



Five Ways to Reengage People Who Have Not Returned to Church

This article is from [ChurchLeaders.com](https://www.churchleaders.com) by Ken Braddy.

Online worship and Zoom Bible study groups have been a lifesaver for churches during COVID-19. People have been able to worship together even though they were apart, and Bible study groups have continued to meet in a virtual environment. But it's time to reengage people who haven't returned to church.



While the benefits of technology have been great, we have also discovered a downside. Individuals and families have grown accustomed to the convenience of online worship and Bible study. Churches that have reopened worship or groups are finding that between 30–40 % of the people have returned for on-campus interactions (*this will likely rise in time, especially when a vaccine is introduced*). The highest attendance I've heard of so far is 50 % of pre-COVID attendance levels. Online Bible study groups that started in March with record highs are struggling to keep people engaged several months into our physical distancing. Church leaders are wondering just how many people (as a percent) will ultimately return. No one knows, and hindsight will be 20/20.



The current decline in attendance should not be a surprise to anyone though leaders have been predicting this. George Barna's group has chronicled the weekly attendance of people from different generations. There has been a noticeable decline of in-person weekly attendance. COVID-19 is simply accelerating the trend. With everything in flux right now (*some churches are reopening worship only, some are reopening both worship and groups, and others are not reopening groups at all*), how will we reengage people who have not returned? How will we reengage a percentage of our church members who once attended with more regularity than they have over the past five months?



Five Ways to Reengage People Who Haven't Returned

1. Reengage people online.

We all may have to face the fact that some of our people are not coming back to church—at least church on the church campus. That doesn't mean they are not connecting to our churches in some meaningful way. Their new preference may be to connect with us online. A way to reach people who have not returned is to provide quality online options for them—both worship and groups. Remember that nothing is going to scale like digital can. You will reach more people more quickly than your physical church plant ever could. Don't fight it. Don't reject it. Embrace the opportunities to advance the gospel through technology. Help your church members “unlearn” that church must take place on the campus. Or on Sunday. Or on Wednesday.

Carey Nieuwhoff has said, “Deciding that digital is your default doesn't mean you'll never gather in person. On the contrary, if you really embrace it, it will mean you gather more people in person because you're reaching more people. If you don't embrace digital as your new default, your church will probably continue to function like a mall in the age of Amazon. If you do embrace digital as your new default, making a bold announcement that you're not meeting in person for the remainder of the year (*like Andy Stanley recently did*) doesn't threaten the mission at all. In fact, it might advance it. Of all the strategies available to you as a church leader, digital has the greatest potential. Digital church scales in a way that physical church doesn't and can't.” This is going to require churches to invest in technology, training, and personnel who can lead the way in the church's efforts to reach people online. It also means starting new virtual groups and making it easy for guests to assimilate into existing groups that are already online each week.

2. Reengage people the old-fashioned way.

If some of your people haven't returned to the church, go analog. Pick up the phone and make a call. Write a handwritten note. Encourage a deacon or the person's group leader to make a short porch visit. While you could send an email or a text, resist the quick and easy path. Reach out to the unengaged in a more personal way.

3. Reengage people by starting new groups.

If people have been out of the habit of attending worship and their Bible study groups, one strategy for reengaging them is to start new groups. Absentees are often reticent to return because of embarrassment they feel from being gone for so long. If your church starts new groups, those unengaged families can easily slide back in without drawing a lot of attention to themselves. Every new group you start will reach 10 people on average.

4. Reengage people by sending them study materials.

A friend of mine, Bruce Raley, is the executive pastor and education leader at a megachurch in the Nashville area. He recently mailed *personal study guides* to group members that he hadn't seen on his church campus in a while. First Baptist Hendersonville was pleased when many absent group members returned to a Bible study group after receiving their new Bible study materials.

5. Reengage people through “care groups.”

If your church's Bible study groups are arranged into *care groups*, reaching the unengaged people in your church is going to be much easier! *Care groups* are sub-groups of each Bible study group. Normally a *care group* has a leader and three to four couples or up to six or eight individuals. The *care group* leader's job is to shepherd this smaller “group within a group.” Ask your church's *care group* leaders to begin an intentional campaign to contact every person for whom they are responsible. If your church doesn't have a *care group* ministry, this is the perfect time to begin one so that you can reengage every person on your church's ministry list.

