



**DYNAMIC GOSPEL
NEW EUROPE**

CONVERSATION
AND GATHERING

December Conversation

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Welcome

Welcome to the December Conversation page, the last one for the unforgettable year of 2020. The focus for the final Impact Group of the year is *community*, so we are giving you fewer things to discuss this month so you will have more time for sharing and praying together. But there will be time to engage with a fascinating interview about online community, something we have all had to learn about this year.

As always, all the materials can be accessed below and you should make sure you listen to the podcast before you come to the Impact Group.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email us at conversation@lausanneurope.org

And if you are just starting your Impact Group, or are confused about what they are about, then check out the introduction pages to the [Conversation](#) and [Impact Groups](#) to find out more.

Instructions

1. Introductions and Prayer

Give time for everyone to introduce themselves if this is your first Impact Group. Ask someone to pray that God would speak to us as we meet together.

2. Fellowship

This has been a challenging year for all of us. So we wanted this final Impact Group of 2020 to have enough time to share stories. They might be testimonies of God's faithfulness, or of lessons learned, or of trials still being endured. Whatever, we want to encourage you to take time to pray for each other. We suggest at least half of the Impact Group time be dedicated to this.

3. Mobilisation

This month we have a fantastic interview for you to listen to. Nay Dawson works with IFES Europe as their Regional Training Coordinator. Yet over the last year she has set up an initiative called Community in a Crisis to help churches

build relational churches online. In the podcast, amongst other things she talks about loneliness, friendships, building community online, zoom fatigue, worship, online church with children, and how to share the hope of the gospel in the midst of Covid.

Having listened to the Podcast we would like you to discuss the following questions:

1. Loneliness has been a real issue for many people during 2020 due to the Covid pandemic restrictions. Have you personally found that to be the case? Have you found it difficult to find balance in your daily life during this year? We encourage you to share and reflect honestly on this together.
2. What stood out to you from Nay Dawson's story of building community online? Are there changes that you or your church might make to do online community better?

3. Do you see opportunities for creating community within your church in this season? Do you need to partner with somebody to see this happen?
4. Where do you see needs and opportunities in the society around you to build community?

4. Prayer

We want to conclude this final Impact Group of 2020 with one more moment of prayer. Use the following prayer points to guide you.

1. Pray for God to show us where we might have become complacent in building community with those around us.
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit will teach us how to build community in this time when so many of us have to do it online.
3. Pray that the Lord will show us the people in our contexts that don't have a community around them and that we may be the light that draws them into the family of Christ.

5. Make Your Contribution to the Conversation

We really want to hear back from your Impact Group after each session. Please find a few minutes to summarise what you hear from God, the highlights of the discussion, and any questions that were raised, in the comments box immediately below.

[GO TO THE CONVERSATION](#)

Online Community

By Nay Dawson

[Go to the article online](#)

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TRANSCRIPT

Kristian:

Welcome to the mobilisation podcast at Lausanne 2021. I'm Kristian Lande.

Janet:

And I'm Janet Sewell. Today we have a visitor: Nay Dawson, welcome.

Nay:

Thank you. Great to be with you both.

Kristian:

We're excited to have you here. The topic of today is how to build community online. Real community, deep community, loving communities. And we're really excited to have you here Nay. You have passion for this?

Nay:

Yeah, I think it's really important, particularly in this time, when we're all desperate for community, many of us being in isolation. We're in lockdown in our house right now. So, yeah, I'm really passionate about online community and how we can build it really well.

Kristian:

Great. Normally, you're a regional trainer, a coordinator in the IFES. You're also passionate about evangelism. You've started an evangelism network for women. And I know you're also working with this. And as I understood it was quite random that it just happened.

Nay:

Well, actually, there is a reason why. Just before our lockdown in Britain, March 20th, I was running a conference for women. 100 women. It was a conference in person. And then the lockdown came, and we couldn't travel anywhere. So we had three days to decide; were we going to cancel the conference or do it online. And before that, I had, I'd done zoom calls every month with 12 people. But I'd never done a conference online. And we just thought it'd be such a shame to not have our conference. So we decided in three days, let's put it online, we reopen the bookings, we had 50 more women apply. And we went from 99 women to 150. We went from women just from the UK to women from across the world. And so that experience was so good. And the next day I persuaded my church to do church on zoom, because it's all live - real time - as a gathering together. And it was that, that over the weekend - I just, I've never really written in my life, but I felt God say now you need to write this down. And friends started saying how did you do that? And I was like; it's just zoom, it's simple. But I started writing. And so that's really how it all started. It was that weekend in March and yeah.

Kristian:

Cool.

Janet:

That's amazing.

Kristian:

Yes, it is. And before we move on, I'll just say: You're married to John, you have two daughters. And you live in Southampton?

Nay:

Yeah, my husband's a scientist. He's trying to grow stem cells for people with arthritis, trying to regrow bone and cartilage. And we've got two little girls who are in this house right now, so you might see them at some point. Their school's closed for lockdown, and they are in isolation at the moment.

Kristian:

Yeah. Sounds like the everyday life for most of us at the moment. I'm actually quite, you know, excited about this topic. Because I think I've observed a couple of things lately. One is that there actually is quite a lot of loneliness going on around us. And it sort of feels like for me that

there's more of it now than in March and April. You know, the first months we kind of managed it. And then we thought that we were kind of done with this. And now it's coming back. I've two examples. Just the last week a church leader saying like: I really miss friendship, I really miss just someone to just truly hang around and have fun, be honest with life and I just feel it's not working through online stuff. Another one, a student, saying; please don't lock down our student group, because it's the only thing I have left. Everything else is closed, it's the only place I meet people. So I feel like loneliness, there is even more now than half a year ago. And the second thing that I think in churches we sort of, I think many of us feel a bit like "Agh, I'm so tired of Zoom, and Messenger, and Meet, and all these kind of things. I just want to go back to normal church". Going into this like; "I just need to hang in, we just need to wait, and then we will get going again". Instead of actually making disciples, doing community, here and now. Is that something that you recognise, Nay?

Nay:

Yeah, definitely. And certainly here in the UK, some surveys have been done. They said that before lockdown, one in ten adults had feelings of loneliness, and then

during lockdown, so from April onwards, that's one in four have these feelings of loneliness. And I'm sure it's worse now with lockdown, for us, lockdown number 2. And then particularly young people aged 18 to 24. So if you're listening and you're in that category, we're most likely to experience loneliness since the last lockdown began. So it's even worse for that category. So yeah, I hundred percent agree with you: Loneliness is one of the biggest problems I think we're facing really. And coupled with that is our inability to really value friendship. And, ultimately, I think discipleship – discipleship and church life – a lot of it is about friendship and relationship. And I think we have just forgotten how to do relationships. I read a really good book this summer, called made for friendship by Drew Hunter and then I wrote an article about friendship. And in the book Drew quote C.S. Lewis, and he says: "To the ancients, friendship seemed the happiest, most fully human of all loves, the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it." And I think it's really interesting how, in our isolation, as our numbers have been restricted, we might actually be beginning to think about friendship for the first time, because certainly, if CS Lewis is right, then we have forgotten about friendship. So yeah, I totally agree.

Kristian:

That's interesting. I just had, as I mentioned with that church leader, or several of us having a chat the other day in a mentoring group. Actually, several of us realised, you know, WE lack, and WE miss friendship. It's like, we're giving and giving and giving and giving. But I lack community, where I receive and give and laugh.

Nay:

I think for me, so when in the UK, we have this thing called the 'rule of six'. So you could only meet with five other people. And at that point, loads of my friends were really disappointed, you know, "we can't meet in large families anymore". And I understand that, it was difficult. But I think what it showed me is that my relationships are based on ease and convenience. And I really began to search myself and ask some these questions. Are my friendships based on convenience? Or are they intentional? Are my friendships driven by love and self-sacrifice and generosity? And are they able to weather through the storms of life? And I think most of my answers were no. And that's what the rule of six showed. And I think more so for the rule of one. And in that, I think is a chance for us to learn afresh: what is friendship? How can we pursue that,

and I think if this season has shown us, we just had friendships out of convenience, then maybe God is saying now's the time to really focus on this and really focus on proper friendships.

Janet:

And it's, it's actually so easy also to do friendship online. Because we're talking about this. I'm a fairly international person, and I literally have friends all over the world. And one of my favourite things to do is, is to go off for a walk and call my friends in America, call my friends in South Africa, call my friends in Iceland, call my friends ... you know. And have a meaningful, long, sometimes one to two hour conversation, as I'm just walking around. And it's actually one of my favourite things of the day and of the week. So it's so easy with today's technology, especially with data being so cheap now, for most of us anyway, to just be able to pick up the phone and say, hey, let's go out for a walk. And we've done that actually, within with some friends of mine, even within church here in London. We can't physically be present, but we'll get on the phone and we'll go off for a walk together.

Kristian:

And then I think for many of us, we feel a bit like, "Agh, I'm so sick and tired of being online". And in a way, I really I feel with you, like: we just want to get rid of this. We just want to wait until it finishes. And then, we will start off doing community, and friendship, and discipleship, and all these things again. And at the same time, how can you help us to realise, and to get rid of, that kind of giving-up mentality?

Nay:

Well, it's interesting. I read in an article that said we should all become like Norwegians. In a British newspaper, it said that Norwegians are really good at coping with long, hard, cold winters. And that we should all get the mentality of a Norwegian. So I was really struck by this. And so I started having a fire pit every night. And my friend Bjørn Inge, you might know him, he was giving me recipes to make with my fire pit. But it made me just think, "if God is in control, and he is weightier than any of our problems, then when we face these troubles and hardships, we can turn to Him, we can trust him that he's in control". But also we can say, "God, what are you doing in this time? How can I live for you in this time?" So for me, the rule of six, I found really

interesting, because for professional gatherers, number six is a magic number. I've been reading this really good book called The Art of gathering. And I've written a blog post; The art of gathering online. And Priya Parker says six is a magic number because in groups of six, you have high level of sharing, and high level of intimacy. And so I suddenly thought, wow, number six is a great number. Instead of having these big groups where we don't really talk properly, we've got to have smaller groups, and so our home group with church, we split from 12 into two groups of six, and it was brilliant. Now I'm sure the UK government did not choose number six because of gathering. They chose it because the police can count to six really easily. In that, you know, I was disappointed, of course, I was disappointed, but I wanted to say: "God, our lives are in your hands, this is your season, what do you want to do?" And I felt him say: "I want the church to have higher levels of sharing and higher levels of intimacy." And then with this now, our new rule of one: I'm really excited of the idea of prayer walking, I can prayer walk with one person. So I think it's always asking, not what can't I do, but what can I do - just for this season. And all my anxieties and all my struggles, I give them to God and I ask him to carry me through; because I have them...

there's lots of things that cause me stress at this time, so I'm not living this lovely, easy life, but I believe that God is powerfully at work in this lockdown, and he is shaking up the church, and stripping away everything that we knew of church, and asking the big question: "Who are we going to be now, as a church, as a body?" And actually, that's what I really think God saying is: What we're learning about the body, we're not together as a body, but in this time, what can I teach you about how actually you weren't as good a body as you thought you were? So loads of kind of marginal groups of Christians have actually found online church a whole lot easier and more accessible. And it's meant they could finally be part of the body in a way that they weren't. And I'm really fascinated by that.

Janet:

What kind of people, when you say that?

Nay:

Yeah. So. When lockdown started, I very quickly got excited about online church and so I started writing. And some friends who are from the disabled community, wrote to me and said: "Nay, you don't know what you're talking about. Why didn't you ask us for help? We've been doing online church for decades". And so it started this really

helpful conversation, where they ... Many of my friends are in their homes, they cannot leave their homes, because of chronic illness. And so it made me realise there are people that we can learn from, about how to do online church better, like we were talking about earlier, the persecuted church, have done online church for years, and we could learn from them. But for example, in our church, Southampton Lighthouse International, we very simply do a zoom church service, no kind of impressive recording, everything's just live. Our pastor, who must be late 60s, moved back to the Isle of Wight to care for his parents. They don't have a laptop and they don't have Wi Fi, so he comes every week into the zoom call via a phone number and his parents listen on speakerphone. They don't go to church, or they didn't go to church until the lockdown, but they've come to know Jesus for themselves - through a speakerphone on a phone. And so, for me, online Church is far more accessible for maybe single mums who can't get out at nighttime but can come to a home group, or a prayer meeting via zoom. Or the disabled community, maybe there are many reasons they can't access the church building but if you put subtitles, if you have someone signing on all of your online stuff, it's instantly more accessible. Lausanne itself, found out that the most

unreached people group is the disabled community and in the UK, that's 20% of our population. So I think there's pockets of Christians, significant numbers of Christians, who it's more much more accessible for, if we continue to think about online, and embrace it as something that God has given us.

Janet:

So in a way, just to keep going, so when we can meet physically, again, is to still keep going with some form of online community to reach these people, who otherwise will never have an opportunity to come to church?

Nay:

Yeah, and I think, coming back to your question, Kristian, about "Zoom fatigue", and people getting fed up... I think where we can, we should try and do as much hybrid life as possible. So, because I work with universities, we looked a lot at how the universities were going to adapt, for this year, and a lot of the universities are doing blended learning, or hybrid learning. So, where you can, do a bit in person; where you have to go online, go online. But also they're flipping the learning, so there's no point getting together on a zoom to listen to somebody for an hour, that's just pointless. So, listen to the talk beforehand, on

your own, come together on the Zoom, or come together online to chat and to discuss.

Kristian:

It's great, because I think there is a lot of great materials, teaching, webinars - a lot of inputs that you can just download or just watch. So, you don't even have to come up with it yourself. But what we really need, is to have the community; we can't just watch, we can't just take in some teaching, we need real community between people. And yeah, so that's ... I love what you said: You don't have to do a one-hour sermon on Zoom, you can do that beforehand, and then you can actually do community.

Nay:

Yeah, I think. It's really interesting watching churches set up online. A lot of people, I know it was a crisis, but a lot of people just went for what they knew. So live streaming on YouTube. For me, the church is a gathering of God's people. The church has never been about a transmission of a message. And so we, as a church, decided to stop and pause. We could have done live streaming onto YouTube, but instead, we went for this in-person-gathering, live on Zoom together, everything; singing, praying, speaking, everything was live. And it was just phenomenal because it

created this atmosphere of being together, and I know friends that did do live stream on to YouTube who eventually realised they needed to have Zoom-rooms where people could chat and connect afterwards. But I think a problem is we've just gone for ease. And again, back to my professional gatherer Priya Parker, she says that the venues we gather in, communicate something of the message itself and each venue is a nudge, it's like a script, so you imagine a nightclub, a beach, a business room - it tells you something of the meeting itself. So, at the beach, you're going to relax and have fun. The nightclub - you're going to dance. The business room - ... You get my picture. And I think, what we've done is we've met online, and it said something of the message and actually, it's not working. And that's because we have gone for convenience rather than values. And I think we all just need to stop, reconsider: What are our values now for our church meeting our community group? What does God want, in this point in history for us, as His people? And then, once you've worked that out, only then can you go to: "Which technological platform do we want to choose? Which one enhances our values, rather than takes us away from it?" So you've got whole range; Instagram, Facebook, gaming, Zoom, YouTube, ... I mean, there's a

whole range. And you can use a couple of them together, like live stream with WhatsApp, or Instagram and WhatsApp. And I just think we need to stop and pause and partly, I wonder, if it's our view of technology, we sadly don't see it as a God given-gift. We see it as something to despise and keep away from.

Kristian:

So what I hear is a message to those of us who feel like giving up, and just wait for normal church to start again: Stop, in the sense of pause and pray, and ask God: "How can we actually do this? To do what we're actually meant to do? What is the actual needs in our place, in our community?" And then be creative and look for help. And yeah, thank you.

Nay:

Yeah. Because God's people, in a crisis, through the Bible, have always sung together. You see that over, and over again. You know, think of the Psalms: "I lift my eyes to the hills, Where does my maker come from". As God's people were on their pilgrimage, and facing danger in the mountains, robbers and people could come and steal

their stuff, kill them; they looked to the hills, and they sang together. And in a crisis, God's people have sung. And yet interestingly, everyone says that online singing doesn't work, yet you need it to work, in order to be able to sing together in a crisis. And what I've seen is it can work, but people think it doesn't. So, I've been blogging since March, and I've been inviting friends to write with me and the blog that has been most read, nearly 8000 times since March, is: "Worship on Zoom tips and tricks". And it's written by my friend who's a professional musician. So, on one hand everyone's saying worship doesn't work; on another hand, God's people need to sing in a crisis. In the UK, and in Germany, singing has been banned in churches, when we're meeting in person, everything is against us. And I think what we need to do, is we need to sing. And I think a book that's really important for our times is the Book of Habakkuk, because in Habakkuk, the structure to it is question, answer, question, answer, question, answer, song. And I think what we need to do as God's people is to stop and ask our questions. We need to genuinely stop and say, God: "Where are you? How long, oh Lord?" As it does the first question of Habakkuk. Then we hear Him answer us, then we ask more questions, we groan, and we moan together. But we eventually sing,

and we sing new songs of grace. And I just think, as a church, you know, it's not the first time the church has been persecuted, maybe it is in the West, but we need to do those: questioning, listening for answers and singing together a whole lot more.

Kristian:

Beautiful, you know, I think I'm definitely going to check out that tip on how to worship on Zoom because we tried with our church to do it. And we had one family leading us, and everyone of course singing from their living room, and that was nice. And then I was just singing along, you know, probably quite loud, because afterwards I heard, you know, everybody else muted themselves and, they were singing, but they were muted. And I was obviously the one singing aloud, and I'm not the best singer. So I got a lot of laughter and joy. So at least, at least there was a lot of joy.

Janet:

We tried singing Happy Birthday at church the other day, it was kind of interesting. Everybody with their microphones on.

Nay:

Yeah. For us actually, as parents, it's been really interesting because - our church is a mission church; we don't have loads of structure or staff. And so for the children, there has been very little, which is five minutes, in each service each week online. And yet, what has struck us is mid-song my children will stop and say "what did that say?" And then we'll have this incredible conversation about God. Or maybe later on in the day we'll hear our youngest, who's five, singing really loudly the song that she heard that morning. And we've realised that normally in church, when we sing the children have gone to the children's work, but for the first time ever they've been able to part of our singing. so the two things that they've engaged in most, well firstly, the best thing has been the children's slot. But after that, the two main things are the breakout rooms where they get to chat to adults, such as surprise, and the singing. They just absolutely love it, and you see them ... One of them actually, my youngest which is five, said: "Mum, why is there water coming out of my eyes during that song?" "You're being moved Agnes, this is a beautiful song". And so yeah, I think there's something really important about singing right now.

Kristian:

Cool. That's, great. Okay, so before we sum up, I have one more question. Because we talked a lot about like how to do community online with our churches, which is really important. At the same time there is there is a suffering world around us, which is, as you said: there's one out of four, at least, in Britain who is lonely. And as a church, we cannot just sit and wait for this to finish, we are called to interact, to meet the needs of this world. How do we, how can we use technical things, and also even, you know ... How can we engage with the world and meet the needs of the loneliness?

Nay:

I think that is a great question. And looking around, I just think people are desperate for community, more than ever before. If you, if you put anything, if you organise anything in person, you just get loads of people wanting to come. So, in Denmark, the Christian Unions, they normally have a camp for 500 people, but they had to change it for 80. The first camp sold out in 40 minutes. I run, I've kind of created a river swimming club, since March. And every time I put on the Doodle poll: "Who wants to come swimming?", straightaway people say yes. People are desperate for

community. They're desperate to meet in person because that's been taken away. And as Christians, we have the ultimate reason for community. We believe in a God who within himself is Father, Son, and Spirit. There's ultimate relationship and community within the Godhead. And so, as Christians we have this incredible motivation and means and method, to be community to our friends. And what I've found in lockdown, is I've just been given by God an incredible opportunity to build community within my community. So, for me that's looked like, well, the latest one, is there are 180 kids in isolation at our school right now? So, I decided we've got 10 days of isolation, why don't we do a 10-day video challenge? Every day, we have a new theme, children submit 30 second videos to a WhatsApp group- a funny video - and the point of that is to build community, we are journeying in this isolation together. And I've done similar things - all slightly crazy, all kind of unique to me - so be yourself in this. But as I do that, friends have literally stopped me and said, Nay: "Why do you build community so much? Why are you so invested in it?" And I said, well, ultimately, it's because of the God I know and love. And I'm able to talk about Him. And it's led to fantastic opportunities to talk about Jesus. Another example is, right at the start of this term, I said to

God: "How can I share my faith with my friends, everything's different?" And I felt God say to me, Nay: "Where do you think you shouldn't be?" And I knew the answer straightaway was Halloween. So as a family, we don't celebrate it, but in our community is bigger than Christmas, is really massive. And so, I thought, well, this is a big thing, God, if you really want me to go there. So, I decided to set up a Facebook page called "Bitterne Park Family Fun". And we would plan activities throughout lockdown, not events, but trails and activities you can do, COVID safe stuff. And I thought I will ask my friends to run the Halloween trail. But of course, they said no. So, me having never celebrated Halloween, I ended up running this trail, and we had 25 houses in the trail, we had a reach of 9000 on Facebook, we had thousands of people come. And we as a family decided we would be the house of light. And so, we decorated our house with incredible lights. And I felt so inspired, I wrote these beautiful little stories about a superhero, and a little boy, and we put them in gift bags with sweets and glow sticks. And we gave out nearly 500 in one day. And, in that, people have just written over, and over, and over again: "Nay, thank you, you're giving us hope". And so I just want to encourage you to do the same, not to copy me but to be

yourself in your own community, and have lots of fun, and build hope and you just will be amazed at what God does through that.

Janet:

Amen.

Kristian:

Now I'm encouraged; to start, you know, asking the questions like: "How can I be a friend and build friendship, deep friendship, in this time? How can I look for opportunities, and not - you know - things that blocks? Both when it comes to building community and when it comes to bringing hope and bringing an answer to loneliness in the world around me." Thank you, for your inspiration Nay, and God bless you.

Nay:

Thank you. It's been great to be with you.