PETE PHILLIPS, CENTRE FOR DIGITAL THEOLOGY, DURHAM UNIVERSITY/SPURGEONS/PREMIER MEDIA

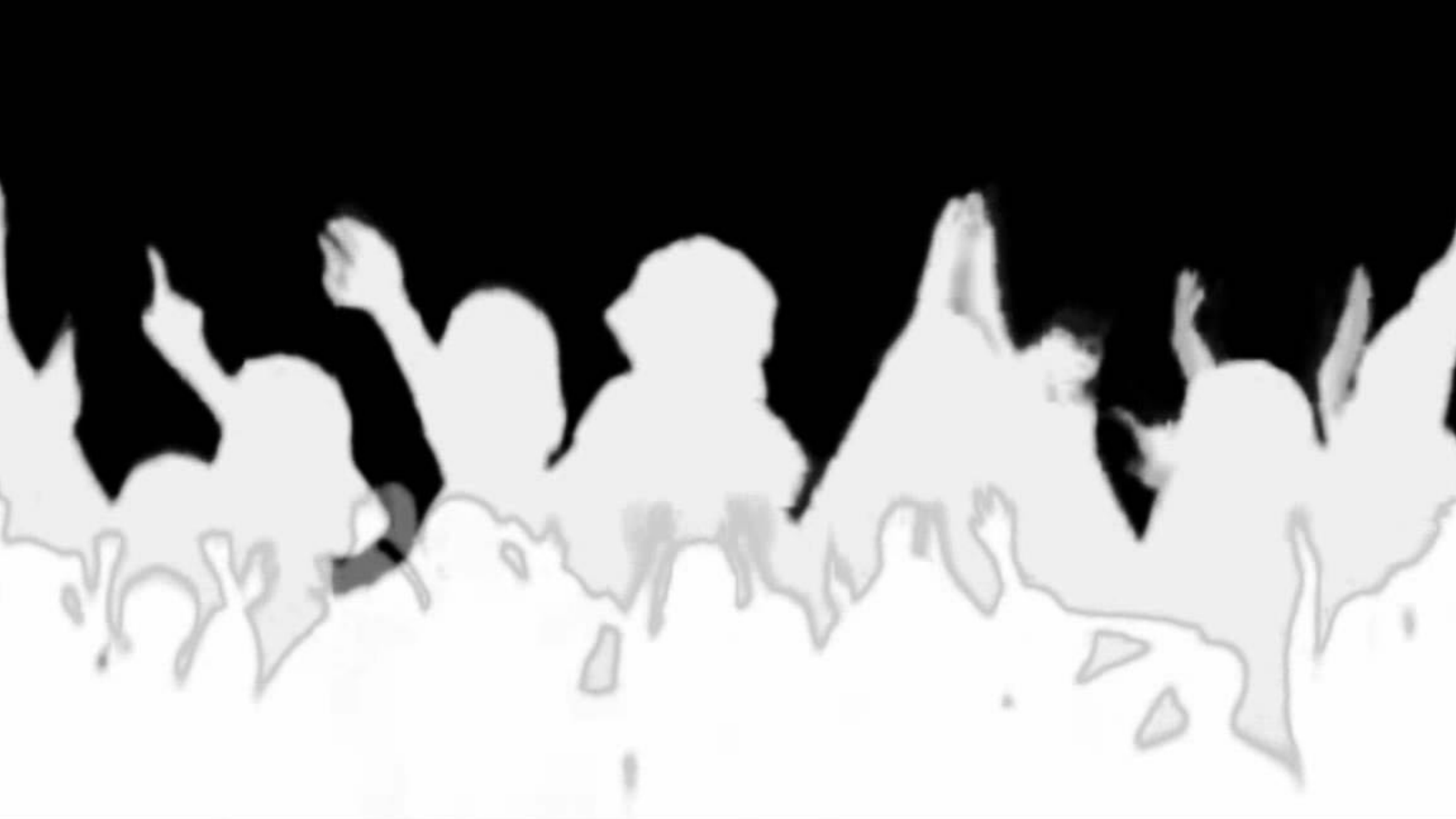
iPRESENCE

DIGITAL MINISTRY & THE HYBRID CHURCH

WHAT TO FOCUS ON IN GOD'S NEW ADVENTURE

THE CHURCH AND THE PANDEMIC?

- Some joined the online church
- We all diversified
- We cared for those in need
- We reached out to those we could
- We remembered the poor, the lonely, the bereaved
- We were instruments of grace
- We were church



How long to reach 50 million users?

WHAT IS HYBRID CHURCH?

- A fresh expression of church within digital culture
- A merging of physical church and church online/digital church
- Giving people the choice to be where they can, to be where they feel safe, to be where they experience God, to be the body of Christ - the sofa behind the back pew?
- Incorporating physically present and digitally present members of the congregation in a corporate act of worship
- Acknowledging the whole Body of Christ (1 Cor 11)
- Discipling, pastoring, serving congregation where they are

WHAT DO THE STATS TELL US?

WHAT HAS GOD TAUGHT US?

SAVANTA COMRES/DURHAM UNI

POLLING JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2020, 2000 ADULTS, REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE UK POPULATION

- 24-28% of adult population regularly engaged in online worship (reg = monthly)
- = 13.9m - 16.2m people (assuming 58m adult population)
- Usual attendance = 5-7% = 2.9m - 4m (Clive Field's data on BRIN)
- Potential uplift in online congregations - 400% (case studies suggest possible)
- More realistic 40-50% (Everyone Welcome Online estimate of viewing in parishes)
- Younger age groups more likely to engage online (up to 48% of 18-35s for example)
- Digital divide, digital resistance, digital drop-off

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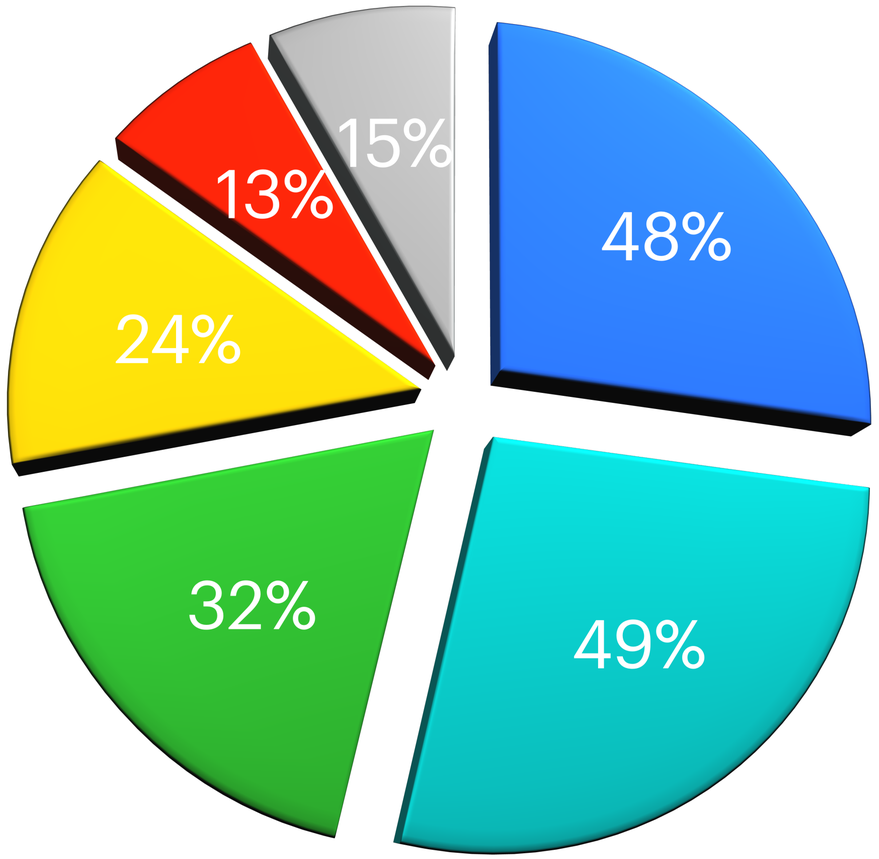

PERCENTAGE OF EACH AGE GROUP REGULARLY ATTENDING ONLINE ORGANISED GROUP DEVOTIONAL ACTIVITY.

18-24 25-35 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

IRISH CHURCH SURVEY/QUB

SURVEY MAY 2020, 439 FAITH LEADERS - NORTHERN PROTESTANTS OVER-REPRESENTED

- 82% continued ministry, 89% population said faith helped during ‘cocooning’
- 87% of church congregations provided online engagement (56% something online before)
- Catholic sites often provided opportunities across day (although 35% no provision)
- “use of Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook, Youtube, etc for a range of activities, including prayer meetings, bible studies, youth groups, c_h_i_l_d_r_e_n_’s_ _and youth groups, book clubs, coffee mornings, afternoon teas, novenas, quizzes, question and answer sessions, marriage courses, retreats, spiritual direction, membership classes, and more. Most faith leaders have directed members of their faith community to other opportunities for online services, fellowship or resources, with 81 percent indicating that they have done so.”
- Discipleship as important than Sunday worship?
- “We can’t go back to where we were!” (Northern Irish Methodist Minister)

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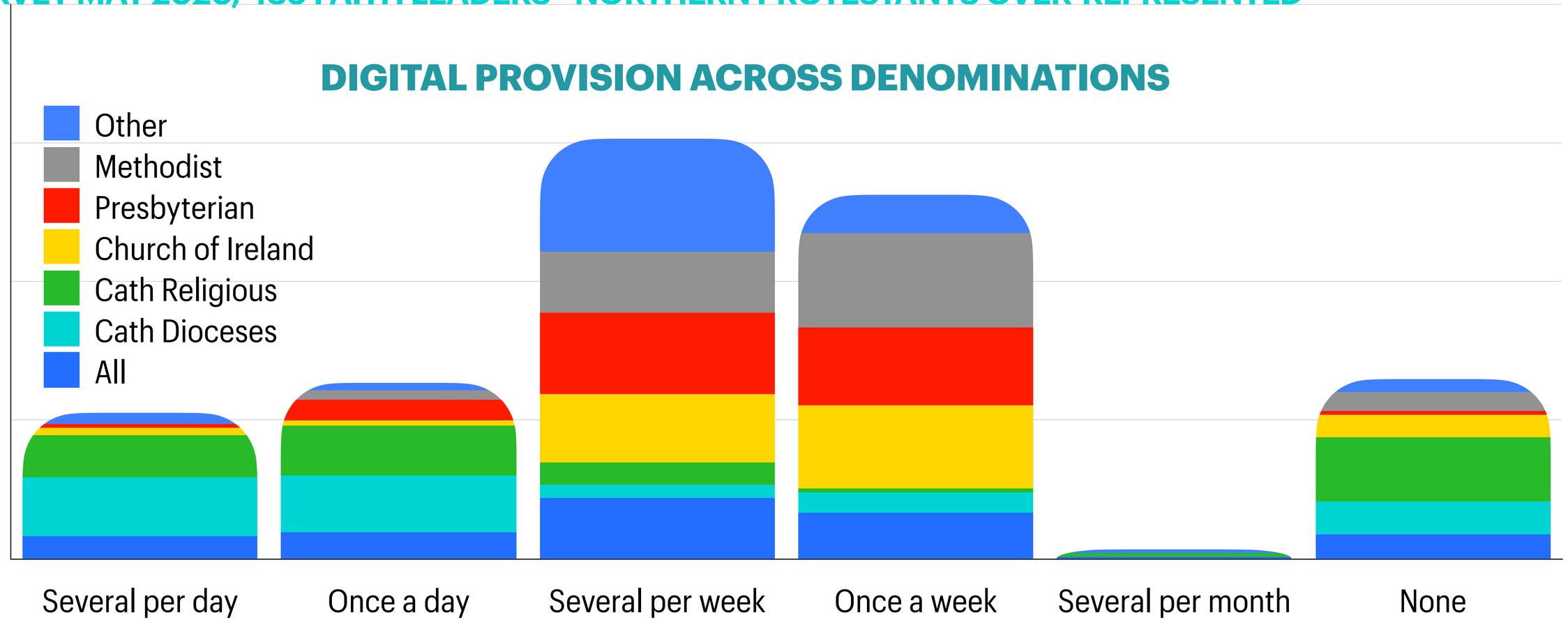

WHERE NEXT?

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTINUED BALANCE OF DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL - HYBRIDITY HERE TO STAY?

- Church of Scotland Synod Poll - 66% want to maintain digital presence
- Irish Polling by QUB - 70% to keep some or all digital engagement (“People still need us”)
- “You’ve set up a comfy sofa for us behind the back pew”
- Potential demise of rural churches?
- BARNA - 81% - important to experience church alongside others.
- BARNA - 71% see value in attending online service, 70% spiritually growing despite no physical church
- BARNA - 20% - high digital openness - younger generations point to hybrid church as important as physical church for the future

THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE?

MARSHALL MCLUHAN

AFFORDANCES?

- Youtube and entertainment?
- Zoom and community - all speaking…all faces…?
- Facebook mix of text messaging and some video
- Whatsapp/Signal/Telegram - texting plus pics

- Is zoom better than physical church for seeing people's faces
- Is zoom too visual for us - hence zoom fatigue - turn self-view off!

HYBRID PRACTICALITIES

- Technology is not just digital - phone, paper, mobile…
- Plurality of platforms - YouTube, Zoom, Facebook, Google, Teams
- Zoom Coffee Meetings, Prayer Groups, WhatsApp, Connection
- Invite housebound/vulnerable/disabled/anonymous to worship
- Ecclesiology - the Church is the body of Christ - the whole body
- What does it mean for the body to be multi-located. streamed
- God is spirit, Church triumphant, worshipping with angels
- Digital as an authentic thin place

LOOKING FORWARD

Six-in-ten attenders go to religious services primarily to get closer to God

*Among those who attend religious services at least once or twice a month, % who say _____ is the **most** important reason why*

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Each category includes those who named *only* the corresponding item as a "very important" reason for regularly attending religious services, as well as those who named more than one reason as "very important" and then indicated, in a follow-up question, that the corresponding item is the *most* important reason they attend religious services.

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

"Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

MINISTRY IN HYBRID CHURCH?

- Not much changes about the basics of ministry -
- preaching, praying, pastoring, shepherding and feeding the flock
- BUT a huge shift…
- Technological shift - using digital to bring different elements of the congregation together
- Cultural shift - changing digital from idol to icon
- Missional shift - centripetal shifts to omnipresent
- Team shift - technologists and creatives in ministry

LOOKING FORWARD

WHAT DOES THE DATA SUGGEST FOR THE WAY FORWARD?

- **The future is hybrid - or 'phygital' - the best of both worlds**
  - Implications for ministry/support team
  - Different local churches providing different provision?
  - Bringing in the creatives/technologists/digitally aware
  - But also Grandma's Church as a counter-culture? - Jay Kim
- **Connection and Community above Perfect Content**
  - Shift from gathering congregations (attractional mission)
  - Connecting through networks (networked society, liquid church, church without walls)
  - Create a tribe NOT a platform. Carey Nieuwhof - affective alliances for spirituality/social renewal/community growth

The ship has sailed - it's time to embrace the new to extend your now

Think network, think global, think engagement, think mission

Follow the patterns from Acts rather than your patterns pre-COVID

Mark Pugh, Rediscover Church, Exeter

WHERE NEXT?

- Beware thinking it’s all about live-streaming worship
- Encountering God midweek through discipleship and prayer
- Encountering God in daily prayer
- Whatsapp prayer groups, prayer chains, networking
- Social networking to hear people’s needs and respond quickly
- Business meeting via online
- Plurality of online networks - phone, voice meetings, video meetings

IPRESENCE - INTENTIONALITY?

1. Presence is more than physically being there…

- We tend to prefer physical encounter - we are fleshy beings
- But remember God is Spirit, remember 2ndPT became flesh
- Remember physical presence is not possible for some
- The disabled, the vulnerable, the housebound, the fearful
- They are as much part of the body of Christ as others.
- Church post COVID is a place to welcome all -
- wherever they feel safe to be.
- This is Hybrid Church

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