

Renew Rebuild, part 2:

Rotation.org 8/23/221 Coffee Chat

Gathering summary, breakout session recaps, Zoom Chat comments, and links

We started our gathering time with a poll, asking "I am currently planning lessons for..." There were some comments in chat related to the poll:

Michele Amick-Madison WI: So if someone is planning for October does that mean you are not starting your ministry year until October??

Debbie Fisher, Cape Elizabeth, Maine: I'm planning for September-Advent.

Beth Tobin, Board Member, Olympia, WA: I'm planning for multiple months at a time. Our programming starts in September.

Karen Burzinski - Wisconsin: Starting September 19. so the first unit will go into October.

Debbie Fisher, Cape Elizabeth, Maine: My approach is the same as Beth's.

Michele Amick-Madison WI: I am planning for fall... figure it out a week at a time.

Roberta Kearney, Doylestown Pa: HI Michele, we are starting in person the last week of September. I am planning mailings for September, as school starts on August 30th.

Meghan Adrian, Coquitlam BC: We're doing similar to Michele. We had a soft start for Sunday school in July

Beth Tobin, Board Member, Olympia, WA: That sounds nice Michele and Meghan. I look forward to hearing more about your plans in our discussion.

After welcome, prayer, and introduction, board member Cathy Walz shared some thoughts related to the Minor Prophets and returning from exile to start our conversation. Some key points:

We were in an exile of sorts when shutdowns began in March 2020. There were parallels to her study of the Israelites during their exile in Babylon and the Minor Prophets at the time. It was – and is -- a strange new world.

Some Israelites were comfortable where they were in Babylon in exile and did not return, just as some of our church members may not return, or volunteers may not sign up again. And others came back later.

Just as Israelites ran into roadblocks as they rebuilt walls in Jerusalem, we are finding roadblocks to restarting.

Some returning exiles were sad that the new Temple was smaller and less grand than the old one, just as we may be sad about the changes in our programs.

But the prophets scolded the people and told them to get their priorities reordered. Where should our time and resources be focused as we return?

Ezra and Nehemiah offered good examples of keeping focused on God's word and of combining prayer and action. Prayer was Nehemiah's first step, not last.

We spent some time in breakout rooms, discussing these questions:

1. In response to Cathy's reminder of the Israelites returning from exile: How are you and your team working to combine prayer with action?
2. What do you see as your biggest challenge in the coming months? (How can the rotation.org community help you with that?)

Recaps of conversation about those two questions from the five breakout groups:

Michele Amick reported for Carol's group:

Prayer and action ideas:

Google survey to members encouraging volunteering for positions, including prayer. Give those volunteers specific things to be praying for.

Prayer lists can be long and overwhelming. Set up a phone tree to be regularly in touch with families to find specific needs.

Sometimes the action in response to prayer is to wait for God to make clear what we should be doing.

We need faith and works and prayer in action. Develop a habit. Consistency can be a challenge, especially in these uncertain days (inertia after our routine was disrupted).

Prayer walk – walk around neighborhood and pray.

Biggest challenges:

Welcome back events have been planned and needed to be rescheduled.

Need to balance fear of outbreak and wanting to gather.

Finding encouraging words for letters to families without being judgmental or pushy.

Using technology to bring people in.

Combatting inertia by offering online class at the same time as in-person (so they get used to getting up on Sunday mornings again).

Lessons from rotation.org are flexible and have been a great help this past year – online, in-person, sending things home, meeting multiple needs.

Chat comments in response to some of challenges shared by this group:

Beth Tobin, Board Member, Olympia, WA: We are intentionally NOT doing a homecoming or rally Sunday this year because we don't want to exclude anyone and there are people who are not ready to be back. We are looking at this as a year of re-gathering, re-building, re-forming etc. and plan to celebrate in June.

Amy Frasier (she/her) Montgomery, Al: We have been worshiping in person in our care groups (we are small enough where 2 can come on their assigned Sunday) to maintain social distancing and masks are mandatory.

Debbie Fisher, Cape Elizabeth, Maine: Someone in our group said we're allowing parishioners to "vote w/ their feet" - we'll try something for a month or two and if it doesn't work, they'll adapt/adjust.

Carol Hulbert - Board Member - Michigan: in June of 2022 Beth?

Beth Tobin: Yes, June of 2022. We are using an "re" word each month through the learning year. And we are the ones voting with our feet. :)

Cathy reported for her group:

Prayer:

Pray the problem or need--not the solution that you want.

Arrow prayers as you are going about your day.

One person said this was a reminder to get back to more praying--personally and as a ministry.

Another noted that the prayers before meetings have gotten longer (with more concerns and feelings mentioned)--so it was more than just a formulaic prayer to start a meeting.

Another noted that they relied on prayer more as they were debating stepping out and doing summer camp as a solo activity (and not with a local church that they usually did it with). They felt called to do the program and it went well and was a blessing.

Challenges:

With Covid increasing and more kids affected--families are not coming to in-person church so they have been trying hybrid (in-person and Zoom); however families are Zoomed out.

Gave families the same story Bible--would "assign" a story with some suggested questions and such. Families would do it for a little while and then interest would lag. Now trying to find something new.

Once again, the question of "Is it safe to come back?"

Families hesitant to come back to in-person since they have been doing online church for so long that the kids have forgotten how to worship and be in church.

One church tried something different: their schools have been in-person--got out early on Fridays--so 2 times a month they would have an hour-long program (using Rotation). It has been received well and is replacing Sunday morning programming (at least for the present) since families aren't coming back to church.

Aren't sure how much of the online content and such is actually being watched

Some reported challenges with the church leadership

They don't want to change in response to current conditions--just keep doing the same thing from before the shutdown.

Focused on growing numbers--but there is value of kids (even in smaller numbers) growing in their faith. How do you measure success?

Chat comments in response:

Debbie Fisher, Cape Elizabeth, Maine: I am the most competitive person I know, have high standards and am VERY hard on myself, but one thing that I'm trying to convince myself of is that we have to stop thinking in terms of #s. If we provide great programming for just one or two or three kids, we're making a difference. Yes, it's a ton of work ... but (God willing) in the end it'll be worth it...

Beth Tobin: I agree. Let God worry about the numbers. Offer an intentional and quality program and word will get out and people will come.

Beth's group:

Challenges:

Construction impacting space availability?

Using tents for outdoor classrooms? How will that work as weather gets colder?

How do you do hybrid and in-person at the same time? Lots of questions and discussion about hybrid.

Families burned out on zoom.

Luanne's group report:

Prayer:

Personal prayers for kids and Sunday school.

Challenges:

Online SS since last September, going fairly well.

Godly play in Zoom has been working.

One person in group getting ready to start back in person in September.

One church started in-person last year when people said they were ready to come back, but no one came.

Need to do the best we can under current circumstances.

How do you sanitize if people come back? One idea to give each child their own supply bin for art.

Chat responses to this question:

Debbie Fisher, Cape Elizabeth, Maine: We will have a sanitation station @ the entrance of every classroom.

Amy Crane, board president, Louisiana: Re supplies: I believe Germs don't live on objects from week until the next?

Debbie Fisher: I believe that's correct, Amy.

Beth Tobin, Board Member, Olympia, WA: Pediatrician advice to us was that materials for children should all be individual because children tend to put their hands in their nose and mouth, so that there is a higher spread of virus to children through materials.

Beth Tobin: Oops, for the morning of SS, not from week to week SS. For individual supplies.

Cathy Walz--Board Member--Chicagoland: Beth--was that pediatrician advice regarding materials shared during the hour of Sunday school--as opposed to using the same materials a week later?

Beth Tobin: The guidance was for our VBS program, so it would be for the morning of VBS, not from week to week.

Roberta Kearney, Doylestown Pa: we are removing non-cleanable items from our classrooms. We will use Lysol or Microban 24, the approved disinfectants, to clean all items each week.

Michele Amick-Madison WI: our preschool has sanitizers that spray onto things that get used.... that could work for the art supplies??

How to do online learning without losing personal connection with kids? How do you get that connection back, especially if it is a while before we are back in person?

We did well during pandemic, but we need to get back to discipline of teaching important Bible stories to our children.

Chris Epstein shared for Robin's group:

Prayer ideas:

Everyone in committee prays, going around group – result is that all seem to be more invested in children's ministry.

Small committees defaulted to only the leader praying. We found prayer partners for each ministry from people not ready to come back in person. Give them specific prayer points for the ministry. Results in others who normally would not volunteer are invested in your ministry.

Challenges:

Group consensus – We are worn out. Short on volunteers.

Family resistance to things.

Parents in one church want things to change – weren't happy with things before pandemic. The parents want a lot of changes now, while we are also trying to figure out how to make things work coming out of Covid.

Additional feedback and comments, typed in Chat comments:

Kathy Fazio: What curriculums are you using this fall? We are using 1) Sparks 2) Spirit and Truth (RCL & Rotation).

Meghan Adrian, Coquitlam BC: We are using Rotation

Amy Crane, board president, Louisiana: We are using Dwell from Faith Alive

Debbie Fisher, Cape Elizabeth, Maine: We use Godly Play for pre-school/K and I write the curricula for our rotation program for 1st-5th graders - with A LOT of help from rotation.org!

Michele Amick-Madison WI: We have 3 public school teachers on our Board of Ed. None of them thought we should do hybrid. So that is how we decided to offer in person classes and Zoom classes at the same time but not in the same room.

Beth Tobin, Board Member, Olympia, WA: We are using materials from rotation.org or writing our own. Doing the rotation model with our whole congregation. We are looking at doing a Bible study that is recorded that people can watch asynchronously, and then respond to the story while they are at church with ideas for ways to respond at home.

Michele Amick: CPYU [Center for Parent/Youth Understanding] has a podcast and back in June they had a whole week of interviews with author, Christian Smith, who had done research about the influence/role that parents have in the passing on of faith to their children. I have been highlighting those points in our monthly newsletter to get parents thinking about this role.

LINK to the first podcast in the series of five: <https://cpyu.org/resource/christian-smith-1/>

Hannah Altman, Harrisonburg VA: I have to go now, but I'm glad I joined this meeting today! I'm new to rotation.org so if anyone has any tips or advice, I'd love any kind of direction - my email is haltman@massanuttenchurch.org

A few people stayed online for continued conversation after the hour-long meeting ended. Here is a summary along with the chat comments and resources related to that continued conversation:

Michelle Amick shared more about what her church is planning to start in September to include those not ready to return to in-person. Her church has three public school teachers on the church's board of education; they recommended not doing hybrid – that is online and in-person at the same time and in the same place, in particular because of time lag on Zoom and awkwardness of conversation for those online and also distraction to those in person. So they will have one or two classrooms for in-person rotation classes during normal Sunday morning time. At same time on Sunday morning, in a church office, one of the public school teachers will meet online for a multi-age workshop with the children at home. Using workshop rotation model, all of the classes will study the same Bible story for several weeks and will do the same workshops (in different weeks). This will have to be adjusted if there is a small number of children in-person and more online – that is, fewer groups meeting in person. (She feels they will end up with more online than in-person.) Lessons will need to be modified for online use; the school teachers should be able to revise “traditional” rotation lesson plans to work online.

Some suggestions were made:

Videotape the in-person lesson activity (such as a science experiment) to show as part of the online class the next week, and then have discussion and reflection part with the online group.

Person leading online Zoom would need to be comfortable with technology.

We talked about safe child policies on Zoom. Two adults required? A parent must be in the room while a child is on Zoom? Background checks for everyone, including those online. (Different churches have different policies.)

Amy asked Michele to be sure to share her lesson adaptations for the online Zoom class at rotation.org to help others. And also to share her suggestions of what worked and what did not work so others can benefit from her experience. Sharing is so important because everyone is so stretched for time these days.

And a question in the chat box that did not get answered: "are you going to send supplies --or a supply list -- so that the kids at home can do the activity?"

Debbie asked about plans for fall. What themes or Bible stories are you planning?

Chris Epstein: Daniel in Lion's Den; Fiery Furnace; Advent; Nicodemus; Good Samaritan; Jesus goes to the cross; Psalm 23; Gideon. ("I usually don't plan this far in advance. Renewed energy this summer.") Chris noted that her scope and sequence is fluid.

Michele Amick: Six year scope and sequence that we just repeat (have been doing rotation for 20 years). This fall we have Cain and Abel, Noah's ark, tower of Babel. Haven't looked to see what's next, but it is all scheduled.

Debbie Fisher: It has become (embarrassingly) obvious that her kids need to learn Bible basics again. Beginning this fall with Bible Bound. (Chris said she did Bible basics this summer, and she is willing to share lesson ideas. Pinterest is also a good source.) Others noted she should not be embarrassed because with the gap time not meeting, a lot of children have forgotten the Bible basics.

Karen Burzinski: We have a six year scope and sequence that fell apart because of the Covid shutdown. Rest of church is having a month-long season of Creation so we will start there (especially outdoor things that parents may be more comfortable with). We will do Advent and still need to figure out what is in-between. We try to incorporate Bible basics in every lesson.

Meghan Adrian: four year scope and sequence. Series of miracles until Christmas, and then probably the book of Acts.

Amy reminded everyone that rotation.org has easy at-home lessons that might work for hybrid, too. They are designed to use less supplies (and use things that are available at home) in a shorter time and smaller space, and could possibly be adapted for Zoom groups. Take a look here: <https://www.rotation.org/forum/Bible-lessons-for-families-at-home>

Recruiting volunteers and volunteer shortage: an idea that came up last month was to have family classes. That way the parents are in the room with the children and you only need to recruit one adult to lead the class – the parents serve as the additional adult in the room (for safety) and also are helpers for the children's lesson activities.

Intergenerational multi-family circle storytime has been working well for Meghan in her smaller church since they started it in July. May not be permanent, but it is gratifying now to see older kids helping with younger kids. Parents have enjoyed being there and connecting with one another. (Especially the new moms in the congregation.) It is not a requirement for a parent to be there, but each family is sending at least one parent. This allows for better social distance, as each family is at their own table. Meghann is keeping it short and light and not expecting too much of Sunday morning.

Michele said last fall when they were open for a few months (before Covid numbers went up again) they had family Sunday school. Each family had a table, and activities were done together at the table with their own box of supplies. It worked well, but feedback from parents was that this year they want their kids back with other kids.

Question: did teacher lead discussion or did parents have handouts and lead discussion? Both had small groups with 3-4 tables/families and teacher led discussion, although some activities were done as a family at table.

Question: was your family Sunday school during a Sunday school hour or during worship? Michele's church had their family Sunday school after worship. Meghan's church has it during worship (children are in sanctuary for first 15-20 minutes of worship, then dismissed to class); still tinkering with it because they used to have two separate worship services. Now just one service (so fewer volunteers need to be recruited).

Kathy Fazio: Used to have two services with coffee hour in between. With Sunday school at the same time as church, a lot of families seem to have normalized not worshipping after going through confirmation. Trying to keep Sunday school before or after worship as a temporary thing and hoping that will stick. Not having Sunday school during worship would help with the volunteer problem. Having separate Sunday school would allow time to build community, which is important especially with fewer opportunities to gather during Covid.

Thank you for your time and input! Remember you can always reach out to us at the [rotation.org](https://www.rotation.org) site for further discussion and also with specific questions.