Brief historical background on First Mobile Church
November 15, 2015 - shared with the worshipers after worship

It was sometime in Oct 2013 when I had the brainstorm of trying to connect people who are out walking their dogs or exercising in the park with a worship service. I then figured that everybody carries a cell phone around, so a simple conference call could do the trick. I ran this idea by my nephew Jay Davidson at a family get together and he said I was thinking too small. He suggested that lots of people for lots of different reasons might want to attend such a service. I thanked him for his insights and then told him that I'd be launching it in a few weeks.

I ran the idea past my session at West Grove Pres and they gave me a blessing to give it a try.

Here are the pieces of the puzzle that I put together for the service:
I secured a conference call account at Startmeeting.com. I had lots of experience with conference calls and used many platforms but this one was ideal. It was a free account and I could upload mp3 files (that's the music) to it and play it. Then I created a google document so that I had a worship script to follow. This is helpful for when I have my elders do the welcoming and prayers and it also is what shows my technical team when to mute the call, when to go to Q&A mode and when to record the service. (what this means is that we have a document that we can all see on the internet. I can even make changes while they're looking at it…… but this rarely happens.)

I then searched for an ideal name for the worship service. After a little bit of trial and error, I settled on First Mobile Church. I created a website with a free website creator called Weebly.com. Then for about $14, I registered the website name - firstmobilechurch.org. At that point, I pointed my weebly website - called mobilechurch.weebly.com to the firstmobilechurch.org site and voila - a website for a mere $14.

In preparation for the first worship service, I uploaded some music by the Rev Dr David Dickey (a friend of mine) who gave me permission to use his material and also from Patty Schraut, a woman from the West Grove Presbyterian Church who married an Austrian and has spent her life in Germany and Austria as her husband Bernard works for Trans World

Radio. For some time, I agonized over how to make sure my music was legally played. More about this later.

My worship script or order of worship hasn't really changed over the years. I started out with welcome and any announcements, a song, prayer time, then scripture, a sermon, a response piece, a song and a benediction. I use the same scripture and sermon that I will be using at West Grove Presbyterian Church.

Then, I announced to my family and friends that I would be launching First Mobile Church on Nov 23rd at 9am. On the launch I had 5 callers (and I count myself). Then it was 10, 8, 11, 7, 8. On Jan 5th 2014, I had 23 callers. Then 18, 20 and I think the standing record is on Jan 26th 2014 - 26 callers. It was an icy wintery day. Then on Feb 16th of that year - I ate crow for the first time. It was going to be another snowed out Sunday, so on Saturday night I posted on Facebook, First Mobile Church never cancels. Here's what happened. The next day was snowy and icy and I got to the office and tried to get on Startmeeting.com, but the conference call site had gone down. I then used my robocaller (dialmycalls.com) to try to notify everybody to change the conference call number. I was fairly successful and got 13 people to dial a new number and a new access code. The other major failure happened at the end of June this year and the first week of July. I thought I had 2 of my old sermons from West Grove Church uploaded to Startmeeting, but they were in some crazy format that wouldn't play. So, some of you just hung out and told stories of God's love, grace and providence in your lives. Thanks for that.

Well, in May of 2014, while on study leave, I registered First Mobile Church with the PCUSA's Thousandandone.org initiative.
(http://www.onethousandone.org/)
From this venue, I had a 5 person team from Richmond VA come and visit me and watch mobile church in my office in Sept 2014. I followed up with them and they haven't launched their own.

In the past 2 years, I had numerous interviews with newspaper editors and got my story in the Lancaster PA and Chester County publications, but these articles rarely get any new worshipers. I've even sent letters to local hospice agencies thinking that they intersect with people who might benefit from this type of worship.

Also, in 2014, I spent a lot of time talking to activity directors at the many Presbyterian retirement homes. They would get quite excited about the venue, but then could never get any interest in their residents calling in.

Communion - later in the year 2014, I got the brainstorm to do communion. I asked the session and even the presbytery if I was permitted to send out communion elements and conduct a virtual communion. Everyone agreed and in Sept 2014, I conducted our first communion service. We did it quarterly until 2015 and then we started it monthly.

Music break-through - the musical breakthrough came sometime late in 2014. I was asking all the major music distributors for permission to play their material in my format. I got permission from all the major houses. But, it got better. I discovered that the music copyright law has an exemption for worship services. Here it is:

Copyright act 110(3) of title 117 exemption

This exemption applies to stand alone worship services. In other words, as long as I'm not distributing the music and only using the song in a worship venue (I'm not copying any sheet music), the exemption applies. So, I can use any song. So, often I will purchase music from itunes, convert it to an mp3 and then upload it to startmeeting. I've tried lots of different music, but as you know, the best audio comes from solo male singers in the alto or bass range.

What are some of the costs of the worship? The major costs of this worship come from the use of the 855 number to call in on, yet that is an important part of this ministry. We desperately want everyone to be able to call in and worship with us, whether they have a long distance plan or not. We're charged 4 cents a minute for every minute use of the 855 number. It runs anywhere from $30/month to $60/month. Other costs of the ministry involve the communion elements and mailing them out. Also, the dialmycalls reminder call costs 7 cents per call. Pretty minor expenses. Also, since I have more songs on the startmeeting site, I'm paying $3 a month for extra storage space as well as $2 a month for the special greeting that you get when you call in.

I have been asking our local presbytery, that the body above our local church for grants to support mobile church. Each year they've given us

$1,000 to help with the expenses. This year we were able to give a love offering out of this grant to my dependable duo.

And, finally, any money that is not used for our expenses, goes toward our mission giving at West Grove Pres. So, we put the offerings to good use.

Do you have any questions? Thanks for your participation and interest in First Mobile church.