The Church in a Virtual World

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" Mark 16:15

As we all know, Covid-19 has had a major impact on almost all aspects of our lives, including the way we function as congregations. Before the pandemic, the churches in our Presbytery provided for the spiritual needs of members through worship in physical buildings. In some cases, our worship was augmented by some digital out reach. Covid-19 and the lockdowns and isolation it has caused has forced us into new ways of serving our members. Most of our churches have implemented some form of virtual (on-line) worship. I believe this is a permanent change. In fact, this may be God's way of moving us into a new way to serve God's people.

Providing and increasing virtual worship and other services, will allow us to:
- Reach members who are home bound or in care facilities
- Stay connected with seasonal members
- Allow weddings, funerals, baptisms and other special events to be shared by family and friends who cannot be there
- Attract new members
- Reach out and minster to people throughout "the whole creation"

To help our churches move into this virtual world the Presbytery has established two new programs.

Grants for Virtual Ministry
Churches can apply for grants for purchases of entering into or expanding their virtual presence. The award will be to pay for 70% of equipment purchases up to a maximum of $10,000. If there are special circumstances the grant may be larger. These will be judged on a case by case by basis.

Qualifying equipment includes, but is not limited to, camera(s), audio systems, computers or other control equipment and high-speed internet connection equipment or lines.

Grants are available for any qualifying equipment purchased since mid-March which was acquired to implement Virtual Services in response to the impact of Covid-19.

Churches may apply for both the Virtual Grant and the Blessing Grant but may only be awarded ONE of the grants for the purpose of virtual church equipment. It is possible for a church to apply for virtual equipment through the Church in a Virtual World program at the same time applying for some other ministry initiative through Blessing Grants.

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While the Presbytery is not recommending a single source provider, the following vendors are aware of this initiative and have agreed to give our churches priority attention and favorable pricing:

Harmon's Audio Visual	(239) 939-2273 – contact Bobby Harmon
Pro Audio	(941) 876-3386 – contact Chris Bertler
Creative Sound and Lighting	(888) 865-8195 - www.creativesoundsolution.com
Team Logic	(239) 288-0531 – Brian or Cathy Bonacci

For churches without any current equipment, these websites may serve as good resources:

https://www.faithward.org/the-super-basic-low-budget-guide-to-livestreaming-for-churches/
https://churchfront.com/blog-churchfront/2018/8/7/live-streaming-setup-for-small-churches

Training Support

Training is a key component to the successful implementation and usage of this new technology. Typically, the equipment vendor will provide operator training. Churches are encouraged to tap into the vendor resources.

Additionally, the Presbytery is offering a six-webinar series at no cost to the churches. The Presbytery is also covering $150 of the $249 cost of a one-year subscription to Worship Design Studio resources. This program features Dr. Marcia McFee, a nationally recognized authority, who has developed online materials for interactive and innovative worship. To learn more about the subscription, go to: https://worshipdesignstudio.com/. To learn more about Dr. McFee, go to: http://marciamcfee.com/index.php/worship-design-studio/

All churches are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity regardless of participating in the equipment grant program – use the Grant Application to register for the webinar series.

Application Process
You can get your grant application from the Presbytery web site.

Deadline: The opportunity to move to Virtual Ministry is seen as urgent. Therefore, applications must be submitted by the end of this year. Extensions beyond the end of the year will be considered for unusual situations.

Applications will be reviewed by the members of the Church in a Virtual World working group. All recommendations will be made to the Steering Committee for final award.