

Book Review for Presbytery of Greater Atlanta

The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges + Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation Thom S. Ranier (Tyndale momentum 2020)

I was searching for a Christmas gift to thank our Elders and Trustees last November. A can of nuts didn't seem right because all of 2020 had been a can of nuts. A sparkly Christmas ornament didn't seem right either—I was taking a Christmas tree break with no one coming to my house for the holidays. That's when I found Thom S. Ranier's book, **The Post-Quarantine Church**. I first started reading Ranier's brief blogs and articles in the early 2000s. I often found his insights and instincts helpful. I looked at the table of contents then checked its page-length (111 small pages!) I knew him to be an engaging writer and given the book's brevity, I thought our leaders might actually read it. I have been delighted to receive emails and comments from many who have found it accessible, helpful, and relevant, sparking new ideas for our context. Our Session is discussing it this month as part of our monthly meeting.

The Six Urgent Challenges are: *Gather Differently and Better + Seize Your Opportunity to Reach the Digital World + Reconnect with the Community Near Your Church + Take Prayer to a New and Powerful Level + Rethink Your Facilities for Emerging Opportunities + Make Lasting Changes that Will Make a Difference*. Ranier is excellent making the challenges+opportunities practical and engaging. He provides 'real life' examples from other churches during the pandemic so that ideas can translate into actions. Each chapter ends with discussion questions.

His main thesis is that with the usual "busyness" of our churches shut down by the pandemic—activities, meetings, use of our buildings, etc.—we have an opportunity to focus on what is essential to the core mission of the congregation (or for some of our churches including the one I am serving—to discuss anew what we think our core mission is at all!). He says we have been so busy "going to church" (events, activities, meetings), that we have sometimes failed to be on mission in our own communities. With our buildings "resting" for a year, now is the time to reassess how we have been using them and discover greater and more efficient purposes for which they may be needed by our community. He encourages us to actually ask our communities what they need from us! And now that some of us have been forced into the digital world, Ranier says we are probably going to be serving three different groups of people as we emerge from lockdown: Digital Only; Digitally Transitioning; and Dual Citizens. How will we continue to connect with these differing groups? Cautioning against falling into the trap of 'digital busyness,' he urges us instead to do a few things well. His chapter on reconnecting with the community near the church offers lots of good ideas.

Rainer describes how beach erosion doesn't get noticed much year by year, but let a hurricane hit with dramatic effect and everyone moves into emergency mode and takes action. That metaphor leads him to write: "In the church, the slow erosion in most congregations was tied to the drift in outward focus. Most churches had begun using their resources of time, people, ministries and money to take care of themselves. It was a gradual process. It was not as if church leaders and members decided one day they would cut back on their efforts to reach the community. It was more of a year by year process replacing the Great Commission with a great complacency."

Ranier is action-oriented, advising leaders and members to respond with a sense of urgency—not with a 3, 5, or 10-year strategic plan. We need to cast a vision measured in months that offers some short-term wins because we all need some encouragement.

I remember how swiftly our churches closed. I think we imagined, as we preached to empty pews, that one day we would reopen decisively with loud alleluias. Today, it appears folks will trickle back in, but they don't have to drift aimlessly and neither do we. No one knows, including Ranier, how exactly the new reality will unfold, but he offers ideas, encouragement, and practical examples that help. Trinity is going to try to reconnect with its community this Easter. We've got a banner and we're even giving yard signs to our members (Trinity has never done yard signs before!). Our yard signs are an encouragement and an invitation in keeping with the tenor of this brief book: "Hope Rises Here."