

DEARBORN FIRST UMC ONLINE WORSHIP

How your online worship has evolved over the 7 weeks since in-person worship was no longer possible. What you include? Who participates?

We have provided an online, streaming video ministry since fall 2019. Prior to March, it was recorded in the sanctuary and broadcast via our dedicated YouTube channel, with streaming links on our Facebook page, as well.

During the 7 weeks that in-person worship has been suspended our online worship has evolved in the following ways:

1. Increase in streaming locations from 2 (YouTube and Facebook), to 4, thanks to the creation of a Youth Instagram page and a dedicated LiveStream worship and resources page on our website.
2. Creation of a dedicated online worship page (dearbornfirstumc.org/live) which features:
 - a. an embedded player for LiveStream
 - b. a form for registering attendance and joys and concerns
 - c. relevant worship resources for that Sunday (children's materials, Order of Worship)
 - d. link to our electronic giving system
 - e. other relevant updates, such as our newsletter, links to messages from the Bishop, camping and scholarships, etc.
3. Evolution in creativity and innovation - from a straight recording of the worship service in the sanctuary, to a multi-location, on-location, multi-media weaving of live feeds, pre-recorded segments, and graphic slides, with multiple participants from multiple locations, thanks to a platform called StreamYard – and an innovative, savvy staff member!
4. Increase in viewer engagement – we are experiencing more congregational “chatter” in the Facebook comments during the livestream, as well as active encouragement by the worship leaders to respond to questions, meditate on sermon points, or to simply pass the peace to each other. This activity has been extremely helpful in cultivating and nurturing the family connection throughout our congregation.
5. Increase in worship participants – from near and far,

A full-service worship experience is provided

We are fortunate enough to be able to cover a full order of worship. However, parishioners are now commenting that the separation from the sanctuary has unleashed new opportunities for creativity and alternative worship experiences – experiences they don't want to lose when we're back in the sanctuary again. These worship experiences include:

- 1) On-location sermon messages – from the shore of Lake Erie, and a wooded path in a state park.
- 2) Multi-location children's messages – from a living room, a backyard, and a rocket ship fort
- 3) Family musical offerings recorded from their homes, put together in loving videos that are woven into the worship service.
- 4) Combined choirs and instrumental offerings
- 5) The Bishop's Easter worship service, woven into our regular worship format and moderated by our weekly worship leaders.
- 6) An Easter Morning Love Feast
- 7) Drop-Off Porch Communion – communion elements were blessed and delivered to those requesting the service through a sign up on our website. Because the blessing was pre-recorded,

the elements could be dropped off for people, who could partake at home while they viewed the Pastor delivering communion on the livestream.

- 8) Worship slides designed for electronic screens in our sanctuary have translated nicely into the livestream presentation format.
- 9) Congregational engagement – questions posed to viewers, Passing of the Peace, sharing of joys and concerns – all “chatter” that takes place in the comments section of the Facebook video stream. Reps from the church act as comment moderators to add helpful links, welcome people, respond to comments, and provide additional information or clarify statements during the service. They also count those who “comment or “like” the feed to get a sense of who is watching.

While this engagement may seem like a small thing, it has created a noticeable sense of connected community at a time when so many are feeling separated.

Our worship service incorporates many participants from multiple locations. Our worshipping congregation includes: current active members, former members, members of a nearby UMC not being served in this way, friends and family without an online church, people from all over the country – definitely a broader group than can be served in-person. Participants also include people of all ages – some learning the internet for the first time.

We have multiple worship participants/leaders. The platform we use is called StreamYard. It allows us to merge live feeds from multiple locations, as well as to weave in pre-recorded segments shot on-location. Participants in the worship service have included:

- 1) Worship leader / video moderator - *weekly*
- 2) Pastor - *weekly*
- 3) Music Director (offering special vocal music, as well as leading and playing hymns) - *weekly*
- 4) Children’s ministries director, offering children’s message - *weekly*
- 5) Accompanist/organist, offering pre-recorded preludes, postludes, offertories, etc. - *weekly*
- 6) A pre-recorded combined Praise Band – vocals and multiple instruments - *occasionally*
- 7) Pre-recorded videos offering messages and vocal music solos from lay members – *occasionally*
- 8) Worship Screens coordinator (produces all the slides with hymns, prayers, congregational responses, etc.) – *weekly*
- 9) And plans are developing for a Graduate recognition presentation, combined kazoo choir, as well as multiple instrumental offerings, possible guest foreign language speakers for Pentecost, and possible guest speakers to observe Native American Ministries Sunday.

Feedback received from members of the congregation regarding what e-worship has meant to them during the health crisis.

Because we stream on Facebook, we have real-time comments from online worshipers who praise the worship team and the creative and innovative worship experiences. Sermons from remote locations, varied musical offerings, multiple presenters, and extra initiatives like the Drop-Off Communion, the Love Feast, and a photo slide show of our church family members on Easter morning have resonated strongly with our congregation.

One of the popular methods of connection has been real-time Facebook Live Stream commenting during the worship service. The amount of well-wishing, welcoming, liking, loving, replying – not just to the worship leaders, but to each other – has provided a sense of connection and communal corporate worship we can’t always get during that hour in a pew.

Do you plan to continue online worship after the congregation is able to gather again?

Definitely, as this was a ministry that was started out of congregational vision, rather than necessity.

Any other insight you have about the value of ministry online or how to do it effectively.

Our online ministry has grown to be more than online worship.

Our objective has been to create many different connection points aside from Sunday worship. In the last 7 weeks, we have converted in-person programs to online forums, resulting in the following:

- 1) Online youth gathering – weekly
- 2) Daily Devotions – NEW - led by the pastor M-Th on Facebook Live for about 10-15 minutes
- 3) Sermon Chats – previously in-person, now held on Zoom – 4 sessions led by different people weekly
- 4) Friday Fellowship – NEW – Purely social Zoom meeting every Friday morning. Anybody requesting a link can join
- 5) Book Club – Monthly Zoom – previously in-person
- 6) Stamping / Cardmaking group – weekly – previously in person, now Zoom.

Events are promoted on Facebook and through the creation of a MailChimp email newsletter.

Participants have joined from across the state, because these activities are easily accessible and provide activity and connection throughout the day or week.

While the shutdown has limited ministries in some ways, the vision and desire for outreach and fellowship has created new, exciting opportunities we may not have thought about or tried before.

How to do it effectively?

Experimenting, researching and benchmarking, knowing our audience, constant communication and education to make sure nobody falls through the cracks, and finally, keeping this mantra in mind: connection over perfection.