

Preparing to Gather Again

During this crisis, the Church has not been able to gather in community. For many this has been a sorrowful and distant season. In some ways this has been instructive and fruitful for ministry in the days ahead. While we continue in this new normal, we must look ahead and prepare for how things will be different when we are able to gather. Here are a few things we must prepare for in the days ahead.

Your Meeting Place

During the quarantine your main worship space has sat empty and maybe been completely unused. Many have used an alternate space for videoing and streaming services. It is also very likely that in your efforts to reduce costs you may have shut down the HVAC in the sanctuary and may not have cleaned it in several months. Prior to gathering again, you must make sure your space is clean and operating efficiently. The difference in this crisis and others is that we should not expect a flood back in the doors on day 1. In fact, when we gather again, we may need to add services and reduce seating in our spaces.

Start today by evaluating your worship space. Have it cleaned and consider an approach that will run air purifiers or cleaners in your space prior to and during your gathering times. Your attention to detail in your space is one step in making the environment one that is both welcoming and safe for your congregation and visitors.

Church plants and multisite churches meeting in a school, theater, hotel, or other temporary space that is owned by some other entity brings a different set of circumstances to your paradigm. After the peak of this has passed, I would encourage you to engage the entity that leases to you and take them a proactive plan as to how you will use the space and clean the space when they re-open the space. Many of the entities that rent to churches do so to generate income and opportunity. While some are like-minded most are not missionally motivated. With a heightened sense of responsibility, we need to understand that cleaning the space we use will be more important than ever. I would create a cleaning team or pay to have a company come in that will disinfect and clean at a higher level than before. While your budget may be in a downturn, this expense may be the difference between having a space and not having a space. You may be able to recruit a volunteer team as this will be an opportunity to go above and beyond as a renter.

More times than not, landlords have a negative view of church tenants. Be the church that changes the perception with your landlord. Be generous, go above and beyond, to treat the space better than they would. This is your witness. Be prepared to enter this conversation and understand that they look at you through both an income lens and a liability lens. Be an asset, a contributor, a partner!

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People Over Place

As we return to our gathering space, we expect that there will be new people that will join us. This season has shown that many people are searching for hope and joining online services. Develop a strategy for your ministry that continues to demonstrate that the Church is the people and not a place. How can we do that?

1. Continue to connect with people online - They found you here and it may take time before they rush the doors of your Place. While we all have dreams of packed gatherings like after 9-11 this crisis may have a slow return as some people may still be fearful to gather. It is common knowledge that when a person or family joins a church it may take 6 months or more before their tithe follows. That rule may apply here as well. People may be following and joining you online now, but it may take a while before they join you in person.
2. Offer ministry opportunities – As we come out of this there will still be thousands of people in need. Engage your members and those who are following online to be the hands and feet of Jesus. While some may struggle to give financially, the opportunity to physically serve those in need can be a catalyst for your community.
3. Equip for Evangelism – Expand your ministerial reach by making sure your members see their role as a minister of the Gospel. You as a leader, a church planter, often carry most of this responsibility but this is a season to light the match and watch your people step up to minister to their family, neighbors, and co-workers.

Budgeting Today

Your budget on March 1, 2020 likely looks drastically different just 30 days later and looking to May 1 there will likely be a larger shift. While we always do an annual budget for ministry the focus on the monthly budget is obviously priority. The monthly budget will need to be looked at weekly by a team. If you do not have a finance team, it would be advised that you gather a team of a couple wise people to make recommendations for the current and coming months. Pastor DO NOT shoulder this alone.

You may need to revise your budget to 50% of your current budget. Maybe it needs to be more drastic. Only you and your leadership team know your situation. Making decisions around personnel and other expenses are critical today. Today, make a budget that expects a significant dip in giving. Moving forward live in a posture of surplus budgeting. By that I mean plan a budget that is under what you expect to receive and save the excess funds. If your normal giving in July 2019 was \$20,000 then plan to live in July 2020 on \$16,000(80% of 2019). I know churches that build each annual budget on 85-90% of the previous year's budget as opposed to many churches that budget on 102-110% of the previous year's budget. Put this into practice as soon as you can in case, we hit a season like this again.

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Financial Stewardship

Giving has taken a plunge. Hopefully you have been able to not pay for your place that you have not been able to use in the last month. In many cases, ministry has expanded while giving has gone down. Cash reserves, if you had them have thinned or disappeared. Take this time to revise your budget. Look for ways to trim the current budget moving forward. If you were not building a cash-reserve, then add that into your budget at the next opportunity. As you take wise steps to prepare for the season ahead be transparent with your membership and let them know their giving is critical to the ministry work of the church. Again, this is about PEOPLE, not PLACE, they are critical to supporting, funding, and doing the work of ministry.

What If We Do Not Have a Place to Meet

If there is a change in how your landlord operates after this what will you do? We must have a contingency plan if a landlord reverses course and decides not to rent the space any longer. We know we can minister to our people regardless of space. Yet we long to gather as the church. We may need to look to gather in a new space. It may look different than it did before. We may have to look at a smaller space that requires more gathering times. Ministry may look a little different as we may need to do family church if we lose classroom space. Change will come and we must prepare for it.