

Several things our churches are doing well is getting worship services online. We have Facebook live, YouTube and online services that are making these worship services an indispensable option for our communities, **“reaching people we are not already reaching.”** This is a way of adding “virtual” seats to existing worship services, but it does not necessarily create a New Faith Community (NFC) as it grows an existing one.

Here are a few ideas and criteria that might be helpful if we want to create an identifiable faith community where people can grow in discipleship, relationships and faith:

- Registration – People should be able to register their attendance online. This is a way to make registration a personal connection and commitment to the service they are attending and the NFC with which they are connecting. Online worshipers should be welcomed and treated just like those who are physically present.
- Online Pastor – There should be a designated online worship/NFC pastor who people can connect with if they have a concern or need. This makes the online NFC more identifiable and singular as a community of faith. This can be the solo pastor in the church, another staff pastor or even a lay chaplain in a smaller church. People should know who they look to if they have a need, even if another pastor is the preacher in the service they are attending.
- Prayer Requests – A great way to increase the value of this experience is to submit prayer requests online. This builds relationships with God, with the NFC itself, the pastor of the service and makes a connection that is much more powerful than just listening to a service.
- Giving Platform – A significant part of any NFC is giving. Having a way to give online as part of the worship experience is a necessary part of making disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Next Steps – Ready information that allows an online participant to join a small group, step up in Bible study or other discipling opportunities and a way to connect with others in the church community, as well as the online community.
- Notes – A way to take notes if they choose, this can include a resource with key points in the message and a way to follow through on the message through Bible study or other readings.
- There should be a way communion can be offered by making it possible for people to request the sacraments and then scheduling a time for them to come to receive communion, or if unable to come in person, a pastor goes by to serve communion. The invitation to baptism would be much the same way.

This type of NFC can also have a special service aimed just for online attendees. This service can be an occasional service or a regular service and would be a great resource for bad weather days when people might not be able to travel. The more the service is elevated to a higher level, the more a church can reach people we are not already reaching.

Some churches can create an entire online service connection on their present website or create a website of its own for the NFC that can include a link to the main site. Others that use YouTube or Facebook Live can do the same on their church's website or a separate website. In the service or on social media, announce that attendees can go to the site and register, turn in prayer requests, connect, etc. Many will use this website in the same way as they fill out an attendance card when they come to church in person. If the online service is presented and understood as its own Faith Community, it changes how people interact, participate and experience the service itself. Most attendees want you to know they are there. This makes it a new online community rather than just adding virtual seats to an existing one. Churches that meet the criteria for an NFC online community can request a grant from the Smith Center to assist. [Learn more about the NFC grant and how to apply.](#)