



## The Post-Pandemic Church in the Great Virtuality By Charles (Chip) Hardwick [\[LINK\]](#)

### A LONGER PERSPECTIVE

- Consider the 500-year forest rather than the 2020-2021 trees.
- Phyllis Tickle – “The Great Emergence”
- The Church holds a grand rummage sale twice a millennium.
- ***What do you think about this?***
- ***How have you understood this pre-pandemic? (Or, was everything hunky dory in the church before March 2020?)***
- ***What do you think the church may have emerged from and what might it be emerging towards?***

#### COMMENTS:

- I did not expect that the pandemic was that one thing that would catapult us toward change. I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that we are in a pruning phase. Pruning leads to better fruits.
- Since spending time outside the building, it feels that the formality of church has been broken and it feels more casual.
- I think we are being called to authenticity, transparency and vulnerability.
- Rummage sale items that don't even get used by new acquirers.
- This may be a truth telling moment.

- The 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation called for a change a few years back, but the pandemic catapulted us. We are shackled to old things and we can't keep throwing things into the 1950s package.

## THE GREAT VIRTUALITY

- Tickle's book was written in 2008.
- Before 3 important dynamics of current reality:
  - "Social media's centrality as a force shaping the way most Americans interact."
  - The wide availability of broadband – more of life online.
  - The Pandemic
- ***Is social media a central point of interaction for you and your members? How has this shifted your tasks in ministry?***
- ***We used to hear, "But people aren't online," this is no longer the case. Do we still wish it were so? Why or why not? How is this an opportunity and not a threat?***

### COMMENTS:

- We have improved our communications capabilities, especially in digital media. Our session is talking about how this fits into our budget.
- I have embraced texting during this time to maintain/build relationships.
- This is a challenge for me due to the time things take to produce. Online ministry is a dominate and time consuming tool, but necessary.
- The stained glass of years ago is the screen today. Are we using it well? Now it's more accessible, but have we embraced it well? How to make it classic and not "christotainment" – longevity and substantially?

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- "These changes lead me to coin the 'Great Virtuality' as the next season for the church (and society). More of our ministries will likely be online than those who just 'want everything to go back to normal' might hope."
- ***How do you handle your own desire to "go back to normal?"***
- ***How do you handle other's desires to "go back to normal?"***
- ***To what extent does exhaustion play into such a dynamic?***

### COMMENTS:

- I know that 5-8 hours of my week will be spent dealing with social media stuff - producing content, pushing content out, and responding to comments and inquiries.
- Listening to podcast, I am amazed at how many people are unchurched and non-christian.

- As a parishener (Boomer), I don't engage the social media platforms and I really miss the person to person engagement.
- The harder work is building engagement and connection.
- Lots of people view the church as a bizarre cul du sac.
- A large percentage want to go back, all the way to the 1960's.
- Is back to normal, back to slow death?
- Beavis and Butthead methods in a Leave it to Beaver world - Jesus rocked the status quo and give us .... I'm confidence that the Spirit will proceed inspite of us.
- We need Sabbath to have the energy to do the work that is before us.
- Like in Chinese martial arts, we have to be loose to absorb the punches. Lean into the exhaustion.

## ALONE TOGETHER

- Sherry Turkle's book, "Alone Together"
- She writes that when technology is introduced, it often goes from "better than nothing" to "better than anything."
- Ex. – Texting. First realized, stuck in a meeting and can't call but can text. Eventually realize the preference for texting over calling.
  - "Sending a message goes from being better than nothing to better than calling – or anything else, for that matter."
- Consider...
  - "The same dynamic applies to worship, which you probably already realize if your congregation has returned to holding services in person. When the pandemic started, we thought: 'I sure wish I could go to church. But since I can't, at least there is Facebook Live (Zoom, etc.). It's not the same, but it's better than nothing.' By now we find ourselves thinking: 'If I go back in person, I'll have to get dressed. I'll need to keep my kids engaged and fairly quiet. And I'll probably run into that person I just can't stand. Facebook Live is awesome!' Virtual worship, for many, has or will become better than all other options."
- ***Do you consider this a real dynamic in your setting?***

### COMMENTS:

- I have been trained to be a pastor to a dying church. I need to retrain myself.
- Even if we aren't trained for it, we are being prepared for it.
- A study of secularism is necessary.
- The decline is happening now in evangelical and independent churches too.

- I copied Kennedy's idea of asking people to share the message - a call to action. It made a little difference.
- To be "fishers of people" we need to go where the "fish" are.
- A call to action to give or share is what has worked for years with TV preachers.
- Unfortunately, for a large group of church people, those "outside our church" are not important. Still a "consumer" self-centered mentality of the Gospel.
- Not only do we need to go where the fish are but we need to make sure we have the right tackle and bait.
  - Sad but true - part of being part of a consumer culture.
- Pre-pandemic we struggled with over-scheduled non participation. An online service helps reach out to those people, since they can watch when they want.
- I can also visit other services online, which helps in seeing with what's working with other churches.
- There are some that want a short worship experience, maybe even a la carte.
- We miss the fellowship time when we go virtual. I feel it is not same as if we are in person.
- We are reaching a much larger crowd.
- How is the PCUSA redefining the boundaries of membership?
  - Out of state people are affiliate members, who can still hold office.
  - Some of the rules will have to be changed, and we learn as we go.
- Online Bible studies have a greater span of reach.

## OPPORTUNITY

- "Models of the Church"— Avery Dulles: The church as herald and as the Body of Christ
- THE CHURCH AS VIRTUAL MESSENGER (Herald)
  - "...the herald's public square becomes the messenger's social media landscape."
  - "This is, indeed, much more public than our churches ever were pre-pandemic."
- ***How has being online well served the people in your church? How about those beyond the church?***
- ***How do you talk about the advantages of digital and online content?***

### COMMENTS:

- Pessimism is over rated. There should be an optimism with the children of the Light.
- Our churches are full of bored people, with boring preachers, who talk a good game about change and the cutting edge.
- People will listen to good content (podcast) even up to an hour long.

- There are no limitations in putting out content. But if you keep it just in the church, it will most likely not be shared outside the church.
- Content is prepared for longevity; it is indexed/tagged for easy retrieval when searching.
- Real time information on Instagram is great for parents during VBS.

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- THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST
  - "...the intimate interdependencies we share as members of one body."
  - In person and face-to-face has an out-of-control nature to it.
  - Turkle – texting does away with the messiness of actual conversation.
  - Turkle: "...the ties we form through the internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind."
- ***What do you think about the challenge to being the Body of Christ? What have you learned during this time?***
- ***What challenges present themselves with this right now?***

**COMMENTS:**

- God got it done with the feeding of the 5,000.
- We need to stick to God's mandate of sharing the Gospel and make disciples – leave the growth to God.
- Are we being called to be tentmakers in our new evangelical roles? Like it or not, our budgets might mandate it.
- You have to gain someone's attention and you need to do it without being irresponsible. Then we need to commit to engaging people beyond the view.
- It is important to have tough conversations, and we have learned that we can have them.
- We must continue the community in-reach: card writing, phone calls, etc. Now the pastor has to tend to both.

## QUESTIONS THIS PROMPTS

- ◇ Is the right technology available?
- ◇ What kind of training do our leaders need?
- ◇ With whom could you partner?
- ◇ What is the best way to measure engagement?
- ◇ What kind of facilities do we need?
- ◇ How can we care for and grow alongside each other?
- ***How are you answering/not answering these questions?***

- **Which question gives you the most pause?**

**COMMENTS:**

- I'm thinking we should clear our schedules for the day and continue talking about this.
- Yes this could be a full day retreat.
- I agree - we could all use a tech retreat.
- Our tech team has to make a lot of on the spot decisions as they are videoing and trying to discern how people are receiving the information online.

## ALONG THE WAY...

1. Breathe deep.
2. Walk and #4.
3. Calories in / calories burned.
4. Ask: Where do I see God in all this?

**Let's all keep talking –**  
**Every Tuesday at 10am and 3pm**  
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