

# Churches: ‘If our desire is to honor God, God is honored’

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He breaks the bread he baked and sips the juice he brought.

In their homes, in front of computer, tablet and smartphone screens, he knows many of the people who attend First United Methodist Church in Astoria and Seaside United Methodist are doing the same.

Can you really consecrate something — Communion bread and wine — virtually?

“I don’t know,” Avila said. “I think the idea is we’re doing the best we can. If our desire is to honor God, God is honored.”

It might be tougher, he concedes, to do a baptism online. Still, the churches have become adept at doing almost everything else virtually. Even as in-person worship returns, some believe the virtual component is here to stay.

At Grace Episcopal, the leadership team is working through a collection of essays that pose questions about what the church looks like and what work it might do post-pandemic.

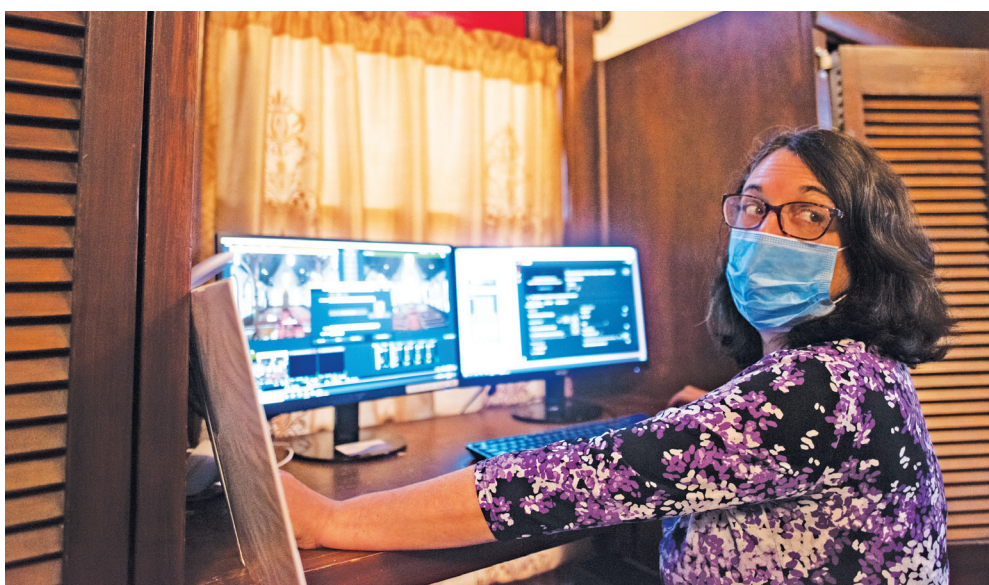
What, the book asks, have churches learned from being forced to worship in new ways? How does the church respond to issues of inequality and lack of access to resources? What leaders does the church need now? What structures? Is virtual worship and virtual community the future for the church? What lessons learned from the pandemic and what new approaches to worship and community do they keep?

There is a mindset of: “We have our liturgy and we have our traditions,” McWhorter said. “We’ve always done things this way.”

Well: “The pandemic has just called us to say that that’s not going to work in the future,” she said. “I think that technology is not going away.”

They found that out-of-town family and friends appreciate the option to watch weddings and funerals on a livestream. The move away from paper is also better for the environment and technology may be a way to bring in young people.

For Kevin Lewis, the pastor at Grace Community Baptist Church in Astoria, the pivot into a more online pres-



Ashley Lertora runs live feeds of the Palm Sunday service to Facebook from a back room in Grace Episcopal Church.

**AS MANY PEOPLE’S LIVES MOVED ALMOST ENTIRELY ONLINE, PASTOR LEWIS AT GRACE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH IN ASTORIA THINKS THE DAYS OF LINGERING IN A CHURCH FOYER, PORING OVER PRINTED MATERIALS AND THEN VENTURING INTO THE SANCTUARY TO SEE WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT ARE LIKELY OVER — ALONG WITH THE POTLUCKS, TOO, HE’S SORRY TO SAY.**

ence was not daunting. Lewis considers himself technologically savvy and the church already used television screens, PowerPoint slides and the like in services.

But email and social media — the primary forms of communication and connection for the church over the past year — were new to some of the church’s older members. Lewis visited several senior church members at their homes, downloaded YouTube for them and linked everything up to the church’s offerings. There was one woman who had never used email before, so Lewis created an address for her.

As many people’s lives moved almost entirely online, Lewis thinks the days of lingering in a church foyer, poring over printed materials and then venturing into the sanctuary to see what it’s all about are likely over — along with the potlucks, too, he’s sorry to say.

People are looking online before they ever set foot in

the building, he said. Because of the conditions created by the pandemic, website visitors often have the option of watching entire videos of past services to get a feel for the preaching style, the music, the flow of a particular church’s worship service.

“The new door of our church is the website,” Lewis said. “That was not true a year ago.”

And he sees other opportunities for church buildings to be more active in the community, not just a place people go once a week. Since the start of the pandemic, Grace Community has hosted community groups that needed larger spaces to meet safely. The church also partnered with Astor Elementary School to operate as a learning hub for students who needed access to high-speed internet and the space to spread out.

Lewis sees a shift in how churches think about ministry. Instead of a “build it and they will come” mentality, he feels the church must put

even more effort to meet people where they are.

## ‘A tunnel’

Change can be difficult, frightening, but it can also be necessary.

Judy Atkinson thinks of all of the people at Grace Episcopal who stepped up and learned how to use the cameras and computer equipment that enabled the church to continue providing worship services, how they worked on despite all the uncertainty and were able to open the doors again, even to just a limited number of people.

Atkinson, who raised her children at Grace Episcopal and is a member of the church’s leadership board, struggles to come up with an analogy for the past year.

Certainly, she has not felt like she was on a mountaintop, but neither, she said, “has it been slogging through those miry bogs like in some Psalms.”

She thinks maybe it is more like when the ancient Israelites, freed from slavery in Egypt, followed the prophet Moses into the wilderness, led by a god who went ahead of them in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Through all their long wanderings, when a need arose, God was there.

Or maybe, Atkinson said, it is “like traveling through a tunnel that seemed never-ending, but all of a sudden there is light at the end. And we’ve been together in this journey with each other, with folks moving toward the front when needed.”

## County reports four new coronavirus cases

The Astorian

Clatsop County has reported four new coronavirus cases over the past few days.

On Wednesday, the county reported three cases. The cases involve a woman in her 30s and a man and a woman in their 40s living in the northern part of the county.

All three were recovering at home.

On Tuesday, the county reported one case.

The case involves a man in his 80s living in the southern part of the county. He was recovering at home.

The county has recorded 838 cases since the start of the pandemic. According to the county, 19 were hospitalized and seven have died.

## Appeal: ‘I’m just astounded by the outcome’

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Over 7,200 photographs and 70 videos, including some of teenage girls engaging in sexual activity, were found on Caze’s cellphone. More warrants were obtained after the evidence from the cellphone was discovered, which led to more incriminating evidence.

The Court of Appeals ruled that Judge Dawn McIntosh should have granted Caze’s attempts to suppress that evidence. The appeals court also found that the judge should have granted a motion for judgment of acquittal on the six counts of using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct.

District Attorney Ron Brown said that without the evidence from Caze’s cellphone, the prosecution is unable to corroborate the victims’ statements to find him guilty of the crimes. He plans to move to dismiss the case.

Brown expressed frustration with the appeals court’s opinion, and also the state Department of Justice for not appealing the decision to the Oregon Supreme Court.

“It’s one thing to take a case to trial and the jury decides that the evidence isn’t there, at least you got your shot, your day in court, your chance to argue it,” he said. “But when you lose it on appeal like that and they just gut the entire case ...

“I feel particularly for the victims and the cops because they worked their tails off and we’ve got nothing to show for it. We got three years in prison to show for it, but we don’t have any criminal convictions to show for it.

“I still think it was a good search. I still think it was a good prosecution, and I’m just astounded by the outcome.”

Caze’s attorney, Andy Simrin, chose not to comment.

There is still a pending federal case against Caze that was filed following his trial in 2018.

He was indicted in U.S. District Court in Portland on six counts of production of child pornography, two counts of transportation of child pornography, one count of receipt of child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography.

## Center: Number of events dropped in 2020

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The report comes after a year of pandemic-related declines tied to state mandates that shuttered most large gatherings to deter the spread of the coronavirus.

The downturn came after historic numbers of tourists and the citywide economic impact of the convention center’s annual programming, peaking at more than \$36.3 million in 2018, and following completion of a \$15 million expansion and renovation.

The city saw 6.4% year-over-year growth in lodging tax receipts from October to December 2019, Joshua Heineman, the city’s director of tourism marketing, said at a City Council meeting in March.

January and February 2020 were also “very, very strong,” Heineman said.

In the first part of 2020, Oregon Fine Foods Inc., the convention center’s food service provider, had been on pace to set a new food and beverage record of \$1 million for the fiscal year, Vandenberg said, a number that would have exceeded by 25% the previous high.

The pandemic changed all that.

Oregon banned large gatherings in March 2020 and Seaside issued an emergency order with restrictions on lodging as people were urged to avoid travel and stay home.

The lodging tax for last

April through June dropped almost 51%

Throughout the year, the number of attendees at convention center events and meetings dropped from more than 37,000 to 8,000.

The number of events fell from 100 in 2018 to 55 in 2020.

“It plummeted,” Heineman said. “It was decimated way below what we see in midwinter doldrums. There was a lot of stress and a lot of fear out there from every perspective you can imagine.”

The convention center reassigned some staff to city public works and the library.

The space opened up for smaller local civic groups, including the Rotary Club and the Seaside Downtown Development Association.

“It gave them the ability to meet face to face when everyone was working on Zoom,” Vandenberg said. “You need social interaction, you need to shake their hands, look them in the eye, see what they’re thinking, feeling.”

Demand for convention space will return to outpace supply, he predicted. “Our priorities have not changed, just realigned to match current guidelines and restrictions,” Vandenberg said. “Even though I am seeing what I hope is the end of this pandemic, for us to recover it’s going to be when the state lifts all restrictions and we’re able to operate at full capacity.”

## Nets: ‘If it looks good, the fishermen are confident’

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“So almost the entire ‘Ring of Fire,’” she said.

Skamser fell into the business because she was broke, having moved to Oregon from Wisconsin to pursue commercial fishing and crabbing. She was on the lookout for year-round work when she noticed a group of women eating lunch at a local restaurant.

“They’d eat their meal and leave,” she remembered. “I asked what they do and was told they worked on fishing nets.”

Curious, she went over to the netmaking shop, got a job, and hated it at first because she didn’t understand the complicated craft.

“There were several women ... and they were encouraging, said I wasn’t seeing ‘it’ yet,” she recalled.

That “it” was the various meshes, the pattern that ultimately creates a four-sided diamond and catches fish. Different fisheries have different sizes. For example, she said, an inch and a half diamond mesh catches shrimp while a 5 1/2 inch mesh catches groundfish.

She finally realized making nets followed the same pattern as the embroidery and knitting she’d learned when she was young.

One of the important techniques in netmaking is the speed. Skamser said that it can take up to three years to master the skill.

“You have to keep your



Jillian Farmer

**Foulweather Trawl is known for its sustainable-style netmaking, focused on merging science and industry into a successful combination.**

hands moving to get fast,” she said. “You don’t want to interrupt the rhythm ... The fastest guy doesn’t even look like he’s working because he’s got the coordination down.”

Skamser said that the concentration required to make nets is also what gets people through the pain in their hands after hours of work.

“... You work until the pain goes away and you can’t feel anything,” she said, explaining that it is often worse in cold weather because “you can’t wear gloves to work on the net and we work outside a lot on bigger nets.”

Each net is designed specifically for each fishery, and for each port along the coast. Producing high-quality, eco-friendly nets requires strong collaboration with scientists and fishermen, incorporat-

ing technology that narrows the type of fish caught and excludes endangered species or fish that are out of season.

This technology includes a barbecue-style grill on the shrimp nets, which have an inch and half mesh to catch the small pink cold-water shrimp and can be filtered by size. The grill keeps bigger fish from being caught and was designed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Skamser explained that the grill size varies and is not at the open part of the net.

“(The grill) allows everything in the net an opportunity to get out because the only thing they’re catching is shrimp,” she said. “Everything else shoots out.”

The shrimp net, averaging 90-foot long, can take up to three days to make. Other

nets, such as a midwater net, can be up to 1,500-foot long. A bottom net can take up to five days to make.

She said that most of the nets made at the shop are generated by “smart science, smart fishermen and seeing what might come down the pike.”

This partnership seeks to protect ocean populations from being overfished, while also benefiting fishermen by keeping them in business. Skamser said that by sharing information and following regulations, there hopefully won’t be a need for another fishery shutdown like what was seen in the 1990s when groundfishing began to be restricted.

“Fishermen know the ocean, we know the gear, and (scientists) know the science,” she said. “It’s a great working relationship.”

At the end of the day, Skamser said, fishermen come into the shop and look at the nets like they are artwork.

“They’ll come in and touch the nets, shake their heads and look at us,” she said, then laughed. “And we’re like, ‘Yeah, we give it to you and all you do is make it dirty and rip it up. Thanks a lot.’”

But the goal is for fishermen to feel good when they get the net.

“If it looks good, the fishermen are confident,” she said.

*Jillian Farmer is a freelance writer who lives in Coos Bay. The Other Oregon is a quarterly publication of EO Media Group.*