

Our First Digital Easter

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Just weeks ago, although it may now seem like years have passed, we all would have been anticipating the thrill of children hunting for Easter eggs on our church lawns, our fellowship halls abuzz as members and guests sat down together for Easter breakfast, and of course, our beautifully decorated sanctuaries filled with the family of Christ, hearing again the good news of Jesus' resurrection and filling His house with joyful praises.

To say the least, this year will be different.

As COVID-19 spreads across the nation, and almost the entire world is in some stage of social distancing, many are now asking, "But what about Easter?" Do we attempt to do some sort of virtual celebration on Easter Sunday? Do we postpone our celebration until the social distancing admonition is lifted?

I believe there is an opportunity to do both. There will come a time when our Lord will see us through even the most difficult circumstances of this pandemic. When that day comes by His grace, we will celebrate, and it will certainly be fitting to welcome our spiritual family and our surrounding community to come back to the Lord's house, and what better message to proclaim and celebrate than our Lord's answer to death, His own death and resurrection!

Yet, it is also a great opportunity to proclaim this good news on Easter, even if we cannot gather as a community of faith. As the social distancing policy will be in effect throughout April, here are some ideas to empower members for at-home witnessing, and to celebrate together our first digital Easter.

Empowering at-Home Witnessing

- "Tag" your front window. Create posters to place in your windows that provide messages of hope and encouragement from our perspective as children of the Heavenly Father.
 - It could be as simple as a favorite Bible verse.
 - It could be an invite to your church's online service [especially Holy Week and Easter services].
 - It could be posts of how you're praying for your neighbors.
 - It could be the contact information of your pastor [if he approves] with the invitation to reach him if you're in need.
 - It could be a way to reach you for their prayer requests.

- Chalk your sidewalk in front of your home. As your children take to the sidewalks with chalk, encourage them to draw favorite Bible stories or messages about Jesus' love for your neighbors. Again, encourage them to share about Jesus' resurrection as Easter approaches.
- Create door hangers to place in your neighborhood, offering to deliver groceries, prescriptions, etc. for those unable to get out.
- Families, read the Easter story together and talk about what Jesus' resurrection means to you. Post your recordings on social media tagging your congregation's name.
- Create yard signs that invite your neighbors to your Easter online services. Have a contest to see who can create the most beautiful, funny, compelling sign. Send pictures of the signs to your pastor or post on your social media outlets.
- Create an Easter-themed "around the house" scavenger hunt you can do as a family, and challenge your online friends to hunt for the same set of items. Once all items are found, post your end-game picture.
- Leave an Easter basket of prizes out on your front lawn or porch with a sign about your church and their Easter online service, inviting neighbors to enjoy an Easter gift from you.
- Challenge kids [and kids at heart] to recreate Holy Week scenes with Legos. Post your creations on your church's Facebook group as well as your own social media.

Digital Easter Ideas

- As congregational leaders, be asking yourselves, "What does the community need from us right now? How will the Lord use our Easter worship to reach those who do not know Him?"
- Ask members of your congregation to record their own Easter greetings. Send them to your tech support person(s) to create a montage video that can be used as a "countdown" for your Easter live stream or pre-recorded service.

- Announce that you're setting aside a portion of your Easter offering to help a special COVID-19 related ministry issue [like purchasing food for families in need, or meals for first responders].
- As a congregation, organize a compassion project like asking members to purchase hand lotions to donate to a local hospital to care for the frequently washed hands of the hospital staff. As a bonus, attach your church's information and online worship information on the bottles.
- If permitted, do an Easter parade by decorating your cars and driving around the church the Saturday before Easter. If travel is restricted, do the same parade online by having everyone decorate their cars for Easter [or dress in their Easter best] and have everyone post their pictures on social media at the same time under the same heading, sometime over Easter weekend.
- Order Easter flowers to go to a local nursing home or to be delivered to your congregation's shut-ins.
- Ask families and individual members to pre-record Easter prayers and use them as part of your Easter celebration.
- Invite online Easter attendees at the time you announce the offering to join your church's Facebook group. A related tip: Facebook allows you to ask people three questions when they request to join your Facebook group. You could ask for a way to contact them and about their further interest in the church.
- Place a large banner on your church's property inviting people to your Easter services online.
- Ask members to send in Easter "throwback" photos. Use a montage of them as part of the Easter service.
- Have "Easter eggs," things for children to watch for throughout the service, to help keep little ones focused as they look for them. [Like "We're going to see a number of crosses during the service, see if you can count how many?" They could also be literal Easter eggs.]

- Use a Zoom webinar during the service so you can all sing together and stream to Facebook live.
- Mail children Easter activity pages that they can use during the online service.

Easter Digital Follow-up

For those who visited your Easter service and whom you have a way of contacting, here are some ideas for post-Easter follow-up:

- First, for your live stream service, ask a member or two to volunteer to be a virtual greeter for the service. They will monitor who joins the service. They will send them a greeting and a request for a way to contact them if they are new to your church community.
- Send every visitor a thank you for joining your faith community in this historic, first-ever digital Easter celebration.
- Invite visitors to a welcome party via Zoom where they can meet some leaders of the church and get to know more about the congregation and your beliefs.
- Send every visitor a way to connect to whatever online devotions you are posting.
- Send every visitor a message, asking them how your congregation might be of service to them during these days of social distancing.

Whether we are all together in one place to celebrate Christ's resurrection or doing so in our own homes, what a joy to know we can rejoice that our Lord's victory over sin and death, as punctuated by His empty tomb, is ours! What a joy to know we can still share this good news in creative ways with our community in these challenging times! Many thanks to those who helped in contributing these ideas for our first digital Easter.