

How Churches Can Respond & Lead Well Through the COVID-19 Crisis

March 16, 2020

Stay calm and lead wisely. In crisis, people often look to their spiritual leaders for guidance and reassurance. Our hope and help are rooted in the Lord. Expect that fear and anxiety about the unknown will cause many to be humbled and seek the Lord. This may be a significant opportunity for you and your church family to reach those that otherwise would not be open to the gospel. The love and help you offer may be a magnet for those looking for peace during chaos. This is your time to shine brightly as a leader and a servant of God.

Leaders and organizations are often evaluated by how they perform during a time of crisis. After this pandemic is over – and it will end one day – how will you and your organization’s “actions under fire” be remembered? This is a time for leaders and organizations to “step up,” serve well, and demonstrate compassionate leadership.

Here are 14 Things Leaders Should Be Doing Now:

- 1. Take care of yourself.** This is not selfish. This is essential if you are going to care for others. Don’t set a bad example by showing disregard or a cavalier attitude towards the guidelines set by the CDC. Even if you feel this is being overblown in culture, err on the side of wisdom.
- 2. Take care of your people like you want them to care for others.** Your people won’t be able to care for your congregation members if you don’t first care for them. Listen to and acknowledge their concerns. This is a good time to encourage your people to pray, trust the Lord’s sovereignty, and care deeply for one another. Be available to your leaders, volunteers, and people in need of your counsel – reach out via calls, emails and conference calls.
- 3. Create a “nerve center” with your leadership team.** Monitor congregation-wide issues and make quick decisions to take necessary actions. “Decide how to decide” key decisions. Have a clear understanding with the leaders in your church about how, when, and by whom these timely decisions need to be made. Power struggles often occur in the middle of crisis. Avoid this.
- 4. Stay focused.** Find ways to keep the ministry focused on your priorities. Your mission and vision have likely not changed as a result of this crisis. Use these chaotic events to further your mission.
- 5. Innovate!** This is a great time to be creative. Leaders are problem solvers.
- 6. Heed the recommendations of federal, state and local governments.** We’re all in this together and the only way to defeat a pandemic is through community action. Collaboration in times of crisis will bear fruit in your long-term relationships

with governing bodies. The information seems to be changing by the hour. The most reliable information can be found at: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/).

7. Remind the congregation. Remind your congregation the church is a body, not a building. This is the time they can be the hands and feet of Jesus by caring for their neighbors. If you need to cancel church services, build your communications around some key themes like:

- We are not being fearful; we are being responsible.
- We are loving our neighbors by being a neighbor.
- This is what love requires of us in this season.

8. Act now to communicate.

- Agree to and send out a proactive communication.** Regularly communicate your church's response and plan for dealing with this crisis as it continues to unfold. But don't make promises you cannot keep!
- Invite questions, concerns and helpful ideas.** Welcome feedback and interaction from your congregation. Sometimes people just need to be heard.
- Develop a care plan for your congregation.** If you haven't already, divide up the church directory between the staff and key leaders of the church so that you can reach out to every person in your congregation.
- Seek out the elderly and homebound.** Don't put your elderly individuals at risk by visiting in their home personally. Ask congregation members to connect with the elderly and homebound to serve them. Some grocery stores have suspended delivery, so church members can do the shopping for them.
- Update your church directory.** Gather updates to your digital church directory and share it with your congregation. Encourage people to use that old time favorite, "the telephone," or text to check up on people.
- Create a way to share practical needs of congregation members.** Use technology to help the needs of the church be known to others. Establish a prayer chain and expand it to include important needs of members, like transportation to doctor visits.

9. Put technology to work for you and your congregations. Advances in technology have allowed the church to be more than a building. Now is the time to leverage the technology to keep your congregation connected while they can't meet in person. Here are some creative ways to still provide programs, teaching, and connection within your congregation:

- **Livestream your service.** *Facebook Live* and *YouTube* are the two most popular and also the easiest to use. Messages can be prerecorded and uploaded “live” at a certain time to give the congregation a sense of worshiping together. Here are some resources if you would like to try and set up a livestream:

- [Church Online Platform](#)
- [Church Online Platform - Getting Started Article](#)
- [How to Livestream Your Church Service: A Practical Guide - TGC](#)
- [How to Livestream Your Church Services for Free - Switcher Studio](#)

However, if you are unable to livestream your services, here some samples that you can direct your congregation to:

- [Calvary Church](#)
- [Immanuel Church of the Nazarene](#)
- [Community Fellowship Church](#)

If you are already hosting your own livestream, please send them to us. We would love to watch your service with you!

- **Move Sunday school/Sunday morning classes online.** Group meetings can be conducted via Facetime, Zoom Calls, Google Hangouts, etc. It is okay to not offer all of your regular programs. You may just be adding more stress to the people you are trying to serve.
- **Host online children’s ministry and youth ministry livestreams.** Do not forget these vital ministries and the power of hosting special events for them. Children and teens are used to watching YouTube for content, why not leverage it with your church? Here are some resources if you want to host content for children’s and youth ministries:

- [SubstanceChurch.com](#)
- [Life.Church Kids Media](#)
- [Life.Church Open Network](#)
- [Youth Ministry Resources](#)

- **Encourage online giving.** If your church has not already moved to online giving, start now. There will be a financial impact by not meeting in person due to the loss of “unplanned” giving of cash. But this can be mitigated by moving to online giving and reminding the congregation of the needs for continual giving.
- **In cases where congregation members must be at your church, please follow the guidelines provided by experts.** For example, [social distancing](#)

may require a change in your reception and waiting areas and redesign of meeting space.

10. Stay alert to government assistance. For example, there is legislation pending in Congress that may provide additional government support for unemployment and emergency leave for employees. This may be a terrific time to set up a way for people to contribute to your benevolence fund to help those who may be put in a financial crisis for a while.

11. Start contingency planning now. Experts are increasingly concerned that this pandemic may cause a global recession. How long and how deep is anyone's guess at this point. And the worst supply chain disruptions may be to come. Here are some things you should consider:

- **What financial actions should you take now?** Are you prepared to weather an economic storm? Should you be reducing operating expenses and capital expenditures proactively, and if so, which specific ones are prudent? How is your current cash position and how do your future cash projections look under various scenarios? What happens if revenues slow? Should you draw on your line of credit now, in case it's not available later? How robust is your giving and how can you improve it? How is your relationship with your vendors and what help can they provide (credit terms, consignment inventory, etc.)? Will you have to shift staff hours?
- **What impact will this have on the workforce in the congregation?** Are there congregation members likely to lose employment due to health issues or economic ones? Will there need to be an increase in benevolence giving? Do you have a plan in place to help those most effected by the economic turndown (i.e. hourly employees)? How might this affect the full-time and part-time staff of the church? This is a good time to look at cross training your staff!
- **What new threats might this create?** Will your bank, key programs, and congregation members survive a severe downturn? How will this impact your organization now and in the future?

12. What opportunities will this create? Is this a time to reach out to other churches to collaborate, support each other's mission, share resources, and impact the community?

13. Consider how this might change churches for the long term. In some cases, people are wondering whether this pandemic will change the landscape forever. For example, does this push your church even more strongly toward community involvement? Will this accelerate a person's preference to do things online/virtually and stop gathering in person at a church building?



14. Utilize the slowdown. Often, we're too busy to tackle projects that make our churches better. If things are slow, take this time to work on those necessary projects, policies, and procedures you haven't had time to do.

We are here for you: We are working remotely from our homes, but we are fully functioning and available to you. If you'd like help thinking through any of these issues, let's talk. We have been and will continue to be praying for you as we move through this crisis, together!

[Psalm 46:1-3](#)

[Romans 8:28](#)