

Worship Liaison Report

September 25, 2020

Paul Hamaty, Vestry Liaison

WORSHIP SERVICES AT ST. MARY'S

Many services are offered at St. Mary's throughout the week including a contemporary service, several traditional services, and a healing service. The Worship Ministries at St. Mary's consist of groups of people who volunteer their time and talents to enhance the many worship services at our church. With the onset of COVID-19, the church transitioned to a fully virtually offering of its services via the church's website, Facebook, and YouTube. In-person worship resumed the week of August 23rd with a limit of 10 attendees per service. The number of attendees was increased to 25 per service the week of September 7th. Attendance, overall, has been much lower than anticipated as services are not to capacity.

The Contemporary Family Worship (CFW)

Using multimedia technology and a full praise band (limited during COVID-19 to 2 people), this service at 9am on Sundays offers a spirit-filled experience for all ages. While less formal and family-oriented, the liturgy remains rooted in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. Church school remains suspended due to COVID-19.

In addition to in-person CFW in the sanctuary at 9am, there is also a CFW drive-in Eucharist with up to 20 carloads of people. Fr. Christian conducts the service from outside the youth building, and it is broadcast simultaneously in the sanctuary. These services are well attended but again not to capacity. The music is led by Pat Channing, Praise Band Director.

The Traditional Services

Services are offered Tuesday (12:10pm healing service), Wednesday (9:30am), Thursday (10am), Saturday (5pm), Sunday (7am), and Sunday (11am). Holy Eucharist is celebrated at each service, and all Baptized Christians are welcome to receive. Our worship is rooted in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. The music at the traditional services is led by Brandon Glick, Music Ministry Director.

During COVID-19, all services are offered virtually and with limited in-person capacity. The choir remains suspended but there is a cantor at the 11am Sunday service. With the resumption of limited in-person worship, it remains clear that the composition of our current pool of volunteers is changing and the number of available trained volunteer hours is decreasing for various reasons.

As we discussed this past January at the vestry retreat, we have the opportunity to be creative with how we approach our worship. The various services have their unique constituencies, with the Sunday services getting much more attention. How can we work together as a vestry and parish to be more holistic in our approach to our worship services? This is particularly challenging in the COVID-19 environment as many more parishioners than initially thought are still reluctant to return to in-person worship.

LOGISTICS

It takes a cadre of volunteers to effectively execute all of our worship services. These include the Worship Coordinator, worship assistants (intercessors, lay readers, chalice bearers, acolytes, oblation bearers), ushers, greeters, vergers, and the altar guild. These volunteers are trained to assist the

*clergy and congregation each week in our services. **With the exception of ushers and limited altar guild, these functions remain suspended during COVID-19.***

With the changing demographics of existing volunteers coupled with the concerns and constraints of COVID-19, we need to develop a pipeline of volunteers, noting that these new volunteers going forward may not have as much discretionary time. We are challenged to determine the appropriate paradigm to recruit, train, and keep new volunteers related to all the aspects of worship.

Scheduling/Registering/Seating Assignments

Genie DuPell is currently responsible for maintaining the schedule of services in the online registration system. She sets them up and then emails Ben to make them “live” in the system. Sue Riddell is currently responsible for extracting this data and creating the seating charts for each service that are then emailed to the ushers for each particular service. There have been recurring issues with the online registration system being unavailable or allowing people to register after the cutoff times. Genie and Sue are backups for each other, and kudos to them for going above and beyond to provide the most current information for each service.

With respect to the registration system, there are continued issues with the “CSV” port being down which prevents downloading the information to create seating assignments. Ben has been excellent in getting it back up and running but that is not a long-term solution. The root cause of this issue needs to be identified. To whom should this problem be escalated? Additionally, there is some confusion with registering as when you go into the system and register, you then have to like “check out” again. We still have people registering late, which is problematic as sometimes there is not enough lead time to notify the ushers. Moreover, the system is letting them register past the deadline.

Ushers

Prior to in-person worship, ushers were not needed. With the resumption of in-person worship, ushers are needed at all of our services in order to welcome parishioners and visitors as well as to ensure that the proper COVID-19 safety protocols are followed during the services. Paul Hamaty and Sue Riddell volunteered to train ushers, and Paul is responsible for the usher schedule at the point. We still need a permanent head usher to replace Alec Connolly.

We are in critical need of a larger pool of trained ushers to cover the seven (7) services held each week in the sanctuary. The usher list provided to Paul had 45+ names on it; however, barely half of the people responded, and of those that did, the majority were not yet comfortable with returning to in-person worship, resulting in the current pool of only 22 trained ushers.

The Worship Coordinator *This function remains suspended during COVID-19.*

The primary worship coordinator assigns all the service duties for the traditional services and oversees the worship coordinators.

At present, it seems that Charlie Lippincott is the de facto primary worship coordinator as Bob Schneider told me he has resigned from this position. Other people who have participated I am told are Mary Shaw, Alec Connolly, and Bob Schneider. Currently, this group wants to know when limited scheduling of acolytes, chalice bearers, and readers (lessons and prayers) will resume. Once that decision is made, it is anticipated that there will be difficulty finding people who are willing and able to serve in these duties, as many are reluctant to come onto campus at this time. Additionally, they will need some additional support and training (e.g., take your mask off at the lectern to read). There

is no one currently in a position to do that. Further it has been expressed that there is a lack of communication (and maybe structure) with how we are going about reopening with respect to resuming acolytes, readers, etc.

From the Verger's point of view, he is on sabbatical until the epidemic is over and we are able to return to a typical Episcopal service with choir, processions, acolytes, etc. Once we have a better sense of when we may return to a more typical service, we will need recruit and training new acolytes. We should develop this pipeline sooner rather than later.

Altar Guild

Joanie Ward is the outgoing head of the altar guild with Anne Hoffmann training as the incoming head. The altar guild is responsible for the preparation of the altars and flowers in both the sanctuary and Ross Hall (currently suspended during the renovation) and for the vestments for all of the services held at St. Mary's.

The Altar Guild has pretty much been shut down since March, and the traditional preparations are suspended. Only Joannie and Anne are involved in setting up and clearing, and silk flower arrangements are being used in place of live flowers. Joanie and Anne alternate sets of days for set up and cleaning so that only 1 member is there at any given time. A major frustration is not knowing when more guild members will be allowed back in to serve which challenges the guild in getting participants trained on the new process and getting them involved. Anne would like to start getting two members back at a time and determine access procedures as no one has a key at present. Joanie and Anne do not want to lose current members but that is a concern.

Concern was also expressed about the sacristy being used a dressing area for members of the altar party and ushers and others who just want to hang around and chat. Traditionally, the sacristy is where the priest can have quiet time to prepare and pray.

The Eucharistic Visitor Ministry *This function remains suspended during COVID-19.*

Coordinated by Bob Brown, this ministry takes the Eucharist to home bound and assisted living facilities to parishioners and others requesting the visit. Prior to COVID-19, communion was provided to approximately 50-70 people per week.

This ministry has been on hold since the end of February, and may not resume until there is a vaccine. Currently, the eucharistic visitors (EVs) are not allowed to visit patients in the hospital or the assisted living centers. Although the team holds meetings via ZOOM, it has been difficult to keep continuity and feeling connected. Given this challenge, there are several EVs who will not be returning to the ministry. The main concern at this point in time is the need to rebuild the ministry and overcoming the EVs' concerns regarding their safety as most of them are in a vulnerable age group.

MUSIC AT ST. MARY'S

CFW Music Ministry, Pat Channing, Praise Band Director

The Praise Band leads the music for the Contemporary Service. Music is chosen to support the scripture readings.

During COVID-19, a modified Praise Band consisting of an instrumentalist and a singer is in place. Pat

has performed in person as a solo for every CFW service since we went virtual. Carla and Sal have contributed videos, and Carla is currently performing live with Pat. Despite technical glitches, things seem to be running as well as they can. With the renovation of the Pittenger Center, the CFW musicians are "squeezed" into the sanctuary. The stage area is small and maintaining a 6' distance can be challenging. Having readers in the playing area is a little disconcerting. Pat's biggest challenge right now is arranging songs for just one or two people and making use of the sanctuary PA system which is not set up for contemporary music. Tom Winter does an excellent job considering the gear challenges and has kept us going thru this difficult time. Pat would like to be able to add a piano player to improve the music. The CFW musicians feel blessed to be working at St. Mary's thru this trying time.

Traditional Service Music Ministry, Brandon Glick, Music Ministry Director

The traditional music program at St. Mary's (choir, concerts, special music) is largely on hold during COVID-19.

The closing of the office and church to parishioners occurred six months ago, and the music program has operated on a "bare bones" basis since then. The guidelines were extremely strict with limited people allowed in the church, which impacts the music. For services, it has been a vocalist and organist, and both of them are also covering other duties such as video controls, reading the lessons, prayers of the people, etc.

Since March, there has been no choir at the traditional service. Instead, Brandon has utilized a cantor to sing hymns, anthems, and service music. This will remain the case until ensemble singing is deemed safe. Our main vocalist in the service has been Colleen Dougherty, with additional support from Carla Holbrook and Paul Hamaty.

Brandon has been able to continue a limited virtual concert series with themed programs (e.g., hope & thanksgiving, patriotism, Christmas in July) as well as piano and organ duets. All of these concerts have been very well received. (Anecdotally, I have heard from several parishioners that they would like to see more of these.) Reopening now allows for live concerts in addition to streaming, and there are plans for upcoming concerts. However, budget cuts make planning concerts more challenging. Brandon would like to plan concerts with local musicians but funds may need to be raised to cover the costs. He still hopes have some lively, festive Christmas concerts.

Recently, Jane Miller, Tom Winter and Brandon collaborated on a video series on hymns which was recently released.

The major challenge is what to do with the choir and the upcoming Christmas season. The choir has met many times on ZOOM but is not able to rehearse using that platform. Brandon is looking into software that might make it possible to create videos of the choir for the Christmas season.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE WORSHIP MINISTRY LIAISON

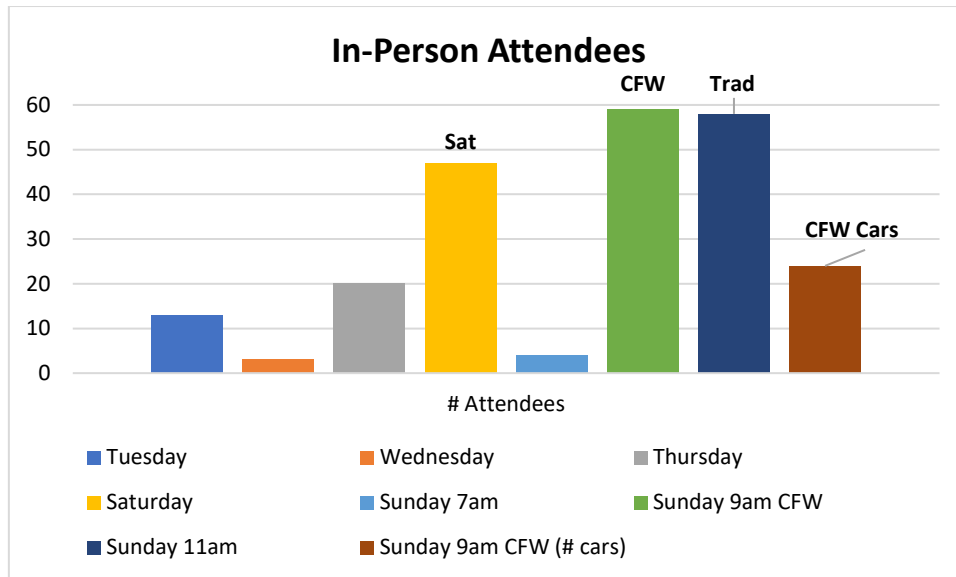
After speaking with various people coordinating the worship at St. Mary's, it would be beneficial to have a worship committee to provide some guidance, focus, and consistent communication to this myriad of volunteers. This is a common committee in many parishes, and is perhaps an idea we should explore.

STATISTICAL DATA

There are currently no processes in place to easily obtain, analyze, and report on the virtual attendance data. Going forward, clergy and staff may want to determine what data is relevant and how often it should be collected (probably monthly) and discussed at staff meetings.

In-person worship through September 21st:

The return to in-person worship was slower/less attended than initially forecast but the 3rd weekend in September provided a promising uptick in attendance. The chart below provides cumulative data from August 23rd through September 22nd, and we had a cumulative total of approximately 204 in-person attendees with 24 cars for drive-thru. As you can see, the CFW in-person and drive thru service is the top attended service with the Sunday traditional following closely behind it.



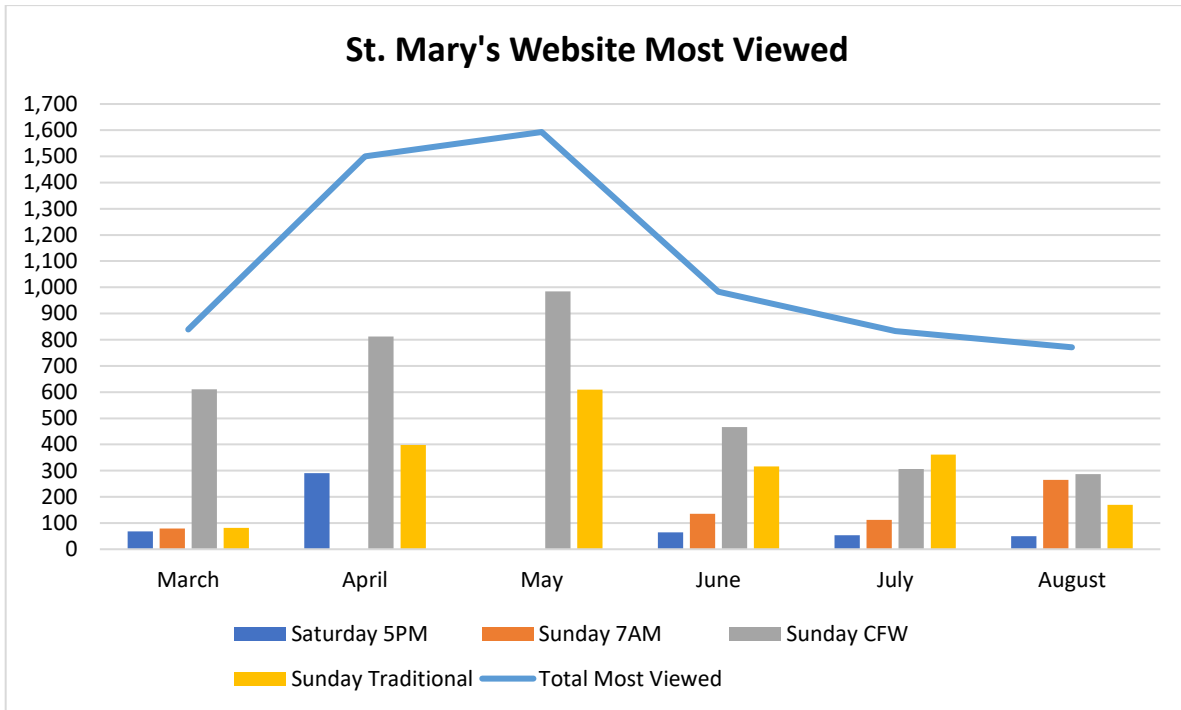
Virtual Worship

Since virtual worship began in March, people have had the opportunity to stream our services live and on-demand on 3 platforms: the church's website, YouTube, and Facebook. The charts below provide some insight into our reach and impact using virtual platforms and indicate that we are reaching thousands of more people than ever imagined. CFW virtual worship has been strong since March, and remains the most streamed service by far with the Sunday traditional being in 2nd place (CFW averaged twice the number of views on YouTube and three times the number of views on FB compared to the traditional service). The Saturday service seems to have gained more traction since June. The 7am service is no longer the top viewed service as it was when we started virtual services.

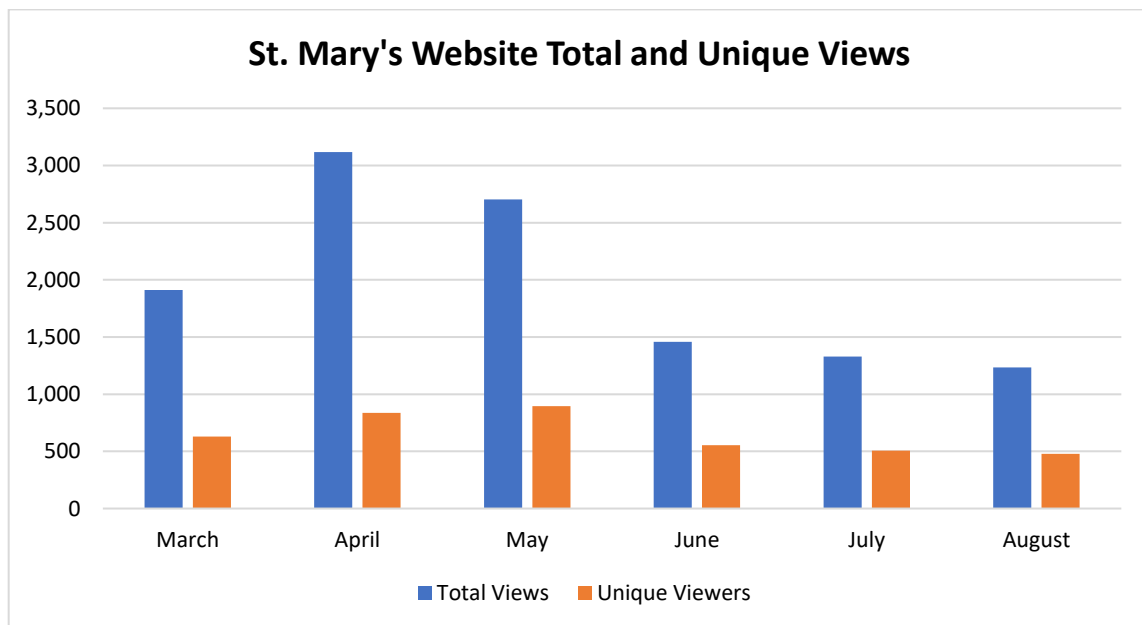
Even though we don't have a full month of September data, it is safe to say that virtual viewing did not decrease once we opened the doors for in-person. Fr. Christian opined that this solidifies the vision that we are no longer an in-person church that happens to livestream our services for a collection of folks. We are a hybrid church that offers a multi-location experience: in person and on-line. This new line of thinking will affect how we analyze data, develop our technology, leadership, craft mission, and budget.

Virtual Worship via stmarys-stuart.org Website:

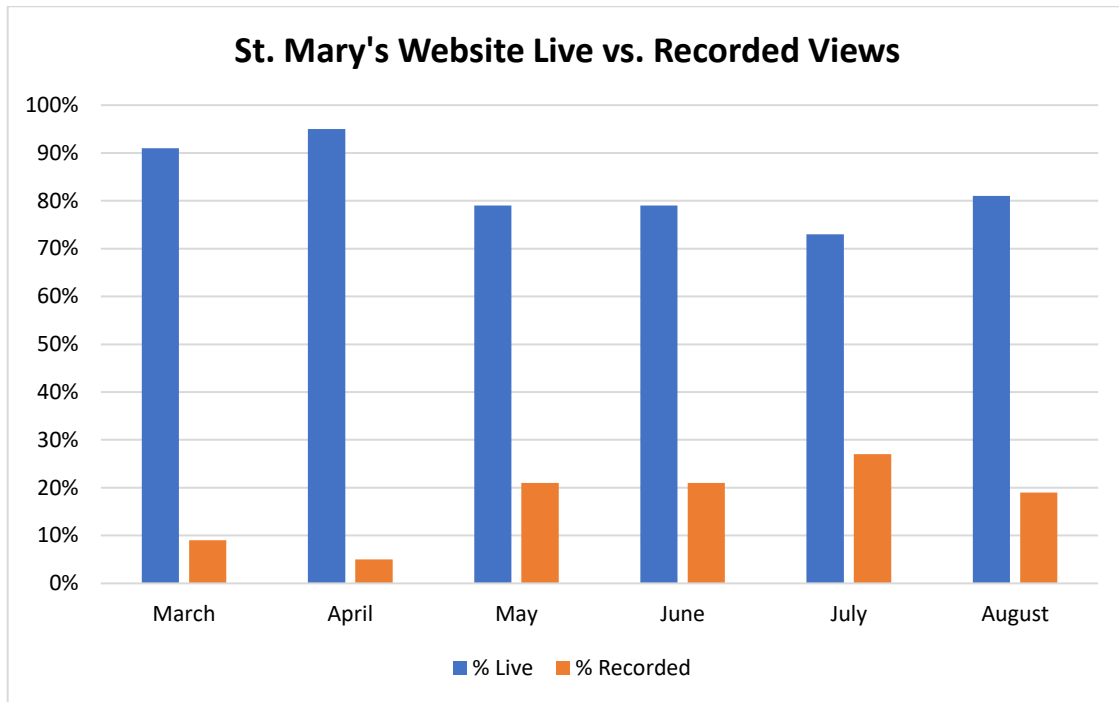
The peak “most viewed” services from our website was in April and May (1,600 most views) with CFW being the most viewed service. The number of views via the website has tapered off June through August but remains at steady levels. During this period, there was minimal traction for the 5pm service, but virtual attendance still exceeded historical in-person numbers. The 7am service peaked in August with over 250 views from the church’s website but does not have that traction at all on the other virtual platforms. The church’s website is being viewed from about 26 different states and 4 different countries.



With respect to total views to our website, we saw a similar peak in April and May (3,000+ views) with traffic tapering off June through August, but remaining relatively stable. A similar pattern is seen with unique views peaking at almost 900 views in May.

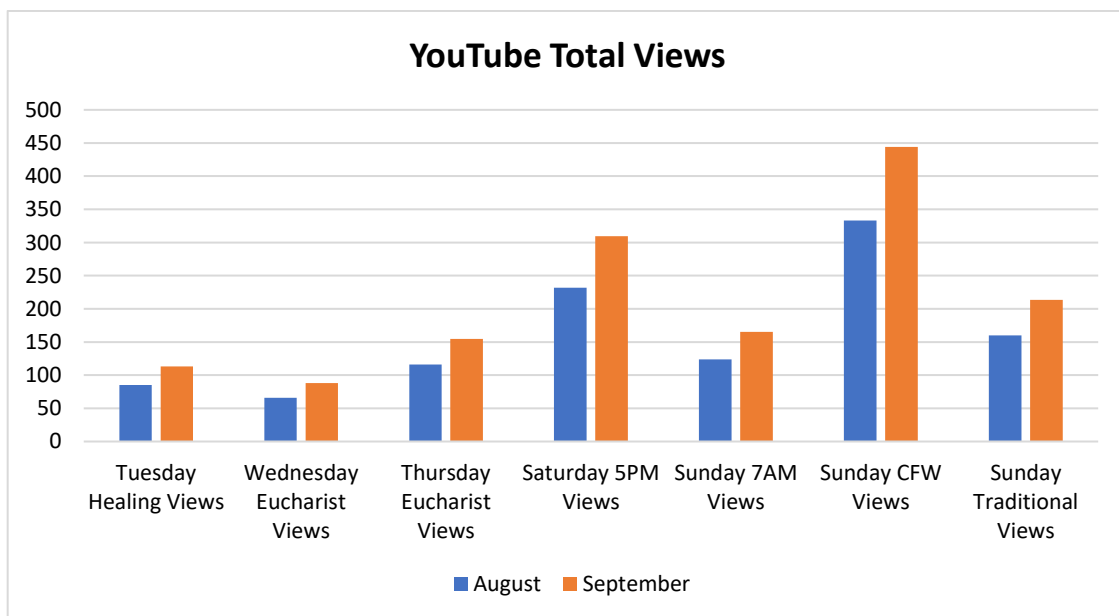


It is interesting to note that during March and April, most people (over 90%) were watching the services live at the appropriate times. Beginning in May, about 25% of the services were watched at a later point in time with about 75% streaming live.



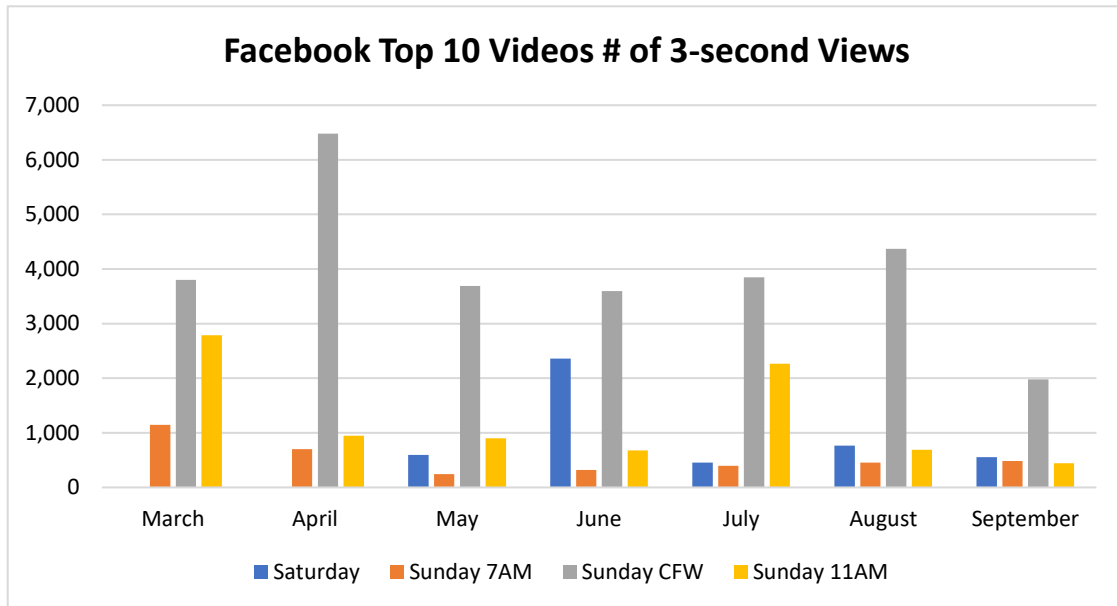
Virtual Worship via YouTube:

Please note that March through July data was insignificant so it is not reported (we don't know why; looking into that). Also, September data did not reflect a full month of data (as of the writing of this report) so I adjusted it to reflect such. Again, for YouTube, the top three streamed services remain the CFW, followed by the Saturday 5PM and the Sunday traditional.

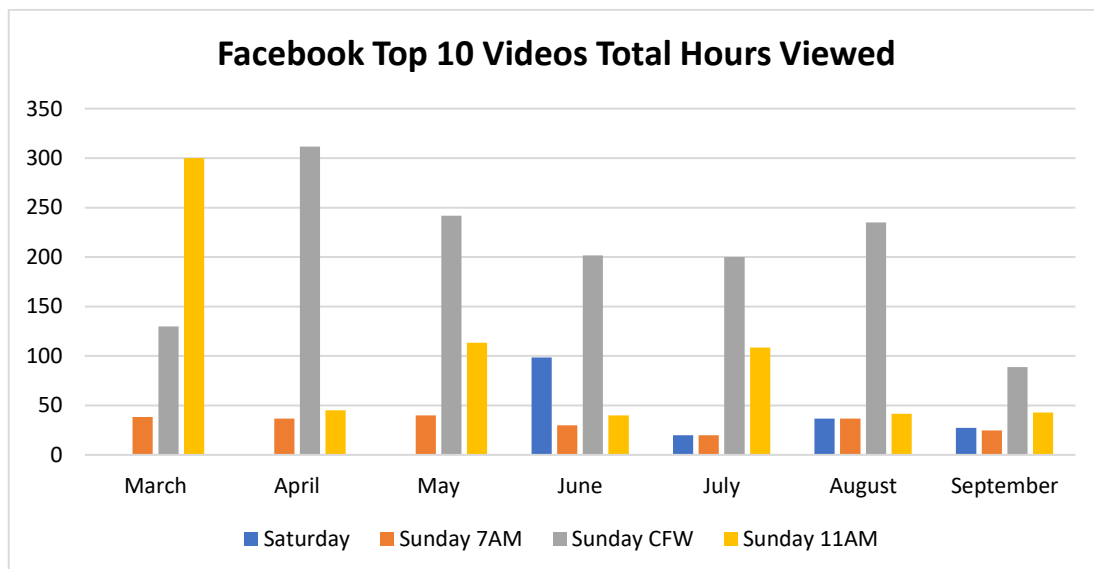


Virtual Worship via Facebook:

Please note that the FB activity was through September 23rd so September does not reflect a full month of data which is why the numbers appear low. As you can see, the CFW services receives at least twice as much FB activity than the other services, and in some cases, even four or five times the activity. This chart reflects the top 10 videos each month that had 3-second views. Although all the weekend services are consistently in the top 10, CFW and 11am traditional consistently outpace all other services.



Based on the next chart, it would seem that the same services in the top 10 3-second views are the same services in the top 10 for total hours viewed, indicating some consistency with the data although CFW is clearly the most watched, accumulating just under 60% of total hours combined in these services. The 11am traditional service accumulated just under 30% of total hours.



Respectively submitted,

Paul Hamaty