



Relaunching Your Congregation – The What and How -- Not the When

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Contingency Planning and Preparation:

- Engage in planning for a ReLaunch, prepare for the ReLaunch, and practice the ReLaunch.
- Do not set a date and then disappoint your congregation. Be mindful of the three phase plan that has come from the White House task force. When will Phase One start in South Carolina? . . . Phase Two? . . . Phase Three? Phase One could start by Mother's Day. Phase Two by Father's Day. Phase Three by July 4th. They could start sooner, but they could also start later.
- Survey your congregation regularly with an online survey as to when they are ready to return to a live worship service and small groups.
- Efforts and conversations must rise above partisan politics and what the government is saying, or it will negatively impact your relaunching.
- As you prepare to ReLaunch bring small groups of influential thought leaders back into the church facilities for dialogue and prayer. They can be advocates for you to their networks.

Prayer:

- ReLaunching your congregation should be a spiritual experience
- Engage in several weeks of a season of prayer leading up to the relaunching of the congregation
- Sessions can be led online by pastor, staff, and key lay leaders and posted on your website and social media.

Summer:

- Realize that with summer coming, that churches may open before schools. Therefore, when safe and appropriate, what can churches do with virtual or physical/social distance events for children and youth/students?
- How can churches help prepare children and youth/students to academically to go back to school in the fall? This can be done virtually – and when appropriate – on-site
- It is possible that the window for summer events may only be July 6th to August 14th—a six-week period once Phase Three has started and before school starts back.
- How will you use that time? Will you have any of the traditional programming such as VBS, camps, trips? Or will you now?

Physical/Social Distancing:

- Phases of physical/social distancing: Strict during Phase One. Moderate during Phase Two. Careful during Phase Three.
- Some physical/social distancing patterns will continue, and some may even be permanent. There will be less handshakes, hugging, and cheek kissing, but there may still be standing and turning to greet one another.
- Post signs about not shaking hands and doing non-contact greetings. You can promote the hashtag [#itsoktosmileandwave](#).

Virtual Church/Technology:

- Use this time to raise the technical knowledge of your congregation. Teach them to use Zoom and other communication vehicles without fear!
- What new technology have, or will you invest in, and who does or will operate it? Just having the new technology is not enough. You need staff and volunteers who can help you reach the potential the technology offers you.

Worship:

- Plan a Comeback Worship Service when appropriate.
- Do not have printed worship folders. Project all information on a screen.
- Consider more/multiple worship services with smaller gatherings if there is a size limit on the number of people who can gather. Physical/social distancing will require a smaller attendance per service.
- Survey people to see which service they plan to attend and have a limit allowed for each service. Make the idea and number of the limit well-known to the congregation.
- Keep an online worship option at least for a while for those who are afraid or unable to attend in person.
- Continue online worship while phasing in live worship, and then decide whether you continue online worship. You might continue online worship as a choice, or even consider starting an ongoing, online “campus”.
- For churches who pass the elements of the Lord’s Supper/Communion the same issues of touching the plate or tray or the elements may be a concern. Self-contained juice and cracker cups may not solve the problem of anxiety as to who has touched them. Forget about the intinction method.
- While physical baptisms might need to be delayed, can some rite of passage ceremony substitute until the physical baptism can take place. To do physical baptism as usual may be a negative testimony to the need for physical/social distance.
- Skip every other row or space chairs out. Meet and greet times – if still conducted – will not involve touching, but words of kindness and expressions of joy.
- Your worship center capacity will decrease from the 80 percent factor to a 50-60 percent factor. How will this drive you decision about how many worship services you will conduct?
- First-time guests will particularly be looking for more space, safety, security, and cleanliness.

Restrooms:

- You must decide whether you will allow restroom usage.
- If you choose to keep your restrooms open, be sure to post signs and washing hands in restrooms with appropriate guidelines to do so.
- If your restrooms are open, have greeters monitor the restrooms to ensure hands are washed and social distancing is followed.

Staff:

- Staff responsibilities may change. During this time people may have figured out they need staff doing different things than they were doing. Perhaps less programs, and more staff-led individual, family, and small group interaction.
- The number of full-time, permanent staff may decrease in favor of bivocational and covocational staff who can relate more intimately to a small segment of the congregation.
- Thus, some full-time staff positions may go away.
- Will a higher level of digital literacy be a new criterion for staff hiring? Will you need to dismiss staff who are not digitally literate and cannot/will not increase their capacity in this area?

Small Groups:

- Many closed-end small groups will become permanently digital. This is a group with a beginning point and an ending point. For example, a new member orientation, a multiple week study of a subject or book, a coaching or mentoring season for leaders, etc.
- Will small groups continue meeting virtually for a while even after live worship returns? Perhaps there will be a phasing in of live small groups at the church facilities. Perhaps other venues will be used for small groups to gather with physical/social distance that is needed during various phases of the ReLaunch.
- Online small groups need to meet for a shorter time, so they do not get Zoom Fatigue. (Note: This refers to the “formal” meeting length. Informally people may want to stay online longer just to fellowship in the virtual “parking lot”.)
- Small groups that start once again meeting live in the church facilities may need to be divided into smaller groups, and a limit placed on how many small or smaller groups can gather in the available space and rooms at the same time.
- Online community can nurture existing small groups but may have trouble creating community among new small groups.

Finances/Generosity:

- Will your church need to write a contingency budget if giving does not rebound in a few months?
- If your church received a PPP loan will you need to repay it if giving does hold up or rebound?
- Budgets will experience small changes in some cases to dramatic changes in others.
- Churches will spend money on new and different things. More will be spent on digital equipment, licenses, and Internet-related access.
- Online giving patterns will continue the increase they are experiencing during this time away from live church.
- Less people will place cash or a check in an offering plate that is passed down their row.
- Passing the plates may become a thing of the past. People will not be sure whose hands have touched the plate. (Already in many worship services where offering plates are passed, the percentage of people who place anything in the plates is dramatically declining.)
- Ushers may need to stand by the reciprocal where offerings can be placed as people enter or leave worship.

Marketing/Communications:

- Advertise the ReLaunching of the church and make it a big day like Easter.
- Connect with as many people as possible virtually, and through both mass media and targeted marketing.
- Even place messages of hope on billboards and social media sponsored by your church.
- Over communicate about cautions being taken as people come back. Communicate that “This is the safest place people can gather!”
- Tell your congregation through flyers on the church doors, email, and social media about how you have prepared the church facilities for their arrival. Be sure to use words like “clean, safe, and mindful of health needs and issues in preparation for a non-touch experience” or something similar. Also say that if they are sick, then they should not be present and can join online instead.

Cleanliness/Safety:

- Consider a temperature check on all staff and volunteers. Some may even want to check everyone who enters for a while.
- Deep clean your entire church. Where will germs be transferred? Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing pews, bathrooms, doorknobs, light switches, and microphones.

- Personal sanitizing will permanently increase. Wipes and solutions will be all around open areas, in restrooms, in education areas for all ages.
- The smell of clean will be the new understanding of “Muzak”. A whole new set of cleanliness standards and practices and frequency must be in place.
- Provide new, clean masks for anyone who needs one as they enter. Making these could be a great project for volunteers in a church with clear specifications for the material and design.

Committees/Teams/Boards:

- Many committee or team meetings can now take place online using Zoom or the connection capacities of many other vendors.
- Do online continually for many gatherings. Attendance is better. Gatherings are shorter. Travel is not required.

Community Outreach/Missional Engagement:

- Reconsider how your congregation will engage in missional engagements that involves regional, national, and international travel.
- How can virtual missional engagements have an impact on a community context, or people group?
- Will volunteers be willing to take the risk to travel and temporarily live in the places they had intended to go – particularly given the possibility of a second and third wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
- Community outreach will more often take place in the actual community rather than meaning that community people come to the church facilities for some activity or ministry. The church will go to the community.

Community Life Within the Congregation:

- For at least a while, the in-person church will be more important to people.
- For a while, when people return to live church, they will come more often than they did before. It will be like it was post-9/11/01.
- In the long-term attendance may settle back to the old patterns. It more depends on how well we reconnect people with God and our congregation.

Facilities:

- The experience will cause congregations to rethink the need to expand their facilities.
- Their facilities may need to be retrofitted, but not expanded.
- It will also cause congregations to consider becoming location partners with other congregations – especially new church plants

Refreshments:

- For the foreseeable future churches should not offer coffee, juice, water, and food openly laid out in fellowship areas.
- They should invite people to bring their own coffee, etc. in a closed top container.
- The church might even give away or offer at cost branded drink containers that meet the church’s guidelines for safety from spills.

Pastoral Care/Mental Health:

- Dealing significantly with the emotions of your congregation.
- Mental health will be a major concern for years. There will likely be a COVID-19 brand of PTSD. Therefore, congregations need to be prepared to help people debrief.
- Deaths where a formal funeral did not occur may – for some people – create an inadequate grieving process.
- How will you address alcohol and drug abuse that may have worsened during the crisis?
- How will you address other health issues such as weight increase that happened during the crisis and aggravated other health issues?

- Will you welcome people who were or are infected—even asymptomatic – with the coronavirus? How? Under what circumstances?

Preaching:

- Shift the preaching schedule and topics to address issues and emotions with which congregational participants return to live church.

Volunteers:

- It is possible that some volunteers will not be willing to engage in their program and ministry leadership for a while due to their concerns about safety.
- What adjustments need to be made if volunteer teams do not have enough participants?
- Perhaps this is a time to consider the essential, simple church pattern rather than seeking to keep all the programs, ministries, and activities of church that existed pre-COVID-19.

Partnerships Between Churches:

- Some smaller membership churches may really be struggling by the time churches can go live.
- Medium membership and larger membership churches need to be ready to partner with them as a Kingdom approach to ministry – particularly within associations like CMBA.
- There could be a season of congregations fostering or adopting other congregations like a big sister or brother fostering or adopting a sibling.

Preschool/Children:

- Pay attention to the preschool and children’s areas. Consider removing everything nonessential from the rooms to limit surfaces for potential contamination and do a thorough clearing in between uses.
- What can you guarantee parents that has been done, is being done, and will be done to assure them their children are safe at church?
- The agenda has shifted from a primary concern about security to a primary concern about safety.
- Clear standards and practices must be in place, and assertively monitored not because workers will not follow the standards and practices, but because it is just that important to parents.
- How will you change programming for children as parents will be anxious with what is going on with their children if they are not in worship with them?
- Will you increase the activity or involvement for children during worship?
- Pre-register preschoolers and children to limit how many are in any room at a time.
- Limit leaders in the preschool and children’s areas to those who do not have pre-existing conditions and/or are not over 65 years old.
- Have extra volunteers to help in the preschool areas where some children may suffer from separation anxiety after only being with parents for a long time. (When parents return to work, some preschoolers may particularly have separation anxiety.)
- Do not let parents in the preschool area. Check in the preschoolers at the entrance to that area.
- Have a written checklist of what has been cleaned in the preschool and children areas and when.
- Develop a list of procedures for your volunteers. Train them on this list through an online gathering prior to the first live church weekend.

Senior Adults:

- Senior adult ministry may change significantly. They may be among the last to return to live worship as they are considered to be among the vulnerable.
- Many senior adults who did not know how, have now become digitally literate and will be willing to use that for a while, or even periodically, after they return to live worship and small groups.
- **Senior Adult Anxiety:** (A conversation with a group of 22 senior adults.)
 - They are positively anxious to get back to live church, but they want to be very careful.
 - They are missing the fellowship with one another and want that restored.

- Although they do their weekly small group by Zoom and they enjoy it, but it is not enough.
- Please do not relaunch until you can prove to us that it is fairly safe.
- Explain to us how we will do physical/social distancing.
- Will we need more worship services on Sunday as we cannot “pack the pew” anymore?
- You will need to sanitize the building and explain to us how you did it.
- Cut out the handshaking, hugging, and cheek kissing!

Sources Reviewed, Noted, and Perhaps Their Insights Modified or Inspired Other Observations

(The resulted insights are those of George Bullard and express opinion and not authority.)

- The Blank Slate: 8 Steps for Churches to Prepare for the Post COVID-19 World with Thom Rainer and others related ChurchAnswers.com. A video conference on Friday, April 17, 2020.
- An Opportunity for All Churches to Relaunch Post-Crisis by the Church Multiplication Network of the Assemblies of God.
- Vanderbloemen – Reopening the Church: A Discussion on Leading After COVID-19.
- Kenn Braddy – Encouraging and Equipping Sunday School and Small Groups.
- Georgia Baptist Mission Board – Basic Guide for Returning to Your Church Building after COVID-19.