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with Barbara Best

Transcript: Remote Ministry in Real Life (interview)

Barbara: This week's guest podcast provides a real life example of how humans have had to learn and evolve in order to serve their community in these unprecedented times.

Hi, I'm Barbara Best and this is humans working remotely. A podcast where I'll show you how to meet the expanding needs of your organization by utilizing alternative solutions for operational staffing, through expert insight and meaningful conversations with business professionals. We'll talk about common challenges and proven strategies that will provide you with more time to focus on your organization's mission, relationship building and other high value growth activities.

Jennifer burns is the coordinator of both the homebound outreach and social media ministries at Asbury, United Methodist Church in Smyrna, Delaware. She is a certified local lay servant with the peninsula Delaware Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Jennifer typically works out in the field in connection with the community, but has had to shift her ministry due to COVID-19 and is currently working from home for the foreseeable future, using a phone and a virtual connection to continue to serve her congregation and the community. Welcome, Jennifer. Thank you for joining me.

So Jennifer, your ministry has moved from in-person to remote community outreach. How did that evolve for you?

Jennifer: I had actually just come back from a work trip and I had probably two or three normal-ish days where we kind of knew that something was coming related to COVID. Seeing the reality of quarantine rearing its ugly head, and when the shutdown happened, it was pretty immediate, and it really left me, "okay, what do you do now?" So a lot of it was really on the fly.

Barbara: Yeah, good for you. So what were what were some of the things that you had to do on the fly that you hope to God would work at the time?

Jennifer: So, first and foremost, we were not allowed to have our normal Sunday worship service because of the limitation on numbers of gatherings. The church I serve has three services on Sunday, and they range in attendance from 30 people to upwards of 100 and in it. I'm in Delaware, we were not allowed to have any gatherings of more than 10 people. So that left us completely unable to have any kind of service. It even left us, we had to make some choices about staffing and even just the people that you have to put on a service. So we did have one week where, like I said, we knew that a full quarantine was coming. But we had one service where we had kind of opened it up 'to make the decision that's right for you - if you're going to come out or stay home'. But we knew that that Sunday was going to be the only Sunday that we were going to be able to have an optional service.

So the biggest hurdle was, you know, how do people worship if they can't come to church? And the answer to the question was live streaming. We had been talking about a live stream for a while, but it was kind of a six month, year five year process, and we came down to basically me getting out my iPhone and literally propping it up on a on a book. And you know what we're going to go live and we're going to hope that the internet holds out. Our church is an over 170 year old building so internet connectivity and bandwidth is a concern. So we literally Facebook lived off of my phone with no lead and no advertising and I was like hopefully people will see it. And that kind of developed, you know, once we knew that, or once the lockdown was a reality. It's kind of you know, the next week I had a camcorder and a tripod. And next week I learned that I needed a wireless mouse so that people don't hear my track-pad clicking. And it's kind of every week, there's another piece of the puzzle that's been coming along.

Barbara: Yeah, so it's definitely evolution for sure. Have you had any hiccups with technology that you'd like to share? Maybe a funny thing that happened somewhere along the way?

Jennifer: We have had some technical difficulties with sound. And you really just have to, you know, sort of pick up where you left off. And, you know, people were 'we all know we're human', and, you know, we just carry on, right, yeah.

Barbara: Because of this new technology that you've developed, and you've done things on the fly, you're what is now a new online ministry that has gained in popularity. How has this opened up opportunities to reach more people for you?

Jennifer: So the internet, I mean, especially YouTube is a new opportunity in that it's fully public, and it doesn't require, the proximity to be in the central Delaware area or anything. YouTube, the way the algorithms work where you're watching certain videos, and it'll do the 'if you watched this, then you might enjoy this...'. We've picked up, there's actually a man in Namibia, Africa for the last I think it's 10-12 weeks at this point, that has been watching almost all of the content we put out on YouTube. It was completely random because you go look at the analytics and where are your watchers coming from? It's Smyrna, Delaware, Clayton Delaware, which is five minutes down the road and Dover, so everybody was in about a half an hour radius of the church, and then 'Namibia, Africa' (!). After I had kept seeing and seeing comments that he was engaging with the content. I did send him a message and I was like, 'I'm happy to have you, but how in God's name did you find us?' It was the YouTube rabbit holes, so that's been interesting to see who else. The other thing too that has been nice to see is that we've seen people who've moved away. Dover has an Air Force base, so you know, we have people that are military affiliated, that have moved out of the area. We have kids who, well, adult children who were raised in the church that are now out of the area, and they're able to come back and watch the same church service that their parents are watching, even if they're not doing it at the same time, they're going back and seeing the sanctuary that they grew up in a lot. That's really nice. It used to be their Sunday school teacher and stuff, and they've been detached from that, a lot of them for years.

Barbara: I take it then Jennifer you're not necessarily used to working from home. So what's it been like for you? I'm sure it's been challenging. What kind of things have been going on for you adjusting to working from home?

Jennifer: So to answer the question, no, I'm not used to working great.

My ministry was really so I felt, you know, to work. With the homebound outreach which before quarantine was probably 80% of my time, and that entailed visiting nursing homes, visiting our senior citizens who live alone. Some of them do come to church and you know, they're fairly active but they live alone during the week. Yeah, and obviously because of quarantine, the nursing homes are not accepting visitors at all; essential travel doesn't even permit visiting people in their homes. So that part of the ministry has moved to over the phone. Unfortunately, some of my nursing home residents are

either for hearing issues or different levels of dementia, are not able to have a phone conversation. So unfortunately, they are kind of left in the lurch right now where I can't really get to them until the nursing homes start allowing visitors again.

But my senior citizens who live alone, and really just other people in the church, that connection has moved to over the phone. So we have a church directory that is really just a phonebook of people in the church, and I really just started finger walking the directory and calling pretty much everybody, and, you know, 'how are you doing?', and I kind of rotate, you know, one day, I'll start at the front of the book one day or see back of the book and try as many people as I can.

So that's been interesting. And then the other part with the [ministry] I mean, obviously, we have the live stream that happens on Sunday, but during the week, we've been doing Bible studies over Zoom, we've been doing all of our church council meetings over Zoom. We were trying a conference call option which we had some issues, but trying to find different ways to include, you know, not everybody's on social media and not everybody is internet savvy. Trying to find different methods to give people a choice of how they're going to connect and trying to offer that to as many people as we can.

Barbara: So no, that's wonderful. Really, that's, that's wonderful that you're doing all that and learning as you go and doing things on the fly, which is great. So we've been in a pandemic situation for just over two months now. Can you tell me Jennifer, what have you learned from this experience?

Jennifer: First and foremost, I think that the pandemic situation taught me that God gives you everything that you need. And, you know, I'm a believer in, you know, God gave us the ability to invent the technologies that we're using. So, you know, some of them are not necessarily, you know, organic, given blessings, but they're things that, you know, we've been able to create for ourselves. But if you sit back and ask the question, okay, God, what are you asking me to do? And how do I do it? It's possible. It's not easy, and some of it is not the way we would like for it to be, but it's possible. And I think the other aspect of it is the resilience people have.

Barbara: Yes, I've noticed that as well.

Jennifer: Yeah. And, you know, it's I think that people are learning the difference between you know, nobody has to pretend that this is fun or that we like this because the fact of the matter is, nobody does and it's okay to say, this sucks, and I want it to go back to normal. But in the moment, it is what it is. I'm going to do what I can do, right here, because, you know, like I said, the alternative is: does that mean that you don't worship until I can come back to the church building and I'm just going to give up for two and a half months? So that's been interesting to see kind of how people make different decisions that are right for them in the middle of it. But still being resolute to, 'okay, I'm going to do this and I'm going to do it as well as I can' instead of just sitting back and kind of throwing in the towel, you know?

Barbara: It's easy to do, because we've not experienced this kind of thing, not in this generation anyway, we did 100 years ago, pandemic, but for here and now, none of us have experienced this kind of thing. So it's like you say it's 'fight or flight', really and we are given the tools and we learn, we have to, you know, to move forward and provide services to those in our community. So good for you. Rock on! That's just great.

So just in closing, Jennifer, I've realized that I've already stated who you are, what you do and who you do it for. Perhaps you could give our listeners some information, how they can contact you, if you wish to be contacted, how they can contact you. Maybe a website, whatever you'd like to put out there, that would be awesome.

Jennifer: So, my congregation is Asbury, United Methodist Church. We're in Smyrna, Delaware, which is about 15-20 minutes north of Dover. All our services for the foreseeable future are still going to be online. The

church website is [www dot asburysmyrnaumc dot org](http://www.asburysmyrnaumc.org). We're also on Facebook at the same, Asbury Smyrna. If you want to get in touch with me, my email is: [media dot asbury at gmail dot com](mailto:media.asbury@gmail.com) and you can also send a message through the Facebook page, all those messages go to me.

Barbara: So wonderful, thank you so much for your time, Jennifer. Very interesting.

In closing, I'd like to thank you so much for listening today. I hope this information was helpful, and I look forward to providing more. I'm Barbara Best CEO of Virtual Works, Inc.

There's a couple of action steps you can do:

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