



Episode 6- Angela Craig, Pursuit Church Live

Announcer: ([00:04](#))

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Carrie Williams: ([00:37](#))

Welcome to another episode of the Future Church podcast. I am Carrie Williams, Exponential Special Projects Director and the founder and CEO of the Truth Republic. And we're so glad that you've joined us again today. I get the pleasure of doing an interview with one of our Austin event participators regarding our Future Church initiative. And I'm so excited to have her here with us today. Her name is Angela Craig, and she is going to tell us all about Pursuit Church Live. Welcome, Angela.

Angela Craig: ([01:09](#))

Oh, thank you. It's such a pleasure to be with you, Carrie.

Carrie Williams: ([01:13](#))

So Angela, I got the pleasure of really listening into the details of what Pursuit Church Live is. And I'm excited to dive in, and share with our audience a little bit more about what you're doing and how the digital world is colliding with the physical world and how other people could learn from what you're doing. And so why don't you just tell us a little bit more about what Pursuit Church Live is, a little bit of the history and what you're doing now?

Angela Craig: ([01:42](#))

Absolutely. So Pursuit Church Live is a digital only church and our main channel or platform, if you want to say is Facebook and how we started. We started in 2017 and the backstory is I'm a credentialed ordained minister with Assembly of God. I worked for the Northwest Ministry Network training leaders, strengthening developing leaders for 10 years for 340 churches in Washington and Idaho. That's who our area covers. And I also was volunteering in my church and working in the church. And the biggest question pastors were asking at the time and possibly still are, is the question, how do we get people to come to church? And as a leader, I was asking the same question about leadership events. People wanted training, but their schedules were so busy, they weren't coming and there was obstacles. And so in 2016, I asked if we could try some Facebook groups to help equip women of our churches to reach their communities for Jesus.



Angela Craig: ([02:53](#))

And so we started a group called Equip Her to train and release leaders. And within six months we had over 600 people and we were breaking people into small groups in person, meeting in our churches or coffee shop and then online and what was surprising to me... Well, there was a couple things. How quickly women developed relationships online. But the other thing was our online groups, which we're using Google Hangout at the time. We were talking about Skype. What's Skype? But Google Hangout to meet. And 40% of these online groups were women that were not going to one of our Assembly of God churches. In fact, they weren't attached to any local body in person group at all, but they wanted know Jesus, they wanted to serve him and they want to show their purpose in this world, really. And so I was like, wait a second.

Angela Craig: ([03:47](#))

What's happening here? This digital thing might be something. So I asked our superintendent, can I try doing a social media church? And he, Don Ross, incredibly supportive mentor, and he was like, well, you have to be obedient to what God is calling you to do. And at the time we had an initiative to plant a hundred churches in two years. And so I think I was number 74 or something. So, I went ahead and we launched in 2017. We were not approved by the national office because of course digital church is not real church. They were like, what is that? That's not real church. And within a year we had 7,000 people. We had 32 baptisms and 29 salvations. And so they said, wait a second, they're doing all the functions of the church, and so we will approve them as a first social media church in the Assembly of God fellowship.

Angela Craig: ([04:44](#))

And so that's how we got started. My heart was really for those that were not coming to church, for those that were unchurched, de-churched, couldn't go to church because a chronic illness or they were housebound. And there's more of those people that can't go to church or won't go to church than there are actually going to churches now. So when I planted the church, the research said that about, Barna said it was 65% of people would not attend a church. Now they're saying this last 2020 report was only one in four consider themselves an active Christian, someone who's going to church, someone who will profess their faith. There's four parameters of that. But basically, it's definitely decreased and pretty rapidly, but we found a different way of reaching people. And I'm just thankful that God uses technology now to reach every corner of this world. And that was pre COVID. So we've seen the power of it during this pandemic time.

Carrie Williams: ([05:50](#))

So Angela, tell me a little bit more about the practicality side of this. So I know it's on Facebook. You currently have about 18,000 followers now as a part of the Pursuit Church Live Facebook. Is it a page? Is it a group? Do you meet daily? Do you meet weekly? What does it mean when you say digital church and you mentioned baptisms and salvation. So just kind of break down some of those things for us. What's that look like?



Angela Craig: ([06:21](#))

Okay, well, I'll tell you the biggest mistake that I made. If you want to hear that. When we started, I tried to duplicate church in the building online and people that are on social media are not interested in our church in the building. If they were they'd go. And so we had to completely change our strategy. And so we did a digital first strategy and I created that. It's definitely more relational. So if you think about how you have built relationships, where the deepest relationships you've built with others and with God. I asked this question in a cohort I was leading yesterday and they said over a meal, going to my gym. They gave all these examples that were not in a building at church. So I gave them this analogy.

Angela Craig: ([07:10](#))

So let's say that you're my neighbor and I invite you over for a meal. And I put a stage in front of my fireplace behind and I have my guitar and I'm ready. You come in and you sit down and I'm like, okay, I'm going to have some nice music for you. And actually I probably should only sing in the shower, but I think I have a good voice. And then I'm going to give you a very encouraging talk. And then I'm going to ask if I could pray for you and would you like to receive Jesus? And I might be like, maybe we could take an offering. You would think I was an absolute freak. So that is exactly what we do when we only just do what we do in the building online because people are not relating to that. It's not relevant. Now, am I saying that streaming online is something we shouldn't do?

Angela Craig: ([07:58](#))

No, I'm not saying that because the holy spirit works in the words of the Bible and he will deliver his message to whoever he wants to do. So making Jesus the center of social media is very important, but it can't be the only thing you do. And so when I see digital pastors say it wasn't working for me, it's because they missed the relational aspect of digital ministry. People are online to be seen, not to see you. And so there are a few people that are very, very popular pastors that can do that. But for most people, Jesus calls us into relationship, so that's what we do at Pursuit. How that looks is we design content around the people that we're reaching. Then we engage with people. So for instance, you asked if it was daily or weekly, it's daily discipleship.

Angela Craig: ([08:52](#))

And so if someone comes on for a video, our impact team is there to say hello. And most people understand this now, you have a host online, but you're there to actually invite them to your community. You're there to private message them after our impact team private messages every single person who watch, who likes, who shares, who comments. And so I will click on their names and so as the pastor, I started out doing this at the beginning and I'm like, Carrie, thank you so much for joining today. Where do you live? Do you have a church that you attend? How can I pray for you today? Then we find out the person's needs. Then we ask them how we can get them plugged into a discipleship circle or a smaller community. And so our steps are content, engagement, discipleship, and then multiplication.



Angela Craig: (09:47)

So we have lots of different groups. Depending on people's needs, we start groups. So we use the YouVersion app a lot, because that gives us a lot of material for free, which is thank you, YouVersion. That's amazing. And all those contributors, everybody who has contributed to that, I'm so grateful. So I lead a Bible study right now of around 60, and we're reading the Bible in a year, but that's not going to fit for everybody. So we have all sorts of things going on on YouVersion. We have groups on Facebook as well. We have a big prayer group of people, a public group that there's over 700 people in there that pray daily for each other. We have some messenger groups. And so we would find anyway to connect people. We've used WhatsApp to have groups regionally because 49% of our church is not in the United States.

Angela Craig: (10:39)

And so then we find our leaders out of those groups. So I can tell you a story of somebody, if that helps, so you could visualize how they went through the pathway. So okay, Dee, she came to Pursuit Church Live. I didn't have to go and seek her. That was another question you asked. There are so many people online that need Jesus, and that want to know that somebody cares about their life. And so that's our biggest problem is not having enough workers that can be online. That's our biggest problem. I don't have to worry about... Out of those 18,000 people, we're just scratching the surface. I think a little over 2000 are in discipleship circles right now. So there's so much more work to do to connect with them individually and invite them in. So Dee. So she was watching a video that I did.

Angela Craig: (11:39)

I commented on her comment. The impact team was inviting to her online. I private messaged her and asked her all the questions I asked. I wanted to get to know her, just like you would sitting next to someone at church. And so she told me she has MS and she can't go to a physical location, but she loved Jesus. She was constantly encouraging people. So I saw right away that she was an encourager and she's great for our impact team because she couldn't serve in her local church, but she wanted to serve Jesus. And so she got involved in several of our discipleship circles. I ended up asking her pretty quickly to join our impact team. Then she led our impact team for two years, and then she passed the baton and started her own micro community online helping other people with chronic illness and disabilities called Moving Mountains.



Angela Craig: ([12:42](#))

And now she's getting her PhD in community care. So that's one example, someone who came to Jesus at Pursuit... I have like a million stories. Maybe not a million, but a lot. So there's Francis who was in Uganda saw a video went through the same process, engagement, got him into a site. He was in one of our discipleship messenger groups. He started leading that group. He was one of those people is supposed to be a preacher. He would get his Bible out and he would record a message from Kampala, Uganda and put it on our messenger and I'd wake up and there'd be people needing prayer in that group and he'd already prayed for them. And so his life was radically changed. He wanted to go to in person community, so we got him partnered with one of our partner churches in Kampala, and he now he's going there and serving there. So that's kind of how our process works.

Carrie Williams: ([13:49](#))

So they tuned into a video that you had posted. How'd they find the video?

Angela Craig: ([13:57](#))

Facebook algorithms. That's pretty easy. So that's why you have to have... And I won't get into all that detail, but Facebook shares your content. If you have an impact team that will like, comment, and share, Facebook goes, oh, 10 people are liking this content. We should share it. So they're going to share it with the person who's doing the... Live video is always better for Facebook. And it's better for your community because we have a relationship. I'm not just talking to you. If I see you come on, I'm like, Carrie, I'm so glad you're here. I'll stop mid-sentence, doesn't matter what I'm doing, because you are more important than what I'm doing or what I'm saying. And then I'll get back to what I'm saying. So that gets you to engage. That gets you to stop because someone saw you.

Angela Craig: ([14:47](#))

So the more your video has received likes, comments, shares, Facebook goes, oh, this is good content. We need to get this out there. And so they will then share it with all of the friends and all of their friends of the people that liked, comment, or shares. That's how the algorithms currently and have been working for the last five years. And so that's how you multiply. The first year we did some promoting, but we have not since for a couple reasons, because we didn't have to, for the second reason is we couldn't complete our model. We could get a lot of followers, but that wasn't the point. We wanted to make disciples that made disciples. And so we could get caught up and I could have, oh, I could tell you we have a million followers, but we've never made one disciple. So that's not what we're supposed to do. So we put some heavy breaks on after the first year because we outgrew who we could serve. And so that's how that works.

Carrie Williams: ([15:51](#))

So great. Now you mentioned baptisms. How did you do baptisms from a digital platform?



Angela Craig: (16:00)

Yeah, so we teach people to be disciples. So just like Jesus taught his disciples to baptize others to go and baptize, we teach people to go and baptize. I understand that there are denominational beliefs about this, whether it's communion or sacraments, baptism laying on hands. But I feel like if you teach someone to lay hands on someone and we've even said, who do you know that you can talk to Jesus about and then have that person baptize you.

Angela Craig: (16:33)

That's how you get people to come to Jesus when you're actually able to say, hey, to your brother or your sister or your friend, my life has just drastically been changed by meeting Jesus. And I want to be baptized. Can I tell you about it? So we want to make disciples that make disciples. And so it's a matter of breaking down that box of the way that we've always done it to really just how are we going to make disciples that make disciples? And we want them to walk with other people. So it's not just the pastor and the pastor team, but that everybody have someone on their arm as you might say to walk with and to hold accountable and all those things. So that's important.

Carrie Williams: (17:24)

So great. So, the people online who are engaging and trying to get questions answered or dig deeper into certain scripture, I've heard you mention the impact team. I'm assuming that the impact team is super proactive in discipling those individuals, maybe even within the context of their circles. You said there's about 2000 now in those groups. Can you just tell us a little bit more about how that part works?

Angela Craig: (17:53)

Yeah. So the impact team, actually, their function is not discipleship. Their function is to move people from engagement, from the platform, to a discipleship circle. So first they are to see people, to make sure they know they're cared for and loved, and then invite them to our community and invite them into a circle. The leaders of those circles are the ones that are going to disciple. We also have a one-on-one program where if someone is brand new to Christ, they get partnered with another person. And so that they can walk for at least a year, if not more to, to know Jesus in a deeper way. So, individually the impact team's role is to figure out what that need is for that person and plug them in there. Did I answer your question? Think I went backwards.



Carrie Williams: ([18:42](#))

You did. You did. It was good. Okay. So we're in the middle of pandemic still. So we're doing this recording in July, 2021, where things are kind of raring back up again, I guess you would say. And so I know that there are church leaders that are looking at all the different kind of models that exist, especially digitally and within their own local community of how to continue discipleship when people won't enter a building or even enter a home, sometimes, out a fear of X, Y, Z. And so I think this model helps address some of those things. Is there anything that you want to share with church leaders who are looking at the potential of digital or maybe, you know, last year they went fully online and now they have gone back to the physical in person programs and structures and models that they were all doing beforehand, but experiencing some drop off because of people who just won't engage or maybe they can't engage, maybe they're immune compromised and they can't enter the building.

Carrie Williams: ([19:55](#))

And so what would you say to church leaders who are looking at kind of this middle ground of how do we continue to disciple and build relationships deeply with our community? Especially the ones who won't walk into the church.

Angela Craig: ([20:08](#))

Mm-hmm (affirmative) Oh gosh. There's so many things I'd like to encourage pastors about. In the first 30 days of COVID because I realized I was getting more calls than I could answer on digital. I wrote a little book it's called Online Jesus. I would read it. It's \$5 on Kindle. It tells our story. It tells our discipleship strategy. It's very encouraging because you can see how it can be done. I think being a pastor is exhausting. And when you are trying to do digital and in person, especially in these pandemic conditions, you will burn out if you haven't already. We've seen that. So you have to have a team. And I know somebody's eyes just went in the back of their head, because they're like, how do I get people to volunteer?

Angela Craig: ([21:00](#))

I'm with you, but digitally, again, it's that thinking outside the box. We started with three people. And as I saw people come online, we always would ask why not you? And so I could have an hour consultation with a church and they will think at the beginning, they really have nobody to lead a digital platform. And I could come up probably with five to seven people just from going through their Facebook page. Now I'll tell you this story because we will say why not you, because maybe someone doesn't have a theology degree. Maybe they barely know Jesus at all, but if you include them in your team, they will know Jesus. And it's very safe online. So you need to just have one strong leader that can be adaptive. We have a great need for adaptive leadership right now.



Angela Craig: ([21:57](#))

We have a great need for health of our pastors. Out of health comes growth. And so I would say to surround yourself with people that are doing it, there are lots of circles of people that are doing digital and physical - phygital as we call it now. I am currently working with 12 church planners. All of them are doing digital first, but they're not doing a hundred percent digital. So, this is going to be a very, very common thing moving forward is how do we do both? Well, you're going to have to build a team. And so for instance, our team, we ask them to commit to 15 minutes a day and guess what? They're online seven hours a day. So 15 minutes is really not a big deal. And as long as you have a structure they can follow and a team leader like I had with Dee who was so encouraging, always following up with people every single day, making sure their birthdays were noticed and making sure they were plugged into a Bible study and making sure they prayed together, praying together as a team is really, really important.

Angela Craig: ([23:11](#))

And not about the needs of your church, but the needs of each other. And so I think that team component is going to be really the key to moving forward and then breaking the boundaries down of what we require of people, because they're not teaching on the platform, all they're doing is liking someone's post, they're commenting on it and they're sharing the post. And then they're asking people questions just like you would if I met you on the street. So there's nothing really unsafe about that. I think it's just that it's a world that's unknown to most pastors, especially this engagement side of it that's really missing because we all went on and did a great job figuring out the streaming part, but now you have to take it to the next level.

Carrie Williams: ([24:01](#))

That's good. So tell me a little bit about, I think you have over 45 countries represented, is that right?

Angela Craig: ([24:07](#))

Mm-hmm, yep.

Carrie Williams: ([24:08](#))

Yeah. And so talk to me about how you connect people from all over the world into these smaller micro groups where they continue to feel seen and can be discipled and kind of go on that deeper level. So talk about those, talk about your micro groups.



Angela Craig: ([24:28](#))

So those are all online. When I started Pursuit, I thought they would be in person. And this is definitely a model that churches do. Elevate does this really well is they'll see from their online presence they have a big group in Canada and they'll start a physical campus there. But for us, all of our interests for micro groups or discipleship groups have been online because that's who we're reaching is people that can't go to church or who don't have a church in their area. So it's actually really the minority of the people that we serve that would get plugged into an in-person community. And then we try to do that to get them. And then that person just becomes part of that church. So, as far as I kind of walk through the process of inviting them into a circle.

Angela Craig: ([25:19](#))

If someone has a need in our community, we have two different things that we do. We have the partner churches, and then we also have what's called a difference maker project. So all of our tithes and offerings go to the difference maker project. And that money is given to a nonprofit on the ground that's serving in one of the cities that we have a population. So for instance, at the beginning of COVID, Susie from Jamaica has been part of our church for a couple years. And she messaged me and said, hey, we have a need for school supplies and canned goods. Can you ship them? I was like, I cannot ship them, no. I've tried doing stuff like that. That was a bad idea. And you kind of have to be a connector. I'm a connector person.

Angela Craig: ([26:14](#))

So I found an AG missionary who was serving Jamaica and said who do you know that's near her? She doesn't have a car. The nearest town is seven miles away. Jamaica is really cut off from getting supplies. And there was actually a pastor this missionary knew in a church seven miles away. And so he contacted him, gave him the list, he brought her the supplies she needed. And so then the difference maker project can give money to that church to help. So that end, now she has a relationship with someone who's seven miles away from her, even though she can't walk there. At least it's closer. So that's how we help fulfill the needs of our community.

Carrie Williams: ([27:03](#))

Yeah. Now you mentioned tithes and offerings and so are you a 501(c)(3)?

Angela Craig: ([27:11](#))

Yep. We're under the group of AG churches.

Carrie Williams: ([27:14](#))

Okay. And so when people give, they give through the platform of AG, or do you have your own giving platform for Pursuit?



Angela Craig: ([27:22](#))

So all AG churches are standalone. And so it comes through Facebook or through the website, or just like you would for your church, you set up giving through Subsplash or PayPoint or something like that. And so that's how we've set up our giving. But the beginning I created a Subsplash app actually, which we didn't need. It was too much. To transfer people from Facebook, if I was going to stream to my website, they have to transfer from somewhere and people are not interested in doing that. So when I saw that 99% of our traffic was coming to our website from on Facebook, I just said, well, we're just going to serve on Facebook. And that's worked for us.

Carrie Williams: ([28:10](#))

Yeah. That's great. Okay. One more question. When it comes to structure of staff, I guess you would say, how many staff do you have? Are they paid? Is it all volunteer? What's that side of it look like?

Angela Craig: ([28:29](#))

Yeah, so in April this year I passed the Baton to Angie and Jared Hughes who are the lead pastors of Pursuit. And so now it's called Hope City Church. And so I am doing all church planting. As far as we are all on board on the same program as we were all co-vocational or bi-vocational, they work another full-time job and pastor Pursuit. And so we didn't have one paid employee or team member. It was all about people that were very passionate about the mission. And so our team was set up as far as teaching team. I wasn't the only one because I don't think I'm the only one. I know people attach personalities, but everybody attaches to a different personality. So we would have different people throughout the week. And it also trains up leaders.

Angela Craig: ([29:27](#))

I know so many leaders that want to be a pastor, a teacher, and they cannot get any training because there's one pastor on one stage. And so that's the great thing about social media is you can really empower and train up leaders in their strengths and in the vocation that God has called them to. So, I always try to design my team around people's strengths. And so we had our teaching team, we had our impact team and then we have the people that are discipling that are leading groups and that's it. It's pretty simple. And then there's me, who's just helping people now pulling out and getting them church planting.

Carrie Williams: ([30:11](#))

Yeah. So great. Okay. So last and final question. If somebody wants to find out more information about Pursuit Church Live, how do they do it?



Angela Craig: ([30:21](#))

So I would go to onlinejesus.info and all the information is there. There's our story, blogs, book, we have a Facebook communities for people, it's a learning community for people that want to do digital first or like I said, most churches are not planting digital only. They're planting digital first or they're they're planting digital plus is what we call it because there's always going to be digital alongside whatever you're doing in person. And so that's Online Jesus is a Facebook community where you can ask questions, you can learn from other people. I do a video very Monday, it's called starters. And I interview people that are starting. And so you can get inspired and kind of see who who's doing what? So on last this Monday I interviewed Andre Andrews who's from Illinois. He's a Assembly of God pastor and he's starting a barbecue. He is doing a barbecue digital only church. So I think I told you about him, but really phenomenal. And he's making great traction doing it. So just helping people be open to other ideas is important.

Carrie Williams: ([31:39](#))

Yeah. So great. So I encourage you if you've listened to this episode today to check out a little deeper what's going on in the digital world. Facebook is a tool that we all have available to us right at our fingertips. And so our excuses are limited as far as being able to pursue something like this, or at least incorporating something along on these lines or thinking about how to incorporate social media, social platforms into our discipleship models. Angela, it's been an honor today chatting with you more about Pursuit Church Live and I love the creativity behind it. And I love the results that are happening - of salvations and people being discipled, not just right where you're planted, but literally all over the world. And so thank you for being with us today on the Future Church podcast.

Angela Craig: ([32:32](#))

Oh, thank you. It was my pleasure.