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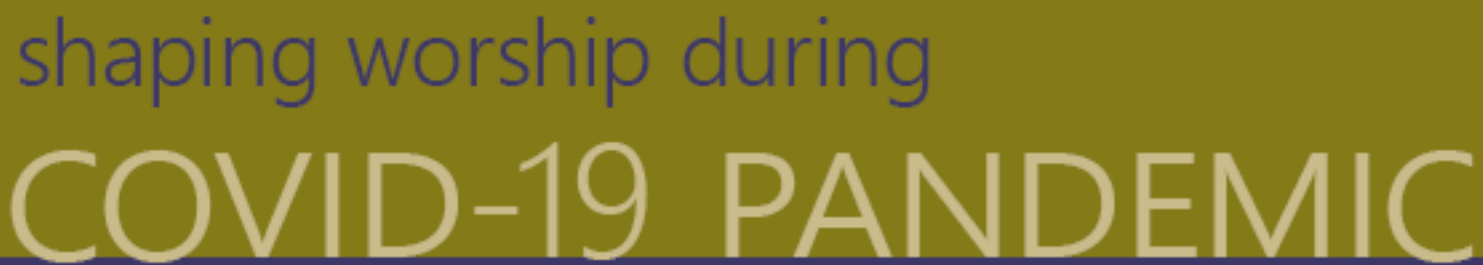
Shaping Worship during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Asking Good Questions in Chinese-Language Evangelical Churches in Vancouver, British Columbia

In this edited conversation, Herbert Tsang shares how to use a mix of digital and old-fashioned ways to help worshipers and community members stay connected. He suggests good questions to think about regarding how technology and COVID-19 will form churches and worshipers.

By: [Herbert H. Tsang](#), [Joan Huyser-Honig](#)

Tags: [chinese](#), [coronavirus](#), [covid-19](#), [covid-19 series](#), [technology](#), [worship planning](#)

Conversation posted on April 6, 2020



shaping worship during
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Herbert Tsang: [Church Music Ministry of Canada](#) president; [Trinity Western University](#) professor of computing science and mathematics

Current city: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Denominational context: Evangelical Chinese-speaking congregations

Worship roles: Tsang's passions are [congregational singing](#) and [intergenerational worship](#). He wrote *Worship —You, Me and Him: Church Music* (Seed Press, 2008). For more than fifteen years, he wrote a syndicated monthly column on Christian worship for Chinese Christians in North America.

COVID-19 situation (as of March 22, 2020): Church Music Ministry of Canada members come from many local Chinese Christian churches. The need to move to online worship came rather swiftly, and many local Christian events are canceled. Churches with more resources were able to test-drive the technology in early March. Others are still experimenting and trying to pick the right platform, such as [Facebook Live](#), [YouTube Live](#), or [Zoom](#).

We often expect people will have a smartphone and internet access. This assumption is not necessarily accurate, especially for older congregation members. Even if the church can broadcast its worship service, some members have problems accessing it. This issue is especially severe in churches with mostly elderly members because most do not have the technical expertise to host or access worship services online.

With people practicing social distancing and not supposed to be visiting each other, if they run into a technical issue, there is no one to help them. So many just give up. One local large mainstream church decided not to do any online broadcast worship service. Instead, the leadership asked the congregation to join another church's online worship. Worship planners are discussing which elements are essential for worship and whether to tape [record] or broadcast live.

What's working well—or not: I received feedback that it is difficult to concentrate and focus on the broadcast. There are many distractions at home, so it is not the same as worshipping in the sanctuary. It's challenging to be an active participant when viewing online worship, especially when no one is around you and you cannot hear other participants. Many musicians find it difficult to lead music in the online worship service. Some opt for playing a YouTube video as accompaniment.

Most helpful worship resources: We are sailing in uncharted territory, so I am still searching. The [recent CICW materials](#) have been useful. Some churches are unsure about [copyright issues for broadcasting newer worship music](#), so they use hymns from their neglected hymnals instead.

Needs, questions, or insights to share: We must encourage each other to think about which worship elements are essential and how to do them with such limited resources. If we try to copy everything from regular worship services into an online medium, we will fail.

"The technological divide among the 'haves' and 'have nots' is real. We need to re-think our assumptions in order to have 'full, conscious, and active participation.'" We have been used to a divided mode of designing and leading small sections of worship. There was seldom one person doing more than one role, such as leading the liturgy, leading music, or reading Scripture. We must remember that technology is not neutral. We are formed by the technology that we employ. Maybe after this saga we can rethink our modes of operation. Also, the technological divide among the "haves" and "have nots" is real. We need to rethink our assumptions in order to have full, conscious, and active participation.

LEARN MORE

Learn more about [Church Music Ministry of Canada](#) and its recent [Vital Worship Grants](#) project. [Internet access in Canada varies](#) by age, education, and language. If you speak Chinese, check out Herbert Tsang's [Bibliography on Worship Studies](#).

Comments



Herbert Tsang

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[Streaming Worship Services and Copyrights in a Time of Social Distancing](#)

In an age of social distancing and remote, online worship due to COVID-19, churches are figuring out how to honor copyrights in entirely new ways, and companies are giving special allowances during this time.

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[A COVID-19 Prayer Based on Psalm 51](#)

Calvin University professor Chad Engbers prayed this prayer on March 12, 2020 during the daily chapel service. This was one of the last chapel services conducted before the campus closed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

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[COVID-19 and Worship: Resources for Churches Adapting to Social Isolation](#)

As containment of COVID-19 forces your worshiping community to implement shelter-in-place worship and practice social isolation, we offer these resources to help you plan and cope in ways that encourage and support your community. These resources were initially created from events and in response to different

situations and can be adapted for worship that encourages prayer and Christian community during this time of social distancing necessary to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

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