

Communication Technology in Churches

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### Abstract

This paper explores that communication has been around over the past five hundred years but is shifting in the Church. What kind of shifts are happening within the Church related to technology in communication is a topic that will be explored, as well as has the pandemic had anything to do with it. It then explains what tools the Church uses in everyday settings based on the uncovered research. It will then discuss a communication shift long before the pandemic. But the pandemic only accelerated the speed of the change.

## Research Question

How has church communications changed over the last five hundred years? Has the pandemic done anything to accelerate this?

## Literature Review

According to numerous sources, communication within a religious organization has always existed. "The tools and strategies for how an organization may communicate with its surroundings have changed significantly after social media became a common part of daily life" (Hodøl, 2021). Previously, organizations were, to a high degree, in control of the communication processes they initiated themselves. Still, in the era of social media, marketing managers' influence on the content, timing, and frequency of information is being severely eroded, according to Hodøl (Hodøl, 2021).

Hodøl then goes on to say, "Scholars within the field of integrated marketing communications (IMC) describe the new situation as a new paradigm (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Georgescu & Popescul, 2015; Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015) because the practice which has worked well for the past century is no longer reasonable as social media has become such an important marketplace for sharing ideas between organizations and their target audiences, as well as between the members of the audiences themselves" (Hodøl, 2021).

So, the concept of translating the Christian message to make it culturally relevant for new audiences was introduced in the New Testament and has followed the Church ever since. In current missiological literature, this approach is often labeled "contextualization" (Moreau, 2018). It shows a functionalistic and pragmatic way of thinking where it is more important to find a way of communicating that works well than keeping hold of the traditional way of doing things, according to Hodøl (Hodøl, 2021).

Another article stated, "Regardless of one's religious views, churches represent an important and distinctive arena of study, partly because of their prevalence in society" (Garner, *Communication in Religious Organizations*, 2017). There are more than 350,000 churches in America, and the average church size is between 100 and 400 members, according to Garner (Garner, *Communication in Religious Organizations*, 2017).

"The demand for a New World Information and Communication Order that had been a focus for debate in the 1970s and the 1980s was super-seeded by the emergence of the "Information Society," reflecting the role played in globalization by information and communication technologies (ICTs)" (Brown, 2012). Such global shifts also saw a new ecumenical communication perspective within the World Council of Churches. In this perspective, communication was one element of a worldwide "ecumenical space," which would articulate an alternative model of unity to that of global economic liberalization underpinned by information and communication technologies, according to Brown (Brown, 2012).

The communication revolution has been asking how to get the churches to take the change seriously, which has concerned church leaders for years (Fore, 1986). "What will it take to have churches involved in radio, television, satellites, and computers – to join the communication revolution?" (Fore, 1986). "But such a question contains many dubious assumptions that could lead religious communication dangerously astray -- as it already has in some cases" (Fore, 1986). Although the Church should give these developments in the world more serious thought, rather than merely accepting them, it should work to transform them in the light of the gospel (Fore, 1986).

There is no denying that the world is undergoing significant transformation. The unity of knowledge, the nature of human groups, the order of society, the order of ideas, and the fundamental notions of society and culture have changed and will not go back to the way they were in the past, according to Robert Oppenheimer's writing from 1963, "This world of ours is a new world." (Fore, 1986). "As a result, the religions of the world are facing not just a communication revolution but a new Technological Era that brings with it its world view" (Fore, 1986). The technological era is pragmatic and practical and is defined by relativism and utilitarianism. It insists on reason and individual autonomy and declares that this space-time universe is the right place for humanity to call home. It is utterly secular. It disbelieves in metaphysical ideas and requires that religion focus on the present. (Fore, 1986).

The 1980s saw the beginning of more thorough examinations of the connection between religion and media. Many specialized institutes focused on scholarly study, and public discussion of these issues has been established by a relatively limited group of scholars investigating the topic. (Ronéáková, 2013). Many churches have a paradox where members have been told to "love one another" and "turn the other cheek." Many churches have an irony where members engage in hateful communication despite being told to "love one another" and "turn the other cheek." People who have been exposed to "love one another" and "turn the other cheek" paradoxically find themselves engaged in nasty communication patterns like grumbling, gossiping, and church divisions (Garner & Wargo, *Feedback from the Pew: A Dual-Perspective Exploration of Organizational Dissent in Churches*, 2009).

One explanation for this contradiction may concern how dissent is expressed in churches. Communication may be expressed constructively or destructively and received warmly or defensively (Garner & Wargo, *Feedback from the Pew: A Dual-Perspective Exploration of Organizational Dissent in Churches*, 2009). Churches are important and distinctive institutions that substantially impact society by influencing members' attitudes, relationships, and fundamental ideals (Garner & Wargo, *Feedback from the Pew: A Dual-Perspective Exploration of Organizational Dissent in Churches*, 2009).

"Several research programs have demonstrated the importance of communication in churches" (Garner & Wargo, *Feedback from the Pew: A Dual-Perspective Exploration of Organizational Dissent in Churches*, 2009). Ragsdale discovered a connection between dedication and interpersonal communication in churches. Taylor found a significant, positive link between communication satisfaction and church membership satisfaction, indicating that one's level of contentment with their Church has much to do with how well one communicates (Garner & Wargo, *Feedback from the Pew: A Dual-Perspective Exploration of Organizational Dissent in Churches*, 2009). In addition, Taylor found no statistically significant link between satisfaction with church membership and attendance, suggesting that disgruntled members may continue to attend services but restrict their involvement in church activities (Garner & Wargo, *Feedback from the Pew: A Dual-Perspective Exploration of Organizational Dissent in Churches*, 2009).

Senior Vatican officials recognized the benefits of communications technology (CT) advancements for the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s, but these possibilities also encouraged ambivalence. (Anderson, 2015). They saw the innovations of radio,



television, and newspapers as a way to spread the message and mission of Christianity over the world as guardians of "circumscribed Church heritage." (Anderson, 2015). The broad nature of CT in Western culture resulted in "semantic uncertainty" or "reinterpretation and development." (Anderson, 2015).

"Throughout history, religious institutions have played a key role in adopting new communication technologies" (McCully, 2014). New information and communication technologies (ICTs) have changed how people engage with one another and with the organizations in which they participate in recent decades (McCully, 2014). As ICTs transform the ways in which individuals interact, religious individuals have sought to redefine the relationship between their faith and the faith communities they attend (McCully, 2014).

Physical presence in the pursuit of spiritual objectives is essential to this development. Some academics contend that online spiritual experiences can achieve the same attributes and outcomes as face-to-face spiritual encounters (McCully, 2014). According to other researchers' more gloomy viewpoints (O'Leary, 2005; Postman, 1985), spiritual interaction that takes place in the absence of physical contact is causing religious practice to deteriorate (McCully, 2014). Regardless of the possible outcomes, religious organizations have already faced significant challenges in addressing changes introduced by new methods of communication (McCully, 2014).

## Population

The population of this study would be the pastoral staff at the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene. The team includes the lead pastor, the family pastor, the associate pastor, the ministry of music, and the administrative assistant. Volunteers or board are also welcome to take part. Most of the staff reside on the south shore. Two live in Weymouth, one in Braintree, another in Quincy, and another in Hingham. The staff breakdown is all white; ages vary from 28 to 77, with three staff members under 55 and 2 staff members over 65 but not over 75. Most of them have very little tech knowledge when it comes to technology. In their mindset, they have no issues. It will work as it's supposed to.

### Instrument

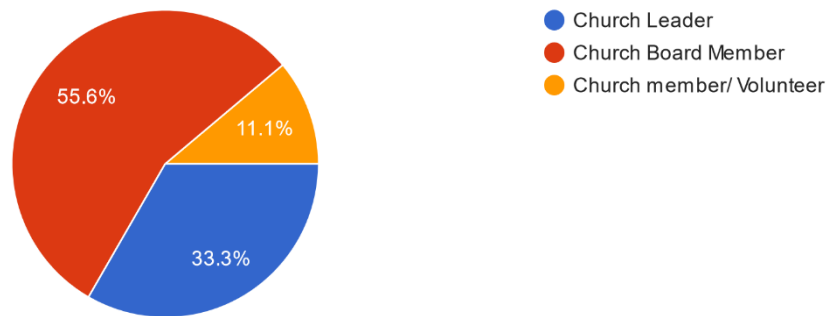
With my subjects as described in the population statement, each will complete a twelve-question questionnaire on google forms, which will take up to fifteen minutes to complete. The questionnaire should be very straightforward within the Church's communication realm.

### Summary of Findings

Based on the results of the survey that I conducted. I received nine responses over the course of a week. Of those responses, only 33.3% were from the church leadership team, about three out of five possible leaders.

Who are you?

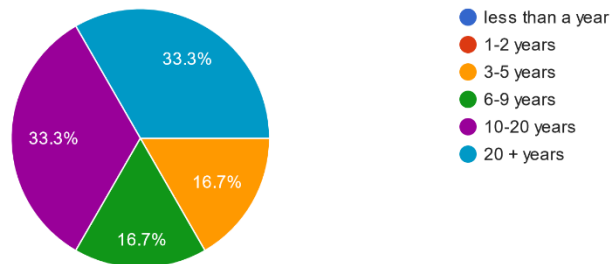
9 responses



55.6% is the response from the church board, five out of ten possible responses from the board, but one of the board members is also on staff. Of the other 11.1% of respondents who are volunteers or church members, which was one out of a possible fifty members and volunteers. To me, this is not surprising that not all of the leadership team

How long have you attended the church?

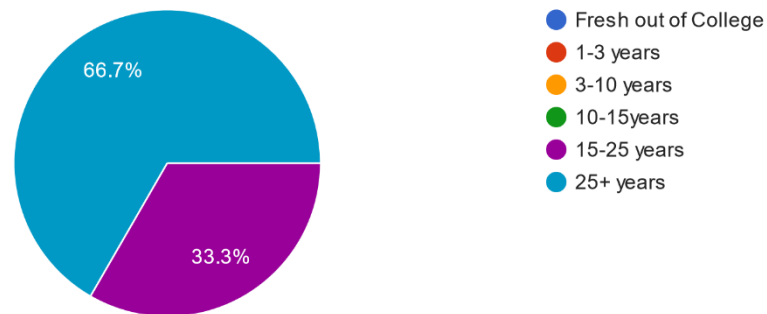
6 responses



responded, as the two that did not respond took a while to get anything to me when preparing weekly stuff for the Church's site and slides for a Sunday morning, as well as take a bit to respond to email.

When asked about how long you have attended the Church. I received responses ranging from three to five years to twenty-plus years attending the Church. The breakdown is as follows twenty-plus years two responses, ten to twenty years two responses, six to nine years one response, and three to five years one response. This was not surprising to me as the Church is made up of very different ages throughout all membership and staff.

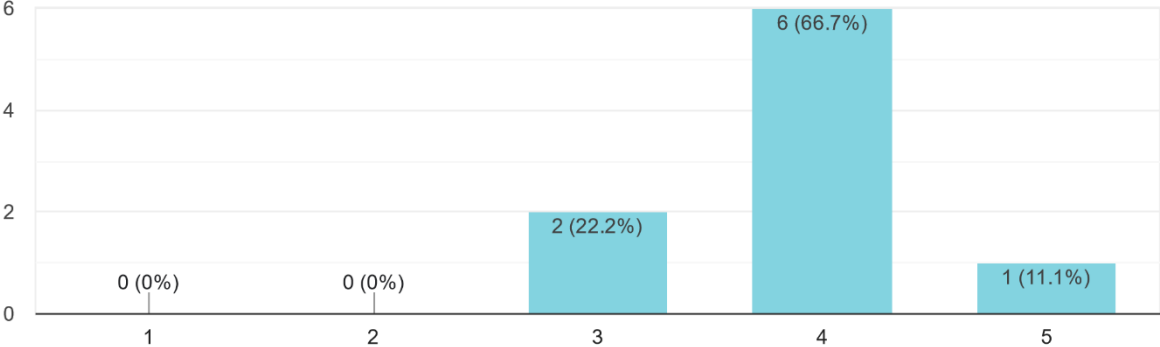
How long have you served in ministry  
3 responses



The Church leadership was asked two questions that no one else saw. One of them, as seen above, asked how long they had served in ministry. Of the three responses, two were twenty-five plus years, while the other was fifteen to twenty-five years in ministry.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, how would you rate your church in communication with its members?

9 responses



When asked to rate the communication within the Church with its members, the responses I got were a bit surprising, with only one saying the Church was doing a good job, six responses were a four, which is ok but could be better, and two answers were a three which could mean they were torn between a good job and not a good job. Now they were also asked about how well the communication strategies were at the Church, with a majority giving the Church a two. It was astonishing to me as I would have given them a three as they do ok with most communication but could do better with social media communication. This question tells me that there is work to be done at the Church with communication strategies.

Thinking about the different technologies you have heard of, please check the ones for which you have heard.

9 responses



Respondents were asked to select the technology they had heard of in the following question. There were no surprises with this question as most of the board and leadership team know what tech is used in the Church. The only surprising response to this question was that one response knew what Send in Blue was, even though it is used weekly to send out the e-newsletter.

The next question asked is based on the tools you have heard of. How many are the Church using? The responses were a little surprising as fifty-five percent of users think that the Church is only using a few of the tools listed when they are using five. But some of the tools also integrate with other tools on the list.

The last question that was asked was, in their opinion has the pandemic changed the way the Church communicates? All the responses agreed that the pandemic changed how the Church communicates. This was not surprising as I have seen how it has changed over the course of the two years and been a part of that change in getting our message out.

## Conclusion

Church communication has undergone many changes in the last 500 years. But unlike the previous 500 years, changes were seen to have fast-tracked during the pandemic. They fast-tracked as everything was printed much in lockdown, so everything had to be digital instead of printed.

Based on my research, the pandemic changed church communications, some for the better and others not. As with anything church-related, the Church must change as technologies change. Most articles I read said nothing about communication changes during the pandemic but only about how we got to where we were before the pandemic.

Each Church implements its communication technologies differently. What we did at the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene was to implement a weekly e-newsletter to keep the Church connected. We use a tool called send in blue, a tool like mail chimp. When the Church was surveyed about the different technologies, only one person had heard of Send in blue, while a bunch had heard of MailChimp. I assume that the one who heads of send in blue is the one who sends out the e-newsletters every week.

The biggest communication tool we started using during the pandemic was live streaming. This was big for us as it kept our community together, but it also had its growing pains. A week before the stay-in-place order came, we were only testing the water of doing live streaming. But as we continued down this road, we improved how we were live streaming and the equipment we used. It took until the new lead pastor started for the Church to purchase a camera just for live



streaming and some other equipment needed. We are still making improvements every week to the way stuff is done.

According to Garner, There are more than 350,000 churches in America, and the average church size is between 100 and 400 members. (Garner, Communication in Religious Organizations, 2017) So, the concept of translating the Christian message to make it culturally relevant for new audiences was introduced in the New Testament and has followed the Church ever since. In current missiological literature, this approach is often labeled "contextualization" (Moreau, 2018). This is so important for churches in our day and age, even after going through a pandemic. It doesn't matter how big or small the Church is. This applies to all churches. This is more than the pastor sending the message through the in-person experience but also getting the message out through all the online changes to keep the church members engaged through their actions in their everyday life.

Another way churches communicate is online with the viewers there. As viewers who check in to the weekly services online, the Church must engage with the online audience so they feel connected to the Church. This is also how first-time visitors check out churches now; if they don't like a church, they find another live stream. But if they want the Church, they will stick around and adrenally show up in person to that Church if they are local to the area or at least stay in touch with the Church if they are far away.

One of the most powerful tools that churches can use to keep track of their members' information is a system like Planning Center, which is one of the many

church management software available out there currently. Within each management software, there are communication tools that allow the church leaders to communicate with the members of the Church and keep a history of communication with the members, which comes in handy if you have not seen them for a while. You need to know when the last contact was.

Many churches also use a piece of software like MailChimp to send emails out to their members. This serves as a way to keep in touch with the church members and keep them informed on what's going on in the Church, any upcoming events, and any message from the lead pastor that needs to be communicated.

Now, based on all my research and field experiences over the last two years. I firmly believe that the pandemic has altered how the Church communicates with its members as it has become more digital. Some churches have removed all printed materials altogether, while others have scaled back. I also believe that we were already in a communication shift before the pandemic. Still, the pandemic sped up the speed of the change as it forced people to hold digital services and communicate digitally with its members.

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Appendix A

**Use of this form:** This form is to be used for IRB determination of exemption status of research involving human subjects, as regulated by the US Department of Health and Human Services, under the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR part 46). **Please be sure you have reviewed the "Applying for IRB Review" flow chart at <https://my.curry.edu/web/faculty/irb>, and determined that your project qualifies as "Research involving Human Subjects" and has possible reason(s) for exemption, before proceeding. If you have questions whether this is the correct form, please contact the IRB Chairperson. **Submission:** Please email this form as an attachment to [IRB@curry.edu](mailto:IRB@curry.edu). During fall and spring semesters, an IRB representative will respond to you within one week with a determination of status and/or instructions for further action.**

- **Your Name, title and email:** Michael Tempesta, mitempes2020@students.curry.edu
- **Name of Co-Principal Investigators (if applicable):**
- **Your Title and Department:** Student, Information Technology
- **Date:** October 19, 2022
- **Research Project Title:** Communication Technology within the Church
- **If you are a student\***, indicate the **name of your Faculty or Staff Research Advisor** here:  
Deanna Gordon

\*Students must have their faculty/staff advisor submit this form on their behalf, along with the advisor review form, directly to the IRB.

True	False	<b>PART A: Please mark a response (True or False) for each item below.</b>
X		<b>Participation involves no risk or minimal risk</b> (i.e., physical and/or mental harm or discomfort is anticipated to be no greater than ordinarily encountered in daily life).
X		<b>Subjects can give free and informed consent</b> (i.e., they are not under the age of 18, are not prisoners, are not under coercion, and can fully understand the nature of the research, potential risks, and potential benefits)
X		<b>Release of data can cause NO potential harm to subjects</b> (i.e., if identifiable data were released, subpoenaed, or if subjects' identities were deduced, there would be no reasonable expectation of legal or financial harm, nor would there be any reasonable expectation of damage to their reputation, employability or personal or business relationships).

➔ **If any of the above in Part A are FALSE**, your research is not likely to be exempt. Please submit a complete **IRB Proposal Form**, available online at <https://my.curry.edu/web/faculty/irb>

True	False	<b>Part B: Please mark a response (True or False) for each item below.</b>
	X	<b>The research is in an educational setting and involves only normal educational practices</b> (e.g., instructional techniques or strategies, curricula, classroom management).
X		<b>The research involves only the use of educational tests</b> (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), <b>survey</b> procedures, <b>interview</b> procedures, or <b>observation</b> of public behavior

		<b>AND</b> the research does <b>NOT</b> involve elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.
X		The research involves only the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, or specimens <b>AND</b> the information is either <u>publically available</u> OR recorded in such a manner that <u>subjects cannot be identified</u> , directly or indirectly.

➔ If **all of the above in Part B are FALSE**, your research is not likely to be exempt. Please submit a complete **IRB Proposal Form**, available online at <https://my.curry.edu/web/faculty/irb>

➔ If you answered "TRUE" to all of the items in Part A, and one or more of the items in Part B, your research may be exempt. This determination must be made by the IRB. **Please include a brief project description below, including the following elements, so that the IRB can make this decision and inform you as quickly as possible.** *Be sure to include enough information to clarify and confirm how the research may be exempt under one or more of the categories on p. 1, Part B.*

**a. Research Question(s) and their potential contribution to generalizable knowledge:**

What kind of shifts are happening within the Church related to technology in communication? Has the pandemic had anything to do with it?

**b. Research Method(s), including Sample, Setting, Data Collection (intervention and/or interaction with subjects; identifiable private information), Protection, Analysis, and Storage:**

Will be using a digital survey that I send out to church leadership on how they see communication has been shifting and whether the pandemic has had anything to do with it.

**c. Describe your informed consent process (attach a copy of your informed consent form):**

As a church leader/member you have been selected to participate in a survey of the different technology communications used in the Church. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and will require approximately 25 minutes of your time. No compensation is available for participating in this study. There are no risks, discomforts or inconveniences associated with your participation in this research. Your answers will be confidential and will help us to see if the pandemic made any changes to the way communication is done in churches.

Should you have any questions about this study you may contact the Principal Investigator Michael Tempesta [mitempes2020@students.curry.edu](mailto:mitempes2020@students.curry.edu) or the class Instructor Professor Deanna Gordon [dgodon@curry.edu](mailto:dgodon@curry.edu) .

A copy of this informed consent statement may be requested from the Principal Investigator.

Your completion of this survey indicates your willingness to participate.

Thank you for your assistance with this research study.

- d. If minimal risk(s) are associated with the study, please describe:**
  
- e. Attach any survey/interview protocols and recruitment/outreach materials associated with the project.**

## Appendix B

# Communication Technology in Churches

\* Required

1. As a church leader/member, you have been selected to participate in a survey of the \* different technology communications used in the Church. Your participation survey is voluntary and will require approximately 15 minutes of your time. No compensation is available for participating in this study. There are no risks, discomforts or inconveniences associated with your participation in this research. Your answers will be confidential and will help us to see if the pandemic made any changes to the way communication is done in churches.

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Michael Tempesta [mitempes2020@students.curry.edu](mailto:mitempes2020@students.curry.edu) or the class Instructor Professor Deanna Gordon [dgordon@curry.edu](mailto:dgordon@curry.edu) .

*Mark only one oval.*

- I agree *Skip to question 2*
- I disagree

## Church Leader or Church Member

2. Who are you? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Church Leader *Skip to question 3*
- Church Board Member *Skip to question 6*
- Church member/ Volunteer *Skip to question 6*

## Church Leader

3. How Large is your Church *Mark only one oval.*

- 0-25 members
- 25-75 members
- 75-100 members
- 100-150 members
- 150-300 members
- 300- 500 members
- 500-700 members
- 700-1,000 members
- 1,000- 5,000 members
- 5,000 + members

4. How long have you served in ministry \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Fresh out of College
- 1-3 years
- 3-10 years
- 10-15years
- 15-25 years
- 25+ years

5. What denomination are you a part of?

*Mark only one oval.*



- Catholic
- Assembly of God
- Nazarene
- Baptist
- Non-denominational
- Methodic
- Congregational Church
- Protestant
- Methodists
- Latter Day Saint
- Jewish

*Skip to question 7*

**Church Member**

6. How long have you attended the Church?

*Mark only one oval.*

- less than a year 1-
- 2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-9 years
- 10-20 years
- 20 + years

*Skip to question 7 Untitled*

**Section**

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, how would you rate your Church in communication with its members? \*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Needs Improvements      Awsome

8. How often do you receive communications from the Church? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Weekly
- Bi Weekly
- Monthly
- Quartrly
- Yearly
- Twice a Week
- Daily

Church Communication Technologies

9. Thinking about the different technologies you have heard of, please check the ones for which you have heard. \*

Check all that apply.

- MailChimp
- Text in Church
- Send in Blue
- Consent Contact
- Planning Center
- Church Community Builder
- Zappier
- Google WorkSpace
- Microsoft 365
- Breeze
- Rock RMS

10. Based on the tools you have heard about. How many do you think the Church is using  
\* currently?

*Mark only one oval.*

- All of them
- Some of them
- none of them
- a few

11. In your option, how effective is the communication strategies at your Church? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1   2   3   4   5

---

Very      Very Bad

*Skip to question 12*

Untitled Section

12. In your option, has the pandemic changed the way the Church communicates? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

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