

7 Keys to Successfully Reopen Your Church After COVID-19

As we settle into the new norm COVID-19 has created for us, it's time to think about what happens when our churches reopen. How can we begin to start preparing for operations after such an unprecedented change in the way we preach, gather and worship? I convened a number of highly esteemed church leaders in a webinar to explore the path to moving forward after COVID-19. With me on the webinar were:

- Matt Chandler, lead pastor, The Village Church.
- Eric Geiger, senior pastor, Mariners Church.
- Dave Dummitt, senior pastor, Willow Creek Community Church.
- Bryan Carter, senior pastor, Concord Church.
- Josh Surratt, lead pastor, Seacoast Church.
- Jeanne Stevens, lead pastor, Soul City Church.
- Dr. Rich Kannwischer, senior pastor, Peachtree Presbyterian Church.

Ways to Approach Reopening Churches

The most common strategy pastors are using when looking at reopening the church is watching and waiting to see how things will turn out over the next few weeks. There's the potential that we will begin gathering in phases, starting out with 20-50 people gathering and growing from there over weeks or months. This reality is leading pastors to create contingency plans for the reopening of their church. Slowly phasing gatherings over a period of time can benefit our community by putting the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional health of our congregations first.

Each pastor on the panel expressed the importance of honoring those in leadership and following the directives of the governor and mayor the whole way through this process. There's a new reality post-COVID-19, and the way we once gathered will inevitably look different. It's important to find ways to help our community prepare for this new way of gathering in the future. Although there's no definitive date to gather again, it's imperative for pastors to intentionally and genuinely love and serve their community well in the meantime.

7 Keys to Reopening the Church

1. The most obvious takeaway is that use of online platforms during COVID-19 is being maximized. It may be challenging but necessary for leaders to begin considering how this translates to the way we do church in the future. How have you been reaching your audience during this time?
2. Even in the midst of uncertainty, leaders can find hope in being able to gather again. As pastors look forward to reopening their church, it'll be imperative for them to stay about a month ahead and prepare accordingly. Stay up-to-date on the latest gathering laws to ensure you're prepared with hope-filled messages, service opportunities and a full staff to open again.
3. Pastors should adjust their future ministry model to accommodate the decisions of the government by slowly phasing gatherings for the well-being of our community.
4. Consider where your community stands emotionally to guide them in the most appropriate way. If you know a large population of your church suffered emotionally or financially due to the pandemic, offer messages tailored to their current needs. If your congregation was overall fortunate enough to fare well, consider providing messages of service and love to those in the community.
5. Over-communicate the precautions that will be taken at your church. People will hold new health expectations

after this crisis. Some ways to communicate that you're taking precautions are to assure parents that kid's ministry areas consistently are being disinfected, mandate that greeters wear gloves or provide numerous disinfecting stations.

6. Create contingency plans that minimize large gatherings. A few considerations could be maintaining online services and offering prayer meetings throughout the week in order to phase in the community as smaller groups. In the meantime, use technology to allow small groups to continue meeting, reach out to your members one-on-one, and consider emailing a daily devotional or bible verse to keep members strong before you can fully reopen.
7. Incorporate multiple services throughout the week to decrease the number of people attending at a time.

Small Groups, Frequency and Length of Meetings

As we've been utilizing online platforms to continue small groups, there's been a universal trend of higher attendance. Sermon-based small groups have been a helpful resource for new attendees by providing support, insight and next steps for the new members in their congregation. This is a great avenue for pastors to utilize while building community and helping their members in their walk with Christ.

There is joy, hope and encouragement found as pastors are able to see the number of people in their community who come together and organically worship together and pray. Meeting virtually might not have all the positive elements of an in-person connection. However, the sense of routine with shorter meeting times has produced positive outcomes across the board.

Shifting the Sermon Focus

Preaching in the middle of a global pandemic has shown pastors the importance of pivoting from a previous sermon series to

one that relates to the current climate of their congregation and community in order to truly lead and care for their members. It's also an incredible time for the congregation to see their leaders lean into God during these challenging times and trust in God's timing.

The content of sermons has changed drastically, and churches have adjusted the entire format of their weekend services, including their preaching schedules. Many senior pastors are pausing on having guest pastors during this global crisis in order to care for the needs of their specific church community.

Since we can't meet in person, pastors are leading their community in new ways by incorporating more daily content, daily encouragement and daily prayer times. These new ways of pastoring will likely remain a staple when we reopen churches.

How to Handle Easy Accessibility to Sermons

Another reality pastors are facing is that their community will begin listening to multiple pastors. As this becomes a larger truth, pastors should remind their congregation that additional sermons are a great supplemental tool but shouldn't replace their involvement with their actual church community. Try to reinforce that the primary source of growth and development of a Christian happens through the church community.

To view the webinar, click here. {eoa}

William Vanderbloemen is the CEO and founder of Vanderbloemen, which serves teams with a greater purpose by aligning their people solutions for growth: hiring, compensation, succession and culture. Through its retained executive search and consulting services, Vanderbloemen serves churches, schools, nonprofits, family offices and Christian businesses in all parts of the United States and internationally. Follow him on Twitter @wvanderbloemen.

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