

Leading Beyond the Crisis

Rev. David Hockett, District Superintendent

In an earlier edition of our District eNews, I shared the phrase, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our world like almost nothing since the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic or the Great Depression. It is a humanitarian, economic, healthcare, educational, political, social, and spiritual crisis like nothing experienced in our lifetime. It has impacted nearly every facet of life including the life of the Church. All of this has happened in the context of increasingly divisive and toxic politics, our ongoing denominational divisions, and the plague of racial injustice. These months of crisis make the future seem uncertain and the path forward unclear.

The word crisis, at its root, implies that we are at a moment of decision, a decisive moment, a turning point. The COVID-19 crisis has reshaped life as we know it and the “normal” we return to will be different from the “normal” we have known, and that’s not only ok, it’s hopeful - if we lean into the opportunity we have been given to let go of those practices, habits, and traditions that actually get in the way of the movement of God’s Spirit and take up those practices, habits, and new traditions that will enable the Church to thrive and bear fruit in new and powerful ways.

In April I shared some insights from a *Praxis Journal* article, [Leading Beyond the Blizzard](#). The authors observe that we are not going back to “normal” and that this moment of crisis “can be a moment of amazing creativity, though it also is going to be a time of unavoidable pain and loss...”. Now some six months into the pandemic and anticipating what “Church” will be like on the other side, I find their insights even more helpful. In summary they suggest...

1. The novel coronavirus is not just something for leaders to “get through” for a few days, weeks, or months. Instead, we need to treat COVID-19 as an economic and cultural blizzard, winter, and beginning of a “little ice age” — a once-in-a-lifetime change that is likely to affect our lives and organizations for years.
2. ...the underlying assumptions that sustained many organizations are no longer true.
3. The priority of leaders must be to set aside confidence in their current playbook as quickly as possible, write a new one that honors their mission and the communities they serve, and make the most of their organization’s assets — their people, financial capital, and social capital, leaning on relationship and trust.
4. The creative potential for hope and vision is unparalleled right now.

As we reflect upon how we might move forward beyond the present crisis and into a new “normal” we first need to create space in which we lament, and grieve, and mourn the tragic loss of health, life, income, and security we all have experienced. This has deeply impacted all of us, maybe in ways of which we are not even fully aware, and we need to name our grief and allow time and space for healing to occur. In addition, we need to take an honest assessment of who we’ve been as Church and consider who God may be calling us to be. Can we find the courage to wrestle with significant questions and take, what Dr. Gary Mason calls, “strategic, prophetic risks”?

Many of you have shared a few of your “moment of crisis” insights and questions with me. I’m sure you can add to the list, but these offer a place to begin.

- Has time away from our buildings caused us to consider a different relationship with “brick and mortar”? What would it mean for us to be the people of a tent rather than a temple?
- What has it looked like, or what might it look like, for our church to be in the community as opposed to simply being in the building?
- Is our local church more a people and a movement or a place and a destination?
- Are there programs and ministries we should eliminate and live without?
- Are there programs and ministries God is calling us to begin?

- Does our budget bear witness to the mission of Christ or does it simply support the stuff we've come to enjoy?
- Our church has connected with new people through online worship or community ministries. How will we maintain, nurture, and build on those connections?
- We discovered that we were better at creating members than making disciples. How do we seize the moment of crisis and change course for the future?

As I said in April, I do not believe that God unleashed the Coronavirus on the world to teach us some lesson. However, I do believe that God is at work in this moment of crisis and if we lean in and listen, we will hear the Spirit calling us to new ways of being and doing. God is always about the work of making things new and we are called to join God in this renewing work by putting "new wine into fresh wineskins...". We need to continue this adaptive, creative work on the other side of our present crisis. In so doing we may shape a new "normal" that more faithfully resembles the Kingdom.

As your District Superintendent and colleague in ministry, I am here to support you in taking "strategic, prophetic risks" for the mission of the Gospel. If you or your church want to lean into this conversation, ask hard questions, and imagine a new "normal" please reach out to me (dhockett@wnccumc.org). I'd love to be a part of the conversation.

Peace be with you,

David