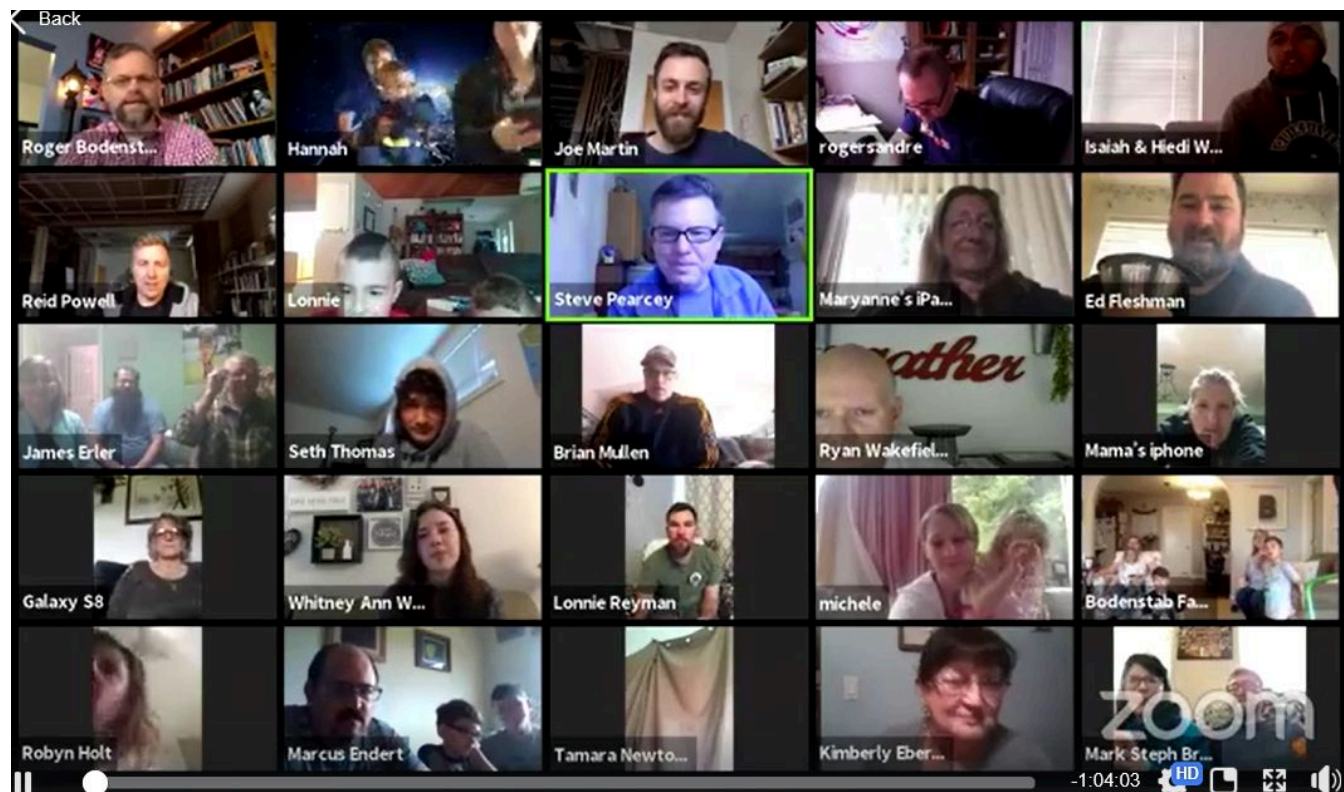


Pastors provide essential services through online technology

April 3, 2020



As the social distancing guidelines to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus extend into the first week of April, local pastors are turning to technology to provide essential services to their congregations.

Roger Bodenstab, Lead Pastor at Crescent City Foursquare Church, turned to a format he's quite familiar with — Zoom Video Communications. Bodenstab said he's used the online platform to participate in remote conferences in the past.

Now, with the limitation of gatherings of 10 people or more, Bodenstab has created Foursquare's Zoom Church.

Last weekend, Bodenstab said 78 homes tuned into services through Zoom, a platform he prefers to live streaming through Facebook.

"It is challenging. I miss the people. But through Zoom, I get to see and hear everybody. It's more personal than Facebook live. I don't do services in an empty room live well," Bodenstab said. "Zoom allows us to

break into smaller study groups, time to pray together and check-in with each other.”

Bodenstab hopes to have a Zoom Church specifically for kids this weekend. The ladies and men’s Bible study groups and the Celebrate Recovery Group are also using Zoom for their get-togethers.

He said not as many from his congregation log into Zoom as with the live stream, as it’s been averaging 450 people on the weekend.

Pastor Bob Wheeler from Crescent City Church of the Nazarene continues to live stream services on the church’s Facebook page. He said a blessing to come out of this situation is for those who haven’t paid much attention to the internet have been pushed into using it.

“If you want to communicate with folks, the internet’s the best alternative,” Wheeler said.

Wheeler added he also uses Zoom to host bible studies with groups of 10-15 participating.

“What’s really cool is we have folks that from time to time join who don’t live in town but like the church,” Wheeler said. “We have one from Sacramento who visits here, who feels this is her church, who joins us on Zoom.”

He expects others, who normally travel to Crescent City to get away from the summer heat, to take advantage of the Zoom app to still engage remotely with the church.

Wheeler said he shared an email with his congregation that relates to the current situation, Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

“God has pointed us to something we can use to bring good news to people when all wondering what is next,” Wheeler said. “It’s a peaceful thing for me as a believer, regardless of what’s going on, all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

Wheeler said he still has a handful of attendees during the live stream service, making sure never to have more than six, including one who is less tech-savvy, and practicing social distancing’s rule of six feet apart.

He added that even though Del Norte County hasn’t had a confirmed case of the coronavirus yet, it’s just a matter of when, not if, it gets here. That’s why it’s important to prepare for its arrival through precautions now, he said.

However, he admits it is an odd experience preaching to a near-empty sanctuary.

“My kudos to the people who do this on TV and act like they can see you in your living room and are talking directly to you,” Wheeler said. “But there’s no substitute for human interaction. We know you can’t survive without human interaction. I miss a good hug, a hardy handshake, the things Americans do on a regular basis.”

He added Zoom and live streaming still have their benefits in these times.

“The upside is people can still hear about God working for good. People still have a lot of opportunities to receive messages from pastors. Only this is messages on steroids. It’s something we’ll all get through,” Wheeler said.