

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

A conversation guide for church leaders

“Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste”¹

“Never let a good crisis go to waste” was a frequent comment in my past life in public safety. We encountered (and sometimes caused...) crises on a regular basis. After each one, we had a goal of assessing what happened, how we responded to it, what worked and what didn't, and what organizational and operational changes we might need to consider. Post-event debriefings and analysis were an important part of our personal and organizational growth and development.

A crisis is simply defined as a decisive or crucial time or a time of great danger. Let me suggest that, for church leaders, emerging from the season of COVID and strategizing for the post-COVID future is, in fact, a crisis – it is a decisive and crucial time for the churches we lead as we decide what to do next in this new and unfolding season of reengagement. We need to decide what is most important for us and for the churches we serve – we likely have not had that conversation for a while, so this is definitely something to talk about.

In last month's article, I wrote about some of the things we should consider addressing among ourselves as leaders as well as among the people we lead. The four were fear, uncertainty, fatigue and grief. Hopefully, you had good conversations about these issues. In this article, we become more strategic.

There are many candidates for “what's most important” for us. Congregants have been clamoring for many different and oftentimes contradictory things. It's been a weird and complex year, uncharted territory. But let me suggest that the most important “what's most important” thing for church leaders to consider is this; “*What should we do now?*”

To not consider this question before we make our plans to reengage more fully is to let a perfectly good crisis go to waste. This is because the pause in “normal” life while we have to work through a significant crisis is a great time to consider what is most important for any organization, including the church. Here are some ideas to help you start your conversation.

- Should we clarify our church's mission? I love the way EFCA's presents its mission/purpose in its Articles of Incorporation: We are an association of churches “...whose purpose shall be to glorify God through *obedience to the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ* by

¹ This quotation is generally attributed to Winston Churchill, but as with most things today, this is disputed and not substantiated. We know for sure the quote cannot be attributed to me.

bringing individuals to personal faith in Christ and helping them toward maturity in Him" (italics mine). This is a powerful yet concise statement of what are trying to do and how we plan to do it. We are here to obey the Great Commission and we plan to do it by bringing people to personal faith in Christ and helping them grow toward maturity in Him. Is this the purpose of your church? Do you have a higher purpose than this?

- Most churches won't be able to just pick up where they left off regarding programming and services. We have choices to make regarding what comes back and when it does so. What do each of the ministries that we used to do or that we plan to do again contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission? Can we, without resorting to mental gymnastics, demonstrate clear correlation between the things we do and the Great Commission? Are we willing to set aside those things that don't make the cut?
- As the church comes back together in person, what should we be teaching them? Should we keep doing whatever series we were doing? Should we remind people of the Great Commission and its role in our church? Do we assume they will remember what our purpose is from the last time we talked about it? How might we use the "drip irrigation" technique to keep this mission in front of the church in the future?
- Are we "over-programmed?" I love a full-program church with lots of options, but it can be exhausting and counterproductive in pursuing out mission. In my Bible recent reading I read about Jesus' call of Matthew.² After Matthew's call, Jesus had dinner at Matthew's house with many tax collectors and sinners, earning the disapproval of the Pharisees. I have often heard this passage taught as a slam against the Pharisees. But this time it struck me that Jesus, the Messiah, having limited time to be on planet Earth, and with all he had to do, took the time to sit in Matthew's home and have dinner with sinners. Jesus' did it because his mission was to save the lost, not to hang out with the found. It got me to wondering – is the church calendar so full that people don't have time to mix with friends and acquaintances that don't yet know Jesus? Is our "full" schedule sending the wrong message? Are we "over-programmed?" Do people have enough margin and encouragement to significantly engage with people they know that don't yet follow Jesus?

I have found that the healthiest churches are those that are running on three rails – kind of like a subway train. The two rails on which the train's wheels rest are bringing individual people to personal faith in Jesus Christ and helping those saved to maturity in Christ. Both are vitally important and deserve significant emphasis. The third rail supplies the power – it is the Holy Spirit at work in individual's lives. Our church's effectiveness in accomplishing God's mission requires all three.

We need all hands on deck. The time is short. Let's not let this good crisis go to waste. A renewed commitment to sharing the Gospel, growing disciples and living in the power of the Holy Spirit can become our "main thing" if we choose to make it so. It's not only something to

² Matthew 9:9-12.

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talk about, but what God has called us to do. Never let a good crisis go to waste. Let's talk about it.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.
Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob.osborne@efca.org.*

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This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.