



# Transcript

## Means of Grace

### Episode 50

**Recorded audio:** Welcome to Means of Grace, a podcast produced by the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

**Luke:** I'm Luke Edwards, Associate Director of Church Development for the Western North Carolina Conference. In September of 2020 the Innovation Task Force surveyed 119 congregations of the conference. The survey asked a series of questions in regard to worship during the COVID-19 pandemic; 98% of respondents said they were offering some form of online worship. Perhaps the most remarkable finding was 64% of the respondents who were new to online worship planned to continue it after the pandemic.

In today's show, we talk with Dan Pezet, Director of Church Development, and Jason Moore of [Midnight Oil Productions](#), about designing worship for both in-person and online participants. Jason began his ministry in the late 90's at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio. And later went on to co-found Midnight Oil Productions. In addition to Midnight Oil, Jason has worked with numerous denominations as a creativity consultant, media producer and trainer. I think you will find our conversation quite helpful. Dan, Jason welcome to the podcast.

**Dan:** Yeah, thanks. It's good to be here.

**Jason:** Yeah, great to be here.

**Luke:** Dan, let's start with you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your position at the conference?



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**Dan:** I am Dan Pezet. I am the Director of Church Development for the Western North Carolina Conference. What that means is that I am charged with the task of helping to start new churches in our area and to strengthen our existing churches. So, you know, only start new churches, strengthen existing churches - very focused type of job. It keeps me moving. It keeps me busy. I just love being able to help. I've always been kind of that behind-the-scenes person, love to help out a church. I love to help a church think and stretch, try to figure out what the vision is for what's going next. And so this job really fits well with me. And one of the areas that we are in right now with COVID and with not being able to worship in-person, we've all moved online to worship. A lot of churches just want a resource for that. And so that brings up the conversation that we're having today and brings us to having Jason here. And so I'm moving forward just a little bit and just go over to Jason. And Jason can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your organization, your background?

**Jason:** Sure. Uh, well, I got my start in ministry almost 25 years ago at a large United Methodist church up in Ohio called Ginghamburg United Methodist Church. I was one of the first media guys there, and we got a lot of attention for what we were doing with worship and creativity and all of that. And after a few years of being there, I felt just a strong call to help small- and medium-sized churches do more to make worship more effective. And so I started a ministry that preceded the one I'm doing now; and started the company I have now Midnight Oil Productions in 2002, and I've been doing that for a long time.

I've written some books. When it's not a COVID year, I do like 30 or 40 seminars a year on creative worship and hospitality and guest readiness. And Dan, as you pointed out, you know, things shifted pretty dramatically for all of us



last year. And so, while - I'll tell you, I was a little panicked about a year ago in March, when I had six events cancel in three days for various conferences around our connection, that were going to have me come in to do some training things that I was going to do, and I thought, "I don't know what's - what I'm I going to do. I don't even know how people could do worship right now."

And what happened was that I had a church that I had done a previous 'secret worshiper' consultation for, reach out to me (that was in-person in 2019) said, "Would you watch our online worship and do a secret worshiper for consultation for us, for that?" And I said, "Sure, I'll be happy to do that."

Took some notes, had about two pages worth of notes to share with the pastor and realized that so much of what I was going to tell this pastor so many other churches, I think, needed to hear.

And so I asked his permission. I said, "Do you mind if I turn this into a little article and post it on social media?" And he was like, "No, that's fine."

So I made him anonymous, posted that, and within a day of posting it, one of our annual conferences in the connection called me and said, "Would you turn that into a two hour workshop for us?" And I was like, "Well, let me see if I have a workshop here."

And then the next day, another conference called and said, "Hey, we saw that article. Can you do a training based on that article?" And I was like, "Well, I'm working on that. Let me see."

And then another, and then another. And within five days, 14 annual conferences reached out to me and said, "Can you help us do online worship?"

And so, really, from about last March, until even today, I have really devoted most of my time to helping churches think about, you know, how do we (and that



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particular training was called), “Telling the Old Story in a New Time”. Actually, [you all hosted it](#) not long ago, and it was really about how do we - how do we adapt worship for an online audience? Because it's more than just putting a camera in the room and going about business as usual. We have to really rethink the worship that we do so that we could be effective in person and online.

So I probably said more than I should have. But that's been my story up until now. I'm passionate about deep, meaningful worship that drives people deeper in their faith, their personal faith development, but also toward mission in the world. And so worship is not just, you know, an escape, but really drives us deeper in many ways.

**Dan:** That's awesome.

**Luke:** Well, Dan, how did you kind of come to this point with the conference initiative and how did Jason come on your radar and how'd this initiative take shape?

**Dan:** Jason's been on my radar for quite some time. He's done some work with the denomination prior to this, working with Paul Nixon at Launchpad, helping with new churches. And so I've known about Jason; and during this period of time, we just needed somebody to turn to, someone that could help us think through what an online presence looks like, how to be engaging, and Jason's had that experience, and it's really amazing. Jason mentioned that he's out of Ginghamburg that's where you got to start. Ginghamburg has been one of the lead churches for our denomination that we've looked to for mentorship and for guidance and for modeling.



So Ginghamburg has been putting out leaders for years, and to know that they put out a leader like Jason that is helping us now is just another testimony to Ginghamburg and in their ministry.

And so the church development team for the conference - called the Church Vitality Team - we talk about strategy and what we hope for the strength of our conference, how to strengthen our existing congregations and what we're looking for there, and what we see in this COVID is, we see a shift that we've been trying to get energy around for a long time.

We've wanted to help churches get online, and there's been some resistance there. Not every church sees the value or has seen the value for moving online; but that's really where the new story is - where the old story is being told in a new way is - online. And so now that churches are forced to do that with COVID, they've started to experience some really interesting things. One, is many churches have seen that online giving or electronic giving has been extremely important during this time. Many churches have seen increases in giving - not all, another bunch of churches out there are struggling. But many have seen increases in online giving and have started connecting with new people. And that's something that many of our churches just haven't been doing here in recent years, is connecting with new people. And the new people they're connecting with can be anywhere! You know, we have churches that have gained people from Australia and Africa. It is a wonderful development that we're able to reach out beyond our walls and connect to new people.

So our Church Vitality Team, we've asked the question, how do we keep this going and even improve on it as COVID - as we start to get that herd immunity with vaccines and we're able to go back in-person and COVID is not an



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issue anymore - how do we keep this online movement going? Because we're connecting with people online, and we don't want to pull church back away from them now that they've connected to a church.

So we want to help improve that and that's where inviting Jason into this process, helping our conference really strategize about how to do in-person and online worship. That's an important part of what we believe God is calling us to do and moving forward as a conference.

**Luke:** That's great. And so it's called the "[Both/And](#)" kind of initiative, or webinar. And Jason, what is this "Both/And" training about and why is it important in this moment?

**Jason:** Luke, I think it may be the most important thing that we deal with in this era of the church. I think - I don't think I'm overstating it to say that this is the most critical moment in the modern church that we face and that is this: I think that what happened last year was like the modern day equivalent of watching Gutenberg fire up the press and make the Bible available to everybody, you know.

**Dan:** That's right.

**Jason:** And we're still trying to figure out, you know, how do we get all the plates aligned and the print to not be smudged and, you know, make the binding work and all that. So we don't have it all figured out; but we have brought, you know, I heard somebody say this the other day - and I wish I could remember who I heard say it so I could give him a proper quote - but someone said, "It used to be that people came to church, and now we take the church to people by doing it online." And so we have to think about how do we tell the story in a new way, because there's an assumption that if somebody is going to come to your building, they're bought in at a certain level and you can assume certain things.



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You can't assume everything, but you can assume certain things. When you're doing worship online there's less you can assume, because you may just end up in somebody's feed who is, you know, they have a friend that is connected to your church, which makes the Facebook algorithm make your church show up in their feed. And we have to really think about how do we tell that story in a way that somebody who doesn't know anything about church, doesn't know anything about our context or our tribe or whatever, how do we reimagine and invite them in meaningful ways?

So here's what I think the critical moment is and that is this: back in March, churches who were doing worship online already, who were already doing streaming worship, if we're really honest about it, were doing worship for people in the room. And sure, at some point they turn to the camera and they'd say, "Hey, if you're worshipping with us online, thanks for coming today. We're glad you're here." And then they go back to talking to the people in the room for the rest of the experience. Now, we didn't have any other model. So at that time, that felt just fine, right? I like being able to worship from vacation, or I wasn't feeling well that day, or it was a snow day, or, you know, whatever. You have those when you live here in Ohio; we have snow days.

**Luke:** In our mountain districts we certainly do.

**Jason:** So you know, that's what worship looked like. And then when the pandemic hit and our churches were forced to close down, (our buildings anyway, our churches didn't close down, but our buildings closed down), we shifted our strategy from talking to the room to talking to the camera. And we designed worship for people watching in their homes, and that looked a little different.



Now many of the people who are listening to this podcast, many of the churches, went online for the very first time in March. So they never did the talk to the room thing, they talked to the camera right from the beginning. And so the critical moment is that as we start to go back into the room, if we're not careful, we will lose all the momentum we've gained over this last year. We will begin to, because we have people in front of us again, we will either (a) turn those people into the studio audience for the people at home because we've talked to the camera for a year and we might still be addicted to talking to the camera and make the people in the room feel like a studio audience that are providing the laughs and the smiles and the singing and all of that. Or, I think what's more likely to happen and I think could be a huge detriment to our online worship, is that we will start to talk to the people in the room again and we won't look at the camera, and we won't think about people watching from their homes. And so they will feel like observers and experience that they're not really a part of. No one wants to feel like an afterthought, not the people in the room, not the people at home.

So the "Both/And" webinar that - that we're going to do coming up is really about how do we create experience where no one feels secondary? We're going to talk about specific strategies about how to reimagine worship, how to reimagine the experience of worship. And then we're going to talk about what I call three "Both/And" strategies - pre-"Both/And" worship, real-time "Both/And" worship, and post-"Both/And" worship.

And Luke, this training is really meant for churches of all sizes, a rural church with no internet, a church in the city, a church that's technically savvy, a church that is going to do this just on a smartphone, a church that does highly liturgical worship, a church that does extremely modern or non-traditional



worship. So it's really meant for everybody. And I'm excited to have the conversation.

The last thing I'll say is that there's just so much to celebrate. I have never seen the church move so fast. I've never seen the church be so malleable. And even if you're just doing this with an iPhone from your little country church and your online, you've already taken a huge step in the right direction.

So, we can't stop doing this when the pandemic is over. We're reaching more people than we've ever reached before - people who would never walk through our physical doors. So it's an exciting time to be in church.

**Luke:** Absolutely. Well, I've got just a couple of questions just from what you've been saying, Jason. One is, I know there was a huge boom of online attendance that occurred in the spring of last year, and then there was kind of a crash too, right? What has it looked like since then? Has there been a steadier kind of - did we increase more? How has that looked?

**Jason:** I heard some of the same things. And I'll tell you, when it all came to a head from what I have observed was, around Mother's Day in May it seemed like everybody saw their attendance drop. And I don't know if it was because it was Mother's Day, and you all just want to go spend time with Mom, or what? But I think the bigger issue is that, around Mother's Day it was sort of the time where we have been doing this long enough that we sort of lost our spirit of innovation and iteration. So, I talked about in this webinar, the idea that we have to iterate and innovate. And in the early days of this, we were trying new things every week. We were, "Hey, let's try this. Let's see how this works!" And there was an excitement, and it was just, it was kind of fun. I mean, it was terrifying for some folks; but worship was exciting again. And I think what happened was about



Mother's Day, you know, that was enough time that we had figured out three or four tricks that worked, and so we started saying, "Well, let's just do those three or four tricks every week." And we kept doing them, and we kept doing them.

And no one likes a spoiler, right? We all hate spoilers. In fact, if you're a fan of, you know, any show that's episodic, like the Mandalorian or Stranger Things or, you know, for me - I mentioned this in the webinar - I don't want to go online on Fridays when the Mandalorian is in its season because I don't want to see a headline or a picture or anything that's going to ruin the story. And I think part of the deal is, we've gotten into a template and spoiler alert, next week is exactly like this week. Spoiler alert, the next week's exactly the same.

And so I share one quote in the webinar from a businessman here in Dayton, who started the IAMS Pet food company. His name's Clay Mathile. They've got a business center here not far from my home that I'll sometimes go work in, like a shared workspace kind of place. And there's a quote on the wall that I love to share and it says this, it says, "The only difference between a groove and a rut is how long you've been in it."

The only difference between a groove and a rut is how long you've been in it. And I feel like we found a new groove in March. And some of us allowed that groove to become a rut because we haven't done anything new in a while. So I would say that's part one.

The second thing I would say is that part of us, part of the churches that I'm talking to, in conversation with, that I've had the opportunity to speak to in this "Both/And" webinar, I think, also are trying to figure out how to read the tea leaves right now. One of the things that's happened is that our live worship has started to decrease, but our on-demand and after-the-fact worship has started to



increase. And so in a way that feels like people are participating less because we don't see the numbers be as large when we go online.

But like everything else in our culture, people kind of want to do it on their own terms and when it's convenient. So we live in the Netflix, Disney+, you know, Amazon Prime Video culture, where we like to binge watch. We like to watch things when we want to watch them. And so I don't know if the numbers have actually changed as much as we perceived them to have changed. In fact, I'm hearing churches say that, "Gosh, when we look at our numbers on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday, they've gone up 60% - 70%, you know." So I think we might even have to rewire our brains a little bit in how we perceive the impact that we're having in the world around us.

**Luke:** Yeah, I've seen a few tweets about folks telling about their like Mom, who's been binge watched and caught up on her sermons watching three or four in a row.

**Dan:** Yeah, and I'll jump in to say that even this podcast talking about the numbers of people that listen to this podcast grows over time. And so if we were to evaluate the success of the Means of Grace podcast, short term or based on live listening, which I guess these are all recorded and put out, so none of that is really live out there. But it takes a little while to build up. But when it does, people will stay and listen to a couple of episodes. And those numbers build over time. Same thing that we're seeing online with worship. It actually fits into the real schedule of real people that they could go online and worship at their schedule when they can. So we're really seeing some good things out of being online in worship.



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**Luke:** Jason another question I have is - I've heard previous conversation with you, I've heard you say the term "online worship community." I'm curious because I know church to some can feel, before COVID, could feel like a kind of audience relationship and I think online worship has that same temptation, if not more, to become a kind of production that is consumed. What does it look like to build an online community versus just an online audience?

**Jason:** I think that's a critical and key question for us to be asking as we think about how we do ministry right now. I think one of things we miss most about in person worship is relationships. You know, part of why we love to go to church on Sunday is to connect with other people in our faith community, our brothers and sisters in Christ. And there's something about being together that you don't feel in the same way as you watch online. I was invited by the denomination, Discipleship Ministries Path One had me as one of the speakers in a series that they did on online worship. I forget what they called it but --

**Luke:** Digital Church Planting, right?

**Jason:** There you go. Thank you. Thank you, Luke. I got to be a part of an amazing teaching team and one of the other instructors was Nona Jones. Nona is the Director of Faith-Based Partnerships for Facebook and she also leads a church in Florida. And one of things Nona said that really stuck out to me and I keep quoting her on this is that "people don't want to show up to watch your program. They want to be a part of it." And so in this "Both/And" webinar, I spend a lot of time talking about how do we make worship more interactive. How do we have participatory moments and so on? But I really believe that we need to think of Sunday as launching into Monday.



How do we create opportunities where Sunday leads us into that Monday Zoom Bible study or Tuesday prayer with the pastor or, you know, Wednesday Women's group or, you know, whatever? We have to start to strategize in such a way that our worship experience launches us into other opportunities for doing ministry.

My old business partner, friend of mine, Lynn Wilson, said the other couple days ago on Facebook that the "big event worship" is over. Now, you know, that may be true. One of the things I'm so excited about, though with online worship, is that we have moved from what I call monologue to dialogue.

You know, it used to be that when you came to church, you listened to one person talk or a couple of people from the stage were sort of doing their program right? And we just received it. Now, through online worship, we can in real time, have dialogue with people and have conversation and then we get to extend that for when worship is over. And so, since so many of us are spending -- I mean, think about this. A year ago this time we all knew what Zoom was but the majority of our friends had never fired up Zoom, didn't know anything about Zoom meetings or anything. And we're all now living in this world where we're connecting in this way - like, we are right now having a conversation - and now we can extend Sunday into Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and so on. So I think that's how we build community. And of course, that never will replace what it looks like to be in community face to face. But it certainly can supplement and make a big difference I think.

**Luke:** Yeah, that's great. Dan, can you tell us and our listeners how a church leader might get involved in this initiative? Might be able to learn from Jason with those next steps look like?



**Dan:** Certainly. Jason has done one the training workshop for us already, and that is available online on our website. And we have [another one](#) that is scheduled for the second Sunday afternoon in March, and more information will be coming out about that and how to register. So keep an eye out on the conference E-News and on our website for more information on that. But we've even got some more things cooking. We're going to be working with Jason throughout the next year and developing ways to help churches to improve their online presence and to really look at that.

So this is not just bringing Jason in for one conversation here. We're actually going to have a relationship with him and build on his knowledge and allow him to guide us through this next phase of whatever this is. There is a movement going on, and we want to catch that wave, and we want to ride that wave. Wherever the Holy Spirit is guiding this, we want to go. And so we are glad to have Jason as a part of this.

We are also working with some of our partners, including the United Methodist Foundation. We're exploring a partnership with the Reynolds Ministry Fund to help bring about a technology grant for churches to be able to work with Jason and to develop a list, perhaps of technology improvements that might need to be made that we could help fund through a grant. That is in the works. We're not quite ready to announce exactly what that looks like yet. We're waiting on some final funding decisions. But we know we'll put together something, and it's coming out soon. It will be attached to what Jason is doing with the "Both/And" worship that will be part of it and then creating some cohorts that will help to examine, explore and improve our online worship. Make sure that we're doing worship that is, I say, online worship, but really both online and in-person



worship in making sure that those are actually working to build each other up rather than divide attention to one or the other. And to make sure that we're building those communities and relationships. So, yeah, this conversation that we're having is the very beginning of something that's going to come out that's important.

So the next step, really is to mark on your calendars the second Sunday of March, which is March 14<sup>th</sup> and we haven't set the really beginning time for that yet, but we will. We'll send that out. It'll be either 02:00 or 02:30 somewhere in that neighborhood. But we'll get that out as we get those details together. That is the next step. And hopefully by then we will have ready to announce these technology grants what that might look like. So if your church is thinking about improving your cameras or lighting or microphones, you might want to hold off on that investment until we can get that settled – it's coming up very soon. So you don't have to wait too long; but that will allow us to make sure that you're getting the equipment that you need. One thing that we've seen in my office is we see churches that are putting too much money into it, to be honest. The technology is really good. And so we want to make sure that you are getting the most for your dollar. And sometimes when churches bring in a consultant, they will bring in more than they need. So we wanted to make sure that we have that due diligence, that we are making sure that we spend what we need and yet not spend too much. This process will help sort that out.

The truth is, we can put together really professional podcast or streaming online worship. You could go out and get two iPhone XR's which have wonderful cameras. Those are \$500 each. You don't have to activate the cell service, so it doesn't cost you any extra. A laptop with a software that will help you create



different scenes and cut from one scene to the other. You could put together that package relatively inexpensively, and so we'll help you think through that.

And Jason has that knowledge of working with systems like this and has people around him that have knowledge putting this together and helping to train churches. And so we're looking forward to a deeper relationship with Midnight Oil Productions and Jason Moore. So Jason, I appreciate you joining us for this journey and being and going along with us.

**Jason:** I am so excited about what's to come. And you are so right. You know, it used to be that you'd have to spend \$10,000 or \$15,000 to do a broadcast quality online worship experience, and I've seen systems as low as like \$1500 and \$2000 - and to even be able to do multiple cameras. So the software and the hardware has become so much less expensive. And so we're going to develop some packages that will help churches at every level, whether you're a little church in the middle of nowhere and you're just going to do this, you know, on a on a single phone. Or if you have multiple cameras and, you know, lots of, you know a bigger sanctuary, you know, all that kind of stuff. We're going to try and help you all think about solutions. I think that's important, but I also I'm really excited about helping you think about what your "Both/And" strategy is. So the equipment is certainly something we have to tackle. But what you do in front of that camera is as important, if not more important, than what's going to happen on the behind-the-scenes part of it. So we're going to have an opportunity to kind of visit.

And you know, for me Dan, I've been learning right along with everyone else. I mean, we're - we are like in the Wild West right now. You know, with our kind of stoke the wagons, making our way across the plains, and trying to figure this out together. And I think what's been really neat to see is that we've had a lot



of early successes. We've struck gold a number of times already, and there's just so much more that I think is possible. So it's an exciting, exciting time we're in right now.

**Luke:** That's awesome. Well, yeah, we'll link the next "[Both/And](#)" webinar in the show notes, so you can find them there, and we'll also link the [E-News sign up](#). So if you're a listener and you're not signed up for the Western North Carolina conference email blast we'll want you to sign up for that because that's where you'll be able to see the updates on this new initiative. And Dan, thank you for taking the time to be on the podcast. Jason, thank you so much for taking time to be on the podcast, but also for just being so responsive to this moment, for being such a gift to so many of our conferences and so many of our churches in the denomination. So we're grateful for your work and excited to continue that with you here in Western North Carolina. So, thank you.

**Jason:** Well, my pleasure, Luke. Thank you for the opportunity. It has been an incredible God thing, to be where we're at. And I hope I'm not the gag gift, but you know, but seriously, I'm thrilled to be walking with you all, and so many churches, in this time.

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