The Church and Online Worship

Northland Church, an inside look

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Summary English

In this era of connection, the possibilities for churches to utilize online communication are limitless. A megachurch based in Central Florida - Northland Church - is doing that with an online worship environment. This relatively new phenomenon enables people to experience and be the church from a distance, with a video-stream and a chat-functionality to connect to others worshiping online, and with an online pastor.

This thesis includes a research under the people who worship online with Northland Church. I conducted this research in combination with a literature-research which is to be concluded in this main question:

> How can a church utilize online communication, in the way
> Northland Church does it, to meet their objectives?

Conclusions

Online religion
There are some difficulties when *doing* religion online, which mainly include the individuality of the medium, the nature of the medium and the lack of true interactivity (face-2-face). Technology is creating new ways and experiences, but is also blocking other ways and experiences.

Northland Church and online worship
Online worship, as the important part of Northland's online communication, is a powerful tool to reach people online. It is also a tool which will connect the online audience to God and others. This, however, is met in a limited way. In the research only 55,3% effectively connect to others when worshiping online. 69,6% of the 392 respondents said that they preferred attending the service physically rather than worshiping online. 76,5% do consider Northland Church to be their home church.

Recommendations

Advice
I advise Northland Church to continue facilitating online worship, when at the same time improving this by maximizing interactivity between the online worshipers, and stimulate them to connect to others locally.

Kramer's model
In four steps, churches who want to start with online worship can see what is needed in order to do that. Both parties, the church as well as the online worshipers are actively involved in this process. Important elements are: Being the church on social networks; a welcoming website portal: the church reaching out; A rich online worship experience: maximizing

interactivity online; connecting to God and others: stimulate offline togetherness.

Summary Dutch

In dit communicatie-tijdperk zijn de mogelijkheden voor kerken op het gebied van internetcommunicatie onbeperkt. Een megakerk in Florida, Northland Church, doet dat door middel van een *online worship* omgeving. Dit relatief nieuwe fenomeen biedt de mogelijkheid voor mensen om een kerkdienst op een afstand mee te maken, met een videostream en chatfunctionaliteit om met anderen, en ook een online pastor in contact te komen.

Deze scriptie is gebaseerd op een onderzoek onder mensen die deel uitmaken van de *online community* van Northland Church. Dit combinerend met een literatuuronderzoek, komen we tot de volgende hoofdvraag:

> Hoe kan een kerk online communicatie inzetten, zoals Northland Church dit doet, om hun doelstellingen te halen?

Conclusies

Online religie
Moeilijkheden op het gebied van het (volledig) doen van religie online zijn voornamelijk de individualiteit van het medium, de natuur van het medium en het gebrek aan echte interactiviteit (face-2-face). Technologie schept aan de ene kant nieuwe mogelijkheden en ervaringen, maar aan de andere kant blokkeert het ook weer andere mogelijkheden en ervaringen.

Northland Church en online worship
Online worship, als belangrijkste deel van Northland's online communicatie, is een krachtig hulpmiddel om online mensen te bereiken. Het is een hulpmiddel dat mensen met elkaar en met God verbindt. Maar, echter, dit is gelimiteerd. In het onderzoek kwam naar voren dat slechts 55,3% effectief met anderen in contact komt via online worship. Ook zei 69,6% van de 392 respondenten dat ze een 'fysiek' kerkbezoek prefereren. Daarnaast beschouwt 76,5% Northland Church als hun thuisgemeente.

Aanbevelingen

Adviezen
Ik adviseer Northland Church om door te gaan met het faciliteren van online worship, en om op hetzelfde moment dit te verbeteren door de interactiviteit tussen online worshipers te maximaliseren, en deze ook te stimuleren om offline met elkaar in contact te komen.

Kramer's model
In vier stappen kunnen kerken die willen starten met online worship zien wat hiervoor nodig is. Beide partijen, zowel de kerk alsook de online

worshipers zijn betrokken in dit proces. Belangrijke elementen zijn: het kerk-zijn op sociale netwerken, een uitnodigende website - de kerk die je de hand reikt, een rijke online worship omgeving - waarin interactiviteit gemaximaliseerd is, en verbinden met God en anderen: het stimuleren van het offline samenzijn.

Preface

Dear readers,

The main idea for this thesis was born a few months after my first experience at Northland Church, an internship there for 6 weeks (May 1st till June 15, 2010). I was inspired by this church and their neatly executed online worship environment. I also was inspired by the team that I worked with, the Media & Design team, the other staff and Northland's vision on the church.

I decided to go back to Northland Church to do a research regarding Northland's online worship environment and it's worshipers from April 1st till the 5th of May, 2011. In the process of conducting the research, I got a full image on how Northland's is facilitating an environment to watch the service online and chat with other online worshipers. I also discovered that this is not only a powerful way to reach people over the internet, but also could be affecting people (in a negative way) as it comes to connecting with others. This thesis gives a balanced view on how online worship could be a communication tool for churches.

I want to thank a lot of people making it possible to do this. At first, Suzanne, my wife-to-be, for coaching and stimulating me. I also want to thank my good friends Nathan Clark and Robert Andrescik in making it possible to do this research, and providing a work space at Northland Church. Also, Jan Noorlandt for his more-than-ordinary input and ideas for the thesis. A special mention is for Dan and Robin Anderson, for giving me the most hospitable experience in Florida. Thank you!

Wilbert Kramer
May 30th, 2011

0. Introduction

0.1 Northland Church

Northland Church is a church in the Orlando area which is based on the *'Distributed Church model'*. This means that they are not just a church which gathers in one place, but is in more places at once. The latest technological developments made this possible. Northland's services are broadcasted live each weekend via internet webstream, to mobile phones, Facebook and the set-top-box Roku (for TV).

Every weekend, 15,000 people attend the church. This makes Northland Church one of the 100 largest churches in America. With the 75-manned staff and under Dr. Joel C. Hunter's leadership, Northland Church is a professional organization, and has a mission to resource it's church members to *"(...) call people to know and follow Christ and equip them to worship and serve together"*.

0.2 Northland Church and online worship

Northland started (in line with their mission to be a distributed church) online web streaming in 2004. With the newly built venue in 2007, Northland launched an *online worship environment* - where *online worshipers* can communicate with each other and a pastor via chat. Northland is considering these online worshipers as part of the congregation.

This online worship environment is used by people all around the world. It's a lively community of christians who worship online on a regular basis. Key elements to worshiping online are not only to connect to God, but also to others. That's why the chat-functionality and different other media (Bible-reading plan, a prayer requests website, etc.) are important to Northland Church in order to achieve these goals.

0.3 Cause Research

Northland feels a need to know whether:
1. Online worshipers feel connected with Northland Church;
2. Online worshipers feel connected with God when worshiping online;
3. Online worshipers are connecting with each other when worshiping online;
4. They are familiar with Northland's media.

This is the first research executed under the online worshipers since the launch of the online worship environment in 2007. Also, this research is executed previous to the launch of a new online worship environment.

0.4 Objectives Research

One of the objectives of the thesis is to question the online worshipers on the four areas stated above. Besides Northland's objectives, I have a few objectives for the research myself:

- Is attending an online service interchangeable with going to a service at a physical location?
- What are the benefits and challenges of online worship?
- What's are common reasons to worship online?

0.5 Thesis

Deriving from the stated cause and objectives above, and to put it in a broad perspective, I have come to the following thesis:

How can a church utilize online communication, in the way Northland Church does it, to meet their objectives?

Subquestions
1: What are the communication objectives of Northland Church?
(Title: *Discovering the Organization*)

2: What social-cultural developments can we acknowledge?
(Title: *Discovering the Society*)

3: Is online worship authentic?
(Title: *Discovering the Authenticity of the Church Online*)

0.6 Methodology for research

The research done for this thesis has two parts: a survey (quantitative), and a series of interviews (qualitative). In order to get a good view on Northland's objectives and how it's mission for Northland's (online) congregation is succeeding (or not), we need those two elements. One remark has to be made; Northland notes that their main (communications) objective is *"to worship God for who He is and what He has done."* Success to an organization as Northland Church is relative. Northland Church is successful when *somebody follows Christ,* as a part of Northland or not.

0.6.1 Methodology quantitative research

The survey - merely focused on Northland's online congregation. It's spread through two different media:

• An e-mail to all the online worshipers who logged in in the past 6 months
• Button on Northland's website during live services

The e-mail is sent to a population of 7,720 worshipers. The button on Northland's website will be shown to around 20,000 people. Noticing that there can be an overlap in people receiving the invitation, we use IP-filtering to exclude duplicate entries. Software we use to create the survey, and export the results, is Wufoo. Different rules can be applied to exclude people who are not suitable for the survey. The survey will run from the 16th of April till 23rd of April, 2011.

The expected people who will fill in the survey will be around 500 (7% of the population). The button on the website is not used to actively invite people to the survey, but as an extra to receive input from people who are worshiping with Northland infrequently. The survey will run during 5 services (one weekend).

The survey will give insights in what the online worshipers think of Northland Church, if they are truly connected with God and others, and if they're utilizing Northland's media. It has closed and open questions.

The results of the survey will answer subquestion 3.

0.6.2 Validation quantitative research

To validate this methodology we use IP-filtering that filters out duplicates, regarding to the survey. Regarding to the research in general, I want to get a complete view on Northland's communications, vision and mission, and also what it is resulting in.

0.6.3 Methodology qualitative research

I'm will obtain information from staff (mainly Robert Andrescik, PR, and Nathan Clark, online minister) at Northland Church about their vision, mission, experiences regarding Northland's online communications and online worship.

The results of the survey will answer subquestion 1 and a small part of subquestion 3.

0.6.4 Methodology literature study

I searched for literature providing more information over today's (network) society (Castells) and online religion (Højsgaard). The results of this literature study will answer subquestion 2.

0.7 Vocabulary

Word	Description
Authenticity of an online church	The authenticity of an online church, being similar to a 'real' church.
Online worshipers	People who attend a online church.
Distributed Church model	Northland's model of being a church that is at multiple places at once, i.e. other church sites, house churches and online.
Online worship environment	Online environment where people can watch the service and interact via chat.
Online audience	The online audience who connects to your church via social media or your website.

Part 1
Discovering the Organization

1.1 What are the goals of Northland Church?

The main goal of Northland Church can be described in one sentence. Their website puts it simply: *"To call people to know and follow Christ and equip them to worship and serve together."*

This mission statement is linked to their vision: *"To see people coming to Christ and growing in Him as we link local and global communities for ministry and worship everywhere, every day."*

Certain values are attached to that: *"Worship, Spiritual Formation, Personal Ministry, Partnership, Inter-generational Leadership."*

1.1.1 What is the target audience of Northland Church?

Northland Church's target audience is defined using the model provided by Floor and Van Raaij 2008. Here below an overview of organizational target audiences and communications target audiences. For a part, the organizational target audiences and partnerships are Dr. Hunter's.

Organizational target audiences and partnerships
- (International) boards / governmental relations
	- President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, 2009-2010 (Dr. Hunter)
	- World Evangelical Alliance (Dr. Hunter)
	- National Association of Evangelicals (Dr. Hunter)
	- The Global Pastor's Network (Dr. Hunter)
	- Children's Environmental Health Network (Dr. Hunter)
	- Christian Peacemaking Resources, Inc. (Dr. Hunter)
- International forums
	- Participant in the Alliance of Civilizations (United Nations) (Dr. Hunter)
	- Participant in the U.S./Islamic World Forum (Dr. Hunter)
- Local Partners
	- About 20 local partners mainly focused on international, national and local relief to disaster, hunger and helping people with special needs (homeless, prison ministry).
- Global Partners
	- Church leaders in China
	- Churches in Bulgaria, Brazil, Argentina, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Egypt and South Africa.
- Missionaries

- Northland has sent out around 50 missionaries all around the world.

Communications target audience
- Congregation who attends worship services
    - Main campus: Dog Track rd.
    - Two satellite churches: Oviedo, Mount Dora
- Online worshipers
    - Individuals
    - Home churches
    - Jail ministry

The survey is merely focused on the individuals and home churches worshiping online.

1.1.2 Who is Northland Church reaching?

Currently, Northland Church is reaching by people from all around the world. For the most part, they are reaching people locally in the Orlando area. The majority of the online worshippers reside in the U.S.A. while a small amount reside in Europe and even fewer reside in other continents of the world.

Northland's weekly attendance is around 15,000. Around the same amount consider Northland Church to be their home church. Here an overview of the first weekend of 2011:

Site	Total weekend attendance
Dog Track rd. (main campus)	6,797
Satellite churches: Oviedo, Mt. Dora	557
Jail ministry	94
Home churches	68
Website: live, registered users	2,153
Roku (TV set-top-box)	77
Mobile/other	253
Website: live, anonymous	557
Website: live, Spanish	9
Website: archived sermons	1,420
TOTAL	**11,985**

1.1.3 Where do these goals origin from?[1]

The history of Northland Church is determining the way they are organizing their church nowadays, and also the way they worship.

History - 1972 to 1988
In 1972, Lyle and Marge Nelson, felt called to help plant a church in the "north land" of Orlando in the Maitland/Altamonte area. The name selected for the new church was Northland Community Church.

Clearwater Community Church (a church based in Orlando also) assisted Northland Community Church in finding its first pastor. John Christiansen, a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate, was called to lead the congregation. 1973 to 1984 the church worshiped in the cafeteria of English Estates Elementary School. Part of the philosophy of the church at that time was to remain numerically small in size, to never own a building, and to avoid traditionalism. However when the number of congregants reached the 500 mark, the need for a more permanent facility became apparent.

An old Skate City roller rink became the new location. When deciding about buying the building there was a difference in ministry perspectives within the congregation. Some felt the Lord leading them to reaffirm the original philosophy of remaining a small congregation, which plants new satellite churches. This group left with pastor John Christiansen and formed a new church. The remaining group felt the Lord directing them to be faithful to the Spirit's movement and not place a numerical restriction upon their form of ministry. This group proceeded and purchased the Skate City property in June of 1984. In September, pastor Roger Franks announced his intentions to resign at the end of the year.

The 1990s
The congregation banded together in faith, prayed for God's guidance and began a national pastoral search. This brought Dr. Joel C. Hunter (their current pastor) to Northland in June 1985. The elders decided to renovate the old skate rink in the fall of 1987. As a result of this renovation, there was a numerical growth to the congregation after the completion in 1988.

In the fall of 1990, the elders sent Dr. Hunter away on an extended retreat to hear a clarifying word from God concerning Northland's future. Precisely, how did God desire for Northland to accomplish its mission of "bringing people to maturity in Christ"? From that mountaintop experience, Pastor Joel conceived, and the elders affirmed, the 10-year "Journey to Spiritual Maturity" emphasis that encompassed the entire worship and educational focus of all age levels of the congregation. In this journey together, one central preaching theme was focused upon for an entire year.

Attendance figures went from 300 to well over 5,000. The staff grew from four to 90; the church went from one service on Sunday morning to seven services throughout the weekend.

In the fall of 1997, the elders again sent Dr. Hunter away on retreat to begin envisioning the next millennium. He returned with a vision of a church unrestricted by geographical boundaries.

In April of 1998 the elders and pastors unanimously affirmed the vision: Northland would become a "church distributed," arranging the church around the relationships of the congregation and partner ministries, rather than around a physical church building. Northland is calling people to follow Christ, distributing their lives every day in ministry to others.

Today
During Dr. Hunter's tenure, Northland has grown from 200 faithful souls to a congregation of 12,000, worshiping at sites located throughout Central Florida and at thousands of smaller sites online. This growth forced the church's leaders to make a decision as to the future character of the church.

Pastor Hunter remembers: "We had grown big enough to become a society within a society. If we had wanted to just do the traditional things to accommodate growth (i.e. be in perennial building campaigns, keep motivating people to live as much of their lives at the church building as possible), then we could probably have kept growing. But growing what? Another mega church?"

"We would be promoting the unspoken message that our congregation was more important to us than other congregations and ministries, and furthering the Western mentality of the rugged individualism of a church while ignoring the larger community life of the church—a philosophy that is neither biblical nor appropriate." The solution? Northland would construct a new church building that would serve as a "distribution point" rather than a "destination."

Completed in August 2007, Northland's $42 million facilities in Longwood, Florida, were built for both the local congregation and those who worship concurrently at other locations. The new facilities offer plenty of room— more than 160,000 square feet of space. However, the intent was never to see how many people could fit under one roof; it was to facilitate ministry worldwide with other believers.

The facilities feature state-of-the-art technology with two-way interconnectivity that provides virtually unlimited seating for worshipers …

virtually. In fact, the fastest growing segment of Northland's congregation has never set foot inside its facilities. An average of 2,000 worshipers attend church online each weekend, and many are beginning to gather into house churches to worship and serve together in their communities.

1.3 What are the communication objectives of Northland Church?

In terms of goal and strategy, Northland Church has a focus on their online audience. For 2011, the following social media goals are formulated:
- A Facebook followers increase to 10,000[2].
- A Twitter followers increase to 5,000[3]

Northland Church has one 'theme' that is to be communicated: *"We worship God for who He is, and what He has done."* In every kind of media Northland is distributing, this has to be the main communication message *and* objective.

1.4 What kind of media does Northland Church use to reach these communication objectives?

Media	Information
Northland Newspaper (RESPOND.)	This newspaper is distributed every month online and onsite. 7,000 are printed monthly.
Media player at northlandchurch.net	All sermons, highlighted songs and in-service video's are viewable on the website.
Someday is Today website	Website to direct people too different distributed journeys (mission trips) Northland is providing.
Northland's mobile website	Mobile website with media, live worship, daily Bible reading and prayer wall.
Northland's Twitter	All communications through Twitter on Northland's behalf.
Northland's Facebook	All communications through Facebook on Northland's behalf.
Northland's online calendar	Northland's schedueled activities for congregants on northlandchurch.net.
Northland's blogs	Blogs with information about Northland's activities, staff, background information and ministry.

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2 Currently 6,189 followers, facebook.com (2-08-2011)

3 Currently 2,494 followers, twitter.com (2-08-2011)

Media	Information
Online prayer wall	Launched in 2010, an online prayer wall where you can leave prayer requests.
Online daily Bible reading	Launched in 2010, Northland provides three Bible readings per day.

Northland Church doesn't want to differentiate congregants who visit services locally and online worshippers. For the biggest part, the media Northland Church is using are concentrated around the services each weekend. Each weekend, there are five (identical) services, on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.
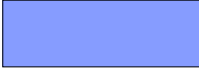
At Northland Church's main campus there are a lot of things to do through the week. Besides the regular services there are classes and other activities. Although there is a lot to do at the campus, many activities Northland Church is facilitating takes place outside the church. Different *Bible Study* and *"Connection"* meetings are held at homes through all of the Orlando area by congregants. Many of these groups are targeted to specific audiences.

Congregants dealing with specific problems or addictions, or special interests can choose to sign up for special groups. Examples: a Christian writers group, *Grief Share* and *DivorceCare.*

1.4 Do online worshipers use these media?

Survey (explained in Chapter 3) shows the following:

Media	How many online worshipers use it?
Northland Newspaper (RESPOND.)	59,98%
Media player at northlandchurch.net	63,36%
Someday is Today website	20,56%
Northland's mobile website	23,14%

Media	How many online worshipers use it?
Northland's Twitter	8,29%
Northland's Facebook	37,74%
Northland's online calendar	43,01%
Northland's blogs	26,17%
Online prayer wall	25,07%
Online daily Bible reading	22,25%

1.5 What is Northland Church's "Distributed Church" model?

The definition of the distributed church: "(...) a church distributed is a church turned inside out. It (...) works through outside relationships, not just inside programs. It places the resources of the church close to people rather than asking people to come to the resources. Multi-site worship can be a part of becoming a distributed church, but there is more than that."

The distributed church is an organizational theory, which works in different parts of the organization:
- Partners: other churches, governmental and cultural organizations
- Satellite churches (multi-site), house churches
- Streamed worship: via internet

The distributed church is also a organizational philosophy. The 'clients' of the church, the attendants, are not only that but also they *are* the organization. They *are* the church.

Also the boundaries between the internal organization and the external are fading. Northland Church underlines that we live in an era of connection, and dependance on the external is more and more important. The church has to be near to the people.

Northland Church has developed a large number of partnerships with

various local, national and international organizations and churches over the last decades.

Part 2
Discovering the Society

2.1 Which communication theories do fit Northland's situation?

Strategic communications & PR
Northland values the strategic alliances they have with other organizations as well as its public relations: strategic communications are very important to them (see: paragraph 1.5). Mastenbroek quotes the definition (University of Amsterdam): *"Het managen van alle communicatie die wordt ingezet om de doelstellingen van de organisatie te bereiken."* Freely translated: "Managing all communications which is used to meet the organization's objectives." As we can see in paragraph 1.1.1, Northland Church has many strategic alliances, cooperations and is active in different global, national and local forums. It's not only part of their communications, but also it is in their mission to 'serve'. Freely translated, Mastenbroek states that you can utilize strategic communications in three ways:

1. To show that the organization's communication is functioning on a professional level and to show how the organization is working on their vision and mission.
2. To show in what way the organization is working, in strategic objectives, methods and in choices.
3. To clarify the subject or area which your organization is communicating about.

What is an organization?
Part 1 gave us a good view on what Northland Church is as an organization. Mastenbroek has an interesting opinion on organizations: "They don't exist". People see just a part of an organization and never the complete picture. That's why Gareth Morgan wrote: *"Organizations are many things at once".* It's identity is formed by what people think about the organization. On the one hand, this is completely true, but on the other hand: people, staff, etc. don't have affiliation with the organization 'just because'. A popular vision on organizations is that it is seen as a 'social construct'. This is matching with Northland's Distributed Church model, which includes all parties (including the church attendants, online and offline) in striving to fulfill Northland's mission and vision.

2.2 Which social-cultural developments can we acknowledge?

The American church embracing technology
A research executed by The Barna Group (2008) under born-again christians in America shows that 38% of the evangelicals and 31% of other born-again christians has listened to a church sermon or teaching via digital recordings available on the internet. Also, one-fourth of the adults said they downloaded this in the past week.

Kinnaman, the president of The Barna Group, states the following about the combination of church and technology: *"Control, image, relevance, immediacy, transparency, purity, truth, stewardship, and escapism are some of the many issues that technology brings to the surface, not always with benign consequences."* he also see some positive influences of the church embracing technology: *"(..) however, technology can empower and engage people, across generations, socio-economic segments, and physical boundaries. Young people, for instance, think of themselves as creators of content, not merely consumers of it. Technology, in essence, gives them a voice and fuels their search for calling."* he concludes.

Business and organizational developments
A church is not a business, however, it is an organization which is developed through time. Northland Church is a church which is aware of cultural, technical and sociological developments. The *Distributed Church-model* (see: Part 1) is partly based on changes on a sociological level - the fact that we live (as Hunter states it) in "an era of connection".

Northland Church has partnerships with various local, national and international organizations and other (inter)national churches. This conclaves with what Castells is stating about business: *"Business are forced to form (international) alliances for bettering the innovation."* For a church as Northland Church, it's important to innovate - to stay connected with cultural and technological developments. However the main goal of these alliances is not innovation for Northland Church; it is helping others. Often, these churches also want online streaming of their services, and Northland Church is helping them - for free! From the perspective of the church partnered with, this is good for innovation.

Difficulties in online religion
Recent surveys suggest millions of Americans are turning to the internet for religious or spiritual purposes every day (see for instance Larsen 2001; Hoover, Schofield Clark and Rainie 2004). We can assume that using internet for religious purposes is gaining popularity. In his contribution to the book 'Religion and Cyberspace', Lorne L. Dawson states that we can do 'elements' of religion online, but it also raises the question *"are we really able to 'do' religion online?"* He explains: "[Doing religion is] the more demanding sense of participating in shared religious rites." (p.15)

Dawson states that technically, the answer to this question is yes. But there's more to religion than that. In Højsgaard's book, Dawson is exploring difficulties when doing religion online. He sees difficulties the following areas:

- On an ethical level (Jay Kinney). Kinney states that the internet is not very compatible with the demands for solitary contemplation and social

disengagement that most religious traditions prescribe for true spiritual development.
- The merely textual nature of the internet (however he states that this isn't a big problem, since religious experiences have proved to happen via textual communications).
- The general nature of the internet: *"The nature of inviting to reaction in stead of reflection, the speed of instinctive rather than considered response."* (McGillion 2000)
- Individuality. Internet *"encourages people to opt out of the kind of flesh-and-blood relationships that are the indispensable condition of shared religious meanings"* (McGillion 2000).
- (Possible) commercialziation of cyberspace (p.30)
- 'True interactivity'

This last difficulty is interesting, interactivity is what makes the internet unique from all other mass media. Internet has the capacity to draw near to the interactivity of offline relationships, unlike most broadcast communication (p.31). This raises the question: *"Can there be religious life, is there collective effervescence in cyberspace, without genuine interactivity?"* and, even further: *"Is face-to-face conversation, for example, the logical base model of interactivity?"*

"Besides this limitations, the internet is also allowing people to be open, personal, and intimate, more self-expressive than in any offline context," Dawson states.

Dawson concludes with his statement: *"The development of religion in cyberspace depends on maximizing the potential of the internet for more complete and satisfying forms of interactivity."* (p.34)

On 'the cutting edge between the virtual and the real', Højsgaard states that the model (see table) that can be used to distinguish 'cyber-religion' from religion offline consist of three variables; mediation, content, organization. With 'cyber-religion', he means the religion online which is mediated and located primarily in cyberspace. (p.54)

Variables	Offline religion	Cyber-religion
Organization	Complete institutionalization	No institutionalization
Content	Reflection of religious traditions	Reflection of cyber culture
Mediation	Body-centered communication	Virtual communication

Jan van der Stoep's opinion on this is that physical presence is really needed to experience the christian community. Virtual churches can be good means, when it's a tool added to stimulate offline contact as well.

Media culture
Ineke de Feijter, lecturer on religion and media on the Free University in Amsterdam says that churches are too stuck in their view on media by seeing it as just an instrument to get information across. But now, in this media culture, it's not just one-way. Interaction has a more important role these days.

Erik Borgman, lecturer on Religion in Tilburg, agrees with De Feijter when he says that new media is more than communicating; "it changes the architecture". He agrees also with McLuhan vision on media: "the medium is the message." (See: *Is technology determining society?*) *"With the internet new connections are made where we don't have any control over."*

Is technology determining society?
It is a fact that technology is more present these days that before, but is technology determining society? If so, how is the relationship between both? We can differentiate four views on technology (Van der Stoep 2010):

- *Technical-deterministic; the medium is the message* (Marshall McLuhan). This vision on technology says that the medium itself is determining a new social reality. Don't bother about the content, it is the medium itself which is shaping our way of thinking, and the way we relate to each other.

- *Social-deterministic.* Our social and cultural background determines how we use media. Van der Stoep uses an example of Pierre Bourdieu, a researcher who analysed different photography styles between people of varying social backgrounds in France, to illustrate this view. You can see a clear difference in style, which is determined by the different social backgrounds people have.

- *Social-constructive* (Manuel Castells 2009). Thinking about whether technology is determining society or not makes no sense. It's more important to see the co-evolution of media and society.

- *Fenomenological* (Don Idhe). Media make new experiences and ways to live possible, but they also exclude certain experiences or ways to live. A more balanced view, according to Van der Stoep.

We can use these models in order to define if online worship is determining how and whether this is defining culture and how people behave. Idhe's model is the best applicable to this situation. On the on side, online worship

is clearly creating new experiences (whether this is positive or negative). It is possible to worship from a distance, when sick, etc., but it could also limit other ways to live, like missing the experience of being in the church and less social contacts.

Culture of freedom
In his book The Rise of the Network Society, Castells writes the following: "The technological blossoming that took place in the early 1970s can be somehow related to the culture of freedom, individual innovation, and entrepreneurialism that grew out of the 1960s' culture of American campuses." (p.5) This culture of freedom lays on the basis of today's culture, together with the technological blossoming Castells is writing about. Modern society is less institutionalized (culture of freedom), and in this culture it's easier to integrate online worship.

Emerging Churches
The movement of the emerging churches has contributed on new visions of being a church, and is comparable with Northland's model of the Distributed Church. But Emerging Churches are slightly different. They are not wanting to be a part of megachurches. Johan ter Beek wrote (based on a research under Emerging Churches in the US and Great Britain) that Emerging Churches experience that there is no room for silence and reflection in megachurches. This is different than the model Northland Church is using, with one mother-church, and different house churches connected to that.

We also see similarities between the Emerging Church and the Distributed Church model. At first, both the Emerging Church model and the Distributed Church model are pioneering in the christian world. Also, the Emerging Church doesn't want to differentiate between the secular and the sacred world (Ter Beek 2008). Which has the same value as the Distributed Church model: being aware of your surroundings, and developing partnerships with other organizations (even if this is outside the christian world).

Also, living and gathering in a (small) community, a house church, instead of attending a regular church service is normal in both models. This is underlined by Vellekoop and Van Loo in their book *Ploeteren & Pionieren* about new ways of being a church.

2.3 Which other churches in the U.S. do have a similar approach as Northland Church?

According to a 2009 study there are around 3,000 multisite churches in the U.S. Attendance at multisite churches – all campuses, all services, counting both adults and children – currently ranges from the low 100s to over

20,000. The most common size (median) between those extremes is a church with an attendance of 1,300. A part of this multisite churches offer an option to worship online.

A few examples of this American multisite churches who stream their services online are Lifechurch.tv and Saddleback Church (California).

Also, Hillsong Church, a church with venues all over the world (also in Europe), recently started facilitating online worship too.

In The Netherlands, no record has been found of churches with an online worship environment. A few churches are experimenting with a live online video stream.

Part 3
Discovering the Authenticity of the Church Online

3.1 Introduction quantitative research

In discovering what the online worshipers think of Northland Church we need to find out if and how online worshipers feel connected with it. It is important for Northland Church that online worshipers feel connected to God and others. What do online worshipers think about worshiping with Northland, and do they usually worship online/mobile or via their TV?

3.1.1 Collection of data

For this part of the research I used a quantitative research method, an online survey. Considering it is a survey on a large scale, the method of doing this digitally is the best suitable option. The survey is sent out via e-mail to 7,720 online worshipers who logged in at least once in the last 6 months. The downside of doing it digitally is that it's harder to capture what online worshipers are really thinking about online worship, that's the reason why some open questions are included in the survey.

3.1.2 Analyzing methodology

To execute this survey the software used is *Wufoo.* Data is partly analyzed in the software itself, to minimize the error margin. The other part is analyzed in *Numbers,* spreadsheet software for the Mac.

3.1.3 Population

Every weekend around 2,500 registered users sign in to worship online. In the past six months, 7,720 users signed in at least once to worship online. Both worshipers who log in infrequently and users who log in every weekend can participate in the survey. Demographics and other characterizations of these online worshipers are:

- International audience, people from all over the world log in
- A certain number of people who attend Northland onsite are part of the people who worship online as well.

3.1.4 Validity and representativity

I used the website *www.journalinks.be/steekproef* to calculate the validity. Considering the population of 7,720 online worshipers, an error margin of 5%, a reliability of 95%, the total necessary amount of people to fill in the survey is 366 to represent the total population.

382 online worshipers filled in the survey, so we can conclude that this survey valid by representing the population.

3.1.5 Survey

The survey is split in three parts: *My Involvement at Northland, How and Where I Worship* and *Resources at Northland*. The average time to fill in the questionnaire is 12 minutes. The conversion rate (people who open the survey vs. the people who complete the survey) is 64.1%.

My Involvement at Northland

Question 1: I have been attending Northland...
Possible answers:
• 0-3 months
• 6-12 months
• 1-3 years
• more than 3 years
• I don't attend Northland **>** *Survey is ended*

Question 2: I worship at Northland (online or onsite)...
Possible answers:
• Monthly
• At least once a month
• Every weekend
• Infrequently
• Mostly on major holidays

Question 3: I worship online at Northland...
Possible answers:
• Monthly
• At least once a month
• Every weekend
• Infrequently
• Mostly on major holidays

Question 4: I worship at Northland...
Possible answers:
• With friends
• With coworkers
• With family
• With neighbors
• Alone

Question 5: Do you worship at churches other than Northland?

Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 6: Do you consider Northland to be your home church?
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 7: Do you give offerings and/or your tithe to Northland?
(All answers are confidential)
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 8: Do you give offerings and/or your tithe to another church?
(All answers are confidential)
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 9: Would you recommend Northland to other people?
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 10: Are you part of a home church?
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 11: Are you part of a small group or Bible study?
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

How and Where I Worship

Question 12: I prefer worshiping
Possible answers:
- Online
- At a physical location

Question 13: Do you effectively connect to God when you are worshiping
online?
Possible answers:

- Yes
- No

Question 14: Do you effectively connect to others when you are worshiping online?
Possible answers:
- Yes
- No

Question 15: What are the benefits of online worship?
Possible answers: open question, answer can contain max. 3 benefits and 200 characters.

Question 16: I worship online at Northland because...
Possible answers:
- I prefer the online experience
- Sometimes I can't travel to a physical location
- I live too far away
- I can worship online with other who live remote
- I have health issues
- I have family circumstances

Question 17: I prefer to worship online...
Possible answers:
- Through a television connection to another device (Roku or computer)
- Through the video-only option
- On our Facebook app
- Through the interactive worship application

Question 18: Do you experience challenges worshiping online?
Possible answers:
- No
- Yes

Question 19: What challenges do you experience worshiping online?
Possible answers: open question, answer can contain max. 3 benefits and 200 characters.

Resources at Northland

Question 20: Do you use the following media?
Indicate if they are familiar with the following media. Possible answers: yes or no.
- Northland Newspaper (RESPOND.)
- Media player at northlandchurch.net
- Someday is Today website

- Northland's mobile website
- Northland's Twitter
- Northland's Facebook
- Northland's online calendar
- Northland's blog
- Online prayer wall (pray.northlandchurch.net)
- Daily liturgy (bible.northlandchurch.net)

Question 21: How do you usually worship with Northland?
Possible answers:
- On demand (archived services)
- At a local site
- Via iPhone/iPad
- Via northlandchurch.net
- Via Facebook
- Via Roku

Question 22: How do you prefer to worship with Northland?
Possible answers:
- On demand (archived services)
- At a local site
- Via iPhone/iPad
- Via northlandchurch.net
- Via Facebook
- Via Roku
- I don't have preference

Question 23: Anything else you'd like to share with us?
Possible answers: open question.

Question 24: If we have questions, may we contact you?
Possible answers:
- No
- Yes, my e-mail address is…

3.1.6 Results

Question 1: I have been attending Northland...

Choices	Percentage	Count
More than 3 years	47.91%	183
0–3 months	20.42%	78
1–3 years	20.42%	78
6–12 months	10.21%	39
I don't attend Northland	1.05%	4
	Total	382

This question is answered by 382 people. None of the respondents skipped this question (since it was obligatory to fill it in). Most of the respondents have been attending Northland for more than 3 years (183 respondents). This is to be interpreted as "online and onsite attendance for more than 3 years".

Question 2: I worship at Northland (online or onsite)...

Choices	Percentage	Count
Every weekend	74.60%	282
At least once a month	15.61%	59
Infrequently	7.67%	29
Monthly	1.85%	7
Mostly on major holidays	0.26%	1
	Total	378
	Unanswered	*4*

This question is answered by 378 people. Four (4) of the respondents skipped this question. Most of the respondents are attending Northland Every weekend (74.6%). This is to be interpreted as "online and onsite attendance every weekend".

- one or mores time a month
- less than one time a month

7,9%

92,1%

Question 3: I worship online at Northland...

Choices	Percentage	Count
Every weekend	45.29%	173
At least once a month	26.18%	100
Infrequently	25.13%	96
Monthly	2.88%	11
Mostly on major holidays	0.52%	2
	Total	**382**

This question is answered by 382 people. None of the respondents skipped this question (since it was obligatory to fill it in). Most of the respondents are attending Northland online every weekend (45.29%), although this percentage is lower than respondents who said that they online or onsite every weekend. I can conclude that a certain number of people who are attending Northland locally also are worshiping online on a more infrequent basis. Unfortunately, I cannot derive the exact number of people who are attending localy as well from this survey.

one or mores time a month · less than one time a month

25,7%

74,3%

Question 4: I worship at Northland...

This question is answered by 382 people. This question had the option to choose more than one answer. You could choose between the different answers below. The exact mentions of the answers are mentioned right after the answers.

- With friends (75)
- With coworkers (13)
- With family (227)
- With neighbors (6)
- Alone (151)

Here an overview of the most popular answers in percentages:

Here an overview of the different mentioned answers as a percentage of the total entries (382).

- A percentage of 19.63% does online worship with friends.
- A percentage of 3.4% does online worship with coworkers.
- A percentage of 59.42% does online worship with family.
- A percentage of 1.57% does online worship with neighbors.
- A percentage of 39.53% does online worship alone.

Question 5: Do you worship at churches other than Northland?
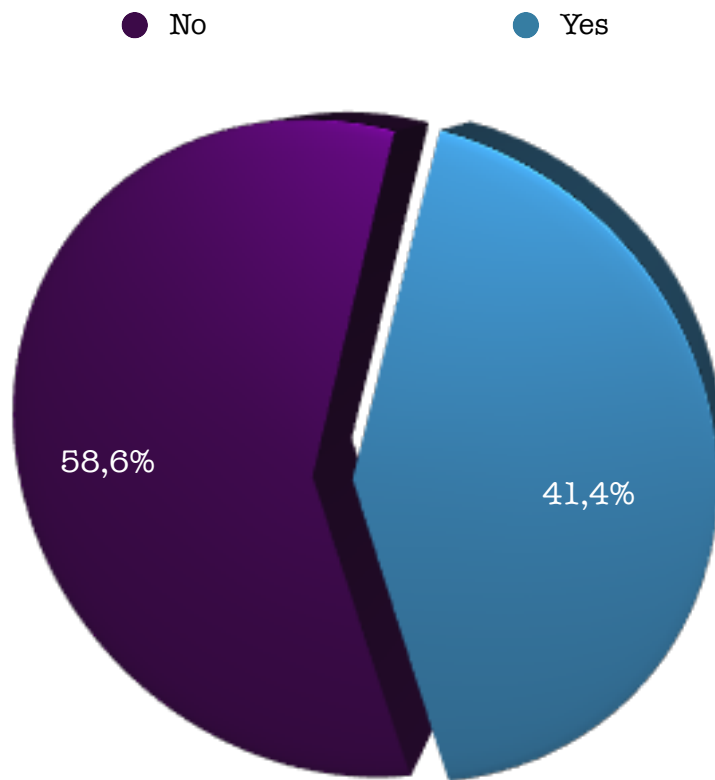
This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. The answers to this question are used to indicate how closely affiliated the online worshipers are to Northland church. We can also see if they worship online with Northland in addition to attending a local service. 58% of the people indicate that they only worship at Northland, and not at other churches.

● No   ● Yes

58,5%

41,5%

Question 6: Do you consider Northland to be your home church?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. The answers to this question are also used to indicate how closely affiliated the online worshipers are to Northland church.
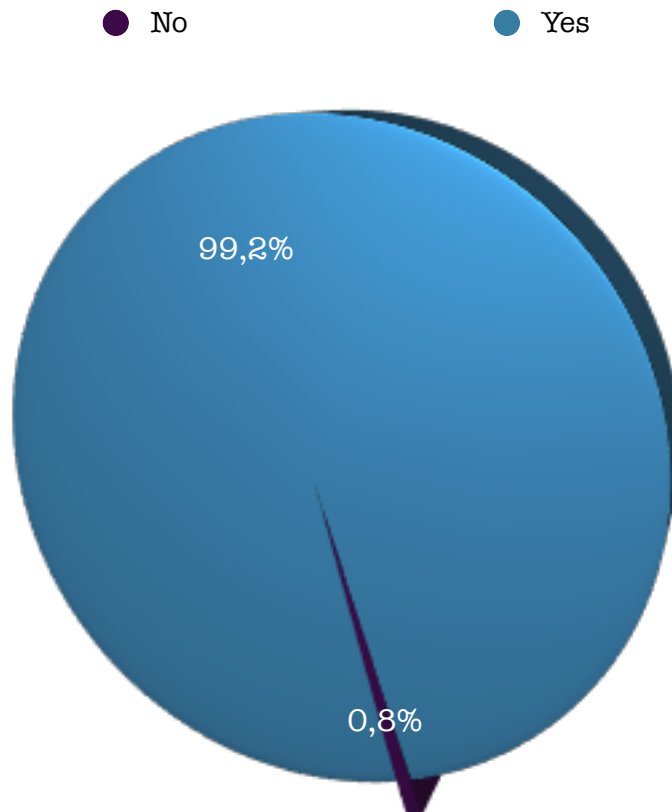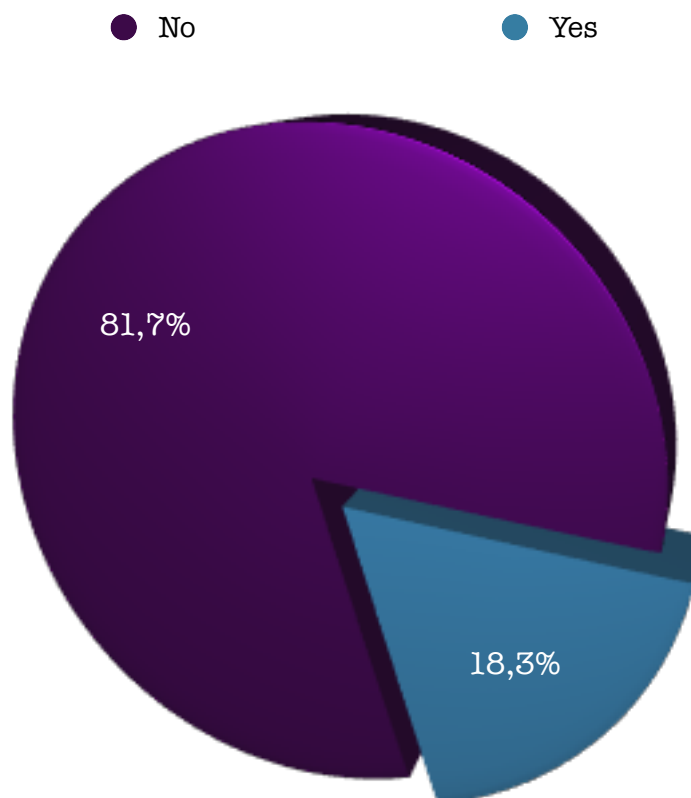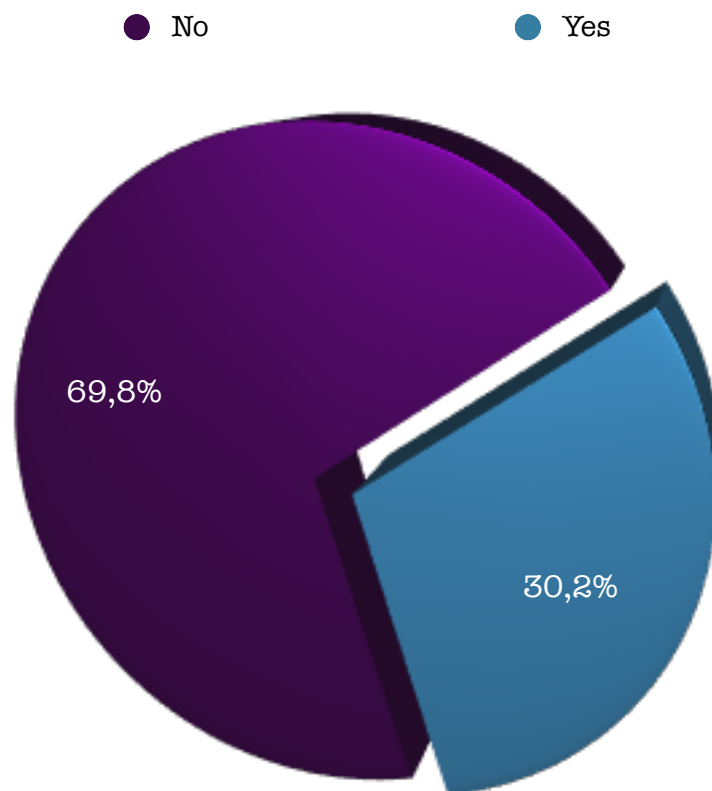
Question 7: Do you give offerings and/or your tithe to Northland?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. The answers to this question are also used to indicate how closely affiliated the online worshipers are to Northland church.

● No   ● Yes

72,5%

27,5%

When correlating this with question 6, we see that only 39.4% of the non-givers consider Northland Church to be their home church. The majority, 61.6% of the non-givers considers Northland Church not as their home church.

Question 8: Do you give offerings and/or your tithe to another church?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. The answers to question 7 and 8 are comparable, and used to indicate how closely affiliated the online worshipers are to Northland church in comparison to 'competing' churches.

Question 9: Would you recommend Northland to other people?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. The answers to this question are used as an indicator of how content they are with Northland Church. Regarding the wording of this question: it's not only online worship, but also attending Northland Church locally. The 0.8% who doesn't want to recommend Northland to other people have comments (question 27), and are merely not agreeing with the 'politics' preached in Dr. Hunter's sermons.

● No   ● Yes

99,2%

0,8%

Question 10: Are you part of a home church?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. The answers to this question are part of the indication of Northland's ideal church: a home church, is adapted by the online worshipers. With it's current (april 2011) of 12 listed Northland home churches, the number of individuals (69) who said that their part of a home church is high, considering the fact that these home churches have around 10 people every weekend. It could be that there are unregistered house churches, or that members of the home churches encouraged on another to fill in the survey.

● No   ● Yes

81,7%

18,3%

Question 11: Are you part of a small group or Bible study?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. This question is an addition to question 10, to see if people are involved with a group of christians in any other way than a home church. Northland Church underlines the need for christian of being together, encouraging each other.

● No   ● Yes

69,8%

30,2%

Question 12: I prefer worshiping…

Possible answers:
• Online
• At a physical location

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. This adds to the question whether worshiping online is interchangeable with going to the church at a physical location. The results show that going to the church at a physical location is preferred by the online worshipers. Limitations which are listed in question 16 could be part of the reason why a part of these 69.6% is worshiping online. Also, the answers given on questions 2 and 3 learn us that also individuals who attend locally and worship online as well filled in the survey.

● Online   ● At a physical location

69,6%

30,4%

Question 13: Do you effectively connect to God when you are worshiping online?

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. This question is asked to get an idea of how effective online worship is for the online worshipers.
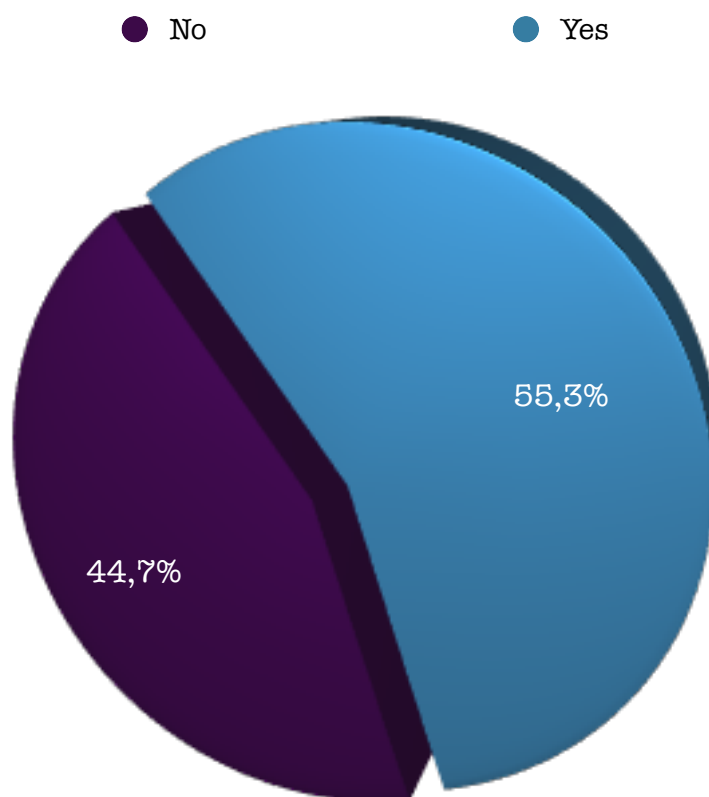

When correlating this with question 10, we see a remarkable result. Of the people who are attending a home church, more experience an effective connection to God (97.1%).

Question 14: Do you effectively connect to others when you are worshiping online?

Possible answers:
• Yes
• No

This question is answered by 378 people. 4 people didn't answer to this question. We can see that the percentage of worshipers effectively connect to others when worshiping online is lower than when feeling effectively connected to God.

When we correlate this to question 10, we see a remarkable result. Of the people who are attending a home church, more experience an effective connection to others (68.1%) than people who are not.

Question 15: What are the benefits of online worship?

Possible answers: open question, answer can contain max. 3 benefits and 200 characters.

Answers mentioned multiple times are:
- I've moved away from Florida, and online worship is a way to still connect
  to Northland Church
- Driving to the church takes too long
- Convenience / not having to dress up
- Visiting specific churches which are too far away to travel too / choice
- A church available when traveling
- A church available when ill / when kids are ill
- A church available when dealing with disabilities
- Time restraints
- The possibility to worship with friends / family who are far away
- Personal worship time without distractions of other people in church
- Getting to know new people online
- Anxieties for social environments
- Flexibility

Question 16: I worship online at Northland because...

This question is answered by 377 people. 5 people didn't answer to this question. This question had the option to choose more than one answer. You could choose between the different answers below. The exact mentions of the answers are mentioned right after the answers.
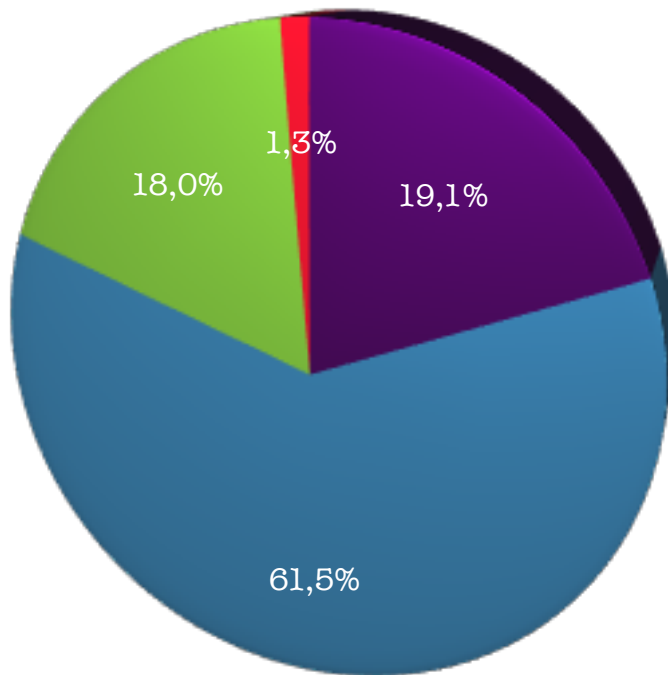
- I prefer the online experience (54)
- Sometimes I can't travel to a physical location (201)
- I live too far away (114)
- I can worship online with other who live remote (37)
- I have health issues (40)
- I have family circumstances (51)

Here an overview of the most popular answers in percentages:

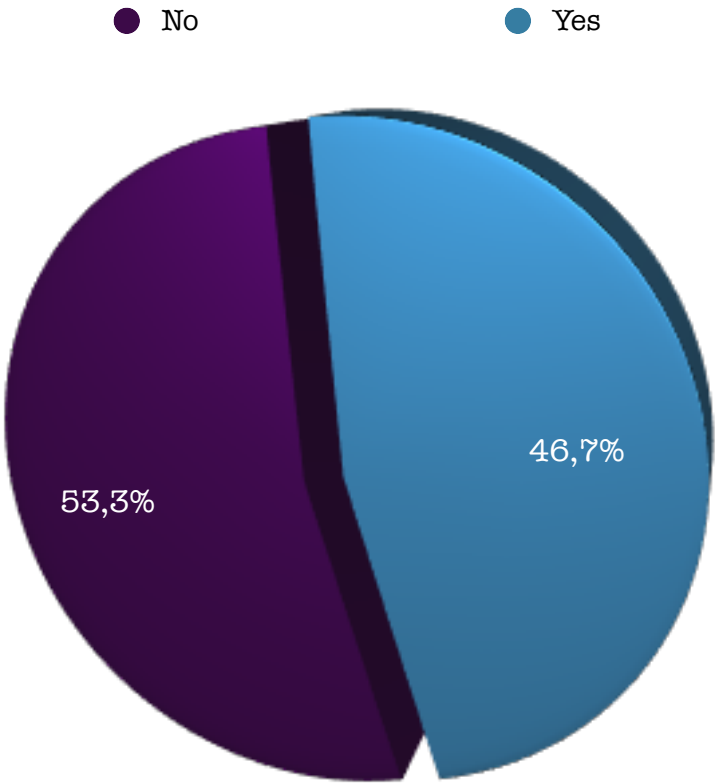**Question 17:** I prefer to worship online…

This question is answered by 377 people. 5 people didn't answer to this question.

- ● Through a television connection to another device (Roku or computer)
- ● Through the interactive worship applicaiton
- ● Through the video-only option
- ● On our Facebook app

1,3%

18,0%

19,1%

61,5%

Question 18: Do you experience challenges worshiping online?

This question is answered by 377 people. 5 people didn't answer to this question.

No ●   Yes ●

46,7%

53,3%

Question 19: What challenges do you experience worshiping online?
Possible answers: open question, answer can contain max. 3 benefits and 200 characters.

Answers mentioned multiple times are:
- Technical issues (freezing screen / network disconnections)
- Community (public) chat is distracting
- Not having the closeness of a church
- Distractions at home
- Missing connection to others (*"I miss human contact", "(I miss) having people around me.", "No fellowship"*)

Some other remarkable answers:
- I'm deaf. Would like to see a video of a sign language interpreter.
- I miss being able to connect to others after services.

Resources at Northland

Question 20: Do you use the following media?

Indicate if they are familiar with the following media. Possible answers: yes or no.

- Northland's Newspaper RESPOND. (No: 40.11%, Yes: 59.89%)

Choices *(Score)*	Percentage	Count
No *(2)*	40.11%	146
Yes *(1)*	59.89%	218
	Total	364
	Unanswered	18
	Avg Score	1.4

- Media player at northlandchurch.net (No: 36.64%, Yes: 63.36%)

Choices *(Score)*	Percentage	Count
No *(2)*	36.64%	133
Yes *(1)*	63.36%	230
	Total	363
	Unanswered	19
	Avg Score	1.4

- Someday is Today website (No: 79.44%, Yes: 20.56%)

Choices *(Score)*	Percentage	Count
No *(2)*	79.44%	286
Yes *(1)*	20.56%	74
	Total	360
	Unanswered	22
	Avg Score	1.8

- Northland's mobile website (No: 76.86%, Yes: 23.14%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage	Count
No (2)	76.86%	279
Yes (1)	23.14%	84
	Total	363
	Unanswered	19
	Avg Score	1.8

- Northland's Twitter (No: 91.71%, Yes: 8.29%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage	Count
No (2)	91.71%	332
Yes (1)	8.29%	30
	Total	362
	Unanswered	20
	Avg Score	1.9

- Northland's Facebook (No: 62.26%, Yes: 37.74%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage	Count
No (2)	62.26%	226
Yes (1)	37.74%	137
	Total	363
	Unanswered	19
	Avg Score	1.6

- Northland's online calendar (No: 56.99%, Yes: 43.01%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage	Count
No (2)	56.99%	208
Yes (1)	43.01%	157
	Total	365
	Unanswered	17
	Avg Score	1.6

- Northland's blog (No: 73.83%, Yes: 26.17%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage		Count
No (2)	73.83%		268
Yes (1)	26.17%		95
		Total	363
		Unanswered	19
		Avg Score	1.7

- Online prayer wall (pray.northlandchurch.net) - (No:74.93%, Yes: 25.07%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage		Count
No (2)	74.93%		272
Yes (1)	25.07%		91
		Total	363
		Unanswered	19
		Avg Score	1.8

- Daily liturgy (bible.northlandchurch.net) - (No: 77.75%, Yes: 22.25%)

Choices (Score)	Percentage		Count
No (2)	77.75%		283
Yes (1)	22.25%		81
		Total	364
		Unanswered	18
		Avg Score	1.8

Question 21: How do you usually worship with Northland?

Choices	Percentage	Count
Via northlandchurch.net	57.33%	219
At a local site	40.84%	156
On demand (archived services)	10.21%	39
Via Roku	4.71%	18
Via iPhone/iPad	2.88%	11
Via Facebook	2.36%	9
	Total Entries	**382**
	Unanswered	*18*

We can see that with 57.3%, worshiping via Northland's website is the most common way to worship. Secondly, at a local site in person is the most popular way to worship with Northland Church. That means that a large amount of people are actually visiting the church locally, and sometimes watch the service online.

Question 22: How do you prefer to worship with Northland?

Choices	Percentage	Count
At a local site	52.05%	190
Via northlandchurch.net	32.33%	118
I don't have a preference	10.41%	38
Via Roku	3.56%	13
On demand (archived services)	1.10%	4
Via iPhone/iPad	0.27%	1
Via Facebook	0.27%	1
	Total	365
	Unanswered	17

We can see that the majority of people prefers to worship in-person at a local site (52.05%).

Question 23: Anything else you'd like to share with us?
Possible answers: open question. 209 respondents filled in this question.

I mention a few remarks made in this field:

"We love Northland, and get so much from the services, but we may have to do a local church for more connection and service opportunities."

"While worshiping online, I frequently see others get visibly annoyed when "distracted" by chatters using the community chat window while the service is underway."

"As much as a physical location is preferable, my health & compromised immune system often does not let me do that. Without online worship, I'd be lost."

The majority of people used this field to express their thankfulness for Northland and the possibility to worship online.

Question 24: If we have questions, may we contact you?
Possible answers:
• No
• Yes, my e-mail address is...

Of the 382 people, 283 individuals left their e-mail addresses (74.08%).

3.1 Do people experience 'worshiping online' at Northland Church as authentic?

This relates to vision on 'creating new experiences', and 'blocking other experiences'. It's another way to worship, but when you're doing it this way, it blocks the experience of being in a real church. Combining this with the outcomes that only 55,3% is effectively connecting to others - which is an important part of being a church - it could be blocking that experience. Officially, we don't know how this is in a local church - but we can assume that this percentage is higher there. What we know is that 69,6% of the people prefers worshiping at a physical location, which could mean that connecting to God and others is more likely to happen there than online.

3.2 Is Northland Church truly connected with 'online worshipers' and vice versa?

Concluding from the results of the survey we can say Northland Church is truly connected with the online worshipers. 45,29% worships with Northland Church every weekend, but most of the worshipers do that on a regular basis (at least one time a month). 76,5% of the respondents consider Northland Church as their home church. And 72,5% give offerings to Northland Church.

Evaluation

When looking back on the executed research, I would like to extend it with a more extensive research on the 'why' of people worshiping online and what they think about the media Northland is providing. This research was on a large scale, and in order to have many people fill it out we had to limit the amount of questions and the difficulty. A more detailed insight is recommended when extending on this thesis.

The research could also be extended if deaf people do want to use the online worship experience, combined with an interpreter. In the quantitative research I saw that two people wanted this. A more tailored research in getting to know if this is needed could be useful.

Conclusions

We can say that online worship is a phenomenon which fits in modern society & culture. With the rise of endless technological possibilities, all things are possible; even for the church. Many people consider internet (partly) as a threat for the church, but there are churches who experience it merely as an opportunity. As we speak, it is a big trend in churches in America.

What we can see as a threat is that online worship is also shaping society. It could be that more and more people are worshiping online, when at the same time experiencing a lack of connection to others. One of the key elements of the church, according to many churches including Northland Church, is being in togetherness with other believers. As we can see in the research done, only 55,3% is effectively connecting to others when worshiping online (at Northland Church).

In answering the thesis: *"How can a church utilize online communication, in the way Northland Church does it, to meet their objectives?"* we can conclude to say that online worship, as the important part of Northland's online communication, is a powerful tool to reach people online. It is also a tool which will connect the online audience to God and others and will shape them to online worshipers along the way. This objective, to connect the online audience to God and others, however, is met in a limited way. In many cases, this is not a problem for the church. People who never connected to a church before, when people are sick, when driving to the church takes too long and when people are traveling, it is a unique way to still connect to the church, when otherwise this was not a possibility. Otherwise, this could be useful for small groups and house churches, which are still in community with other christians. But, in some cases, it is limiting people to connect to others in real life. This is where the online church (still) lacks to meet the church's objectives fully.

Recommendations

1. I advise Northland Church to continue facilitating online worship, with in mind that it could have implications on how people connect to God and others. I advise Northland Church also to do an additional research on how people connect to God and others when attending the church locally, and compare that the research which is done under the online worshipers. These results could show how effective online worship is for Northland Church.

2. I advise Northland Church to maximize interactivity between online worshipers, and keep encouraging online worshipers to connect to others (in their neighborhood). There are a few elements that can be utilized to do that:

- Facilitate a rich online experience. Offer online worshipers a lot of ways to connect to others:
  - Make the online worship environment also an *online meeting environment*, open 24/7.
  - Continue to invest in online worship, and hire a community manager which is moderating and managing this *online meeting environment*, when at the same time fullfills a pastoral role in helping these *online worshipers*.
  - Offer group chat, and the ability to create groups in the online worship environment.
  - Offer not only chat, but allow people to connect with each other on social networks, Skype and other communication networks - but only if this is permitted by the user.
  - Offer online bible studies and training for these groups.
  - Consider facilitating online worship for kids.
  - Consider facilitating online worship for the hearing impaired.

- Involve the online audience as much as your local audience in the service.
  - In services, online worshipers are more watchers than active participants. Involve them as much as possible in the service itself.

- Be a distributed church in all areas.
  - For example: Northland Church is activating their church attendees to do small jobs like painting, gardening, etc. on their yearly Serve Day. The online worshipers are not involved in this kind of activity. To be a real distributed church, Northland Church should iterate the need to actively involve online worshipers to do small jobs in their own community.
  - Facilitate resources and equipping materials.
  - Facilitate all the resources that you give to local worshipers also to online worshipers. Give them the ability to attend the same classes, studies and more as you would give to the local worshipers.

These conclusions can be applied to any church which is using, or is intending to use online worship. If you want to take online worship serious, it's also a serious commitment to continually invest in it. In the end, you are investing in people, who you have to take as serious as you take your 'own' local attendants. If you facilitate online worship, it's not an 'extra possibility', it is considered by (at least a part of) the online worshipers as a real church.

Model of maximizing effectiveness for your online church audience

Category	Elements	Role
Online presence	**BE WELCOMING** *Welcoming website portal;*	*1*
	BE THERE *Being the church on social networks;*	*1/2*
Interactivity online and offline	**BE INTERACTIVE** *Facilitate a rich online worship experience: maximizing interactivity online;*	*1*
	BE PURPOSEFUL *Connecting to God and others.*	*1/2*

⌂   *1.The church (organization)*
👥   *2.The church (online worshipers)*

The model
I hereby present the Kramer-model of maximizing effectiveness for your online church audience, which are or will become your online worshipers. The key to being an online church which is effective splits in two parts: *online presence* and *interactivity online and offline.*

In this model, there are two actors with different and overlapping responsibilities are involved. The church, as an organization, and the church, the online worshipers. Both *are* the church, but in the practical sense - they have different responsibilities at some levels. All of the actors have the same purpose: to connect to God and others.

Usage of this model
This model could be used by all christian churches which want to facilitate online worship, or utilize online communication.

Step 1: Be welcoming
This it not necessarily the first step, that could also be "Be there", when someone comes in contact with your church via social networks. This step means that a church ought to have a welcoming website. A website at least has to comply with the following standards:
- A front page which include information for new-comers, our a button "I am new here." It should include ways to connect to the church or ways to attend a church service locally or online;
- A page with information about the christian faith;
- Make the website itself useful for regular visitors. Include ways to stimulate them to come back regularly;
- Mobile devices are more and more used these days, so be sure to make a mobile version of your webpage, delivering content which is useful specifically for mobile usage. An example: daily bible verses, for reading during lunch and short breaks;
- Make your website welcoming for all people. Make it readable for people who are visibly challenged.

Step 2: Be there
People are not going automatically to your webpage. It's part of a network of websites, the internet, and you have to make sure that you're on more than one webpage to be recognized. Social networks are an ideal tool for that. A few guidelines:
- Don't just post messages as you were used to do in one-way communication means, but make sure to involve the people in communicating *with* them in stead of *to* them;
- Tips what you can post on social networks as a church: video highlights of your service (short clips), devotionals, bible verses, activities and prayer requests;

- The online audience is involved in this: they can comment, interact with each other, repost your posts, etc.;
- Be sure to monitor reaction to these posts, and react when necessary.

Step 3: Be interactive
It is important as a church to facilitate interaction between christians online (and offline). Internet is no longer a way to get information across, but also an interactive medium. With social media the internet got a new dimension, which should be used by the church not only to keep up with how people interact these days, but also because the nature of social media ought to be 'social'. This fits in the target to 'connect to others', an important part of the church.

A church ought to have an online worship environment with possibilities to connect to God and others online. Choices which are to be made are:
- Is the church choosing an open or a closed environment? With an open environment it is harder to moderate, but it has also less steps before connecting to others (no login required). A closed environment has the benefit that people who are there have done some effort to connect to the church online (they registered and provided information about themselves). This could create a more 'connected', social experience.
- The church has to choose what kind of tools they are providing to worship online. They could choose to take the whole experience of being in a church to the internet - an online worship environment, or to use the internet in addition to a local church experience. This is determining if they are providing a live webstream of their services, combined with a chat-functionality.
- Tools which could be used in the online worship environment:
    - Sermon notes;
    - A map showing people who logged in;
    - Chat functionality;
    - Sharing option of the service on social networks;
    - An option to ask questions about the service;
    - An option to read the bible (along with the service).

Step 4: Be purposeful
The process of facilitating an online experience for believers and non-believers should be measured on two levels:
- How is the online experience provided by the church used by the online audience? (statistical measurement: pageviews, Google Analytics)
- How is the online worship environment experienced by the online worshipers? (survey)
- Is the online experience connecting people to God and others? (survey)

Also, this step includes communicating to people that meeting other christians offline is important.

I recommend to evaluate this on a yearly basis.

Summary of the role for the church (organization)
The church as an organization is facilitating a local service, and is also facilitating an online experience on many levels. They are present and active on social networks, they have a welcoming website, they provide a rich online worship experience and they stimulate online worshipers to connect to God and others - also offline.

Summary of the role for the church (online worshipers)
In this model, the online worshipers are not only watching the online service, but they are also active participants, co-creators - they are the church. In that way, online worshipers don't stay anonymous and inactive - they become part of the church. In many ways they can participate:

- They *are* the church on social networks. Christian and non-christian can see their posts on social networks, which could be short video clips of the church involved or a bible text, provided by the church. They connect to people attending the same online church, but also to people who are not directly involved with that church or the christian faith.
- They *are* the church in the online worship environment, they connect with other online worshipers via chat (and other possibilities to connect).
- They *are* the church in their own environment. Provided with resources from the mother-church they organize, for example, bible studies or meals with other believers.

Vision and implementation
Being the church at multiple places at once is one of the key elements of a church. In my own experience, churches are merely focused on equipping their attendants rather than reaching out to the 'world'. Initiatives as the emerging church and simple churches are trying to reverse that, and these are good initiatives. Online worship is a way to reach out, when at the same time equipping in a sufficient way. Many times this last element is what lacks in emerging or simple churches (house churches).

When a church starts with online worship, their focus should not only be on the local attendants of the church, but it also has to take reaching out to an online audience very seriously. For many churches, this will be a new way of communicating. The old ways of evangelizing could be less powerful than the tool of online communication. Online communication is better in two ways: 1. Rich content: video, text, images, blogs; 2. It could potentially be reaching a much larger audience than you would reach in 'normal' ways.

However, a church must be aware of taking this too far. Online is powerful, but personal contact is necessary to grow and maintain faith. In being

purposeful as a church, personal contact is obligatory. This could be the church as an organization getting in touch with you personally, or otherwise facilitating (or encouraging) gathering with other christians.

When a church considers implementing online worship, they should take account of the limitless possibilities online communication has. Literally, it could change the behavior of their church-goers. They could stop attending a local service, and only watch online. On the other hand, many people will have benefits of it when sick, when watching over the children or other reasons. It will also create endless possibilities to reach out to the outside world, and be the church in the world. It's the way they present online worship which will make the difference. In my opinion, online worshipers should be incorporated in 'the church'. They should be taken as serious as local attendants. They have to feel part of the church in order to really connect to God and others. As we can see in the research executed, a high percentage of the online worshipers contributed financially to Northland Church - they do feel connected to the church. This one of the signs that there really is a connection between the online church and the offline church - which definitely should be maintained and nurtured.

Additional research

To build upon research done before on this subject, additional research can be done in the following areas:

- Do an additional research on how people who attend the service locally connect to God and others, and compare this with the results of Kramer's research.
- Find creative solutions for the problem of people who live in solitude - how can we connect them to others (online and offline)?
- Do additional research on how Northland's mission and vision is 'lived' by the church.
- A more extensive research after the launch of the new online worship environment (expected to launch in July 2011), and compare how/if the experience of feeling connected to God and others is improved.

Appendix

1 This is a modified version of Northland's History-page on their website: http://www.northlandchurch.net/articles/history/

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