

Pods with a Purpose - Yellowstone Presbytery – October 25, 2020
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The Why of Pods with a Purpose - pod-church.com

Before the Covid-19 pandemic began we taught the combination of worship and of weekly face-to-face groups, centered on scripture are two essential keys to congregational vitality. Congregations practiced both with varying degrees of success.

Today, where in-person worship takes place, generally the numbers are far below their pre-pandemic levels and levels of online worship engagement vary widely from church to church. Generally, the number involved in face-to-face groups, in-person or online, is far lower than the pre-pandemic levels.

This raises several matters of importance for the church choosing to adapt to be vital in our new realities:

1. Pastoral Care: For many people there are growing challenges including concerns about work, personal finances, isolation, everyone home dynamics, Covid-fear and so on. See “Holderness Family Quarantine” videos on Youtube.
2. Connection – How to move from isolation and loneliness to supportive face-to-face fellowship and authentic connection and trust?
3. Attrition - Worship in-person and online is affecting age groups differently. The over 40’s generally are sticking with routine, the under 40’s have routines that easily change by the hour.
4. Entry points: How may a guest, a new person who comes to in-person worship or watches online connect authentically with anyone? Who cares?
5. Church websites – need updating! They mostly are still pre-pandemic with the exception of how to attend or login to worship – with virtually nothing on how to get face-to-face with anyone.
6. Discipleship and Service – are we actually growing disciples and sending them to serve? How do we gauge and assess these?

7. Ministry of the Saints (Eph 4:11.12)! - pastors are pooped – and so are their people. Sustaining multiple worship formats, technology challenges and attending to the pastoral needs and strong opinions of their people is exhausting. Adjusting to the pandemic reality is exhausting for everyone. There isn't much head-room, time or emotional energy for something else unless we *share* the work.

Pod-Thinking (check website menu item)

1. *Koinonia* – trusted relationships in community – is ancient Christian practice

“... not giving up meeting together.” Hebrews 10:24-25

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” Acts 2:46

2. Face-to-face groups have had many names in the church such as circles, small groups, covenant groups, growth groups, micro groups and life groups.
3. Jesus was constantly with, investing in and blessed by such groups: the Twelve; the 3 - Peter, James & John; Mary, Joanna and Susanna (Luke 8:2-3); and Mary, Martha & Lazarus.
4. We must move from any idea of “been there done that” with little groups to “we have to do that in fresh interesting ways”
5. What percent of your active people are in weekly little face-to-face groups for the purpose of spiritual growth and friendship...?
6. For Jesus and for us, face-to-face fellowship is a lifestyle to be lived before it is a program to be run!
7. What is a pod? A pod is a life-sustaining vessel - think of pea pods and space craft – that sustain their participants and send them to serve.

8. Pods give us a new name for the ancient practice of *koinonia*.
9. Think of a pod of God's people as a little group, as a tiny church!
Pods have 3 to 14 people. Pods of 5-7 work very well.
10. Pods are do-able, expandable vessels that help people grow and be empowered in their relationship with God, the people of God and the work of God in the world
11. A “pod with a purpose” is a fresh name for ancient practices with the same vision as any Christian *koinonia*/fellowship – practices that help participants grow in three ways:

A growing commitment to Jesus

A growing commitment to the Body of Christ

A growing commitment to the work of Christ in the world

12. The life-giving and faith-growing pattern for all of these groups *always* includes at least the elements of the discipleship triangle and so the pod pattern is the triangle Word-Share-Prayer-Send. Such as:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [**Word**] and the fellowship [**Share**], to the breaking of bread and the prayers [**Prayer**].” Acts 2:42

“praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved [**Send**].” Acts 2:47

How do pod groups address the concerns listed above?

1. Pastoral care: people in pods love one another – offering practical care as ALL disciples are intended to do.
2. Connection – pods enable *friendships of the road* and *friendships of the heart* to grow
3. Attrition – pods are like “relational glue” and keep people involved.
4. Entry points – pods give guests a way to know and be known by name.

5. Church websites, social media posts, letters, personal invitations, classes... may move to offer many pod options – and share stories as to the why's/fruits and *be persuasive*.
6. Discipleship and Service – pods challenge people to have a devotional life (study scripture and pray), attend worship and serve their Lord, understanding themselves as sent.
7. Ministry of the Saints! – pods spread the leadership load in the congregation and enable all disciples who are not pastors or elders (without a certain role/title) to discover, develop and use their gifts as they serve.

The *How* of launching ‘pods with a purpose’:

1. It takes an hour or less to read the website www.pod-church.com
2. Leadership - Get a winsome mover-shaker or two with some spiritual maturity plus another one or two.
3. Decide your initial approach(es) – See “Pod Launch” on www.pod-church.com
 - Some seven week (5+2) pods
 - A learning community - 30 minutes class teaching 45 minutes pods
 - A reach event - 30 min. speaker, 45 min. pods, 5-week follow-up pods
 - Pods in conjunction with mission or service
 - Pods in a group gathered around a common interest, hobby or activity – yoga, hunting, sewing/quilting, running, animals....
 - **Open post-worship pods** – could be some pre-established, but *always* provide opportunities for ANY visitor or newly interested person to have opportunity so no one feels excluded, has a way to connect if they wish.
4. Make pod persuasion *part of the fabric of all you do* – Worship, emails, etc. List major areas of church communication, life, meetings, worship. Be specific about *how* you will actively inform and promote/invite and *by whom*
5. Use your website to feature and to urge worship and pod participation.
6. Solve the tech. Do people need coaching to use Zoom or other platforms? Ask and find the help to do it. Yellowstone Presbytery has leaders and grants to help with this.

7. Be like an aircraft carrier – focus on the next group to launch!

Your Church Website

1. Church websites often have pre-pandemic programming – perhaps info on how to access worship in-person or online BUT rarely opportunities and how to get face-to-face with others.
2. In recent years, visitor entry moved from the sanctuary front door (worship) to side doors (relationships/groups) but now for many visitors, it's back to the new front door of the church, which is it's website.
3. Feature pods, make them prominent, easy to notice, even if one is not looking for them. Pre-pandemic websites typically made you search the website to find small groups.
4. Suddenly pod-thinking means you can't make small groups "one of our programs." Its "THE" program.
5. Not EITHER/OR Information vs persuasion – but BOTH/AND, offer both on your homepage!
6. Giving – is your website clear and persuasive concerning the congregation's needs and the need of the people to give? What of pandemic missional giving options such as hunger relief or rent relief, service in congregation AND community?

Next Steps:

"The present system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets!" W. Edwards Deming If you want different results you have to act!

1. Who has the heart to be on a "Pods with a Purpose" Ministry Team?
Heart for our Lord and God's People
Persuasive and organizational skills

Note: Pray like Jesus did before choosing his disciples, look for and invite those gifted, interested who may not already be involved in many things not just the "same old people". Ideal opportunity for 'new blood' and discipling/equipping others.

2. Follow the steps of "The How" above.

3. Email, text or call me with questions. Please tell me what you plan to do.
4. Compete! Be persuasive, prayerful and persistent.

Pre-pandemic we “competed” with people’s busy-ness and other priorities.

Today we compete with different forms of “busyness,” such as Zoom fatigue, discouragement and inflexible opinions (about everything)...

A yes is a yes but a no is not a no! Keep on knocking. Launch those pods!

5. For a podcast on the transferable concepts of Christian encouragement check out www.BuildingOneAnother.com.
6. For additional perspective, check out Pod-Church.com podcasts:
 - BuildingOneAnother: Episode 61 You, Your Church and Pods with a Purpose <https://www.buildingoneanother.com/episodes/you-your-church-and-pods-with-a-purpose>
 - The BibleGPS: Pods with a Purpose for Vital Churches <https://www.buzzsprout.com/796616/5491615>
 - The Reclaimed Leader: Episode 149 When Sunday Morning Isn’t Enough <https://reclaimedleader.com/episode149/>