

LEADING A POST-COVID CHURCH

**A PASTOR'S GUIDE TO
MINISTRY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**



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 **CHURCH ANSWERS**

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequent questions church leaders ask is, “How do I lead my church in this new world after the pandemic?”

Indeed, everything seems different. Most everything seems difficult. Leading a church is not what it used to be.

As leaders deal with the fast pace change of culture and their churches, they need to keep in mind some things have not and will not change. The Bible is still the Word of God. Jesus is still the only way of salvation. People still need to hear the good news of Christ. Followers of Christ still need to grow as disciples.

While eternal truths have not changed, how we do the work of ministry has changed incredibly. Who would have thought that Facebook views for streaming worship services would be one of our common church metrics today? Who would have thought that, at least for a season, we would have to measure our worship centers to accommodate social distancing? Who would have thought that our churches would have intense efforts to move as many church members as possible to digital giving?

I have taken some of my key **articles** from **Church Answers** and put them into this single e-book to help you navigate this new world. In addition, I have added some new material and new insights I have never published to this point.



“People still need to hear the good news of Christ.”

This book is divided into three major sections. We begin with an overview of the post-COVID church. This section includes a forecast of what the church will look like in the near future, and in five years. We then look at some of the early struggles of churches in the second section. But we conclude the book with some key strategies and issues that can help the church move forward.

Yes, these are challenging times for church leaders. I pray for you leaders often.

But I am convinced God is preparing our churches for a new era and new opportunities. Every great challenge churches have faced in the past 2,000 years has been met with God's power and pathways. Our churches will prevail. It is my prayer you will see God's opportunities as you lead your own church forward.

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF A PANDEMIC AND GOD'S CHURCHES

Church leaders and members rightly gave much attention to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. In-person church services were cancelled. Small groups met digitally, if at all. Church leaders urged members to support the church financially through digital giving. Churches sought ways to minister to their communities in the midst of the pandemic.

I am grateful for the responses and for the caring hearts of so many church members. In the midst of a major challenge, it is heartwarming and reassuring to see people who really care.

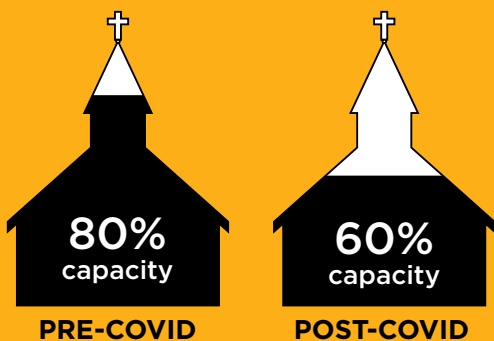
Hopefully soon, the coronavirus will move past its pandemic state. I am fascinated to see what our churches will look like on "the other side." Here are some likely developments:

Non-digital giving will become an outlier.

Fewer people will want to handle the offering plates or buckets. Fewer people will touch cash. Watch for a dramatic decrease in non-digital giving. Make certain you are moving your church to digital giving. Your church should be receiving 60% of gifts digitally right now. That number must grow. Have someone in your church who can help the digitally challenged to set up online giving for them personally.



Smaller worship services will become normal. We were already seeing a trend of churches moving to smaller worship gatherings, even if the church was growing. We anticipate many larger churches will attempt to have services capped around 250 to 300. Smaller churches will, of course, have even smaller gatherings. A 200-attendance church, for example, may move toward two services post coronavirus.



The 80% rule will become the 60% rule for worship gatherings.

The 80% rule said that a worship center with a capacity of 200 feels full at 160 (80%). The 60% rule says the congregation will want more social distancing, and thus the 200-capacity worship center will reach its social distancing capacity at 120.

The negative economic impact on churches could have long-lasting effects.

Church leaders should begin discussions of “what if?” What if our giving was cut by 30% for the next few years? What adjustments would we make? Indeed, we are beginning to see more and more churches make significant changes to their budgets.

Social distancing will change permanently some of the traditions in many churches.

Stand and greet is gone and will not return in most churches. Church huggers will no longer be tolerated. Even handshakes

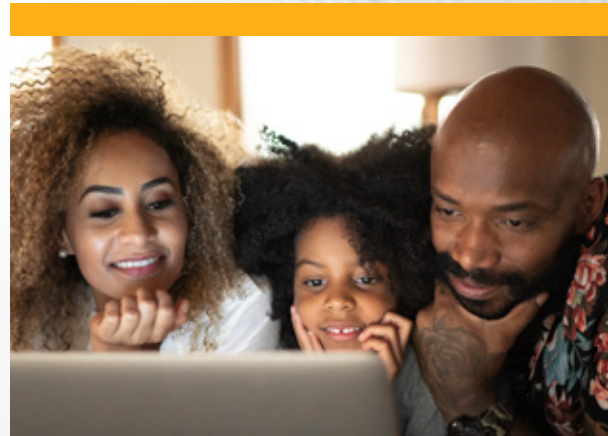
will be minimized. Some church members resent even mentioning these changes. Some church leaders do as well. But it is the likely reality we face.

The death rate of churches will worsen. Many churches are barely hanging on. These churches will not survive the consequences of the coronavirus. The death rate of churches will thus increase significantly. These deaths can be mitigated, however, with an intentional focus on church adoption and church fostering.

Church adoption and fostering will increase significantly. I address this issue later in this book. Church adoption takes place when a healthier church brings the people and assets of a struggling church into its church family. The adopted church becomes a campus of the adopting church. Church fostering is the process where a healthier church provides assistance and resources to a struggling church for a defined period, typically less than a year. Church fostering may or may not lead to church adoption.

Churches will rapidly adopt more virtual practices. Many churches have resisted the migration into the virtual world, but the coronavirus has taken many congregations into a quick immersion into the digital age. The initial forays have been to move into digital giving more fully and to stream some form of worship services. But coronavirus is the tipping point of much more to come in the digital world. Indeed, this change may be the most profound of all the changes churches will face after the coronavirus is no longer considered pandemic.

For certain, these are trying days. I know you know it, but remember God's got this situation. He's got you. And He's got your church.



“... remember God’s got this situation. He’s got you. And He’s got your church.”

EARLY FINDINGS FROM CHURCHES THAT ARE REGATHERING

The regathering of churches for in-person services is garnering a lot of attention in both the religious and secular media. I totally get that. There are very few organizations other than churches that meet as a large group every week. The implications are significant.

We are following closely as more churches open for in-person gatherings. More than half of the churches are now open, and more are added each week. Those that are open will be making adjustments. Those that are not yet opened can plan accordingly.

For now, we see several early trends. The list is not exhaustive, but these findings are the most common we are observing.

1

Most churches are cooperative with local and state officials and desire to comply with their guidelines. While the media will highlight adversarial relationships between churches and governments, such tension is simply not the norm. To the contrary, the vast majority of church leaders desire to work with governmental entities. The real story is not a battle between church and state, but a cooperative spirit between the two.

2

Early attendance is significantly lower than the pre-quarantine era. At this point, one-half of the churches we have surveyed have an attendance of 60 percent or less than the pre-quarantine numbers. We rarely hear of a church that has an attendance of 80 percent or higher. For now, those churches are the outliers.

3

We have numerous reports that senior adults are among the most eager to return to in-person services. Frankly, this trend is going contrary to our initial expectations. We thought most senior adults would be the last returning group

because of potential health concerns. But as many of these older adults return, leaders are concerned how to minister to them spiritually and protect them physically.

4

Negativity among members has grown. When the pandemic began, many churches had to hit the pause button on a number of fronts and issues. One of the unintended positive consequences was the pause button was hit by the negative church members. It has been a blissful silence for churches. Now that churches are planning to regather, the pause is lifted and the acrimonious few are back. We will look at this issue in more detail in the next chapter.

5

Most churches are utilizing some type of extra service at least for the short-term. The regathering churches are adding space to allow for social distancing. Some are adding services. Others are adding overflow rooms. Some are doing both or providing other creative solutions. The need for extra space has been exacerbated by children coming to the worship services who were previously segregated in their own age-graded area.

For certain, the way churches are returning is changing regularly. These findings will undoubtedly change as church leaders make necessary adjustments.

Let's look ahead and see where churches might be one year from now.

HOW CHURCHES WILL HAVE CHANGED ONE YEAR FROM NOW

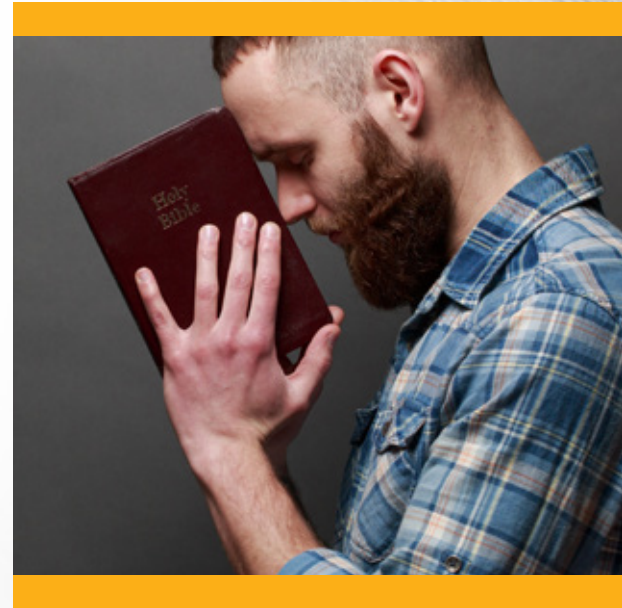
I am not prophetic. And if I am prescient, it's only because I have the incredible vantage point of hearing from tens of thousands of church leaders every year.

While it is admittedly difficult to project trends in typical times, it is exceedingly difficult to do so in a time of pandemic headed for, hope-

fully, a post-quarantine era. Because we hear from so many church leaders and church members, allow me to venture where local churches will be in one year.

At least 20 percent of those who attended before the pandemic will not return to church. Of course, this number will vary from church to church, but early indicators point to this level of losses. Some of the former in-person attendees will become digital-only attendees. Most of this group, however, will not attend at all.

More pastors will leave vocational ministry over the next twelve months than any time in recent history. Pastors suffer a death by a thousand cuts. It's usually not just one or a few factors that push their limits, it's the drip-by-drip effect of constant criticisms and conflicts they experience. That continuous pressure and discouragement has been exacerbated by the incredible pressures brought by the pandemic. I address this issue in the next chapter as we look at why many pastors will quit.



Churches will move to a new emphasis on conversion growth. Churches have been quietly disobedient to the Great Commission for three decades. We are seeing signs of a new wake-up call. Church leaders are becoming increasingly convicted that they must lead their churches to reach those who are not believers in Christ. Church members are reflecting that same conviction and commitment. Most church growth for the past three decades has been transfer growth, Christians moving from one church to another. That dismal reality is about to change.

Churches will start more churches, many of them as micro-churches. Churches are moving from vertical growth (getting as many to attend as possible at one place on Sunday morning) to horizontal growth (growth beyond one site on Sunday morning). A lot of this new growth will include the starting of microchurches, congregations of around 25 to 30 people. As a side note to be unpacked later, these trends will have huge implications for the future of church facilities.



Two movements will grow rapidly: church adoption and church fostering. There will be more unhealthy churches needing help in the next few months. There will be more struggling churches without pastors. Some of these churches will be adopted; they will be assumed into another church family and become a site of the adopting church. Others will be fostered, which means a healthier church will help those struggling churches for a short season. I will address both of these movements in chapter 3.

While it has become cliché to say we are living in unprecedented times, we are living in unprecedented times. Those organizations that view this new reality as an opportunity will indeed see limitless possibilities. This perspective is especially true for the organizations we call churches.

It's a challenging time. It's an exciting time.

The next twelve months will be incredibly telling for the future of local churches around the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHALLENGES OF A CHURCH IN A PANDEMIC

It has been a common theme at **Church Answers**. We have heard from pastors and other church leaders about members who have divergent opinions on the timing for re-gathering the in-person services.

No surprise here.

It might be helpful, however, to understand the reasons behind the disagreements. Let's review several of the major themes that have emerged during the pandemic.



Strong extroverts and strong introverts will have major disagreements on timing.

The reason is obvious. The extrovert is dying to resume interaction with fellow church members. He or she thrives on in-person gatherings and conversations. The strong introvert, however, has done well seeing few people and interacting with few people during the quarantine. I fit the latter category.

Different church members have different sources of authority on the coronavirus. Some of it could be related to political leanings. For others, it could be connected to the type of news that comes through social media. For some, they listen to certain friends and family members. In case you haven't noticed, there are a lot of different opinions out there.

Age and health can be factors of divergent opinions. Two of the common themes about COVID-19 have been the vulnerability of the older population and those with underlying health conditions. It would not be unexpected for those two groups to be more likely to prefer a later opening than an earlier opening. One of my sons has chronic asthma. I worry about him returning to in-person services too soon.

Parents with children at home may decide to wait. Most churches will not segregate the children from the adult worship services at the onset of the re-gathering. Some parents will be hesitant to bring the kids to the worship services for health reasons and for fear of disruption.

Attitudes toward change affect opinions about re-gathering. For example, if a change resistant church member learns that the church must have additional services for social distancing, he or she may prefer to wait until the church can return to “normal.” Change-receptive church members, however, are often eager to try new services and new ideas. They will be ready to return and experiment with the new approaches.

It’s cliché for you pastors and church leaders to hear, but you can’t please everyone all the time. Take the path that you deem is best for the church and for the health of those who will attend. Listen to voices of wisdom. And pray that God will honor your decision and protect everyone involved.



Take the path that you deem is best for the church and for the health of those who will attend.

FIVE TYPES OF CHURCH MEMBERS WHO WILL NOT RETURN AFTER THE QUARANTINE

It is one of the most common questions we get from church leaders: When will all the church members return to in-person services?

Leaders do not like my response: Never.

It is a reality church leaders and members are hesitant to accept. For most churches, not all the church members who were attending before the pandemic will return. In fact, our anecdotal conversations with church members and church leaders indicate somewhere between 20 percent and 30 percent of the members will not return to your church.

From an attendance perspective, if 20 percent of a church with a pre-pandemic attendance of 200 do not return, the new reality attendance will be 160 in attendance after everyone feels safe to return. You can do the math for your own church.

So, who are these non-returning church members? Why are they not returning? Here are the five most common dropout groups. The groups are not mutually exclusive; there could be significant overlap.

1

The decreasing attendance members. These were your members who, at one time, attended church almost four times a month. Before the pandemic, their frequency of attendance declined to twice a month or even once a month. COVID accelerated their trends. They are now attending zero times a month.

2

The disconnected church members. If a church member is in a small group, his or her likelihood of returning is high. If they attend worship only, their likelihood of attendance is much lower. Please let this reality be a strong motivation to emphasize in-person small groups once everyone feels safe to return.

3

The church-is-another-activity church members. These church members see gathered attendance as yet another activity on par with, or lower, than other activities. They were the church members who let inclement weather keep them from church but not their children's Sunday soccer games. Commitment to the church was a low priority before the pandemic. They have no commitment in the post-quarantine era.

4

The constant-critic church members. These church members always had some complaints for the pastor. They are likely still complaining even though they have not returned to in-person services. Many of them will not return at all.

5

The cultural Christian church members. They were part of a declining group well before the pandemic. They were those church members who likely were not Christians but came to church to be accepted culturally. Today, there are few cultural expectations for people to attend church. These cultural Christians learned during the pandemic that it was no big deal to miss church. It will be no big deal for them never to return.

Church leaders and church members, however, should not fret about these losses. Your local church has the opportunity to write its future on a blank slate, and these church members really had no plans to be a part of that future anyway.

You may feel the pain of the losses; that is normal. But God has a plan for your church to embrace the new reality to which you are headed. Head into His future with confidence. God's got your church. And He's got you.

Before we get to strategies to lead effectively in the post-COVID world, let's look at some reminders why your church members may seem ornery right now. It's a tough time for them too.

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WHY YOUR CHURCH MEMBERS ARE ORNERY IN THE PANDEMIC

There have been three consistent questions our team has received in the early days of the pandemic.

In the first weeks the question was, “When do you think we can return to in-person services?”

As a number of churches began to regather, the question became, “When will more of our church members return to in-person services?”

Today, a common question we get at **Church Answers** is, “Why are so many of our church members ornery?”

The answer may seem obvious, that we are experiencing a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. After all, who would not be concerned, frustrated, and uncertain? But as we dug deeper talking with pastors and other church leaders, we began to understand there is no simple response to the latter question.

Indeed, we are finding the “ornery factor” to be more complex than it initially seemed. Here are some of the factors putting your church members in a concerned and bad mood:



1

They are weary. The cumulative toll of the pandemic is telling. Some are weary because loved ones and friends have COVID. Some are just tired because of the pandemic in general.

They are confused. It’s difficult to get a consistent story about COVID. Even the organizations that supposedly have all the expertise don’t seem to be on the same page. It is both confusing and frustrating.

2

3

They are fearful. It’s easy to tell a believer he or she should not fear. It’s a challenge to fight fear with the barrage of bad news we get every day.

They feel like they have lost their church. In some ways, they have lost their church. It will not likely return to the way it was pre-pandemic.

4

5

They are weary of the cultural fights. In one day, I counted fourteen different cultural issues in the news where one or more groups were fighting others.

They are stressed because it's presidential election season. The four-year cycle is here. It is always a stressful time even without a pandemic.

6

7

They see so much negativity on social media. Indeed, Facebook and other social media can be harmful to your mental and emotional health. Social media is a magnifying glass to negativity. It gives a voice to those who were rightly ignored in the past.

They miss gathering with their friends at church. I know. The church is the people, not the building. I get that reminder daily. But the church is supposed to gather, and digital gatherings just have not sufficiently replaced in-person worship.

8

9

They have lost their outward focus. One of the reasons for the orneriness is self-focus. When we are focusing on what is wrong in our lives, we are not focusing on reaching and ministering to others. A self-focused church is an ornery church.

They lament that their regular patterns have been disrupted. Even the most change-oriented of us need some type of routine in our lives. So many of our routines have been totally disrupted by the pandemic.

10

If you sense your church members are getting a bit ornery, you are probably right. Indeed, you as a church leader may be struggling with some of these same issues.

One final note is in order to conclude this challenge: many pastors are ready to quit. If you are a pastor, you will identify with many of the reasons. If you are not a pastor, please be in **prayer for pastors around the world**.

SIX REASONS YOUR PASTOR IS ABOUT TO QUIT

About one-third of my readers are laypersons. This section is for you. Of course, I know pastors and other vocational ministry leaders will be reading as well.

Please hear me clearly. The vast majority of pastors with whom our team communicates are saying they are considering quitting their churches. It's a trend I have not seen in my lifetime. Some are just weeks away from making an announcement. They are looking for work in the secu-

lar world. Some will move to bivocational ministry. Some will move to marketplace ministry.

But many will move.

Why has this period of great discouragement ensued? Of course, it is connected to COVID-19, but the pandemic really just exacerbated trends already in place. We would have likely gotten to this point in the next three to five years regardless.

I also want you to know that these pastors do not think they will be leaving ministry. They just believe the current state of negativity and apathy in many local churches is not the most effective way they can be doing ministry.



So, they are leaving or getting ready to leave. There are many reasons why, but allow me to share the top six reasons, understanding that they are not mutually exclusive.

1

Pastors are weary from the pandemic, just like everyone else. Pastors are not super humans. They miss their routines. They miss seeing people as they used to do so. They would like the world to return to normal, but they realize the old normal will not return.

2

Pastors are greatly discouraged about the fighting taking place among church members about the post-quarantine church. Gather in person or wait? Masks or no masks? Social distancing or not? Too many church members have adopted the mindset of culture and made these issues political fights. Pastors deal daily with complaints about the decisions the church makes.

3

Pastors are discouraged about losing members and attendance. For sure, it's not all about the numbers. But imagine your own mindset if one-half or more of your friends stopped engaging with you. And pastors have already heard directly or indirectly from around one-fourth of the members that they do not plan to return at all.

4

Pastors don't know if their churches will be able to support ministries financially in the future. In the early stages of the pandemic, giving was largely healthy. Church members stepped up. Government infusion of funds for businesses and consumers helped as well. Now, the financial future is cloudy. Can the church continue to support the ministries they need to do? Will the church need to eliminate positions? These issues weigh heavily on pastors.

5

Criticisms against pastors have increased significantly.

One pastor recently shared with me the number of criticisms he receives are five times greater than the pre-pandemic era. Church members are worried. Church members are weary. And the most convenient target for their angst is their pastor.

The workload for pastors has increased greatly. Almost every pastor with whom we communicate expresses surprise at their level of work since the pandemic began. It really makes sense. They are trying to serve the congregation the way they have in the past, but now they have the added responsibilities that have come with the digital world. And as expected, pastoral care needs among members have increased during the pandemic as well.

6

Pastors are burned out, beaten up, and downtrodden.

Many are about to quit.

You may be surprised to discover your pastor is among them.

But, in the midst of all these challenges, there are an abundance of opportunities. God is not done with His churches. Let's move from the challenges to the incredible mission fields we can reach moving forward.

CHAPTER 3

WHY CHURCHES WILL HAVE AN INCREDIBLE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

As congregations return methodically to in-person services, something else will be taking place. It will be obvious to some churches; it will be more subtle to others. Simply stated, churches will have an incredible window of opportunity to make substantive and positive changes.

We have been watching closely the responses of congregations and their leaders during the pandemic. We have surveyed thousands of them during our **webinars**. There seems to be little doubt. God is using this difficult season to prepare churches for unprecedented opportunities.

Why is the window of opportunity opening right now? Of course, the correct answer and perspective is that God is opening the window for our churches. But it is fascinating to see specifically how He is working in our congregations. I see at least five reasons for this new and exciting opportunity.

Many of our church members are more unified in the midst of the challenges. This crisis has brought our congregations together. Nitpicking and self-serving has transitioned to praying and serving. More of our members are focused beyond themselves. God is preparing them to move in greater passion and obedience to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Our congregations have been exposed to a variety of worship experiences.

Have you ever seen a church member's perspective and attitude change dramatically for the better when he or she went on a mission trip? That church member becomes aware of a world and cultures dramatically different from her own. Our church members have been exposed to hundreds of streaming worship services. Many of them look and sound nothing like their own. Their world has expanded for the better.



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Many church members have already made changes.

I received a comment from an older church member who made the transition to digital giving during the pandemic. His words were likely meant to be humorous: “I swore I would never give online because I was certain it was the abode of the devil.” His willingness to change to **digital giving** is but a microcosm of the changes many church members have already made. They will likely be receptive and prepared for even more change.



The community is more receptive. In most communities, those who don't attend church have been watching streaming worship services. Many of the residents of these communities have requested prayer. Many churches have been highly intentional to reach out to members of the community. The window of opportunity is wide open in these communities.

Church members are anticipating and celebrating re-gathering in person. They are more in the mood of joy and celebration rather than complaining and nitpicking. They are not nearly as focused on themselves. This pandemic has made them realize that their churches, as imperfect as they are, truly are blessings from God. They are not taking their churches for granted.

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It is indeed a window of opportunity. If past major events are indicative, this window of opportunity will remain open for several months to a year.

God has given us an opportunity.

We cannot and must not let it go to waste.

GETTING YOUR CHURCH MEMBERS BACK IN THE HABIT OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE

The transition is moving forward. Every week more churches are beginning the process and stages of opening the doors of the church facilities for in-person services.

We are back.

I get it. The church never closed. The church is the people, not the building. Someone reminds me of those points daily.

But the doors to the church facilities closed. The opportunity to gather for worship in-person closed. A lot has transpired over the past few months.

Now it is time to exhort your members to return to in-person gathered worship. Though this statement is admittedly not theologically precise, it is time to “return to church.” Why is it important to get back in the habit of regular and faithful attendance? Why should those connected to a local congregation make a new commitment to attend as regularly as possible? Here are five reasons.

1

The Bible mandates we gather for worship. The writer of Hebrews is unequivocal: “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25, NLT). Gathering for worship is not an optional activity. It is not an occasional activity. It is an ongoing and regular commitment.

2

The Bible emphasizes the importance of the local church. Think about it. After the four gospels, almost all of the New Testament is about the local church or directed to the local church. Throughout the New Testament, different local congregations met together and worshipped together. It is simply what believers do.

3

When we gather together, we encourage each other. I am a classic introvert. Admittedly, I adjusted well to streaming services and Zoom community groups. But I readily admit I did not get or give the same level of encouragement as those times when we were physically present with each other. Look at Hebrews 10:25 again. The act of gathering is an act of encouragement.

4

When we gather together, we encourage our pastors and other leaders. The encouragement of one another includes the encouragement of our pastors and leaders. They desperately need it. You cannot know the challenges of a pastor unless you have been one or are one. The stress and responsibilities they had during the pandemic were especially challenging. The world acts surprised when a pastor takes his life. Sadly, I know the depths of pain many pastors feel. There are plenty of critics and discouragers for pastors. I pray that many people will return to the in-person gatherings with new levels of commitment. Our pastors will be greatly encouraged.

5

We grow spiritually when we commit to faithful attendance. We grow as a believer in Christ when we have a committed prayer life. We grow when we are committed to read Scripture daily. We grow when we share our faith regularly. We grow when we serve in ministry. And we grow when we commit to attend worship services faithfully. That attendance is a spiritual discipline. It is a vital and necessary act toward greater spiritual maturity.

The pandemic and quarantine have been transformational moments for our world and our churches. We now have the incredible opportunity to hit the reset button in our own lives. For many Christians, committed church attendance was waning before the pandemic. God has reminded us, perhaps even given us a major wake-up call, how really important the gathered church is.

Get ready to return to the gathered church. But do so this time with a new enthusiasm and faithful commitment every week.

It's a habit we cannot and should not neglect.

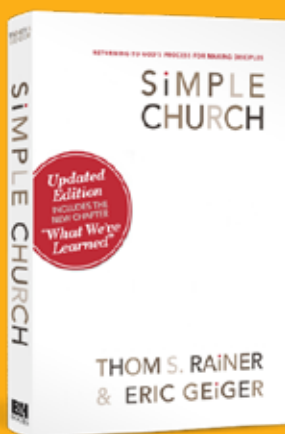
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MINIMAL CHURCH: A KEY POST-COVID STRATEGY

The calendar of most churches in America is scary.

There are so many activities, programs, and events that some members feel like they have to live at their church to be faithful and involved. Add to the busy calendar all the digital requirements adopted during the quarantine, and you have a church too busy for its own good.

Almost 15 years ago, Eric Geiger and I wrote a book called ***Simple Church***. We dealt with the challenge that most churches don't have a process of discipleship. We presented that process in four major categories: clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. It was that last category that got a lot of attention.



“Focus” dealt with doing a few things well in the church and discarding the rest. A lot of leaders love the concept. A lot of church members did not and pushed back, some with anger.

It is time. It is time to revisit the need to simplify. It is time to look at how effective churches of the very near future (like in the next few months) will do only a few things well and eliminate the rest.

Many of our churches have become so busy that we have hurt our best families. Many of our churches have become so cluttered with activities that we

don't give margin for our members to have a gospel presence in the community.

The pandemic, for the most part, provided us a blank slate. It's time to rethink our busy schedules and become a minimal church.

Where do we begin? Let me suggest these starting points:



Bring this issue to four to seven of your best leaders in the church. Their titles are not as important as their influence among the members. Get these few leaders together to discuss and take seriously this issue.



Review the church's calendar or some similar log of activities. Obviously, you need to look at the calendar from a pre-pandemic perspective. But add all the new requirements, like providing a livestream service, to the pre-pandemic list.



Focus particularly on those activities that required people to come to the church's facilities. Those are the activities that consume your members' time. Decide which are essential (like gathered worship), which could move to digital, and which could be eliminated.



Consider this question: If your church expected your members to be at the church facilities four hours a week, what would you put in that four-hour slot?

The exercise would be hypothetical at first, but it could move closer to reality. What is absolutely essential in terms of on-site attendance? What could be eliminated?



Begin the process of elimination immediately.

Now is not the time to have a long-range planning committee decide something that will be ignored three years from now. Now is the time to eliminate so much of the busyness that hinders our churches and our church members. This post-quarantine era is the blank-slate opportunity. Don't let it pass.

A minimal church is not a church of minimal impact. It is a church that has decided that we need to unleash our members to have more time to disciple their families, to become a gospel presence in the community, and to develop relationships in their neighborhoods.

So, a minimal church is really a church with maximum impact and influence. It's not about a wavering commitment to do less ministry; it's about a commitment to use our time more wisely for God's mission outside the walls of the church facilities.

It will take courage to lead your church to become a minimal church. Indeed, it takes courage to be a leader in this era. Let's look at two major movements our church should consider joining in the midst of these opportunities.

CHURCH ADOPTION AND CHURCH FOSTERING: TWO IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS

When Sam Rainer coined the word “adoption” two years ago as a descriptor of one church acquiring another, I knew he was on to something. Instead of using corporate words like “acquisition” or unclear words like “replanting,” he used a powerful familial word. Adoption is one family bringing another family member into the household of faith.

I followed Sam’s example a year later by using the word, “**fostering**” to refer to a healthier church helping a less healthy church for a season. In the case of **adoption**, the arrangement is permanent. For fostering, the relationship is temporary.

Both are important and powerful words because they describe two distinct but closely related movements that are important and powerful. Why are these terms so important? Even more, why are the movements behind them so important? Let’s look at a few reasons why these movements will become critically important in the days ahead.

When a church is adopted or fostered, closure is prevented or, at the very least, less likely. There is therefore still a congregational presence in the community. The physical resources intended for God’s work remain for God’s work.

The pandemic has increased the need for church adoption and fostering. More churches are struggling. More churches are at risk of closure. More pastors are leaving under pressure and frustration. The need is great. And the resources are there.



Adoption is one family bringing another family member into the household of faith.

The church adoption and church fostering movements are reminders that churches should work together to reach a community. These movements are a form of “horizontal growth” rather than the typical “vertical growth.” The latter is focused on getting as many people as possible to one place on Sunday morning. The former is focused on reaching the community.

Churches that foster and/or adopt get healthier themselves. Both church adoption and church fostering are outwardly focused ministries. They take the focus off the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I, and move the focus to reaching others with the gospel. Outwardly focused churches don’t have time to be grumbling churches.

These movements are grassroots and local. Those involved know the community. They typically love the community. This movement is not a movement where a denominational authority or some other distant entity tries to impose its will on a community. Fostering and adopting churches take place because those who lead them know healthier churches will lead to healthier communities.

We will be spending quite a bit of time discussing, researching, and following these movements. They may prove to be some of the greatest opportunities coming out of the pandemic.

It’s cliché, but the best days are likely just ahead.



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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUDING WITH THE OBVIOUS

As you have read this book, I hope it has given you some ideas for moving forward. I hope it has given you a taste of the reality of these challenging days. Above all, I hope you have seen God's possibilities even in the most trying of times.

I worked with someone who would often begin a sentence, "I know it's stating the obvious . . ."

I finally got to the point that I told him if it was obvious, he didn't need to state it. Yet, I will change my mind as I conclude this book. These final points are obvious, but I also hope they are welcome reminders.



You and your church must be increasingly dependent on prayer. The first church began from a movement of prayer. The spiritual awakenings of history began with movements of prayer. The churches that emerge from this pandemic as healthy and vibrant will have leaders and members who looked to God in prayer for a great intervention. You must be one of those leaders of prayer and in prayer.

You and your church must be focused on the Great Commission. Many of our churches are too busy for their own good. The pandemic has given us an opportunity to eliminate the busyness and focus on the priorities. If our church leaders and church members are

not prayerfully and intentionally sharing the gospel, we are not truly New Testament churches. Related to this issue is the need to focus

You must be one of those leaders of prayer and in prayer.

more time on the Great Commission and less time on critics and naysayers. The latter will drag you down emotionally and cause you to lose focus.

You and your church must be open to radical change. We were largely ineffective in the way we did church before the pandemic. Many of our congregations today are mostly irrelevant. Incremental change won't get it done. We must seek God's new paradigms and pursue them relentlessly.

You and your church must be willing to sacrifice it all. Of course, I can't define "all" for you. But you will know. You will be challenged to make incredible sacrifices for the sake of the gospel. This era is not a time for weak or mushy Christianity. It's a time for radical Christianity, which is really the only true faith we should practice.

It is indeed time.

I am praying that I will be the kind of leader who will be used of God to move churches forward.

I am praying you will be the kind of leader to lead your own church forward.

And I pray we will be willing together to do whatever it takes, whatever it costs.

Then, and only then, can we say our lives have truly made a difference.



It's a time for radical Christianity, which is really the only true faith we should practice.

***I invite you to get my new full-length book on this topic:
The Post Quarantine Church at www.ChurchAnswers.com/books/***



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