



## Live Worship: 8 Ways to Help the Reluctant return and New Ones Join In Part 2 of 3

It's all about relationships. Period.

Our God is a God that calls us into a deep and profound relationship. It's called the Kingdom of God/the Realm of Heaven.

We become Citizens of Heaven (Phil 3:20) and are welcomed into a transformed and eternal, unconditional love of Christ with grace, forgiveness and wholi-ness.

This is what the early Christians gave their lives for. This is the Good News Jesus came to preach. (Mark 1:14-15)

Here are eight relationship-oriented actions you can take as the pandemic comes to an end to help the reluctant return and the new questioning ones to join in.

1. Engage them with letters, door hangers, regular calls, visits. Find out who they are and who lives in walking distance. (Exercise will be a big thing post-pandemic) Invite them to join you in activities that they are interested in. After they come to these, invite them to classes, workshops and ultimately, as a step on their spiritual journey: Worship.

(Maybe "Door Hanger" reminders & invitations to join in?) You can't make intelligent decisions unless you have reliable information about what people are thinking and the decisions they are making. It takes work to learn where people are now that the pandemic is close to ending.

Start with church leaders having in-depth conversations as a group. Then have them reach out to their church friends, and participants. You can even expand the conversations to a walking distance around the church. (1-mile radius) We need to rebuild the relationship network that was the framework of every church. We need to reach out and engage them with God's realm, unconditional love and graceful forgiveness. We can no longer wait for people to show up.

2. Be ready to apologize if necessary, (i.e. absence of contact, past church related trauma) but don't guilt them, listen to them, encourage them, even affirm them if they decided to go somewhere else.

If they have decided to attend another church, they are not "lost" to God, only shifted to another Christian expression.

3. Help them draw closer to God right where they are. Brief Devotionals, short thoughts on daily worries. Let them know you are there to help.

Send out devotionals. Put short bible and life insights onto Social media. Share what we uniquely have: The reality that Christ has brought God's Heaven to even the most unlikely person. Give them reminders of that heavenly love.

4. Have something to offer soon! A class, a picnic, an opportunity to serve.

Provide an immediate opportunity to serve others. Invite them into a ministry that touches their hearts. (This means you need to gain their trust and talk to them about what God has put on their hearts.) Ask them what gives their life meaning. Open up a door to "God talk."

5. Design a Sunday morning experience they can't get online: interactive, personal, friendly. Surrounded by the atmosphere of "stepping into heaven."

Change Worship to be more interactive, less of a "show." The Ancient/Future liturgy of the church is a good place to start, but include times when people can talk to each other in worship, (even at a 6' distance) perhaps sharing insights they learned from the pandemic or changes that have happened in their lives because of the pandemic.

Involving and deeply contemplational "special services" can be offered to provide a deeper engagement in the spiritual walk. (Such as Memorial gatherings for lives lost to Covid, Candlelight vigils for Social Concerns; Mother's Day, Pentecost, Graduation Sundays, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Prayer service for our nation; Summer Retreats, Centering Prayer workshops, Centering Prayer monthly/weekly times, Summer prayer walks, Silent Retreats; Back to School Celebrations, Labor Day Picnics, All-Saints Remembrance of the dead, An Introspective Thanksgiving, A "Counter-culture Advent", Longest Night/Blue Christmas, Renewal of Baptism, Ash Wednesday, Lenten Evening Prayer / Labyrinth times, Holy Week services, etc.)

All of these need to be well planned, with high social engagement and solid theological content followed by small groups, classes, seminars or other events that they can come back to.

6. Pray with them when they express a deep concern.

Train all your leaders and those contacting people (including Ushers) to stop and pray WITH people about their concerns as the greet people back into worship. If they meet neighbors, pray with them as well. (Do more than: "I'll keep you in my prayers.") Do it right now.

Don't refer everyone to the pastor right away, but at "first contact" spend time with them, take their hands if ok, and pray a simple prayer of hope, wisdom, healing and being filled with the unconditional love of Jesus.

Teach your leaders, active members to leave pauses and silences to help people have space to listen to God. They needed fill up every moment with words and flowery phrases. Then, if needing extra attention, ask if it's ok to share their need with the pastor and/or the care team at church.

7. Don't ask them for money.

Some have been struggling financially since last March. Others have heard that all their lives and it's a "trigger" for past uncomfortable church memories.

8. Keep your own faith strong and vital. Step up your and your leader's personal devotions.

What personal devotional resources do you use and recommend? Are your leaders engaging their faith on a personal level? Is spiritual growth the primary reason for the existence of your congregation? ...and is all its ministries places where spiritual growth intentionally happens whether it's the soup kitchen, bible study, worship and administrative meetings?