

On Wednesday, October 28, as part of the United Mission is the Vehicle initiative, leaders and members of three American Baptist Churches regions, met to discuss ways **technology** can be used to **transform ministry**. The question was addressed from multiple angles, including identifying specific **tools** and **techniques** congregations could use to help them spread Christ's message more effectively.

Here's the highlights:

We talked about live streaming.

Live streaming is a tool that congregations can use to broadcast worship services, installations, and other special events **as they happen**. To make live streaming a reality for your church, you need three things: a camera, a computer with a high speed connection to the internet and access to a live streaming service. Live streaming services are available for free and as a paid service – choosing a paid service means you will have access to more features and your viewers won't be exposed to third party advertising.

We identified a ministry opportunity for younger congregation members.

Integrating live streaming into the operations of a local church presents younger congregation members with a great opportunity to take on a **more active role** in the church. People who are between the **ages of 15 and 20** represent the largest contingent of live streaming users; they are extremely familiar with the technology and can **use their skills to help** things run smoothly when your church chooses to live stream a worship service or other event. Charging admission to certain live streamed events is one tool organizations use to raise funds: this may be something you wish to discuss in your church.

We talked about choosing the right platform for online conferencing.

There are many, many online conference tools that allow users to connect via video, voice and chat. Common features of these tools include the ability to share one's screen with the audience and record the event for later playback. Factors to consider when choosing an online conferencing platform include audience size and your budget. There are free online conference tools available that are **ideal for small groups**, such as Google Hangouts and Skype. Being able to meet online makes it easier for **committees, bible study classes, worship groups** and other people to connect when weather, geography or other circumstances make it difficult for everyone to meet in person. Look for online conferencing tools that have supporting **apps**; this will allow congregants to participate in the event using their smartphone or tablet.

We learned that some churches are recording portions of their worship services to share online or via social media.

As part of their ministry, a couple in one American Baptist church records the **weekly worship service at their church each week** and then uploads it to the church website so that it can be widely accessed. In another church, it has become part of the congregational culture for participants to record **musical performances** and other aspects of the worship service they find especially moving, and then share the recordings on social media.

We talked about how complicated being “always connected” can be.

The thought of recording and sharing parts of a worship service seem completely natural to some people and anything but to others. It is important to have **congregational conversations** about the role technology plays in our lives. Smartphones and tablets can be used to **enhance** children’s spiritual engagement during worship services – but they can also be a **distraction**. It is important to maintain an appropriate **sense of reverence for sacred spaces** while also being interested in **spreading the message of Christ**.

The act of **giving testimony**, for example, may be impacted by the speaker’s sense of who is watching them share their story; there is a very real difference between sharing your personal narrative with your church family and the entire world. Musicians who share their talent during worship services may feel the same way. As American Baptists, we should discuss how we will balance the **excitement** of sharing Christ’s message with honoring the **sacred and somewhat confidential** nature of the worship setting.

Congregations need to discuss what is acceptable to them.

It is very important to have personal consent **before** posting pictures, images, and words online. **This is especially true when children are involved**. Some congregations have formal media policies, while other congregations are in the process of developing them. You can **set parameters** about what type of experiences are appropriate for sharing on social media and which ones are not. Signage can be used to **encourage recording and sharing** when it is particularly desirable, such as during conferences, Mission Summits, and other events.

American Baptist Churches are using a variety of social media platforms.

Facebook is the most common social media platform in use, with many congregations making use of **business pages** and **groups**. A Facebook business page is an ideal way for a congregation to inform the larger community of what is going on; it is a great medium to share news items, **event information** and more. Groups are for discussion; they can be public, private, and even secret, depending on the needs of your congregation. Some churches are using Facebook business pages in lieu of a formal website: these pages can generally be found through a Google search, even if the searcher does not have their own Facebook account.

Other social media platforms American Baptist Churches are using include Instagram, Twitter, Google +, WordPress, and SnapChat. **Instagram** is a rapidly growing photo and video sharing site that offers many features that may be of interest to your congregation: not only is it the **most popular social media network for young people**, profiles can be made private, giving you total control over who sees your content. And, don’t forget about **YouTube** - this video sharing site features elements of both search and social and can be seen in almost every country in the world.

We learned it is important to secure social media profiles.

Keep the number of people who have administrative access to social media profiles to a minimum, and institute 2 step verification procedures wherever available to prevent profile hacks.

We acknowledged that we're not all equally tech-savvy.

Technology changes constantly, and each user's knowledge of and comfort with both emerging and established online tools and social media platforms varies considerably. For that reason, it is important to provide basic information, **making it easy for all people to participate** in online and social media information, including such data as event time, log-on procedure, registration requirements and more.

Taking our message outside the walls of the church means making sure everyone can access it easily!