



Church Innovation Insider

By Rev. Lorenzo Lebrija • Jan 06, 2022
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Happy New Year! Welcome to the first edition of 2022. Here you will find all you need to know from [TryTank Experimental Lab](#). We hope you had an awesome holiday!

Send us any feedback in a quick [email](#). Remember to [sign up](#) if you aren't yet subscribed.

1 big thing: TryTank Experimental Lab is now three years old

Big picture: When TryTank Experimental Lab launched on Jan 1, 2019, who could have predicted what the next few years would bring to the world and the church? As a joint venture between two seminaries, TryTank itself is an experiment in working together.

There have been some successes (Alexa skill, Latino Ministry in a Box, video action alerts, evangelism events, the virtual preaching monks, and more!), and some failures (spin church, “drunk bible,” cleaning monks, prayer puppets, and more!).

Why it matters: Being able to own successes and failures hopefully allows TryTank to model how to be the church in the world today.

Here are some of the highlights of our 2021:

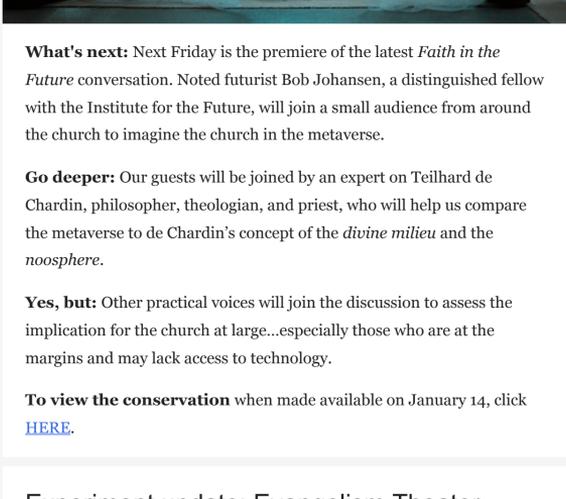
- Presented webinars on leadership, becoming a hybrid congregation, mission clarity, cultural intelligence, foresight for the church, and faith in the future.
- Began experimenting with creating a church in the metaverse and worked with the Diocese of Washington on a digital confirmation program.
- Together with the office of Latino Ministries, began to roll out Latino Ministry in a Box. Also began the work of launching *La Misa in English* experiment in three dioceses.
- Gathered about 5,000 responses to the *Covid 19-Church 21 Impact* survey and registered more than 1,000 volunteers for the upcoming Episcopal Pulse micro-surveys.
- Began in-person work to re-imagine youth ministry by holding a design thinking workshop with youth.
- The Blessing of the Animals evangelism experiment had 15 congregations participate. One congregation (with 60 ASA) had 50 new neighbors stop by. One congregation even had a spontaneous baptism!

What's next: The strategic priorities for TryTank in 2022 are:

- Latino ministry
- Smaller congregations
- Youth and Young Adults

The bottom line: We still have many ideas and energy to try them!

Coming next week: “Church in the Metaverse”



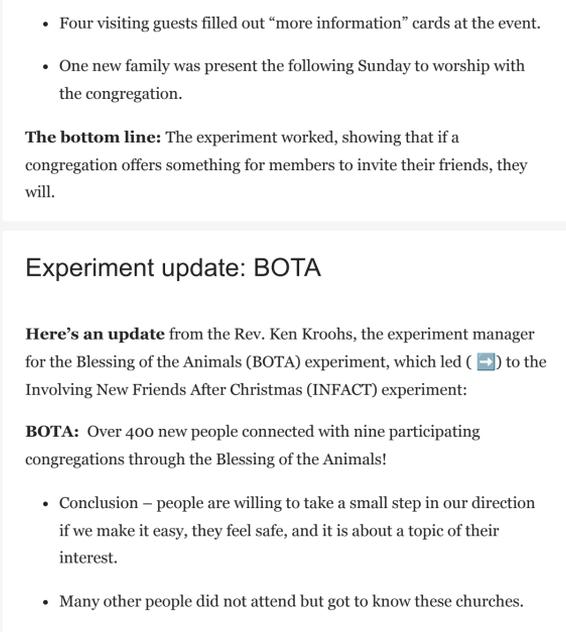
What's next: Next Friday is the premiere of the latest *Faith in the Future* conversation. Noted futurist Bob Johansen, a distinguished fellow with the Institute for the Future, will join a small audience from around the church to imagine the church in the metaverse.

Go deeper: Our guests will be joined by an expert on Teilhard de Chardin, philosopher, theologian, and priest, who will help us compare the metaverse to de Chardin's concept of the *divine milieu* and the *noosphere*.

Yes, but: Other practical voices will join the discussion to assess the implication for the church at large...especially those who are at the margins and may lack access to technology.

To view the conversation when made available on January 14, click [HERE](#).

Experiment update: Evangelism Theater



Bertha with her assistant Justin at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in St. Louis, Missouri.

Here's an update on the evangelism theater experiment. The experiment — which was delayed because of Covid-19 — aimed to create a theatrical experience in a church that members could invite their friends for a night of fun.

Why it matters: We know that people have no problem inviting a friend to the theater but aren't as likely to invite someone to join them at church. We wondered what would happen if we made theater *at* the church.

By the numbers: The show (*Baking with Bertha*) took place on Friday, Dec 10 at [St. Paul's Episcopal Church](#) in the Carondelet neighborhood of St. Louis, Mo. The goal was to get church members to invite their friends. And they did!

- The rector reports that some 2/3 of the audience that night were friends invited by church members to attend.
- Four visiting guests filled out “more information” cards at the event.
- One new family was present the following Sunday to worship with the congregation.

The bottom line: The experiment worked, showing that if a congregation offers something for members to invite their friends, they will.

Experiment update: BOTA

Here's an update from the Rev. Ken Kroohs, the experiment manager for the Blessing of the Animals (BOTA) experiment, which led (👉) to the Involving New Friends After Christmas (INFACT) experiment:

BOTA: Over 400 new people connected with nine participating congregations through the Blessing of the Animals!

- Conclusion – people are willing to take a small step in our direction if we make it easy, they feel safe, and it is about a topic of their interest.
- Many other people did not attend but got to know these churches.
- We don't yet have good numbers on how many people are staying in contact.

INFACT: Involving New Friends at Christmas Time has been successful both in immediate results and teaching us how best to proceed.

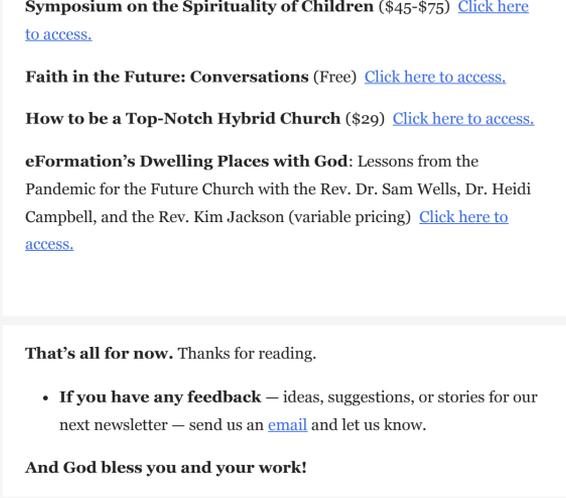
- Even with COVID, several churches reported meeting new people electronically or in person.
- Interestingly, the Blue Christmas services generated the most interest.

What's next: We have seen great results from experiments focused on reaching out to new people—many people connected with various churches.

- Along the way, we learned some lessons about what works and what falls flat on its face!
- So, we will take those lessons and re-design the process to focus on the time from now to Easter.
- Our goal is to connect with new people with the intention that some will be our **Friends at Pentecost** (F@P). That does not necessarily mean attending services. It means we are building a relationship with them.

If you would like to join us in this work, let us know [HERE](#).

More than 10K Spanish-language missals distributed



Members of one Spanish-Language congregation show off their

Big picture: If you ask, most clergy will tell you that the bulletin takes a few hours of their time each week. We asked, what if they had that time back?

We created a Spanish-language missalette that included the Eucharist from the *Libro de Oracion Comun* (Book of Common Prayer).

- It is called, *El Librito de la Misa Episcopal*.
- We offered it for free to congregations in exchange for their response to our evaluation survey. Before too long, all 10,000 copies were spoken for.

For TEC dioceses in other countries, we had a certain number of copies made in-country.

Upcoming offerings from

LIFELONG LEARNING

Virginia Theological Seminary

[Click here for more information and to register](#) for the Lifelong Learning and Seminar events below:

- **Jan 6** - Dwelling Places for God: Lessons from the Pandemic
- **Jan 14** - Faith in the Future Talks (Part 2 released)
- **Jan 22** -Godly Play Commuter Core Training Module 3: Supporting the Circle of Children and Liturgical Action Lessons (In-person) [Register here](#)
- **Feb 1** - Conversations on Race and Faith: Sacred Ground cohorts
- **Feb 2** - May She Flourish: #ThisIsWhatAPastorLooksLike: Being a Pastor with a Female Body
- **Feb 3-24** - Shaping a Faithful Life: Pathways to Discernment and Discipleship
- **Feb 18 – Apr 1** Digital Storytelling for Church Communications Professionals

On-Demand digital offerings from Lifelong Learning at VTS

Symposium on the Spirituality of Children (\$45-\$75) [Click here to access.](#)

Faith in the Future: Conversations (Free) [Click here to access.](#)

How to be a Top-Notch Hybrid Church (\$29) [Click here to access.](#)

eFormation's Dwelling Places with God: Lessons from the Pandemic for the Future Church with the Rev. Dr. Sam Wells, Dr. Heidi Campbell, and the Rev. Kim Jackson (variable pricing) [Click here to access.](#)

That's all for now. Thanks for reading.

- **If you have any feedback** — ideas, suggestions, or stories for our next newsletter — send us an [email](#) and let us know.

And God bless you and your work!

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