

[Home](#) / [Cover Stories](#) /

August 31, 2020 12:00 AM

Reimagining the Worship Experience

by Jim Kumorek, Church.Design



The pandemic and its aftermath are causing churches and their tech teams to radically refocus their vision and equip teams to share the Message in a new way. This shift can oftentimes be best served by enlisting the aid of designers.

“When the stay-at-home order was first issued by the North Carolina governor back in March,” comments Justin Manny, production pastor at The Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham area, “we all thought, OK, we’ll do this for three or four weeks max, and then we’ll be back. Then someone commented that they thought this could go on for a couple months, and we were all going, ‘Whaaaat???’”

And here we are, not eight weeks later, but 16 weeks later, and The Summit Church recently announced to its congregation that there will be no plans to attempt reopening any of the campuses for services before January 2021. And many other large churches around the country have made similar announcements, including Atlanta multisite North Point Community Church.

Prior to making this decision, Summit surveyed its congregation to “take their temperature” on the idea of reopening campuses for services. “Similar to national trends,” states Janetta Oni, director of communications for The Summit Church, “roughly one-third of the congregation were ready to attend now; one third were unsure; and one third will likely stay away for a long time.”

“The complexity of opening is extraordinary, the experience is often underwhelming, and the future is unknown.” —

Janetta Oni, Director of Communications, The Summit Church, Apex, NC

This information, coupled with the fact that four of Summit’s nine campus locations meet in public school buildings no longer accessible to the church due to the pandemic, managing re-opening while following public health guidelines for a church whose weekly attendance approaches 14,000 with only four permanent campus locations to utilize would have significant logistical challenges.

The lay of the new landscape

“The complexity of opening is extraordinary,” says Oni, “the experience is often underwhelming, and the future is unknown. We heard from many other churches who were

operating in person that it was odd: seeing masks was very jarring and maintaining social distance felt awkward. Plus, the attendance numbers were declining, not increasing, in large part because people realized that corralling their kids in an auditorium was much harder than letting them play on the carpet at home with a snack.”

"Given the options in front of us, we actually really like our current plan. It is forcing us to reconsider our strategy as a whole and radically equip and mobilize our people." —Janetta Oni, Director of Communications, The Summit Church, Apex, NC

Oni continues, "Our leaders also wanted to prioritize a strategy that we could really lean into and plan for over the next few months, rather than wondering week-to-week what might change in the pandemic. And we really want to keep our movement moving together. We realized that if we had in-person gatherings, it would only minister to roughly a third of our people. Then we would split our resources between Summit Online and the extraordinary effort it takes to pull off a weekend gathering in the middle of a pandemic. By deciding not to meet in person for weekend worship (for a time) we have dedicated our people and staff to all figuring out how to be the church in much smaller gatherings. Given the options in front of us, we actually really like our current plan. It is forcing us to reconsider our strategy as a whole and radically equip and mobilize our people."

After it became clear that large group gathers were not going to happen anytime soon, Summit evaluated what would be the best way to provide a compelling online service experience to the congregation.

"We felt that the 'normal' service style is an excellent format for when there are people in the room," states David Listor, video team director at The Summit Church, "but not necessarily as engaging when watching it at home in your living room with your family, friends, and neighbors. Moving to a pre-produced format shot in smaller spaces allows us to create a service that is more engaging for our congregation and anyone else who might be tuning in for the first time. We wanted to make it feel like we were

talking to you in your living room instead of an audience in a big empty room (since obviously no one is in the auditorium).”

“Moving to a pre-produced format shot in smaller spaces allows us to create a service that is more engaging for our congregation and anyone else who might be tuning in for the first time. We wanted to make it feel like we were talking to you in your living room instead of an audience in a big empty room.” —
David Listor, Video Team Director, The Summit Church, Apex, NC

The new worship experience workflow

To that end, Listor’s video team, which normally produces media such as bumper videos, testimonial videos, and other material for use during the service, assumed the responsibility for shooting and editing the weekly service using more cinematic-focused equipment and styles. Initially, the regular live production team assisted with this, but as they settled into a regular rhythm, Listor’s team now handles most aspects of producing the services.

- multisite church
- worship
- COVID-19
- COVID-19 streaming
- education
- church design
- September 2020

Jim Kumorek

Jim Kumorek is the owner of Spreading Flames Media, providing video production, photography and writing services. He also provides training services on theatrical lighting systems, specializing in Jands Vista. Reach Jim at james@spreadingflamesmedia.

Read more by Jim Kumorek

Church.Design

Read more by Church.Design

August 31, 2020 12:00 AM

[RSS](#)

[Print](#)

[About us](#)

[Who we are](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Submit your project](#)

[Popular on our page](#)

[Projects](#)

[Design](#)

[Education](#)

[Perspectives](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Follow us](#)

Newsletters

Visit our archive

[Back to Top](#)