

Slide 1 **Lutheran Media** opening slide

Slide 2 **Challenging our digital boundaries:** social media and web presence as missional opportunities

- I acknowledge that I'm presenting on Kaurna Land, and I'd also like to acknowledge the lands where you are located. I thank God for the elders of these lands, past, present, and emerging. And I pray that our loving creator God may continue to bless these lands.

Slide 3 **Leveraging digital platforms for Kingdom impact**

- Digital platforms = social media; your website; other online means (Zoom) = unprecedented opportunities for Christians to engage in mission
- Social media
 - Over 8 billion people in the world
 - 3 billion Facebook users (2023)
 - 2.4 billion Instagram users (2.5 billion by the end of 2024)
- Social media can be a powerful tool for sharing the gospel and growing meaningful connections.
- Global reach and accessibility of the internet
 - 60% of the global population has access to the internet.
 - In Australia, 87% of the population are using the internet.
- Important to establish a strong online presence for churches, Christian ministries, and for individual Christians.

Slide 4 **Importance of web presence**

- The first step to coming to your church is going to your website.
 - What do they see?
 - Are they welcomed?
 - What do they need?
- Consider the pathway from first attendance at your church to regular attendance? Video from **Partners in mission** on 'Welcoming' asks, when does the pathway begin?
 - The door?
 - The carpark?
 - The signage?
 - For 90%, the pathway has already begun with the church's website. Your website is the start of the welcoming process.
- Task: Look at your website from the point of view of the visitor
 - The most visited webpages are often the 'Meet the pastor,' 'Meet the team' or 'About us' webpages.

Slide 5 **Importance of web presence**

- Task: Do a google search by putting in the name of your town and the word 'church' and see what comes up.

- If your church doesn't have a website, does it appear on a local directory and is the information accurate?

Check out: <https://www.immanuelchurch.au/>

Immanuel's website video speaks volumes – all ages; friendly (does not use stock photos)

Immanuel's website has a 'I'm new' webpage which is an incredibly welcoming addition to a website.

Most people aren't interested in doctrinal statements as their first website view. They are interested in finding answers to:

What do I wear?

Is the church formal/informal?

Where do I park and enter?

Will I be able to sit near the back and observe?

Your website must be authentic!

Slide 6 Navigating the social media landscape

- **Facebook** – broad range of users; tends to be slightly more women than men on Facebook however, overall, really a balanced representation of males and females in Australia.
 - Lutheran Media (2600 followers – 59% women/41% men)
 - Messages of hope (2200 followers - 67% women/33% men)
 - a fishing group may have a different demographic.
 - Why two platforms? – *Messages of hope* aims to reach people who are curious about Christianity, whereas *Lutheran Media* aims to inspire fellow Christians
 - consider the 'Engel scale' in what you post (Haven't heard of the term? Then look it up.)
- **Instagram** – younger demographic – fewer static pictures than Facebook and more short videos or reels
- **LinkedIn** – tends to be a platform for professionals; used widely for recruitment – increasingly used socially like other social media platforms; has a slightly more masculine demographic.
- **Twitter** – less popular in Australia than in US
- **TikTok** – young demographic – all about the short video grabs

Using these platforms provides the opportunity for reaching diverse audiences.

Slide 7 Navigating the social media landscape

Task: Like, follow, and share excellent Christian content

Why like, follow, and share?

1. By liking and sharing Christian content, a whole new audience (the audience of your friends and followers) hear of God's love for us.
2. Multiplies your reach.

Check out www.lutheranmedia.org.au/social-media

Each Monday, Lutheran Media posts a text and image from the following Sunday's gospel for anyone to use.

Slide 8 Navigating the social media landscape

According to McCrindle research, the first faith encounter for new and exploring Christians is online. Almost half of **Gen Z** (teenagers and adults in their 20s) use social media as their primary source of spiritual life. So, the question is, 'If young people are going to social media for spiritual encounters, what are they seeing and where are we?' By having an active online presence through social media, we are offering a voice of hope into the lives of people.

Slide 9 Building an online Christian community

How do we create a supportive and engaging digital community?

- Importance of having a social media policy or, at the very least, establish some guidelines by considering what is tolerated and what is not.
 - www.lca.org.au/policies – The LCA's social media policy is an excellent help.
 - suggest a minimum of two admins – for monitoring and responding in timely manner.
- Respond to comments positively/affirmatively.
- Provide content that is good, noble, God-centred, holy, affirming, inspiring.
 - 1 Timothy 6:11 Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.
- Provide content that is mobile phone friendly.
- Aim is to develop a relationship and for that relationship to become in-person and not purely online.

Encourage participation, dialogue, and mutual support among members.

- Public group – participate as if the world is watching/reading what you have to say.
- Private group – share resources, be mutually supportive.

Slide 10 Sharing the gospel

Share the good news of Jesus' love through sharing blogs, videos, podcasts, and social media posts.

- From Lutheran Media and Messages of hope
- From the LCA
- From other Christian organisations (it's a tangible demonstration that Christians are all in God's mission together – one church, one faith, one God)

The following are some individuals or organisations effectively spreading the Gospel online.

- Centre for Public Christianity
- Undeceptions podcast
- Podcasts – Lutheran Media – on radio, Spotify and iTunes (Apple Podcasts)

Story of Julie:

'Julie has been a supporter of *Messages of Hope* for several years now. After hearing *Messages of Hope* on the radio she ordered a booklet on Forgiveness and later several booklets on Grief, for herself, when her husband died, and for some of her friends.

Julie told us that she was having a really hard day, and not coping very well, when she straightened some books on her bookshelf and the Grief booklet literally fell into her lap. She said it was just what she needed. She confessed that she couldn't even go to church because the pain of her grief was too much. The booklet spoke of the exact things that Julie was experiencing. Julie told us, that 'The Grief booklet has been more help than any other resource.'

It was a few weeks later when we spoke with Julie again and she reiterated that she can't believe how the booklet appeared right when she needed it most. Julie is most keen to share her story with others. She wants everyone to know that helpful and practical Christian resources are available for all. God does deliver and its certainly timely.'

Slide 11 **Social media campaigns**

Targeted campaigns amplify the impact of missional efforts.

- Advent or Lent (leading up to Christmas and Easter)
- Post an engaging image.
- Ask questions (to seek a response)

Key elements of successful campaigns are storytelling, visuals, and engagement.

What do you post on social media?

Types of social posts (as suggested by Nils Smith, US digital marketing and ministry consultant)

1. Inspiration – at least 50% - text, video, image
2. Information - at most 25% - has a call to action – e.g. has a link in it to a website; informs how to sign up for an event.
3. Conversation - 10% - ask a question > which drives comments > which drives engagement > which builds relationship.
4. Celebration 10% - the community
5. Connection 5% - connect to the church in a personal way.

Slide 12 **Addressing some challenges:** negative comments

Acknowledge challenges and risks.

How do you navigate controversies? Respond to criticism? Maintain a positive digital witness?

'You are in my prayers.'

'I'm glad you liked...'

'Thanks for your feedback.'

Slide 13 **Addressing some challenges:** one-directional nature of communication

- Are there other risks or challenges?

Slide 14 **Levering technology for worship**

How can we leverage technology for worship?

Covid meant that many congregations went online quickly, and some thankfully have stayed online. Online platforms give people an option when they are sick, away from home, feeling anti-social, anxious, etc.

- Livestreaming - engage through the chat function.
- Zoom means that you see the faces and feel part of the worshipping community.
- Hybrid church – two rooms (face-to-face and online)

How can churches effectively use technology to connect with their congregation?

- Encourage members to pull out their phones and go to their favourite Bible app to read the passage that's being discussed/is part of the sermon.
- Online Bible studies – means that single parents and others who find going out at night difficult can participate.
- Online alpha
- Use the *Church Connect* app to tell members and friends about events etc.
- Emailed Bulletins can be more useful than a print bulletin when filled with hyperlinks to more information.
- Regular electronic giving uses technology.
- Make a Card reader available for the offering time and for sales at events.

Slide 15 **Encouraging discipleship online**

Actively foster discipleship relationships in the digital space.

Zoom – bring coffee and a snack to the gathering; bring a glass of wine to your virtual meeting; send digital hugs; encourage people to keep their camera on.

Alpha - now offers Alpha online – Covid meant they moved from a face-to-face format to online; Alpha format valued the shared meal – how do create hospitality online?

Some tools/resources for online Bible studies, mentorship programs, and spiritual growth.

www.alpha.org.au/online

Discovery Bible Study www.dbsguide.org

www.ripple-effect.net.au

The Word one to one www.theword121.com

Podcasts – Undeceptions, Sam Chan (on evangelism)

Spiritual growth – Lectio 365 app

LCA daily devotions – to your inbox

Bible Gateway - has Plans – loads of topics including:

on *Loss* - 21 days 'daily prayers for grieving hearts'

on *Healing* – 5 days 'Restore My Soul'

Other ideas?

Slide 16 **Romans 10:14,15**

Social media and web presence have missional transformative potential.

I encourage you to embrace these opportunities for Kingdom impact.