number of podcasts and on conference talks and in interviews and full disclosure John serves the church where my mother attends and so I've said over and over my mother has a fairly new pastor and my guess is that her wonderful church of a few hundred people in the woods of North Carolina. She would say it's a thriving little town. I would say yes, but you can also say the woods of North Carolina. If he had come to his board of elders last January and said, "I have this fabulous idea. Why don't we stream all of our services live online every single week?" Chances are they would've laughed him out of the boardroom and said, "Nice idea new guy but not yet."

William Vanderbloemen:

Now, guess what they're doing every single week? John, walk us through the mechanics a little bit of how did you guys decide to do that and really what if any changed dynamics were at work that you had to navigate in your first call as senior pastor making this switch? It was right before Easter, right?

John Hagmann:

Yeah. Right in the middle of March was when our first online service started and we didn't really have... We weren't ready. We didn't have a website that was able to do what we wanted it to do, we didn't have the social media capabilities that we needed to be able to communicate in ways that were effective and those kinds of things. Again, I was brand new so we were trying to figure out, okay how do we do a YouTube channel? How does that work? How does lighting and sound and I had to learn all those kinds of things. The decision making process for us was really pretty quick. I just reacted and we could meet in person and so I was just, okay well I got to do something. I went to our session, our board of elders and just said, "Hey, can I do this?" They were like, "Yeah, go for it." That was kind of how it started.

William Vanderbloemen:

Did you set your iPhone up on a tripod and hit go or did you have to go recruit kids or... I know the composition of your church. It's not Silicon Valley, right?

John Hagmann:

That's correct.

William Vanderbloemen:

What'd you actually do to get that going?

John Hagmann:

Yeah, so fortunately for us my wife is into photography so she had a DSLR camera and so we had a lot of the stuff that we needed to make it happen and she's taught me a lot about how to do lights and make it look halfway decent. I can tell you, even now looking back on some of the stuff we did in March, I'm kind of like, "Ooh." It's kind of cringe worthy when we do it. Fortunately too I have three kids so I roped them into doing a whole bunch of stuff. Hey kids I need you to learn how to sing Doxology real quick and harmonize and make it sound all right. I need you to learn Gloria Patri real quick. Fortunately they were up for it and they've done a really good job.

John Hagmann:

In fact, just to take a moment and just say that's been one of the coolest things for me is watching how my children have engaged in leading others in worship and watching their development and how they kind of understand the behind the scenes of why we do what we do. It's given me a chance to explain to them, here's why we have this liturgy in place and here's why it's important and here's how we can try to keep it intact as best we can given this new media we're using. I had a little bit of a head start as far as equipment went and as far as personnel.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think you've just taught us all a new lesson in change management. If you have a new idea let your kids be the ones that want to do it and then let the congregation get mad at the children. No, they aren't going to do that.

John Hagmann:

Absolutely. It was them.

William Vanderbloemen:

It was them. You want to get mad at the kids? Yep. Lillian, talk to us a little bit about what you guys were doing before. I know you had been kind of leading this established church in this direction and it sort of accelerated so tell us where the church was when you got there, what had happened and what's accelerated since COVID.

Lillian Daniel:

Right. I had come from more of a high tech congregation in the suburbs of Chicago and we had been doing the recording of worship and then posting it and had learned that that was really helpful to people and just really helped. Your average person attends church they think they're regular so they come twice a month maybe. I'd already sort of had that experience so I came to Dubuque and was pitching that and it was interesting. It wasn't the older members who were against it, it was my younger members who said, "Oh, people are just going to stay in their pajamas and not come to church and be lazy." In the end what happened was I convinced some of my snow birds. I had folks who would go away to warmer places and they got invested in the idea because they loved the idea that they could keep up with church and to be honest, some of them contributed financially to make that expenditure possible.

Lillian Daniel:

When coronavirus hit so many people said, "Oh thank goodness, we're already doing this." Having said that, it was also a huge learning curve for us because we were basically doing sort of almost like the

camera was recording what you missed as if you're an eavesdropper and you see it later. Once corona hit I realized that camera angle being so distant where you want to see who's in church that day and stuff, all of a sudden you've got to really change what you're doing to make it more intimate. We've had a lot of learning curve on that. I love your story about pulling family members in. As we shut down and created our own little bubble in the church, we thought there was going to be four or five of us on staff, six I guess and then our families were the bubble.

Lillian Daniel:

You're conscripting all these people. Our office administrator has become a fantastic videographer. So many people have stepped up in ways and now as we look ahead to kind of opening things up a little bit, I'm thinking about how do we spread some of that work around safely.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's great. That's good. And Jim, tell us the before and after picture of streaming at Rockland.

Jim Gribnirz:

We had a guy before I was here and then he was here a little bit doing our tech stuff and he was on vacation or something and he just pulled up a chair and he said, "I want to watch church online," and pulled up some little podunk Texas Baptist church and said, "If they can do it, we should be able to do it." He really pieced together the inter workings of it. He kind of did a great job with the initial, why are we paying to stream? We're all here. That's kind of mindset which sounds so silly now. He really did some of that but it wasn't great so it was really geared towards our people. Now we have so many other people watching. What we've tried to do is... We used to look at all the metrics. It was just streaming on our website and then we found out there's a service we use that can stream it to YouTube and to Facebook and to our website as well and we just decided to put it out to all those places and it makes metrics a little trickier but it just makes it more convenient for people to watch.

Jim Gribnirz:

We really looked for what are some one time costs if there's a cost or one time thing. If we can learn like our software was clunky. If we can learn this piece of software and just invest in that, it's a one time fixed cost of either money or time that can ramp up ongoing. We have a couple people that our tech guy has been working with some other volunteers and we had one Sunday, he was out and we had a young man that's a sophomore in high school and then we had a girl that's in college that ran the entire service in person and online as well. We've been really trying to invest in other people and I think a lot what y'all are saying. How can we find other people and bring them in because we also find that we get a lot of grace right now and the bar was kind of low for us as well with what we produced and so I honestly think if we had moving cameras and moving lights and all that, our congregation would probably just, would turn it off. That's one of the benefits we have is just a real kind of personal feel to it.

William Vanderbloemen:

Jim was the fellow who saw the little Baptist church in wherever, Texas was he a leader in your church?

Jim Gribnirz:

He was. He was very part time staff guy that did our tech for us and so he would run it on Sunday mornings but what we paid him for and what he actually spent hours doing, he volunteered quite a bit as well.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think one of the passages I was studying for a talk I'm giving for an online pastor's retreat because they first responders rightfully have all the banners and ribbons and signs but you guys are a different kind of first responder for the soul and I think it's going unnoticed so we're trying to put out things to help pastors rest and this pastors online retreat's one. My talk I decided to do, I was particularly taken with Nehemiah and how he went and rebuilt a broken world and what were the steps that he took. It had never dawned on me that the first people he used to rebuild the wall were the priests. Now I don't know, about you all but when I was in seminary I didn't have any masonry classes. They're arguably the worst people in the whole workforce to rebuild a wall. They're just the priests but they're the ones that volunteered. What I'm hearing over and over in churches that have had to go online is yeah, they weren't a church leader but they were here and they raised their hand.

William Vanderbloemen:

I wonder, are you seeing that John other than using your children which I love but have you seen hands go up for leadership that were not leaders that are helping? What's the dynamic like?

John Hagmann:

Unfortunately for us not so much. We're not really receiving that. I think it's intimidating to try to learn something new especially to be in front of the camera for sure. That's something that folks don't want to do and frankly I don't want to do either. I think that we're starting to get a little bit more engagement as far as things that people can do behind the scenes as we're having some restrictions lessened here in North Carolina we're able to have a little bit more people coming in and out of our facility. We're starting to see a little bit more folks who are excited to get back and to get to work. I'm really looking forward to that. I'm looking forward to the new ideas and the new things that will come of this but so far it's been very, very quiet and for me that's tough to kind of say but it really feels isolating and it feels like there's a lot on my shoulders to really kind of will it to happen and to make it happen and if there's any barriers or those are mine to crash through and it's been a really, it's been a tough half a year.

William Vanderbloemen:

Wow, wow. Jim, sounds like you had some high schoolers jump in and you've had volunteers jump in but are you finding leaders that you didn't know you had?

Jim Gribnirz:

Yeah, that's actually pretty exciting and I think there's two factors right now that are real helpful. One is since no one knows what they're doing there's something in us that likes to be a part of solving problems and so what we're inviting people to do is go, "Do you want to figure this out with us?" I think there's naturally this empowering thing to it that they're able to solve problems. Then the other piece that is generally good for volunteers is whether or not it really is they see it as a short term commitment and then they've got a little bit of time, some of them have a little bit of time right now and so to be able to say, "We've got an issue. You know what it is. We're trying to figure something out." We're seeing people... Our greeting ministry that we're about to redo is going to be led by someone who is just

marvelous and I don't know that she's had a formal service role within the life of the church before. We're doing communion. We've got the little rip and sip things they call them where you-

William Vanderbloemen:

McEucharist.

Jim Gribnirz:

What's that?

William Vanderbloemen:

McEucharist.

Jim Gribnirz:

McEucharist, yeah. I'm going to start using that.

Lillian Daniel:

That nobody can get open.

Jim Gribnirz:

Yes. The first day we did it I stood up there like an idiot and I straight up just faked it I have to say. I feel like a total hypocrite. We were going, "Hey, we'd like to start doing communion. How do we do it?" Ordered some of the things and then got one of the volunteers who used to coordinate them engaged and I said, "I don't really know what to do. What do you think?" Then the going back and forth I think was actually besides he came up with something better than I would've come up with, I think there was something meaningful to him to go, "I'm getting to actually help craft this. We needed gluten free stuff. He's like, "I know someone with celiac. Let me figure that..." He went through and just really figured it out. Some of it is people don't know right now how to help as well I think. Some people can't because of health or whatever it is but I think the more we make those opportunities available people seem to be responding if we're specific.

William Vanderbloemen:

I was talking with Craig Groeschel not too long ago and he told me... He's said it many times but he told me he's learned a lot from another pastor Andy Stanley who's a little older than he is and he said, "Maybe the two most important words in leadership development I ever learned I learned from Andy and this is it. You look at the volunteer and you say, 'You decide.'" It just opens doors like crazy.

Jim Gribnirz:

Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen:

I want to shift gears just a second from online service. Now you've got people interested in your service. You're at this older church. This could apply to any church but I'm thinking of the churches that have been around a while or they're in older facilities. Lillian has had a fantastic platform that she's been developing. She's had a... Since I stalk for a living I've been watching her give a tour of her building and

engaging the people not just in a talk to Lillian sort of thing but one day we're going to be back in this building, here's the... Tell us how that started Lillian and it's kind of turned pretty fun, huh?

Lillian Daniel:

It has and I think it gets to another question that I think a lot of pastors are wrestling with which is the sort of serious part of it is the recorded worship that you put out there after the fact versus the live stream. We were in the recorded worship and we're probably transitioning now to live stream but there was something about that that felt very formal and then also the fact that if you want people to get it on Sunday at least for us with the time it takes to upload we had to start recording it on Thursday and then people would get this email on Sunday, right? Just to get it going it seemed like we had a need of something that was less formal and more spontaneous felt in the moment and so those became these midweek videos that I would do from my desk initially saying... I remember how it started. It was we weren't going to meet that Sunday and I had to tell people and a written newsletter didn't seem to cut it.

Lillian Daniel:

I wanted to say that to the congregation from the office and say how sorry I was. Then the coronavirus church tours videos started and it was saying, "Here's this beautiful spot," but then it got silly and going to the men's room and telling them about the new pew cushions and things like that. It's an opportunity also to talk about stewardship and in the mean time when all this has been going on we had a capital project going on, renovating our kitchen and our social hall. It was fun to do the tours from there during construction.

Lillian Daniel:

I think that what it points to is this sense of how do you make it feel immediate when it is recorded and yet what do you lose when you go to live stream? In our case in Iowa where I am our wifi is terrible in this old building. You're looking at a lot of buffering and stuff. I'm really interested in that question and how pastors are going through that learning curve as well.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think it's going to be one of the questions that we're all going to wrestle with and like Jim said, nobody has this figured out. I keep telling people unless you were alive in 1919 you don't know what you're doing. No matter what profession, we're all in uncharted ground but I think one of the things that I'm beginning to see as a trend is if a local church is going to remain relevant to their local congregation and their people engaged with the local congregation, they're going to have to, I call it hyper localize their ministry. Their preaching's going to have to be about in this zip code, this week this happened. Otherwise people just go stream whatever great preacher. I'm at a Methodist church. Everybody just stream Adam Hamilton or if it's Presbyterians they stream whoever... Rich [Canwisher 00:24:41] or whoever the person they want to listen to is. Hyper localization and not just local to the zip code, but local to the time.

William Vanderbloemen:

Sometimes you got bad wifi, you got to pre-record but then there's got to be something live to go on top of that. I think you're spot on Lillian and the hundreds and hundreds of churches that we're talking to every week, that is a very, very real struggle that people are trying to figure out. How do we produce in a



way that will work but keep it current enough that in a world where the news cycle changes every three days. Hey question-

Lillian Daniel:

I mean, I remember with pain the time when... Well, when George Floyd was murdered and I had recorded a sermon on Thursday and then that happened and it just felt so inadequate but we didn't have the technology to do it differently.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well, I am so tired of the word pivot but it is what we have to do, this agility. I messed it up, I didn't even have that excuse Lillian. I had just moved to Houston when the space shuttle blew up on reentry on... John would remember this right over the skies of Houston and Texas and it happened I think on a Saturday and then I was to preach on Sunday and I didn't change my sermon and I didn't know my context. There were more people in church then than any time except maybe right after 9/11 and they weren't there to hear the sermon that I wrote two weeks ago and I totally blew it because I didn't hyper contextualize.

William Vanderbloemen:

Let me shift just a second to each of you and ask the question how are you staffing this online thing now? Is it all volunteer? Are you doing outside labor? What if anything are paying someone to do to keep services online and your people engaged. I'll start at the top of my screen. John are you guys doing anything in contract labor or anything like that?

John Hagmann:

No. Because we're remote we were able to hire a student ministry intern who's actually in nursing school in New Orleans. A daughter of the church, someone that we all think very highly of and so she's been helping us with our student ministry stuff with Zoom and that kind of technology. Also helping us try to figure out what's Instagram and how does that work? Those kinds of things. We have a communications director who's helping us with our social media and those kinds of things. When it comes to the services and it comes to putting those together and making sure they get online, that falls to me.

William Vanderbloemen:

Okay. Jim, what about you? Have you had to change staffing or cost structures to make things work?

Jim Gribnirz:

A tiny bit. For me there's two pieces of it. There's the behind the scenes we've got a guy who's great and then he's got volunteers that he's been working with and then all this it and we went, "Okay, you've got to really ramp that up," and he's done awesome. I'm a little spoiled. One of the things I found was he can't read my mind on this because it's such a just constant moving thing and so we've just started meeting together once a week and we'll walk... We already walked through the service but we would just talk tech stuff. I would say, "What are your challenges? What questions do you have? How can I help? How can I support?" I lean on him. I think initially I kind of went, "Gosh Matthew you figure this out. I'm going to figure out how to talk with nobody in the room," kind of thing and now I think the first few services I'm a little embarrassed about from my end but now we really partner together and instead

of going, "You do this, I do this, we'll see you Sunday," I lean on him a bunch for that and then he leans on me for, "Here's the content. I got to get it to you by this time."

Jim Gribnirz:

We have developed volunteers. The other piece of it too is thinking about how do I do something different when I'm standing there speaking because there's people at home and I don't want them to feel like the B team because they're not in my heart but if I'm just doing this and I never address them they could feel like I think they're the B team. Some of it is the people. We rotate more people through. We do a kids blessing time, someone reads it. We have prayers, we have all those different things and we try to rotate people through. We have volunteers that come up and we have professional, we have paid people that do the music but then we'll bring in volunteers and let them sing. I think the variety that people get to see is important on Sunday mornings and see it through the camera.

William Vanderbloemen:

Well the good news is Jim any mistakes you made in those early services won't live forever. Oh wait.

Jim Gribnirz:

Thanks William. Gift of encourager right there.

William Vanderbloemen:

I'm just glad I'm old enough that my first sermons are dead. They aren't recorded anywhere, they aren't anywhere to be found. Only Jesus can remember them and yeah.

Jim Gribnirz:

Didn't you put them on laser disc or something if I recall?

William Vanderbloemen:

That was the fancy churches had that. Yeah, we were reel to reel.

Lillian Daniel:

No, you were carving them in stone tablets.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's right, that's right. Lillian, what have you guys done? Have you had to employ anyone or what are you doing in terms of staffing for having to be online more?

Lillian Daniel:

It's so interesting. There's such a contrast here, right based on context. I had friends in the Chicago metro area who were like, "Oh, we hired a videographer to come in and record things and it looks great." Well, it depends where you are. It's not like there's a bunch of those folks hanging around in Dubuque, Iowa and the ones who are doing that stuff got snapped up I think by businesses who had more work to offer. Even if we had wanted to run out and hire staff to do this it's different depending on where you are. I think like many of you we've had to rely on our own staff more than ever. Suddenly

they have a new job description and sometimes that's a stretch to get people to say whatever it was you did before, this now becomes the most important thing, this weekly worship.

Lillian Daniel:

I worry about church staffs and clergy. I think we're all exhausted and we have volunteers out there who want to help but with the lockdown and everything before we even understood how it was spread we were terrified of people picking it up from touch and things like that initially. We got similar feedback. Here we're working our tails off to produce this but there'd be people like, "Why don't we have any males involved in this service?" Because it was me and my colleague and our musicians and it was like, "Oh my gosh, do you realize the juggling act we're doing here?" We were able to open that up-

William Vanderbloemen:

They don't.

Lillian Daniel:

Yeah, we were able to open it up and we realized people want to hear their voices and we got creative. We had members who might... a guy who wanted to do a harmonica solo and he's in a high risk category so he was able to come in, record that in the church separate from us and then it's part of the service. That's the beauty of the pre-recording. You can do that. Now we're getting more comfortable with having people participate but we space everybody far away from each other. You have your own stand that you sit at. I think people, they miss seeing each other but they also miss helping themselves. That's one of the hardest pieces of this.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's right. That's right. I've heard... I actually told Lillian this in a prior conversation a pastor friend of mine said, "You know William when our church is at its very, very best the reason we like in person worship is because it's a faint echo of what we'll have in heaven. We're pretty diverse as a church but we're not diverse like we're going to see in heaven. We sing okay but everyone's going to sing in tune in heaven. We get this faint echo when we gather together of what we're going to have forever. He said, "The problem I'm running into with online worship is yeah, it's the best thing we've got right now but it's an echo of the faint echo." It's just not the same. I think that worship will come back in person in every context eventually. I also wonder, and I'd love for each of you to answer and I'll just reverse the order, do you think that your online streaming service will go away once whatever lockdown your under ceases and people are able to get out and freely move around? Lillian, what's your answer to that?

Lillian Daniel:

Well, it's got to continue and it's got to be better and we've got to challenge ourselves to make it better just like we would challenge our in person worship to do that and it's excellence for the glory of God. You have to remind yourself you're not putting on a TV show but you want it to be as beautiful as it can be. What I think we're going to see around here and what we've already seen from churches that have opened up is initially they get some folks but then they're seeing about 10 or 15% of their regular worshipping attendance so you've got a lot of people still really relying on that. That's where you have to make that shift though which I think we're about to make into letting people back in the building and having to go to the live stream and what you give up in terms of excellence in the product you're gaining perhaps in the immediacy but because it seems crazy, right to record a service on Thursday but then do it in person on Sunday.

William Vanderbloemen:

Absolutely.

Lillian Daniel:

That's when you start feeling like, "Okay, I'm just making a TV show."

William Vanderbloemen:

Jim, what about you? Do you see this having... Will it continue? Will it be different once we're back to whatever normal means?

Jim Gribnirz:

Yeah, I think we're definitely going to keep it going. This is a big miss that had. When we first went and nobody was in the room, we did a worship service as though there were people in the room. We did the same number of songs, we did the same basically everything, I just looked at the camera instead of looked down at the crowd and then we started realizing if we were a full online church, which we were for six or eight weeks or something, I would have a different order of worship. The order of worship has been created for the people that are there. Just as we went, "Oh, duh," and we started figuring that out then we became this hybrid model of we've got people watching and we've got people there.

Jim Gribnirz:

I think the shift for us is going to be I think we'll keep acknowledging people online but it will be more of a look in which is what it was before. Basically you come to church and people online know that they're just looking into a worship service so I think will probably get back to a little bit more of that in our mindset as we're planning. The other reason we're going to get it going, I do get the tension of if someone goes, "No, I don't have to go to church. I'm just going to sit around and watch it, watch it online." And I also get the tension we have people in different states that watch and go, "I'm glad I can do this because I don't really like my church." There's something in me that doesn't feel right about that. I want to write them back and go, "Hey thanks. Go to a church and be with humans in the same room when you can kind of thing." I get that but we do have a number of people that are elderly so we're definitely going to stream it for them.

Jim Gribnirz:

We've got young families, you wake up that morning and your kid's sick or whatever and they go, "Well forget it. We're just not going to do anything." I think what we're going to have at the end of this is a better experience for those families that couldn't make it and then we're trying to figure out what kind of things could we do? We talk all the time about we want to create worship services that people don't want to miss. How can we do that that people go, "I'm glad I was here. I was greeted, I got coffee, I saw people that I knew. We got to hear everybody sing together." They leave and they don't really talk about my sermon that much. They talk and go, "It was so good to be here and hear the music and see the people." Then I kind of... Nope, nothing? Okay. That's it. People want to come back and they want to be... And that's great. Great. I think this is going to help move us towards what the church should be William. I really do think it is.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's great, that's great. John, how about you? Do you think this will continue or will y'all shelve it and go to what you were doing before or something in between?

John Hagmann:

I think it has to continue in some capacity. I think that folks have become accustomed to this. I think it's a great opportunity for folks who can't make it for whatever reason. My particular setting we have a lot of folks who live in assisted living type facilities and so for them this has been a really neat kind of thing. I think the challenge for me is how and how does that work? I think one of the things that we've learned for me, our shift was complete and total. I shifted to where I'm filming in my backyard at my house. It's close up because my thinking was if you're watching online, you've invited me into your living room and so I'm not going to wear a big robe and a stole and the high church kind of thing. I'm in this with you. I'm filming in my backyard. There's my kids that just ran through on a slip and slide. They shouldn't have done that but that's what they did. This is real life and so it's-

Lillian Daniel:

Wait, I thought they were your choir?

John Hagmann:

They are but I got to let them play so they can sing, you know? It's payment. I think it's I'm trying to communicate a more visceral personal experience of what worship can look like and so my concern is that if I back the camera out in our sanctuary and it's this big sprawling huge thing-

Lillian Daniel:

Can't do that.

John Hagmann:

I don't know if that's going to communicate that same... I think it's less personal. At the same time, I might have shot myself in the foot because now like you said, it's the Thursday Sunday thing. How is that sustainable for someone like myself in a congregation of our size when I don't really have the staff to drive it or the volunteers to drive it. That's a concern for me. It's like, "Hey aren't you excited to get back in person?" I'm kind of like, "Not really," because it's going to be even more work than what I'm doing now and I am barely making it now, you know what I mean? It's like I don't know what it should look like. I don't know what it will look like but I know that online church situations are here to stay. I think that for us it's one of the big things in addition to the worship services have been small group opportunities to where I can blow the doors off of the traditional, "Hey it's Wednesday night at 7:00," and that's it. No, no, no. You can meet Friday morning at 7:00 a.m. if you want to. I wouldn't recommend that but you can.

John Hagmann:

I think there's a lot more opportunities that we have now because we've shifted online that folks are getting used to and so how to manage those and how to make sure that you're honoring the in person thing that I think is so critical but also honor the on demand aspect of our Christian formation that's also critical.

William Vanderbloemen:

There's some things that are just incarnational and then there are committee meetings. Maybe some things will be on Zoom and that's okay.

John Hagmann:

Yeah.

Lillian Daniel:

Yeah. I think we're learning that a lot of the stuff we showed up in person for was not necessarily worthwhile like people haven't missed some of it and then it's interesting what they have missed. I think it's an opportunity for us to streamline or to maybe even ask questions about some sort of sacred [inaudible 00:40:49] programs that people weren't really showing up for anyway and to think of new ways to do it. I think a lot about this in the area of Sunday School and youth ministry. I think we're going to have a huge shakeup.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think you're right Lilly and we've got several searches right now that we're doing for churches in program ministries. I would've thought we're just going to be doing senior pastor searches till this calms down or is over but we've got some folks... William we've had the same whatever it is, children's pastor, student pastor for 20 years. They're finally ready to step aside and I can shake things up. I need to do this search now while people are giving grace for change. I need to get some stuff cleared out before there's any normal. I don't know if you're sitting in a normal sized church today. Maybe Lillian's onto something here. Maybe it's time to say, "Why are we doing this? Let's reshuffle everything. Let's give it a new try." I will tell you, I am hearing particularly John I really appreciate you sharing the fatigue piece of things. I'm hearing that over and over and over.

William Vanderbloemen:

Our family actually prays for pastors every night now more than we used to and part of it is you're right John, you're prescient to look to what it will be like in the future. My oldest daughter is a high school math teacher and so from March on she was all virtual and was that hard? Yeah, I had to learn that and what's been the hardest thing? She said, "Oh this semester." I said, "Why?" Well because I have to both now. I have to do in person and then I have some people that want to be virtual and I got to do it both. I don't think they doubled her pay. I'm pretty sure your pay is not going to get doubled this year.

John Hagmann:

No, no.

Lillian Daniel:

I think that's such a good analogy with the school teachers who are going to the hybrid teaching experience and I've actually leaned on some of our school teachers or asked them, "How are you doing this," because I realized they've been thinking about this more than we have in some ways but really we're going to be hybrid like the schools and we're probably also like the schools going to see in and out. They'll be a case, we're stopping this, we're doing this and schools and colleges have had to have eight plans going at the same time and I have huge respect for that but also I think what's happening in the schools and people's work lives then affects how they view what we do. Initially I think we were looking and saying, "Okay, let's learn from these other folks and start doing Zoom meetings or Zoom youth

activities and stuff." What we found out was that our congregation was Zoomed out, particularly the younger members and so they did not want anything on the computer and a Zoom meeting for their children on Wednesday nights. They were like, "Just shoot me. I don't want that." That's going to be really challenging because the church can't just do what we usually do which is copy what industry does 20 years later and cheaply, you know?

Lillian Daniel:

We're going to have to figure out what that we do is incarnational and then what maybe we just set aside or say we're going to wait and do that later.

William Vanderbloemen:

I think that's spot on and I think that as great as virtual is we tried doing all virtual searches for a while years ago. Now the tech's better now than it was when we first tried it so some things can be done virtually but the success rate dropped. It was horrible. We shuttered it. It was a big mistake and the theological takeaway was, if virtual really worked, Jesus would've Zoomed it in. This would be the fullness of time and he would just Zoom us all at once. We wouldn't have to go anywhere and I don't know how you do a virtual crucifixion but no, it doesn't. There's some things that have to be incarnational. I want to encourage everybody listening today, these three did not sign up for this job they're doing right now and if you're feeling that way all three of them are feeling that way and you're just on the front lines in a time where I'm convinced that when we're in heaven... I never did Boy Scouts but the badges I guess you get or if you're Baptist the AWANA badges or whatever... Pioneer Club, whatever your kids program was growing up. You're going to have a badge if you served a special tour duty and a lot of you guys and ladies and women and men that are serving right now are going to show up in heaven with a 2020 badge on.

William Vanderbloemen:

Yep, I was a pastor then. I bet some people from the Bible are going to come up and go, "Wow. You had it tough," so just hang in there. I'll close my part with this and then I want to hear from each of you. It's interesting to me when you think about the real breakthroughs in the church like seismic shifts that have happened in church growth. They always happen right after a communication breakthrough, always. Rome builds roads, Paul plants churches. You can make a case for a common Greek finally comes together, we get a New Testament canonized. Printing press comes along, Luther puts a Bible in everybody's hands. Now we were before COVID in the greatest breakthrough ever but now it's accelerated and I really think if you're tired right now it sounds like a Pollyanna promise but I believe with all my heart we're on the verge of maybe the biggest kingdom breakthrough that has been seen in hundreds of years and you guys get to be on the front line. Sorry you didn't ding up for it but my heart and prayers are with you and I think it's going to be a memory worth making.

William Vanderbloemen:

Closing thoughts from the three if you all. As you think forward, what word of encouragement would you give to people that are sitting in your shoes right now that "didn't sign up for it?"

Jim Gribnirz:

Couple things came to mind for me as you were talking. One is I kind of think of it like on Easter Sunday if we really need to be here at say 7:00 I ask everybody to get here at 6:30 because it's the one Sunday and I say, "I'd rather you be sitting around with nothing to do rather than Easter Sunday and we're

scrambling, scrambling, scrambling," so one of the things I've been talking to some pastors around here is to say at some point you're going to be opening up. You know it's going to get even more hectic down the road. Are there any things you can be doing now to alleviate then? I've got my advent series pretty well planned. I went to my graphics guy and I got him to send me the graphics already and so I just took some time to really plan ahead and right now it just feels like I'm adding a bunch on but I think it's going to make that time afterwards for me more bearable, more doable.

Jim Gribnirz:

I think the biggest thing that I've been thinking about as a pastor, my wife and I have been talking about this, it is so easy to be so disappointed right now. Someone graduated from high school, they don't get their graduation. First day of school. Easter for most pastors were going, "We got to stream this thing. That stinks." It's so easy to be disappointed and I really think that that is the ploy of the enemy is just to go, "Everything is bad and everything is disappointing." Instead of saying, "That stinks. What has God done through this and what could God do as a result. We have simple things like coming to church and seeing friends is so much more precious to them now. I said, I really do think, I agree with you William, I think this is going to shape the church. We did bulletins, we had all these handouts and stuff that we didn't really need but they were sacred cows so we couldn't get rid of them and now we can't and now people are just seeing, much like John you were saying, like they're now seeing, "Yeah, we need online stuff."

Jim Gribnirz:

They had to experience it. Now we can go, "You don't need a bulletin. Do you know how much that costs us and how much time it takes and we're fine." I just think there's so many things. I think the enemy would want you to focus on all your disappointments and I just think we missed the blessings of God of going through this.

William Vanderbloemen:

Wow.

Jim Gribnirz:

I don't want anybody to do that including me.

William Vanderbloemen:

Any other closing thoughts? John? Lillian?

Lillian Daniel:

First I would like John to send us the PowerPoints for his advent sermon series because that would help me out a lot.

Jim Gribnirz:

Sure.

Lillian Daniel:

No, I was going to say I really appreciate this and I think as worn out as clergy are what I have to remind myself is that the people on my boards and on these Zoom meetings, they're worn out too in different



ways. It's so hard that we don't get to see each other and talk. When we feel unappreciated or something, I just think, "Oh my goodness, what's this person feeling like as a teacher or worried about getting laid off." I think somehow we're going to have to figure out how to do that deep conversation pastorally in new ways. I've rediscovered the phone call. Just pick up the phone and say, "What's it like to work at John Deere right now and to try to do that from home?" I saw this in the newspaper because that's what we miss is we don't get that and then we have a stressful Zoom meeting. Of course we do.

Lillian Daniel:

The other thing is, I think it is a time of forgiveness but I think as clergy we're not used to having permission to fail in our field. It tends to be a little more conservative and all of a sudden I think that's the skill that's called for. We have to be willing to try something and fail and we've got to get our churches up for that as well. That could be the breakthrough here that people say, "Oh my goodness. We did something and it wasn't perfect and we survived and Jesus seems to be fine with it." Agility and the willingness to fail.

William Vanderbloemen:

Good, good. John any last thoughts?

John Hagmann:

Yeah I think all of y'all are awesome and have shared a lot of cool stuff. I think this is a moment that if we're up for it we can leverage. We can leverage this time and we can implement and achieve incredible amounts of change that would've taken years, literally years to go through the process but with COVID-19 and all the things like this is one of those leverage points where we can implement change in a much faster, more free-wheeling kind of a way and that's coming from a Presbyterian so it's legit.

William Vanderbloemen:

I'm yet to serve a church called The Free Wheeling Presbyterian Church.

John Hagmann:

We're bringing it so. It is a leverage point where we can try some stuff, you know? What the worst that's going to happen? We can try some things. I think that's encouraging for someone like me who loves that kind of future looking type of thing. I think the other thing that I would say is that in order to maintain that kind of vision and in order to be able to leverage those kinds of moments we have to be able to care for ourselves. I think that self care is something that I talk about a lot because I'm terrible at it but I think this is one of those moments where if your battery is drained, you've got to charge your battery somehow. I think for me it's one of those things where it's like, the church is going to continue on whether you're there or not. It's okay. It's okay. If you have to stream someone else's service for a Sunday so that you can have a break, that is okay and your family's going to thank you and your body's going to thank you and your soul's going to thank you.

John Hagmann:

If there's some creative ways that pastors can help one another that for us like Presbyteries and higher ups in our denominational systems, ways that they can help us to create worship experiences that are kind of canned where we can get some time off, those are huge things. Even if you don't have those

resources take time. Your congregation is okay. They're going to be fine and they're going to thank you eventually for taking care of yourself. I say that out loud guys because I need to hear it but-

Lillian Daniel:

Well I needed to hear it so I really appreciate it. That sounded like a good word. Yeah.

William Vanderbloemen:

That's really good. I was reminded of when I was a young pastor and I took a month off in the summer one time and I thought clearly the church is going to close if I take a month off. There's no way they'll make it and we were pulling back into town and you come around this corner on the main road into town and there's the steeple of the church and it was like God almost whispered, "Yep, right there where you left it."

John Hagmann:

Still got it.

William Vanderbloemen:

It's going to be okay.

Lillian Daniel:

It had doubled in size while you were gone. That's okay.

William Vanderbloemen:

Right. Baptismal records, everything. It was awesome. Well thank you all. Thanks to the three of you. Now if you're listening today and you want to go see three... Okay, yes I know there's Life Church and it's an amazing church. Yes, I know there's Mariner's Church another amazing church but what is the normal church look like and how are they doing this? Go to Rockland's website, go to First Presbyterian Church Morganton's website. Go to First Congregational Church in Dubuque's website and check out these things. Also I would be remiss if I didn't point out, Lillian has a book out that's really thought provoking and it's Tired of the Church... No. Tell me-

Lillian Daniel:

Tired of Apologizing for a Church I Don't Belong To.

William Vanderbloemen:

Tired of Apologizing for a Church I Don't Belong To. Don't read it if you want status quo but if you want to be provoked a little bit you'll enjoy it quite a bit. Thank you all for joining us today. Really appreciated all three of you and you making time in a busy and tired season to pour into some other pastors. Thanks very much.

Lillian Daniel:

Thanks William.

John Hagmann:

This transcript was exported on Sep 27, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Thanks William.

Jim Gribnirz:

Thanks.

William Vanderbloemen:

Thank you all for listening. If you'll check out the show notes we'll include links to all of their websites. I'll even try and find a link to the tour the church in Dubuque video series and if you're not on our email list for the show notes you can go to VanderNews.com. Just leave your email address. We won't beat you up with a bunch of emails. We'll just send you those show notes so that you can follow the links of everybody that we have on the show. Thanks for tuning in and we'll look forward to another chance to visit together as we all try and figure out what it looks like to reopen the church.

Speaker 1:

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