Presentation Notes

Timeless Message.

The central message of the bible has not changed, but the medium in which we communicate that message has. Jews and Christians have use timely mediums to share this timeless message. But first let's clarify the message.

At it's core, the message of the bible is:

> God is *restoring the world* to His original design *through Jesus Christ* and the *Holy Spirit.*

> The world is in a *state of brokenness* because of mankind's *rejection of God* and His plan. *Jesus entered* into a broken and hurting world to die on the cross and return to life *to restore mankind* to God.

> The *Spirit is in us now* to be God's messengers and champions *to see heaven come to earth.*

This first part of this message hasn't changed since Genesis 3 and the last part hasn't changed since Acts 2.

The conversation around Digital Church can quickly descend into - often intergenerational - discussion about the how we should share this message but before these discussions it's important to remember what our shared belief is. We want to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

We can challenge and change the medium of how we communicate the message but the core message itself never changes.

Timely Mediums.

"If you'd come today you could have reached a whole nation Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication" - Jesus Christ Superstar

The communication of the bible and gospel certainly didn't start with us and the internet, nor were we the first to change how its communicated. There is a long and rich history of changing communications with the core Christian message. Before we delve into how we use the internet and social media, it's worth engage with some history around christian communication.

Oral Tradition & Scrolls

It's obviously very hard to pinpoint when oral traditions started, however we know that before things were written there was a collection of shard stories and histories which would be retold. Including the life of Abraham, wilderness wanderings, settlement in the land of Canaan etc

Exodus 17 is the first time in the bible a person is directed to start to record events which will become the Hebrew bible and then Christian bible.

> "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this[1] on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it…"" - Exodus 17:14

The first commandment from God to record what we now know as the bible is two fold. Write it and share it.

The old testament is a collection of collections which is made up of materials from all periods of Israel's history, religion and literature. It came into existence through a multi-step process.

Period	Writings
Events	• The life of Abraham, the wilderness wanderings, settlement in the land of Canaan, etc
Oral Traditions	• The family history of Abraham's ancestors the wilderness wanderings, early songs: Exodus 15, Judges 5, Psalm 29…
Early written traditions	• "This is the scroll of the generations of humanity" (Ben 5:1) • "The scroll of Jashar" (Joshua 10:13, 2 Sam 1:18) • "The scroll of the wars of Yahweh" (Num 21:14)
Early collections of written traditions	• "The scroll of the deeds of the kings of Israel" (1 Kings 14:19, 29, etc) • "The commentary of the scroll of the kings" (2 Chron 24:27)
Proto-edition of biblical books	• "The proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah compiled" (Prov 25:1) • "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" (Psalm 72:20) • "The "Mosaic" Torah" (Exod 21-23 & Deut 12-26) • "1st edition of Jeremiah (Jer 36)"
TaNaK editions of biblical books (Hebrew Bible)	

You can in fact view some of these scrolls that were preserved in a cave throughout history. If you visit http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/ you can view Isaiah as a scroll. This was hidden when Jerusalem was sieged by Rome in 70 AD.

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[1] *this* refers to the Israelites defeat of the Amalekites

Codex (Books)

From there we have a period of letters in which along with the gospel make up the majority of our new testament. These were a different medium to scrolls and as such are used in a different way. Due to letters being shorter and linear, how you use it to engage a letter within the larger context of the bible than how you deal with a scroll.

For instance, many of the scrolls have references and links at their beginnings to the ends of previous scrolls to imply an order, whereas letters are much more stand alone.

The earliest dated copy of the bible still in existence is from 300 AD. That being said, we of course know the gospels are eyewitness accounts written within a lifespan of the events (as is the same with the letters, account of Acts, etc)

This transition from scroll to codex is often argued by some to have lost some of the "magic" within the original medium. As we are viewing content designed for scrolls within a book. Although this is great as a library, there are several links and repetition which only make sense in the context of a scroll.

At this point, the bible was translated from its original Hebrew to Greek a more accessible language in the modern era. Accessibility and readability was prioritised over preserving the original languages native text.

Printing Press (Mass Production)

The Gutenberg Bible was the first mass produced bible, although it's predicted that only between 158 - 180 were created. There are 49 copies remaining in existence still. Lambeth Palace has an original new testament and the British library has a full copy.

The Internet (Mass communication)

Many people see the internet and social media as something new, it's not. It is logical next step of the continued partnership between God and human communication.

> *"We are in the middle of the biggest communication shift we've seen in the last 500 years"*
> *- Brady Shearer, Pro Church Tools, 2020*

We are currently still living through the transition from the bible and gospel being shared via book and direct preaching to is being mass marketed and totally accessible to anyone.

> *"There are 7.77 billion people in the world, 4.54 billion of them are active Internet users." - Statista, 2020*

> *"3.9 billion people check their email at least once a day" - eMarketer, 2019*

> *"1.7 million people user Facebook at least once a day" - eMarketer, 2019*

> *"With users in every country of the world, the YouVersion Bible App has reached a quarter of a billion downloads." - YouVersion (Bible App), 2019*

> *"Our social media content is seen more than 3.6 million times each month" - Church of England, 2019 Digital Report*

Although a lot of concern, this is currently the most accessible way to share the bible and gospel with the least barriers.

A Brief History of the Internet

Despite many believing so, the internet is not one static thing. Due to the nature of it being a network of humans, it is ever changing and evolving. In the 31 years it's been around, there have been significant shifts in how the internet is used.

Web 1.0 (~1990 - ~2000)

This is the era of dial-up, Windows 95, modems, and AOL. The internet was in its absolute infancy and we'd not really understood its full potential. Lots of companies rushed to gain valuable web real estate, however once gained, they weren't too sure what to do with it.

Many business' used it to direct people to a single response call to action. *Ring us today. Find us here.* Or as a menu of services that were available only in the physical shop and not online. eCommerce, although promised to destroy the high street, was met with resistance from most users.

The internet served as effectively a digital yellow pages during this period. Use it to find out information to inform your life and decision making in physical world.

This period was broadly between 1990 and 2000.

Web 2.0 (~2000 - ~2010)

Around the year 2000, we transitions into what's known as Web 2.0. This is where people started to utilise the interconnectivity and community potential of the internet. However, this was very 1-to-1 basis.

This was the era of personal blogs, MSN Messenger, and 1-2-1 Skype calls.

The bandwidth was widening to allow for more real time interactivity. Video calling as well as quicker file downloading speeds. This allowed organisations to keep documents on their websites for people to download and print (or fax).

Although social media sites were created in this period (Facebook in 2004, LinkedIn in 2003, Twitter in 2006) they didn't start gaining mass traction until the early 10's.

Web 3.0 (~2010 - ~2020)

In the early 10's there was a flurry of now very popular social media sites starting (Instagram 2010, SnapChat 2011, Pintrest 2011) and in 2012 Facebook bought Instagram. This begins the social era of the internet. Web 3.0.

The name of the game now is interactivity. Not only can business' have their own online space but individuals can for free. Every individual can act and interact with any other individual who is also on that network.

Although there was a shift in Web 2.0 from direct to interactivity, Web 3.0 was the tipping point where interactivity took over. That being said, there is still a place for direct calls to action, but the two have distinct places on the Internet

> "The internet is currently optimised to invite interaction not just call people to action"

Before we step into the more practical element of this session, it's worth considering our own context and church.

• Which parts of Church suit an invitation to interaction?
• Which parts of Church suit call to action?

Finding the Time.

If you're struggling with time and don't know where to start:

> If you want to a single response from someone use Email, if you want to invite interaction, use Facebook.

Although of course there is a range of other social media and internet tools out there, these two are the most important to use as a Church and where the majority of people spend time online.

Case Study 1: "How can we pray for you right now?"

On our Church Facebook page every week we will share a post offering prayer saying something like "How can we pray for you right now?" Or "How can St John's pray for your right now?". Almost every time we've posted that, we've had some form of response. Usually it's a comment of someone within the congregation asking for prayer. Unless we feel the need to respond more personally, we usually write a short prayer as a reply to them. Occasionally, we'll have people private message our page with prayer requests.

About a year ago, we had someone who had liked our Facebook page when they came one Christmas comment about how they felt their life was spinning out of control and they needed help. Our ordinand messaged her privately and asked if she wanted to meet in person for prayer. They met, prayed and chatted and eventually that relationship got to a place where our ordinand felt comfortable asking if she'd like to come to Church and our toddler group. She did and as she came, built more and more connections and eventually started coming on a Sunday.

As she attended more she wanted to commit her life to Jesus and did so publicly by being confirmed. She then went on to have her daughter baptised.

This for me is evidence that social media is more than a digital notice board but can be the first step for someone coming to faith and into the life changing relationship with Jesus.

Case Study 2: "Show don't tell"

For about a year, we regularly taken photos of our church life. Most regularly this means our Sunday service but also includes Messy Church and social events.

This allows us to show the people who like our page but don't attend our service what Church looks like. It's our digital church window. We don't call them to action afterwards but write something like "In case you missed today, here's what Sunday looked like" Or "In case you couldn't make it, here's what we got up to this morning".

We've heard first hand of people who said they found coming to church less daunting after they could see what to expect.

Other ways to invite interaction online

• **Ask Questions**

We will regularly ask questions to our Facebook followers, sometimes theological, sometimes just for fun to build community and relationship. Our most answered question was "Do you remember your first car?" We have over 50 comments of people talking about their first car experiences. Although not theological, we've had people like our page because that popped up on their feed and since have engaged with our more 'christian' content.

• **Create a House Group WhatsApp Group**

I have a WhatsApp group of close Christian friends which we use to encourage one another, chat about life and arrange virtual bible studies (as we live in different parts of the country). As my phones always with me, I can always pick up their messages and can always send a message.

This tends to work in smaller numbers (less than 6). Consider, which 5 people do you want to stay in touch with and study the bible with in your church?

• **Online Bible Reading Challenges**

Explain on social media (maybe with a video), you're looking to read through a certain book/passage over the next few weeks, who wants to join you?

• **Link to Online Church Services**

If you're struggling to get a live stream for your own Church, share another Churches live stream. *We are one body because we all share in one bread.*

• **Facebook Group Bible Study**

As pioneer by Archbishop Justin Welby several years ago, you can use Facebook to do an interactive group bible study. If you create a Facebook group, you're able to 'go live' with that group and discuss it with each other. Set a time and see who turns up.

• **Tweet a Daily Bible Verse**

Although we don't use twitter much at St John's Church, this is a quick and easy way to generate content each day.

• **Offer Help**

Pose the question on social media "How can we help you? Message us if we can help you practically"

• **Share Youtube Worship Playlists**

Although many Churches have fond themselves in hot water for including Youtube videos in their live stream services, one thing that is 100% is to create a playlist on Youtube with a collection of worship songs

• **Play Games**

Ask people to write their favourite bible in emojis and get others to guess them.
Ask people to describe a bible story in the least words possible, pick a winner.

• **Encourage People to Serve Locally**

What's happening in your local area that needs help and support? We regularly encourage our followers to give to the local food bank.

• **Instagram Live Worship Session**

If you have a guitar and an internet connection you have

• **Text a Loved one for a Chat**

This is very analogue but something that requires very little technology. You can message a loved one or someone from the congregation. Need to know where to start "Hey [NAME], was just thinking about you. How are things?"

• **Facebook Live Bible Study**

Rather than with a smaller group to participate, have a discussion with those in your house online and stream it.

• **Post Liturgical Information**

Why not post about the liturgical festival? What's today's collect? What's today's reading? Is there an image that corresponds to the day you could share?

• **Offer Prayer**

"How can we pray for you right now?" And reply to everyone who messages or comments with a prayer. Follow up any with a private message if you need to.

• **Caption Competition**

Find an old picture of something that happened in the Church and ask

• **Share Christian Resources**

Personally, I love video resources from the bible project and love sharing their videos but there are a range of podcasts and courses you can share. Consider, what Christian resources do you find useful? Might others find them useful?

• **Share Scripture**

Sharing the gospel and the stories of the bible, is a direct teaching of Jesus. Why not do it online? Struggling for a verse, check out YouVersions verse of the day.

• **Share photos of Church life**

We try to take photos of our Church service every Sunday to post online later in the day. Although it's tempting to think once you've

You'll notice that there isn't any direct calls to action on that list, nor an invitation to "Join us on Sunday" because:

> "The aim of inviting interaction isn't to get people in the church building, but to *be church* online "

Once you have interacted with people and built relationship and good will, it becomes easier to engage with them about next steps. The best thing to ask them on social media is to consider joining the mailing list where you can talk much more directly.

Email [2]

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[2] In this context, we're talking about emails where you're promoting and event or sharing some information, what otherwise might be known as Marketing emails.

We are so used to using email in a friend and work context, we often apply those same rules to sending church emails. Although we want to be professional but also friendly, sending emails from a church is different from work or home.

In my job, I'm often speaking with clients or various team members within my organisations. The vast majority of the time, detail is incredibly important. What is the agreed deadline? What's a realistic timescale? What's the accurate price compared to the value? etc. Church isn't like this with those you're trying to communicate [3].

Comparatively, church is neither sending emails as a friend who would use jokes or colloquialisms. You want to make sure you're honouring the generations past and the organisation of the Church within your community. Although Christians have a very intimate and broadly positive relationship with the Church, those outside sometimes don't. Be weary.

So, what should you aim for in a Church email?

4 Rules for Constructing an Engaging Church Email

1.   Keep it as short and direct as possible

Ideally, you should have a single action point within your email. What one next step do you want people to do? Sign up for conformation class? Bring apples for the apple-festival? Fill in their and return their DBS forms by the end of the week? If the point is complex or needs some narrative added to contextualise it, write that with clear headings that people can skim and scan.

The more steps you put in, the less likely people are to do them.

2.   Include that clear call to action

I know that sounds obvious, but make it as easily as possible for someone skim and scanning the email to understand what you require as a response.

Remember: Send your DBS forms before holiday club next week.

Please can you: Bake and bring some mince pies to our Christmas Eve service.

Before you can book: You must have returned your permission slips to Sarah.

3.   Sign your name

People respond to people not organisations. They want to know who they're talking to. Who's accountable. To whom they pose further questions.

Rather than signing emails "St John's Church", we always sign the name of the person writing the email and their role within the Church.

4.   Include a P.S. at the bottom

People skim and scan emails for key information and decide whether to do something or not. A P.S. not only peaks curiosity but is also the most likely part of your email to be read. Ensure it's directly linked to your call to action, so even those who don't read the whole email get the point.

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[3] There are exceptions in terms of PCC getting quotes and contracts, but we're talking about emails in the context of talking to the church congregation and/or those on the mailing list.

Other Information

Digital Church Organisations

prochurchtools.com

digitalchurchtoolkit.com

churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/church-england-digital-labs

Church Social Media Resources

digital.stjohnsellel.co.uk (Free)

creationswap.com (Paid)

churchmotiongraphics.com (Paid)

Secular Social Media Resources

canva.com (Design)

unplash.com (Photography)

pexels.com (Video)

Reading List

Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways a New generation Can Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon - David Kinnaman & Mark Matlock

Making Space for Millennials: A Blueprint for your culture, Ministry, Leadership and Facilities - Barna Research

Branding in 5 (and a half) Steps - Michael Johnson

Get in touch

If you have any questions, comments, feedback, success stories, let me know. Email me on geraint@stjohnsellel.co.uk or visit digital.stjohnsellel.co.uk

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