

How can God build a tapestry of love online through skilled leadership?

"Going online felt better. Being part of the river of God's healing love. It felt profound. Lifegiving ... A tapestry of prayer and love across Aotearoa," concludes Jill.

Steve Taylor, from KCML, interviews Jill McDonald, from St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Hastings about her leadership of Sacred Space Whakamoemiti (<https://vimeo.com/409667384>). Why did she take this short midweek prayer service online, and what was the result? What has been learnt?

The interview outlines five practices for cultivating safe and prayerful space online.

Such experiences require skilled leadership. Here are the five tips for creating sacred space online.

1. The value of a pre-gathering bidding question. Prepare people to participate by sending out prior a question you will be inviting response to during the online experience. A bidding question clarifies purpose. It communicates an ethos of participation and gives people space to prepare. This is likely to enhance the depth of participation and a sense of meaningful engagement.
2. Guiding the conversation through a focused question. Rather than offer an open space for anyone to answer, call people by name. It could be clockwise around your screen, or top of the land to the bottom. Being directive lets people know when and how they will be able to participate.
3. Modelling through drawing first on those familiar with the culture. Begin asking focused questions of people who have been before. They have experienced the culture of the group and the length, depth and type of responses.
4. Create a pass. Give words that allow people to pass. "I'm going to go around and call people by name. If you don't yet have a response, just say "pass."" Giving a specific word reduces a sense of forced participation.
5. Work to a settled rhythm. In the familiarity, there is safety. People can settle into their work. Good liturgy has call and response which gives direction. A pattern of welcome, a settling question to ensure folk have heard their voice, a sound to start and end a period of silence, a repeated ending ritual. It means that participants are more likely to settle into prayer if they are aware of where they are heading.

*Steve Taylor and Jill McDonald
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