

What's Next in the Pandemic: Phases of Disaster; Will we survive, Will we thrive!?

"Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around."

~ Economist Milton Friedman

I've talked about the Phases of a Disaster and folks have asked for more information, definitions and descriptions of these. There are different approaches to these. I like to consolidate them into these four:

1. **Impact:** Safety and Security are the focus. Shock and fear are the emotional drivers. It's the wind blowing, waves crashing, fires burning, snow burying, waters rising, deaths mounting moment.
2. **Short Term:** Assessment, Grief and Stability are the focus. The immediate danger is passed and its time to pick up the pieces and assess the damage and impact. People begin to perceive and deal with what has been lost. People start looking for stability and predictability in a new normal. This is emotional, spiritual and pragmatic work, it can't just happen in the head or in some strategy. It is the place where illusion of what was is stripped away and the essence of what can be is discovered. Or not. Resilience depends on what's lying around.
3. **Long Term:** Adapting, Recovering and Thriving into a new normal are the focus. Meaning-making happens here. We shift our understanding and behavior as we live within the 'new normal'. This happens in our behaviors, our emotions, our spirituality and our frameworks. We change: A clearer identity. A sharper purpose. A powerful new story of what could be. Or not!
4. **(Preparation:** This is actually the first phase. It is the pre disaster phase where folks get ready for what is to come and folks are educated about what preparation and resilience mean.)
This pandemic follows these phases in its own unique way. The Church is learning this.
So, if the ideas that are lying around you are about how to get back to the way church used to be before the pandemic I have some questions: I am going to ask you if that is faithful. I am going to ask you if that is what you are really discovering in this moment of crisis. I am going to ask you if you really believe that going back will help your survival and sustainability. I don't believe it is. I don't believe it will.

One of the challenges of our age is that so many folks, particularly in each new generation, believe that the church is irrelevant to their lives and their world. Some believe it may be harmful. Our Governments have said, in their Stay Home/Stay Safe orders, that faith based organizations are among the list of Essential Organizations. (I wonder if that is because they believe that, or because they don't want the backlash of saying otherwise.)

Following the events of 9/11 Rev. Nancy Taylor made an observation. She reminded us that people flocked to our churches only to discover why they left in the first place. That is the challenge of this pandemic. In this moment, we will either confirm that we are irrelevant or we will demonstrate that we are essential. That may depend on the ideas that are lying around you.

Some churches are anxious that they may not survive this pandemic financially. And there are some churches who had already planned to close, who had a date chosen (to lock their doors, cease worship and sell their building) who have now found themselves thriving because they have a renewed sense of identity and purpose as they respond to clear and compelling needs within their communities. Something is dying. Something is being created. Some churches are trying to endure and tolerate this moment until they can 'get back to normal'. Some are experimenting, learning, creating, discovering a whole new way to be and to do church.

Disasters, like crises, bring real change. Or at least the opportunity for it. There will be a new normal on the other side of this disaster. And this is an incredible moment of possibility.

Rev. Don Remick