

Hello Everyone, from Indiana –

we are the ONLY CB church in the state of Indiana, so this is a very nice opportunity to introduce myself and our church family to our CB church association. I have pastored off and on at New Providence in rural Indiana in a full time or bi-vocational capacity since 2004. I have served there for the last eight years as the Senior Pastor.

I was glad when Wendy reached out and asked if I would consider contributing to this newsletter. This time has been challenging in ways we could never have foreseen, and I know that those similar challenges are being faced by many reading this right now. It seems like talking about this is not only therapeutic but mutually encouraging to know we are not alone in this war with COVID-19 and how the Enemy would leverage it to discourage, divide, and destroy. Wendy provided some writing prompts to me to initiate the conversation, but I'll actually use them as the template for this article as a kind of interview format.

Q. What was your initial reaction when your church had to temporarily close?



A. I have run the gamut of feelings about church closings, like everyone probably has. I initially felt tremendous responsibility to keep everyone home, as at the beginning, sheltering in place seemed to be the safest course of action for our church family. I also felt incensed as the fear that the Enemy wanted to plant in the hearts of Christ's people seemed to spread even faster than COVID-19.

Q. How did your family do during the height of lock-down?

A. I have two teenage sons, (sophomore in College and a HS Senior) who are pretty self-sufficient young men. My wife works from home and is quite content as a home-body anyway. I however, went partially insane (kidding/not-kidding) as I am extremely extroverted and gain great energy from people. I am grateful that my wife didn't kill me during the height of the lock-downs!

Q. How did the transition to live streaming or whatever you use go?

A. To be honest, I believe preaching to an empty room with a web-cam on a tripod was the most difficult challenge for me. The fellowship of the saints on a Sunday morning, the children, the seniors, the teens, the families, the worship, the smiles, the hugs, the tears . . . all gone. Nothing but an empty auditorium. We transitioned seamlessly to an online worship service that started out well-attended but leveled off as time went on, and people began to try to get out to "normal life" again.

Q. Have you been able to stay connected to the people?

A. During the lock down, I did a daily "quarantine worship" on Facebook live. A lot of calls, texts, emails, all of the technology that everyone has been leveraging. But with visitations and funerals and the like placed on pause, the true CONNECTION feels very fabricated, though it is sincere and intentional.

Q. Have there been any COVID-19 cases among your congregation?

A. Yes, we've had a couple of positives, and all who were positive are well. The greater concern is the handful that are still sequestered. Even with tremendous care and protocols, there are still a small group who seem to be frozen in time, as though it is April 2nd and not September 2nd.

Q. If you are meeting again, how has the transition back to the building gone?

A. We have begun meeting again in person for many weeks now. There was great care taken by the Church to ensure that wherever anyone was on the COVID-19 concern spectrum, they could feel a great level of comfort being in the church building (spacing, masks, temps, high risk care, no food, no children's

ministries, etc.). What we found out quickly was, if you were concerned, you stayed, home. If you weren't, you came. And if you weren't and you came, you felt that the preventative was almost unnecessary. Our attendance is back to pre-COVID-19 levels, giving never dropped, and a couple of families have fallen away.

Q. How are you doing through all this?

A. This will be one of the times in history where we will look back and say, "I was a pastor in 2020 through COVID-19." It has been one of the most confusing, complicated, frustrating (*add your own word here*) times of my ministerial life. It has simultaneously been one of the most rewarding, encouraging, productive (*add your own word here*) times as well. Truly, what Satan has intended for evil, God has intended for good. I feel as though I've been a miner. Constantly mining from the muck and the mud the nuggets of gold. It's a rare find. It's a fleck here or there. It's a chunk sometimes!! But during the times when the finds were slim, as discouraging as they are, though they made me want to give up mining, there have been other miners right next to me, in the mud and the muck encouraging me to keep on mining.

Q. Most of all if you could put in a word of encouragement to others that would be paramount.

A. Don't. Stop. Mining. There's gold in them there hills!

In Christ, Mining Together,

Brice

Pastor Brice LeBlanc, New Providence Baptist Church, Greencastle, IN