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Triage for Churches during the COVID 19 Pandemic

Hey Guys!

Never before has the American church been put in a place where it cannot meet regularly for such an extended time. This unprecedented situation did not catch God by surprise and so we believe He has allowed it for His own purposes. One of them must be to strengthen His church.

Below are **Eight Initiatives** you can begin or enhance to help strengthen your church for the now and the future:

1. Keep highlighting and repeating your mission and vision

- Remember that vision leaks. It's really leaking fast now. So keep reminding your people of the mission of Jesus' church and the particular vision He's given you to fulfill the mission.

2. Member care:

- a personal email and/or snail mail that goes out to your membership that includes a link to log their prayer needs (good chance to establish a prayer team if you don't have one)
- personal phone calls to folks over 60 or those you know have health problems
- remember to quote Scripture and speak words of faith and hope

3. Stewardship

- Push online giving with a goal of doubling the percentage of online givers. Make sure that you also stress how easy and important it is for them to make their gifts regular when they sign up. Might even post simple how-to instructions. If you don't have online giving capacity yet on your website, PushPay is easy to add. You might also check out LifeWay's website and the GiveInJoy website to discover more about online giving.
- Send a series of emails encouraging people to give with an opportunity to click/give imbedded in the email.
- Send snail mail letter out every month for 3-6 months with stamped return envelopes to targeted givers—those less likely to online.
- Begin developing/enhancing a culture of generosity (*go to my website to sign up for a free 30 minute phone call to discuss what that would look like for you*)

4. Budget realignment

- Work on a budget that is tiered; i.e., 60%, 75%, 90% There is a **downloadable document** on my website that explains this further. If I can help, let me know.

- It sounds crazy, but begin now developing a plan to fund an ‘opportunity’ account that builds to 3 months minimum of budgeted expenditures and could become 6 months in the next 3 years.

5. Live streaming

- Produce a quality, yet inexpensive live streaming presence on FB and your website. www.churchonlineplatform.com is a free service put out by lifechurch.tv.
- I have posted a help sheet for “**Preaching Without An Audience**” on my website to help hone the skill of preaching to a camera, not physically present, audience.

6. Small groups

- This is a great time to highlight and build your small group leaders and structure. I’ve listed some helpful resources but the most important resource is YOU and your leadership. Now is the time to recruit and train and multiply.
- Resources:
 - The Gospel Project* offers great Bible study curriculum
 - www.thechurch.digital help churches develop online community and discipleship.
 - RightNow Media* has tons of streaming videos, including ability to customize training courses on their site including uploading discussion questions, etc. If you don’t have an account, let me know.

7. Digital Meetings

- It is absolutely critical that you don’t just maintain your staff meetings, but that you **increase their frequency** during this time.
- Virtual meetings can include not just your staff meetings, but your small group gatherings, leader training, deacons and elder meetings—AND, if you are a multi-staff church, **include a staff wives meeting**. Get the spouses to corral the kids and let the wives gather online to encourage each other.
- If you haven’t read Patrick Lencioni’s book, “Death by Meeting,” it’s an easy, must read for those who want to get the most out of their staff and leadership meetings.
- Zoom offers unlimited times of 40 minute usage; FaceTime is free; GoogleTalk costs.

8. Gospel

- This is a great time to both **demonstrate** and **declare** the gospel
- Develop online prayer requesting and prayer groups
- Look for ways to help your community
 - Food pantry
 - Provide gift cards for 1st responders and workers at nursing homes & hospitals
- Post daily devotions that increase hope and cut away the fear

This is just a starter. I’m sure you are doing most if not all of this, but thought I’d jump in and see if any of this might help. You’re certainly welcome to share this with other colleagues.

For You,



Pointers for Preaching "Preaching to an Empty Room"

1. If you're not live and not used to preaching to a camera, feel free to warm up first and your team can edit. In other words, like a pitcher warming up, go and get used to it and then start over when you are more comfortable and ready to go.
2. Work hard to use words like "today" instead of "this morning" or "this afternoon".
3. The mind game I tried to play was thinking that the camera was the living room of someone I was trying to talk to and attempted to keep that image in my mind as I preached.
4. Encourage your people to treat this like they were sitting in the worship center: limit distractions, silence cells, and help their children find the passage. Remind them to look on the bright side--they get to control temp in the room and volume of worship for first time!
5. Preparation is more important than ever. Because the listener is more focused on you and your facial expressions and verbiage than in a normal service, you need to be more prepared. Little bits of unpreparedness show more.
6. You should always use illustrations, stories, and humor-- but they are more critical now to help not only develop understanding and application but to help the listener stay tuned and not drift away.
7. Be shorter. Probably should aim at 15-20% less time spent preaching.
8. Eye contact is more important than ever. We're used to scanning our eyes over the crowd but we can't do that while preaching to an empty room! Imagine you're standing up at a fireplace in your house and speaking to a group in your living room.
9. Stand in one place. Don't wander as you might be accustomed to.
10. Work harder at smiling. The audience is focused on your face!
11. Practice reading the text out-loud multiple times before Sunday and read it with inflection!
12. For tech team: Keep the camera focused on top half of body. If you need to move the camera closer to the stage, do so.
13. Review. I know, I hate it too! But watch yourself 2-3 times over the next few weeks to look for issues that may distract your listener.
- 14: Finally, **Be Yourself**. Phillips Brooks, one of the four great preachers of the 19th Century and contemporary of Spurgeon (also wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem") fashioned my favorite definition of preaching: "Preaching is truth through the prism of personality." Study the scripture. Pray fervently. Prepare diligently. Ask for His anointing. And then be you under the control of the Holy Spirit. That will be enough!



Realigning Your Budget

Churches have to learn how to be nimble in adjusting budgets and controlling expenditures. I encourage you to examine your budget as soon as possible. You may want to freeze spending for a brief season, but the best step is to move forward with an adjusted or realigned budget.

Realign your budget by developing three tiers: one that is 60% of your annual budget, one that is 75% of your budget, and one that is 90% of your budget.

60% of anticipated annual income

Personnel: this is a good time to trim down your staff and make it leaner, as well as cutting loose staff that have been underperforming; ask staff to copay some benefits like health insurance and book/retreat/conference monies; reduce or eliminate any retirement contributions your church may be making on behalf of the staff. If you feel you don't have staff to cut, then move to a cross the board salary reduction.

Utilities: since you're not using your building for program ministries and office functions, plan on continuing this for as long as possible, downsizing those costs for the rest of the year; i.e. continue to work from home except for rare occasions; make sure your programmed heating and cooling systems reflect the change in facility usage.

Mortgage: ask if your lending institution will suspend payments for 6 months to 1 year OR ask to refinance since the rates are so low and get as long an amortization as possible. Warning: be careful of prepayment penalties that could incur.

Facilities: go to a partial or full volunteer basis for cleaning and upkeeping the facilities. In 2008 & 2009, we divided up the building between our Rush Creek staff and cleaned it every Thursday in preparation for Sunday. Call on members with maintenance skills to help; postpone scheduled maintenance for at least 3 months.

Ministries: rethink expensive ministries like summer camps and mission trips. Instead of going away for those, plan on scaled-down efforts that stay local.

Equipment: eliminate all upgrade purchases of software, office, AVL, and other equipment unless they are needed to get you into new virtual space, but then only when absolutely necessary.

75% of anticipated annual income

Personnel: it's still an opportunity to trim down your staff and make it leaner, as well as cutting loose staff that have been underperforming. At this level you may still need to cut benefits but keep your normal contribution for health insurance. You might reduce but not eliminate any contributions to retirement accounts.

Utilities: at this level you still need to cut utility expenditures as much as you can, as in the 60% tier.

Mortgage: at this level you still need to talk to your lending institution to see what favorable treatment you can get for at least interest only payments for 6 months.

Facilities: you'll still need to drastically cut facility costs per the suggestions in the 60% tier.

Ministries: with summer right around the corner, expensive retreats, camps, and trips should be greatly reduced or eliminated and replaced with inexpensive alternatives.

Equipment: adopt the same suggestions as in the 60% tier

90% of anticipated annual income

Pick and choose options from the 60% & 75% levels and take the opportunity to increase your surplus account for the next emergency. This won't be the last!