

RE-Launch is a gift from the church planting community to the whole church. We at Path 1 at Discipleship Ministries wanted to take the learnings from new churches launching worship for the first time, and offer those to existing churches as we all prepare for worshipping together again, and welcoming new people after the pandemic subsides.

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We are church planters and/or coaches of planters. Two of us have worked with the Path 1 New Church Starts Team at Discipleship Ministries, helping United Methodists plant churches globally. Each of us has made the journey to public worship launch with a new church multiple times. Together we have coached and equipped hundreds of new church leaders to launch public worship.

With the moratorium on social gatherings in most of the world due to the 2020 pandemic, churches have been forced to rethink everything that they do. In some cases, the closures of physical church facilities may be the straw that breaks the camel's back, advancing the day when certain churches close for good. In many more cases, however, churches are discovering a fresh vitality in exile from their buildings. Anecdotal reports from the field suggest that worship attendance more than doubled for many churches during Lent 2020, even as gathering was forced onto computers. This occurred even in post-modern Western Europe!

As of Easter 2020, we do not know when churches will be able to gather again in physical buildings. Will it be June? August? Will it be a season of reopened buildings mid-year followed by another closing later in the year? Will physical gatherings be severely size-limited for months? There is so much that we do not know.

But we do know this: at some point in the months ahead, millions of churches around the world will re-open their doors to gather people for worship. **We are about to see RE-Launch in houses of Christian worship, on a scale unprecedented in history.** Most churches will see this as a chance to get things back to normal. We believe that would be tragic—since *normal* has not been working well for most churches in the western world. Furthermore, we anticipate significant change in human practices and habits in response to this crisis, which will render certain understandings of normal as irrelevant.

We would invite churches everywhere to think of RE-Launch as *an opportunity to start again*, not necessarily on the first Sunday back in the building, but within a few weeks, as people return to public spaces. To that end, **the four of us gathered during Holy Week for a conversation, recorded from our homes in four states**. In this conversation, we talk about what every church might learn from the best practices of new churches, and then how we might apply this to a specific context. **We want churches everywhere to take this precious moment as an opportunity for new birth**. It is an opportunity to invite a boatload of new friends and neighbors onboard.

The video is broken into sections, with clearly marked places to stop play and to process the content with friends, pastoral colleagues and/or fellow team members from your church. On page 4 you will find a short conversation guide, which will help you process the ideas and translate them to your church's context.

We anticipate that we will make a second video within six to eight weeks, due to the rapid speed with which we are morphing in our understanding of what is truly happening globally.

Our goal is to help you to re-think this pandemic season as a hope-filled ministry opportunity—and to provoke decisions that will help your church to rise to this rare occasion, and to bless your community anew with the Gospel.

Both the video and the conversation guide are free—and we encourage you to share with your friends. If you are a ministry coach or a denominational leader, we encourage you to use the resource as a part of your work. RE-Launch is a gift from Discipleship Ministries, an equipping agency of The United Methodist Church.

THE PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

KIM GRIFFITH (Kim@griffithcoaching.com) is co-owner of Griffith Coaching. She and her husband Jim Griffith have taught and/or coached hundreds of church planters and their teams. *Church Planter Boot Camp* in the United Methodist context is almost synonymous with Griffith Coaching. Kim was previously a church planter, and also a Strategist with Path 1 New Church Starts at Discipleship Ministries.

DEREK JACOBS (Derek@thevillageumc.org) is founding Pastor of The Village Church in DeSoto, Texas (a suburb of Dallas). Derek's church will soon do their re-launch as their first Sunday in a brand new church campus that is nearing completion of construction. Derek brings a passion for competent marketing and social media.

KAY KOTAN (Kay@kaykotan.com) is founder of You Unlimited. Coach, consultant and author, Kay is a bundle of energy, always tackling a big new thing. She has led church development initiatives in Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas. Kay is author/coauthor of *Gear Up*, *Mission Possible*, *Get Their Name* and more.

PAUL NIXON (pnixon@umcdiscipleship.org) is Director of Church Multiplication, and part of the Strategic Programming group at Discipleship Ministries. He is also president/CEO of Epicenter Group, a coaching organization helping church leaders rethink ministry possibilities. Previously he was planting pastor of what became Community Life UMC in Gulf Breeze, FL. Paul is author/coauthor of *Weird Church: Welcome to the Twenty-First Century* and *Multi: The Chemistry of Church Diversity*. His next book, *Launching a New Worship Community* will be released in 2021.

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR RE-LAUNCH

The accompanying video is very simple: a one-hour Zoom conversation between four people. At three different points in the conversation, you will be invited to stop the video and to engage in conversation with your friends, colleagues or team members—as you process what this might mean for your church. After each local conversation, you can re-start the video where you left off.

Before the Video Plays

We assume that most participants will access this video online, since it is very difficult to gather in single locations in Spring 2020. If you have more than 8 people gathering, you may wish to divide the group into smaller circles for the discussion questions. You also may wish to give the group copies of pages 5 and 6.

- Ideally, you will show the video online while people are gathered on the digital platform of your choosing. The total time required for video and conversation is about two hours.
- Another plan would be to encourage them to watch it in advance, and then to gather. The challenge in this approach is that your conversation would be farther removed in time from the relevant sections of the video.
- A third possibility would be to break this into two one-hour sessions: (1) Watch the first half of the video up to the point of the first conversation break (about a half hour in length) and then take a half hour in conversation. (2) Then watch the second half with two processing conversations during a second hour, maybe a few days later.

Welcome Your Group

Do what you need to do to get centered as a group: the chitchat, other group business, and *be sure to stop to pray*—all before you start the video. Remind them that this gathering may serve to raise more questions than it answers.

Tell them: The point today is to look at this ministry moment differently. By design, the video does not contain a detailed list of all the great things other churches are doing, in part because **we want the creativity to bubble up from within your context.** All over the world, since mid-March, we have watched churches of all sizes and ages adapting beautifully to the challenges they face. The Holy Spirit is driving these adaptations. Now we are re-framing the challenge a bit, and shifting our focus outward from our church family to the people around us. Trust that your people will come up with some great ideas—but they **MUST** be developed in conversation with new people if we intend for your re-launch to be a community event! Thus, building relationships with new people is critical.



PLAY FIRST HALF OF VIDEO until the place where it says “Pause the Video Now. Explore the five questions about Pre-Launch in your Conversation Guide.”

FIRST PROCESSING TIME: Thinking about this time as Your Pre-launch Season

1. How might your church re-think this moment as an opportunity to prepare for a new birth rather than just an intermission preceding a shift back to normal?
2. How might you adjust the format of your online worship experiences in order to engage new people more readily?
3. Have you discovered ways to begin to get to know the folks who are lurking in the shadows of online worship? Do you offer a way for them to register their interest, their questions, their prayer requests, etc?
4. How can your congregation focus on being invitational in this on-line ministry season? What kinds of virtual gatherings might you create that would be easy to invite friends and neighbors to attend?
5. How might you re-acquaint yourself with the people around your church during this on-line ministry season?

A church always has to work at building relationships with worship guests who zip in and out without even stopping for a cup of coffee. This challenge is even more acute with online worship and other kinds of online ministry connections. To this end, every church needs a strategy of getting to know the people who are wandering into its online gatherings and/or viewing its resources. In the RE-Launch video, Pastor Derek Jacobs mentioned the invitation to online coffee. He understands that ministry is all about relationship-building!



BEST PRACTICES: La Croix UMC in Missouri (www.lacroixchurch.org) has a website well formatted to welcome newcomers online. When you land on their page, a pop up screen greets you with critical information: service times, an easy portal to online worship, specific Covid-19 opportunities and a way to connect. If you click on Connect, they take you to a simple online form made possible by www.cognitofrms.com. It is important that when people are ready to reveal themselves or to explore relationship that we make it easy for them to do so, and have clear strategies for quick follow up. Note how easy it is to meet members of the church on the website and hear their stories on video. Elsewhere on the website, if you click on Weekend Podcast, they take you to their Facebook page, with several services listed in a row, by date, and easy access to the Follow button, which then draws people one step closer in relationship to the church.

Most United Methodist annual conferences (and judicatory offices of other denominations) have someone on staff that thinks about the above questions 24-7 and collects ideas. Often this is a director of church development or congregational vitality. We encourage you to reach out to that person (or the closest person you can find) and continue your conversation with them. They probably know resources that can help you! If you can't find that person, we encourage you to contact us at Path 1 New Church Starts at Discipleship Ministries and we will seek to help!



PLAY THE NEXT SEGMENT OF THE VIDEO NOW – it is less than 15 minutes in length. At the end of this segment, the screen will read, “Pause the Video Now. Explore the five questions about your Launch Party in your Conversation Guide.”

SECOND PROCESSING TIME: Thinking about a Great RE-Launch Party!

1. What kinds of festive engaging events might your church consider for maximum community engagement during its RE-Launch season in addition to in-person worship?
 2. How might you offer a season of grieving loss before shifting to celebration? (Or how might celebration be offered within a season of ongoing loss and challenge, so that we are hopeful without seeming tone-deaf to the moment?)
 3. Who will you invite to be on the planning team for your RE-Launch? What kinds of people will enable you to have the best RE-Launch?
 4. When will you start meeting with them? (You will probably have to start by meeting virtually.)
 5. How are you going to equip and mobilize your congregation to start praying? And to start inviting?
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PLAY THE NEXT SEGMENT OF THE VIDEO NOW – it is less than 15 minutes in length. At the end of this segment, the screen will read, “Pause the Video Now. Explore the four questions about Marketing and Social Media in your Conversation Guide.”

THIRD PROCESSING TIME: Marketing & Social Media

1. How are we marketing our ministry right now for both our church and for our neighbors? How can we improve our marketing as we move toward RE-Launch?
2. How does our website or social media platform stand out from all the other stuff out there? What could we do to help it stand out more? What is special about our church that should guide us in how we intend to stand out?
3. Is the current church website and/or church Facebook page easy to navigate in terms of newcomers finding what they are looking for? How easy is it to find the virtual portals to your online worship and other gatherings? How easy is it for people to make inquiries and to ask for more information?
4. Do we need help in building up our social media ministry? Who in our church family or community might be able to help us if we asked them?



RETURN TO THE VIDEO FOR THE WRAP-UP SEGMENT. It is only a few minutes in length, but will help to summarize some of the big ideas for folks to carry away and to pray about in coming days!

CONCLUSION OF YOUR GROUP TIME

(and this may be the conclusion of your second meeting if you divided this in two)

Ask the group members to share what is the biggest idea that they take away from this conversation. Ask them to consider if/when they should meet again and to think of two or three key things that need to happen before the group reconvenes.

Remember: this group of leaders you have gathered is not the RE-Launch team we envisioned in the second segment of the conversation. The RE-Launch team likely will include a more diverse array of people, including some who are new friends to the church, peripheral to the church or much younger than the median age of the church.

Close the meeting in prayer, and don't rush it. Spend a little time praying. After all, if we are living in a time reminiscent of the Book of Acts, we must acknowledge the Spirit's work in driving our focus and momentum, as well as in readying all of us for this moment. Remind them to pray daily for their church during this season and for their neighbors.

FINAL NOTE

RE-Launch was produced quickly and without the typical production quality that one can expect from Discipleship Ministries. We wanted to get it out to you as fast as we could, given the urgency of the topic and the moment. We expect to have a second conversation (RE-Launch Part 2) available by the first part of June. It will feature the same leaders, and go deeper into the topics we explored here. Expect more time given to the design and execution of the Launch itself and to marketing/social media.

Discipleship Ministries is thinking holistically about ministry opportunities and resources during the pandemic season. To discover more, we invite you to check out UMCdiscipleship.org for **Resources for Responding to the COVID-19 Outbreak**. In addition, Upper Room is publishing **Devotional Suggestions** for living through these times. Upper Room also has a page **Resources for Spiritual Wellness in Anxious Times** which you could link directly to your church website.

Emails for each of the RE-Launch conversation leaders are made available on page 3. Derek, Kim, Kay and Paul welcome email questions and feedback on topics covered. If inquiries come in faster than they can respond, you may receive a response from a member of the Path 1 staff team or the church development staff in your annual conference. But please know that we wish to respond to every inquiry. It's important! We probably will not get another opportunity like this in our lifetimes.

So please reach out to us as questions arise!