Anglophone Protestants of Paris

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Martin Luther's 1527 letter on the subject of ministering through the bubonic plague in Wittemberg [3] [4] provides a reference for the American Church in Paris, for the American Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris and for Saint Michael's Church in Paris in preparation of a Covid-19 Easter 2021. How we choose technology to complement our being and doing depends on how each church approaches religion within our present constraints.

The American Church in Paris has made a bold decision to "follow the science" and not hold in-person live services for the four weeks of Paris lockdown, from March 20 through April 16. This decision is empowering. It creates a situation where we can gather, but don't[1]. This allows for possibility that would otherwise be unavailable.

Dean Lucinda Laird of the American Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris has detailed a bold persistent vision for the place of technology in the time to come, and has showered both congregants and staff with praise for the steps achieved thus far. The American Cathedral will continue live worship complemented with Facebook simultaneous prerecorded-services live-stream of and a practice of a Zoom chat before services.

Saint Michael's Church in Paris has taken a middle path, limiting worship due to the new restrictions. There will be fewer worship gatherings.

With the happy indulgence of the reader, I would like to detail here what I see as one possible set of scenarios implementing the power of what I have understood of Dean Laird's vision, as it inspires me, in a theoretical testing ground of the very unique situation of the American Church.

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[1]There is one new exception. The American Church will hold an Easter Sunday sunrise service outside along the Seine apparently with special permission from the Prefecture.

1 French Mass Freedom

At the request of the Catholic Church, the French high court *Conseil d'Etat* on November 30, 2020 compelled the French state to not treat churches fundamentally more stringently than non-essential stores[1]. The *Conseil d'Etat* judge ordered the government to effectively harmonize treatment of churches to treatment of non-essential businesses within three days.

> However, in this beginning lockdown easing, no other re-authorized activities (such as 'non-essential' businesses) are subject to a limit on the number of people regardless of the size of the premises. The particularity of religious ceremonies is not sufficient to justify the 30-person limit imposed on all establishments of worship, regardless of their size. ([1])

It was before the Christmas shopping rush. There was no threat of variants. We were optimistic about vaccinations. Non-essential business were again opening faster than places of worship. Cultural and sports venues analogous to places of worship had been closed since mid 2020 and are still haven't reopened.

The government hastily met with religious leaders and announced a new agreement on December 2[7]. The then-new rules for places of worship have not been modified since: every other row empty, two seats vacant between any parishioners not from the same household, no singing, distancing of over one meter and government-approved masks (not home-made cloth masks) worn correctly. These rules have been set in stone without review since December 2. The government action excludes parishioners from nuanced adjustment to protocols in places of worship. Protocols are continually adjusted for example for non-essential businesses according to expertise and public policy.

As of March 20, 2021, we entered a new lockdown in Paris. Non-essential stores are closed. There is no change for the churches, still open according to the December 2 rules of lockdown easing. This has forced churches to make ad-hoc decisions on how to best care for congregants[2].

Consider the current protocols for schools. Students are tested regularly. An entire class closes if one Covid case is discovered[3]. Churches have no such benefit, an the populations we serve are much more vulnerable than schools. Children are educated in the matter of reverence for Covid-19. The messages

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[2]By contrast, it is my understanding that churches in Belgium would be continually limited invariably to 15 participants in a service.

[3]Actually, schools are closed as of a Presidential declaration of March 31 and for four of weeks or so.

relative to Covid from places of worship may vary as much as or more than their respective dogmas.

2   Martin Luther has Seen Worse

In a pamphlet / letter around November 11, 1527 to Rev. Dr. Johann Hess[4], Martin Luther reminds us of how to worship in a worse pandemic than ours, and why God's ministry is essential, including through every pandemic.

First, Luther describes the role of government in a pandemic.

> To abandon an entire community that one has been called to govern and to leave it without officials or government, exposed to all kinds of danger such as fires, murder, riots, and every imaginable disaster is a great sin. ([4])

To some degree, it could be argued that the French government seems to have abandoned governance in places of worship. It is not because we attend church that the government should allow large gatherings contrary to public health imperatives. After all, the pandemic started in France with of a super-spreader church event in February 2020[8].

The gathering itself is one danger. The recklessness of the gathering is another danger. Today, both church and state set examples. President Obama brought some dignity back to the USA for example simply by asking teenage boys to pull their pants up in the face of a fashion epidemic fixated on falling pants and visible underpants. Example and intention have consequence[4].

Martin Luther is precise in how we should address a pandemic. We are Christ's body, sick, but still Christ's body, as in 1 Cor. 12:12. The hand needs the eye and the head the feet (1 Cor. 12:21)[5]. Consider Luther's words below.

> Now if a deadly epidemic strikes, we should stay where we are, make our preparations, and take courage in the fact that we are mutually bound together (as previously indicated) so that we cannot desert one another or flee from one another.

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[4]This could be akin asking citizens to simply wear masks over their noses and mouths.

[5]1 Cor. 12:12,21 NSRV

"12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

"21 The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

> [...] the devil would tempt us so that we would disregard God's command in our dealings with our neighbor and so we would fall into sin on the left hand.
>
> Others sin on the right hand. They are much too rash and reckless, tempting God and disregarding everything which might counteract death and the plague.
>
> [...] If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. ([4])

What a wonderful rallying cry. The letter is adorned with wisdom and insight into the place of an epidemic and the place of a believer. It pains me to only include the above for respect of your attention, dear reader. To sum up, not even the bubonic plague, therefore much less Covid-19, can change the fundamental nature nor need of religious practice.

Luther is also specific, and reasonably so, about three core and necessary missions of the church always and also during a pandemic as follows.

1. Preach sermons that congregants hear.

2. Perform sacraments, of which communion.

3. Minister care to congregants of sound mind.

I concur with Luther's analysis. "If you are of a different opinion, may God enlighten you. Amen.[4][6]"

3   Anglophone Parisian Protestants Online

The American Church, Saint Michael's and the Cathedral are each wonderfully creative. Should any one not do well, it doesn't make the others look better. It would blemish the image of "church" that each institution shares.

The American Church in Paris has been creating quality video Sunday services since the beginning of the confinement. The youth pastor and youth

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[6]What audacity!?! Should we keep this inspiration in our Protestant faiths? What does this audacity mean? Is it like the saying from Mario Cuomo, previous Mayor of New York City, "I can explain it to you, but I can't understand it for you." I think it is, but you, dear reader, may see it differently due to the extreme circumstances of Luther in 1527 Wittemberg.

intern have created a video-blog "acpnotcancelled.com[7]." I started simultaneous video watching of these services in an interactive manner through Zoom and now that practice is generalized, but no longer interactive. They are no longer interactive because I no longer lead them and because the videos no longer invite moments of interactivity as they did before. Different types of participants came at the beginning in the experimental phase than now that things are more stable. The music director has become a video producer and blogger.

Saint Michael's opted for a live service early on. It was a mix of a live interview with the pastor and pre-recorded parts. Music was pre-recorded as well, each congregant from their home. I don't remember if the pre-recorded music was assembled or not[8]. Saint Michael's set up break-out rooms very early on as part of Sunday worship, allowing congregants to reinforce community.

The American Cathedral uses a wonderfully orchestrated pre-recorded video with a simultaneous diffusion via Facebook Live on Sundays at 11 AM precisely. I was actually quite happy with the text window in the Facebook live feature because it allowed me to have sufficient interaction with other congregants, which is what I was seeking (and achieved, but in a more limited way) with my Sunday viewing Zooms. The Cathedral also has an enlightening pre-service powwow at 10 AM via Zoom.

4 Simultaneous Communication Effectiveness

The Churches and the Cathedral have a time-proven communication technology of prayer. Prayer and attentiveness around prayer are obviously the mainstay of religious communication.

Current public protocols allow for walks between 6 AM and 7 PM within 10 kilometers of our places of residence. Perhaps current social-distancing measures could allow mini-gatherings of church members in physical spaces

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[7]This is an example of a technological need for a new wineskin (Matthew 9:14-17) at the American Church. We were unable, in the old website (proverbial wineskin) to welcome the energy of new web development necessary in Covid-19 of 2020. Unfortunately, even though the technology is the same (Wordpress), I do not know if the articles were kept for posterity. I also note that the American Church may have a challenge attracting a 'modern' youth and young-adults minister if we cannot have a pertinent digital presence. It can also be noted that Martin Luther's writings of the early 16th century were the first use of modern-day social media, made possible only by the then-recent invention of the printing press. What has changed from printing press to 'Wordpress?' What has changed from the bubonic plague to Covid 19? Perhaps change itself is now less dramatic.

[8]I think each musician would compose a whole piece from home.

in this way for now.

Initially, evening centering prayer at the American Church would proceed as follows. The leader would distribute the liturgy and ask everyone to follow it on Thursdays at 7 PM. We all have clocks and it worked.

Telephones are also an option, as is email.

At the time of this writing, the majority of congregants have become comfortable with video-conferencing software. Churches are able to successfully coordinate meetings wherein each participant (or couple) is behind one computer, telephone or tablet, with one "Brady-Bunch"-type square. The rest of this section details organizational and technical criteria applicable to successful modern-day use of technology in welcoming congregants into a virtual space for any purpose: worship, discussion groups and/or individual conferences with clergy. Although this section is mainly concerned with fully-virtual communication, these same criteria will be used in considering hybrid physical and virtual meetings.

Here is a pragmatic framework for consideration of synchronous communication technologies. There is a technical consideration and an organization consideration. The organizational consideration has three categories: welcome, security and comfort. The technical consideration has four bases: audio in, audio out, video in and video out. I find these categorizations useful in defining the effectiveness of any communication setup.

Let's first consider technology. A typical TV has video in and audio in. The video in is the screen. The audio in is the speakers on the TV. Most laptops have a webcam and a microphone. The webcam provides video out. The microphone provides audio out. A laptop usually has a screen and speakers that can also provide audio and video in. Another way to look at this is to consider video in as seeing, video out as being seen, audio in as hearing and audio out as being heard. My goal here is to materialize those distant present and those present in the distant space.

Now let's consider human relationships. Welcome is usually the first impression any guest would get from coming to a space. The impression is actually constructed from a host of preparations and intentions. Usually, a practice of addressing the visitor by name within a very short time of arrival goes a long way. Comfort takes over for welcome after the first impression. Personally, I try to solicit feedback as directly as I can and I try to be attentive to everyone present. Labeling what is uncomfortable can be liberating. Activating video and audio is also reassuring to all those present. This is both comfort and security. Security has to deal more with the parameters of the meeting. One important aspect, for example, is knowing if the meeting will be recorded or not. There is also the question of managing invitations responsibly.

5 Preaching Sermons

The first of Luther's three church missions is preaching sermons that congregants heed, or at least hear. Personally, it would take some time and thought to figure out why I go to church in the first place. That doesn't necessarily mean that your guess be as good as mine. The core message of the bible is relatively constant even though the duty of ministers is to bring this message to life as so eloquently put by Ralph Waldo Emerson as follows.

> The true preacher can always be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life, life passed through the fire of thought. ([2])

The sermon is held in the light by the service, the congregation and the world around it. A pre-recorded service allows the congregant to jump right to the sermon and skip everything around it when they listens (please be patient with my use of the singular "they"[6]) to it on Youtube. Inversely, technical difficulties at the Cathedral created a situation where we had everything around the sermon, but not the sermon itself because the sermon was supposed to be delivered from a recording, but the speakers (audio in) didn't work.

Consider the following questions. Is this pandemic period a time to pause "standard" or "customary" or "traditional" activities? Is this time bringing about "new" practices that could be used in the future? If so, how?

Lucinda Laird suggests that we are headed toward an environment with a permanent mix of pre-recorded and live components for a live Sunday experience. My assumption is that this involves both the physical space and the virtual space. This would involve a virtual video mixing table in the church building. Congregants would need to take particular care to make their viewing environment a sacred space. I haven't given much thought to this, so that is all the ink I will dedicate to it for now.

I notice that services of the American Church are divided between Vimeo and Youtube platforms, never quite breaking the 1000-views mark on either platform, mostly staying under the 500-views mark. One service, that of August 16, 2020, only showed 4 (four) views. Nor has the viewership increased. Although the video productions are of excellent quality and very topical, interest in celebrating through video-viewership is visibly waning.

Hybrid physical and virtual gatherings is one scenario that is of particular interest and applicable to preaching sermons in these times of social distancing. This technology has the ability to potentially fully welcome online guests who wouldn't otherwise be able to congregate.

6 Hybrid Physical and Virtual Gatherings

The most common situation with video-conferencing, especially with a certain ubiquitous application, is to have each person behind a screen individually. Eventually, we may find two persons equidistant from a computer on one terminal, and that can work. Common use of video-conferencing software doesn't work well with three or more persons physically present at one terminal.

Hybrid physical and virtual gatherings must cover all four technical points in a broadcast capacity (as I have mentioned previous it the section on Simultaneous Communication Effectiveness). A virtual congregant ideally sees and hears through a panning camera with a directional stereo microphone. A virtual congregant is seen and heard though a speaker-equipped large tv screen, Any management screen should be independent of the wall of virtual participants. The video and audio output feeds (from the physical room to the internet) are usually separate, but visible to the computer.

All such use of these kinds of technologies usually requires practice. I will reflect on this in particular in the section on Learning Habits.

There can be a special situation with multiple virtual avatars is a single physical space. Audio feedback strictly prohibits any two terminals in a same meeting to be within even distant earshot of one another. It is possible, and even desirable, for two terminals to be present in a same physical space, but in different meetings, sub-meetings or break-out rooms.

Each terminal in a physical space would ideally be run by a pair: one person in the physical space and one person in the virtual space. They would also insure the three organizational imperatives of welcome, security and comfort. As I myself learn, my views may change.

We now have means by which participants can move into a separate sub-room with clergy, for example just like passing by the clergy on the way out of the service or maybe potentially in the sacrament of virtual communion.

7 Delivering Sacraments

The second of Luther's three church missions is delivering sacraments, one of which is communion. Somehow prayer never gets top billing as a sacrament, but it seems as if it should. Prayer itself is perhaps the most pure of sacraments. Glossing over this sacrament, let's consider communion.

The physical manifestation of communion appears to be a blessing of bread and wine, followed by waiting in line, giving of the bread and wine, receiving of bread and wine, an exchange of words and a contemplative walk,

returning to one's "place." We Protestants are blessed to consider the bread and wine as symbols and not as literal spiritual manifestation impossible to share without shared physical space. Otherwise, perhaps the congregant could receive this week's wafer and even wine as blessed but mailed the week before. In this pandemic, we have foregone the blood of Christ and added hand sanitizer.

The online manifestation would ideally reproduce these very steps: waiting in line, receiving the sacrament, returning to the pew in meditation. The careful maneuver would be inviting the congregant to leave the space after the blessing. At physical communion, the congregant initiates leaving. The congregant would perhaps prepare the bread and wine and present it to the reverend for blessing. The difference being that perhaps the congregant would be virtually inviting the Reverend into the congregant's sacred space. This can be achieved by allocating the congregant to a separate room to wait for the clergy to come and give communion after which the congregant would return to the main meeting then to the sub-meeting with the computer in place for the pew at which the congregant would be virtually seated.

Along with the Lord's Supper, we Protestants only need worry about baptism for the official sacraments. For now, I will only consider that virtual attendance would not include the person receiving baptism. It is fully fitting that we do consider remote baptism for online participants as an eventuality, but not now, not here. For the ceremony, simply consider the configuration to include hybrid physical and virtual meetings. For the preparation, the meetings would be straightforward if the interview involves just one pastor and one congregant. Should multiple congregants be involved, it would be best to ask each congregant to be on a different terminal in a different place. Even with two congregants, it is very unlikely a hybrid meeting with the equipment available to the congregants would allow for the requisite intimacy.

In the beginning of the pandemic, the American Church would deliver communion by video. There was no other way, and we would receive the blessings in this manner. Now, perhaps we can ask the question if communion and/or baptism, as sacraments, can be delivered with spacial and temporal distance. Reflecting on Luther's letter only, I would tend to think there need be an element of conscious submission on the part of each party involved.

Confirmation, ordination and marriage are pseudo sacraments with heavy implications for "augmented reality." (Isn't religion itself the initial augmentation of what we first were born to accept as reality?) Each could be considered in the context of appropriateness to technology. In each case, the church body is the community through which the sacrament has earthly grounding.

8 Tough Choices

Churches offer a very difficult arbitrage to congregants, especially for Easter celebrations. Should a congregant not come to church when given the opportunity? Should a congregant come to church upon the lone basis that a religion is not exposed to the same rules as analogous venues? Implicitly, coming to church implies two assumptions:

1. The place of worship would manage better than analogous venues.

2. The congregants would be more responsible than patrons of analogous venues.

Covid will treat congregants as Covid addresses the general population. My own personal observation inclines me to believe that the basis of these two assumptions is weak. Worse, the exception accorded to churches may lead some congregants to assume that they themselves would be exceptional with regard to the threat of Covid.

Places of worship face difficult tasks in holding gatherings. Here is the rule for schools as of this month. One Covid-positive case and the school closes. Students may be tested twice a week. The rule for places of worship is detailed above and hasn't changed since December 2, yet we are none-the-less in a very different context. There is no incentive for congregants to test. If tested, there is no incentive for congregants to share that information with the place of worship. There is no incentive for places of worship to actively seek information from the congregants. There is no requirement for a place of worship to have any pre-decided plan.

In the case of hybrid physical-and-virtual worship, the best a place of worship can do is to fully welcome any virtual guest. The inability to be physically present may be considered a handicap.

Particular care should be given to any personal information requested and stored. Churches are subject to European GDPR rules (General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union) as any organization, and are probably as behind, if not further, than the median organization in France. Should the church ask for personal information (full names, emails and/or telephone numbers), the church should at least have an explicit plan for using that information, if not the invariable intention of using that information in a way acceptable to the individuals who share it[9]. Otherwise, I recommend not requesting the information in the first place.

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[9]For example, an easy way would simply be to send a thank-you email to the congregants asking them to inform the church if there is a Covid-positive case.

What, if anything, would do or has done the American Church, Cathedral or Saint Michael's in the eventuality of a Covid case?

There is one statistic that I suggest we share. Among the pool of persons who have physically been present at services since March 2020, how many have contracted Covid, regardless of when they contracted it. This would be an indicative statistic only. In order to better qualify this statistic, it would be useful to indicate how many persons who have attended services who have not answered if they have or not contracted (tested positive for) Covid. We may also include an educated guess as to the number of persons who may have slipped through the cracks of our registration practices.

9 Funerals, Memorials and Prayer

Funerals and memorial services are a special case. The American Church yesterday memorialized the life a 79-year-old congregant, Jerrie Tisserant who would have died alone, apparently of Covid according to different sources. I saw Jerrie being imprudent in her practices. Should Jerrie have attended services (and I am led to believe that we do not know if she had), she would have seen what I qualify imprudent examples : situations where congregants were unduly[10] exposed to the risk of Covid contagion. This example of carelessness is more contagious than Covid. Such an example in the American Church, if present as I think I saw it, could have reinforced Jerrie's lack caution outside of church.

Jerrie's memorial was filmed and I will watch it and lay this memory to rest in peace. I am immensely grateful for the filming of the memorial by the American Church because I personally have decided to no longer attend any religious gatherings until similar cultural events are permitted. I would not have been able to benefit from a religious honoring of Jerrie's life otherwise. This is how the Church was able to tend to Jerrie, and to me, during the Covid pandemic. Perhaps I am a "left-hand" sin, and Jerrie a "right-hand."

Funerals are not a sacrament, but still perhaps an important function of augmented worship in tending to the congregation in COVID-19. I attended another virtual funeral of a soul passing because of Covid. He belonged to the AFCU (American Foreign Christian Union). This was a broadcast event with mixed live and pre-recorded components. Technically organized by the

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[10]"Unduly" in the sense that there would have been a situation of exposure to risk of contagion that I think could easily have been avoided : not following self-imposed precautions, not respecting social distancing, crossing one another in aisles, taking off masks in front of the congregation for announcements, otherwise relaxing of masks, having potential contact cases, etc.

senior pastor of a major Los Angeles Presbyterian church, there was mastery and caution. Invited speakers were able to speak, and that was the extent of audio and video in.

I personally witnessed a horrible "super-spreader" funeral out my own window [5]. Over one hundred persons loudly mourning inside and outside a Roman-Catholic church in close proximity[11].

10   Learning Habits

It takes a lot of training to become clergy. A goal is to eliminate all unnecessary exposure to risk of Covid-19 contagion: not eliminate Covid contagion nor rely on any powers outside of our control (consider the left hand and the right hand sin as suggested previously by Martin Luther). Every time we expose ourselves or induce exposure of another unduly to the risk of Covid, we fail. What a wonderful opportunity for clergy to learn new habits induced by these new constraints in the context of the necessities of religion itself. In again learning, clergy can also teach learning itself. I fully expect wonderful lessons to be learned and probably forgotten from this pandemic for all. Let's do what we can whilst we are here.

French churches have a horrible freedom to discern what is right. What is our intention? Ministry serve intention and not habit. Habit serves ministry, even in Covid, but habits may need tuning. Like old habits, new habits must be learned and integrated such that they become muscle memory in intention and in demonstration. In the present moment, we always consider ourselves correct, including in our esteem about how we would have been wrong previously. Practice, practice, practice until the intention of avoidance of undue risk to potential exposure to Covid 19 is eliminated.

When clergy don robes, there is also a mic-check. In lighting the candles, we verify that the wifi is strong, or the wired network is working. In preparing the sermon, we check the exposure relative to the face of the pastor and insure that there is enough frontal light. When the clergy smile, it is a true smile, with eyes. Only a smile with eyes can be assuredly true. We welcome congregants from another space, from another time who may watch from their homes days after a recording. The service is for those physically in the space at that time, and those who may be in different spaces or times. That mask should not be removed for whatever reason. A face is ultimately a form

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[11]More recently, a priest of Roman Catholic Church Saint Pierre Saint Paul has show the poor judgment of removing the mask from his nose in dousing congregants in close proximity to himself and to one another. I only observe such things from my window on occasion.

of vanity. Be ninja clergy. We may already be in the time of Christ and not know it[12].

Children will define rules in schoolyard games. The rules become as arbitrary as human imagination. Covid is not human. Covid obeys divine laws of nature as should we. The American Church declared not having the benefit of science to keep its doors open. Furthermore, the Senior Pastor Odette Lockwood-Stewart declared that science was not in favor of opening the services this Easter 2021, as was sadly the case at Easter 2020. We can think we define rules that are appropriate. We think these rules work until proven otherwise. If we are proven incorrect, it would be too late anyway. We must figure out for ourselves what is right[13].

What you show outwardly should be the perfect expression of what you do inwardly. The video camera is not only to enhance "role-playing" (also known as hypocrisy in Scripture). The video camera and the face-to-face meeting are there to reveal your practiced expression of intention: intention to avoid all undue exposure to the risk of potential Covid contagion: graceful reverence.

Ask the right question of self and other congregants by testing for the disease as appropriate. Do not assume. Seek actively in the congregation for cases of Covid. No unasked question will be answered. Ask. Ask in a statistical sense. Request and follow-up with self and with physically congregating persons if and when they have tested, and, if so, it was positive or negative. The absence of answers could perhaps be understood, but not the absence of questions. Only questions churches may ask will have a chance to be answered. That is why we pray.

At the time of my writing, the only comparable situation I see is with schools. When classes have one positive case, they close, today[14]. Two factors intervene here.

1. Students are automatically contact cases, whereas brief services may have involve exposure.

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[12]Luke 12:56 NRSV "You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" The term "hypocrite" would have three meanings: someone who gives answers; someone who plays a role or an actor; someone hypocritical as per our modern definition. (See Strong's Greek 5273. hupokrités)

[13]Luke 12:57 NRSV "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?" Should we read this with a touch of sarcasm? Jesus only starts address the crowd in 'the Sermon on the Crowd' at Luke 12:54, only addressing the disciples before that verse Luke 12:54. This goes beyond Scripture of prescription and beyond Scripture of description. This is true Scripture of invitation.

[14]The week following the publication of this article, all schools in France are closed for four weeks. No change whatsoever for places of worship.

2. Students are not at risk in the same way that many congregants are at-risk.

Schools arrange for the testing of pupils for Covid on a regular basis. Congregants may be inclined to keep a Covid-positive diagnosis to themselves or not seek a diagnosis at all. In this, we can yet again turn to Martin Luther for enlightenment.

> Though one should aid him in his time of need, as previously pointed out, he in turn should, after his recovery, so act toward others that no one becomes unnecessarily endangered on his account and so cause another's death. "Whoever loves danger," says the wise man, "will perish by it" [Ecclus. 3:26[15]]. If the people in a city were to show themselves bold in their faith when a neighbor's need so demands, and cautious when no emergency exists, and if everyone would help ward off contagion as best he can, then the death toll would indeed be moderate. ([4])

By the very proposition of canceling services, it implies we have had the opportunity to hold services in the first place! Praise the Lord and give Them[6] Their opportunity. Give us our opportunity.

A place of worship's credibility is put to the test in this Covid-time. Any tendency to hide in the past, any lee-way allowing for error, may now present opportunity for undue exposure to the potential of Covid contagion. The virtual-and-physical preparation, as the spiritual preparation, is to allow the service to be of the same integrity as it is inherently. The importance of Covid requires trust not in the institution as it should be, but rather in the institution as it is. There is always time for betterment.

11   Pastoral Reconciliation and Unction

The third of Luther's three church missions is preparing congregants who are of sound mind: reconciliation of the penitent and (perhaps and perhaps not extreme) unction to the sick. We are in the realm of the individual, or as

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[15]Sirach 3:25-27 New Revised Standard Version (some texts lack verse 25)
"25 Without eyes there is no light;
without knowledge there is no wisdom.
26 A stubborn mind will fare badly at the end,
and whoever loves danger will perish in it.
27 A stubborn mind will be burdened by troubles,
and the sinner adds sin to sins."

we say in internet-speak, one-to-one marketing. Magic happens in individual exchanges.

The same rules detailed previously for simultaneous communication effectiveness apply to individual meetings as they were described above in the context of hybrid virtual/physical gatherings. Save for COVID, we have mastered these criteria with the technology of physical proximity. Covid is a cold, but our communication can stay warm in a Marshall McLuhan sense. The habits resulting in regular use and mastery over technology acquired partially as a result this Covid experience are able to span space (transmission) and time (recording and reconstitution) and with probable persistence.

There is a delicate line between pastoral care and lay care. Ministry exists between every congregant, ordained or not. Times of separation increase the need for ministry. Online, as in person, our churches prefer congregants to seek pastoral care from ordained clergy or under the supervision of ordained clergy. New technological media do not require a new relationship. Online and in-person go hand-in-hand.

It is now useful for you, dear reader, to perhaps pay close attention to online interviews in contrast to in-person interviews. How do the preparations for the meetings differ? As discussed in the sacrament of communion, who renders visit to whom? How does each participant discover the shared virtual space? I may someday enrich this article with your observations.

12   Physical Space Imposition

Churches are sacred and beautiful spaces in the eye of the believer in situ or res digita. Churches may capitalize on the full physical reality of their churches: and how sorry it is to hear the empty reverberations of an empty church in a recorded sermon. Human bodies are meant to absorb the words of the reverend both in mind and literally in body. How can we manifest the physical church meaningfully in a virtual space?

This may seem like and afterthought, but how do we manage membership and congregation in such an on-line world? The American Church officially conditions membership on physical location according to its bylaws, but allows some exception. The AFCU – the alumni association and quasi-denomination of the American Churches in Paris, Berlin and Vienna – is already designated having a world-wide parish. Does the American Church wish to still be a church within Paris and the immediate area, radiating outwards in some respects through mission? When pastors, staff or lay leaders from the American Church participate from the church immediate geographical parish in ministry beyond the church by online meetings, do we consider

that the church is also also extending its sanctuary in the home of the guest to that distant screen?

In some ways the virtual meeting becomes more intimate. Each party is both host and guest. In some ways, we get to know one another better.

13   Revealed Abilities

Human resources from churches contribute to technology-enhanced religion. There are new needs. Existing church personnel, volunteers, leaders, clergy, members and congregants have talent, abilities to learn and new routines to incorporate as useful to their respective roles. The subjects and tasks range from website content management, to website design, to website programming, to emailing production, to emailing content creation, to hosting virtual or mixed physical-and-virtual meetings, to managing software accounts with different providers, to maintaining personal information on members, congregants and other users of church services, to social-media presence, to closed-circuit text-chat groups, to coordinating an extranet of activities with decentralized metadata, to network administration, to managing shared secured files, to video, to lighting, to sound, to makeup, to video editing, to sound editing, to video effects, to password management, to synchronizing content from website to paper newsletter to ad-board to emailing, to database querying and interfacing, to electronic calendar and room reservation management, to email account management, to tech support for congregants to better welcome them, to computer classes, to physical maintenance of computers, to maintaining the systems and software of computers, and other things to reinforce ultimately digital-and-in-person relationship. The key is for places of worship to provide opportunities for personnel to avail themselves with knowledge, know-how and confidence. I have witnessed this myself with the evolution of centering prayer on Thursday nights at the American Church where a self-professed technophobe has progressed from asking members to synchronize prayer by mechanical watch to hosting that same prayer on the ubiquitous video-conferencing software (which may not actually be an improvement).

We have to try.

On the one hand, we have a whole new series of temporary impositions. On the other hand, we have a new portfolio of mature technologies available to places of worship that were previously beyond reach. Also, practicing these technologies should develop abilities applicable elsewhere in life and could also increase effectiveness of church work and ministry. Discernment defines "shall." Revealed abilities concern the whole congregation and all

staff.

In this present time between Passover and Easter, we are again called to do everything we can to avoid:

1. all undue exposure to the risk of Covid contagion; and

2. any undue exposure to the risk of Covid contagion because carelessness is more contagious than Covid itself[16].

The Cathedral will hold Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Services foregoing an outdoor procession. Saint Michael's will hold more restricted and fewer services, because the mid-March re-confinement. The American Church has canceled all indoor services, but plans to hold an Easter sunrise service on the Seine. Will the Cathedral live-cast the service? Will Saint Michael's integrate those outside in the walls for the service, or hold one live and one on-line service? How will the American Church, in a most obvious exercise of its prerogative as a religion with rights afforded that other types of gathering do not have, use the special permission it has obtained from the Prefecture[17]? All of these questions ultimately depend also on the resources and the abilities of the congregation and of the staff, including technological abilities[18].

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[16]Covid is in a race with carelessness at the time of my writing this article. Covid is the distance runner, the tortoise. Carelessness is the sprinter, the hare.

[17]As a congregating member at the Church, my bias may lead me to be particularly exacting in my care for the Church.

[18]For example, at the Church's Easter sunrise service, we could imagine different scenarios with or without electronic technologies that would not require congregants to group closely to better hear the pastor outside on the Seine, or even be physically present.

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