

The Church Response to COVID-19

Ministering in the New Reality

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A Letter from Michael

Thoughts about using this guide

These are unprecedented times.

When things changed quickly, churches scrambled to meet online. Then we realized we needed solutions for children, youth, and small groups. Then we came to grips that this might be a new normal for a while, and we're all trying to figure out how to lead our way forward.

This guide is full of ideas, strategies, templates, and resources to help you lead your church. As things change, we will change. As new ideas emerge, we will share them with you.

But as you move forward, keep these three big ideas in mind:

#1. It wasn't about a building before, and it's not about a live stream now.

There are sites and services to help you get everything online. But just like just wasn't a building before, it's not a website now. Just like your church was more than Sunday before, it's more than a live-stream now. Yes, figure out how to show up online. But don't limit your ministry to a video feed.

#2. These unprecedented times give us unprecedented opportunity.

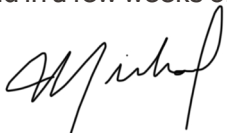
Your community needs your church like never before. They need you to be a voice of hope, peace, and comfort. You've challenged your members to "be the church" for years, now it's time to back up those words with actions.

#3. You're building new patterns.

As you figure out how to connect online, work remote, and minister digitally, these new patterns are going to help you even after you can gather in person again. You're developing new skills and new habits. You didn't ask for them and you didn't know you needed them, but you're going to be a better leader after this.

Throughout church history, our tactics have changed but our mission has remained the same. I hope this guide helps you adjust your tactics to meet current needs.

And in a few weeks or months, we'll be here to help you adjust your strategy to move forward.



Michael Lukaszewski
Church Fuel, Founder

Meet the Authors

This guide was a team effort



Meagan Ranson

Meagan is a 'Hamilton' fan who does project management, in that order. She co-hosts The Seminary of Hard Knocks podcast, is the articles editor for SundayU, and kills every healthy plant she owns. Previously a Communications Director for a multi-site church in Southeast Michigan, Meagan has a passion for church health and church growth. Wife to Geoff, and mother to Emma, you can usually find Meagan with her nose in a book or hiking somewhere with her family.



Jeremy Maxfield

Jeremy loves the creative process—especially for ministry—so his mental gears really start turning with partners and new projects. With 15 years in pastoral ministry and Christian publishing, he's served churches of all sizes and developed products for some of today's leading pastors, authors, and ministries. Living near Chattanooga with his wife, three girls, and chocolate lab, Jeremy's family enjoys countless opportunities for adventure and relaxation outside.



Jenna Pelletier

Jenna was systematizing her environment as soon as she was tall enough to reach a drawer. She's a Jane-of-all-trades, combining her skills in organization, communication, and time management to make Church Fuel run as smoothly—and beautifully—as possible. When she's not at work, Jenna enjoys cooking, going to Lake Burton, shopping at TJ Maxx, or hanging out with her husband and two dogs.



Shannon Whitehead

Shannon's all about words (both reading and writing them). She takes that passion and applies it to managing content for our members and blog. A North Carolina native and graduate of East Carolina University, Shannon's background combines church communications, digital marketing, and a brief stint in the fashion industry. After work, you can find her spending time with friends, with her head in a good book, or at a new restaurant.



Michael Lukaszewski

Former youth pastor, church planter, senior pastor, and church consultant, you could say Michael's lived nine lives—and he's still going. Today, he writes books and articles and helps create courses for church leaders. Michael's a graduate of Florida State University and did post-graduate work at Liberty University. Husband to Jennie and father to three kids, you can find him smoking ribs or grilling steaks on the Big Green Egg on the weekends.

COVID-19 and the Church

New challenges mean new opportunities

The coronavirus (COVID-19) presents unprecedented challenges. Nobody has ever dealt with anything like it. As a result, our churches now have unexpected opportunities. Never in history has the chance to demonstrate the heart of Christ and the mission of the Church been greater.

Though one may be
overpowered, two can defend
themselves. A cord of three
strands is not quickly broken.
(Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Not since 9/11 have Americans collectively experienced a comparable level of uncertainty and change in social norms. This season will shape future generations and the rest of our own lives. It will also shape the way we “do church” now and, most likely, in the future too. We have the opportunity to not only reevaluate existing norms as a church in order to meet temporary needs but to potentially realign ministry practices with mission statements, values, and core beliefs. Prayerfully, this season will reignite the passion of our people (and perhaps ourselves) for gathering as a church for worship and for living in our communities as witnesses to the peace and hope we have in Jesus.

Most of us have wrestled with questions about how to continue doing things as normally as possible. Almost overnight, certain aspects of

ministry shifted from “What’s our philosophy?” to “What’s practical?” Attention has shifted across the country from “How can we get people into our churches?” to “How can our churches get out to people?” The question is: So what do we do now? Where do we go from here?

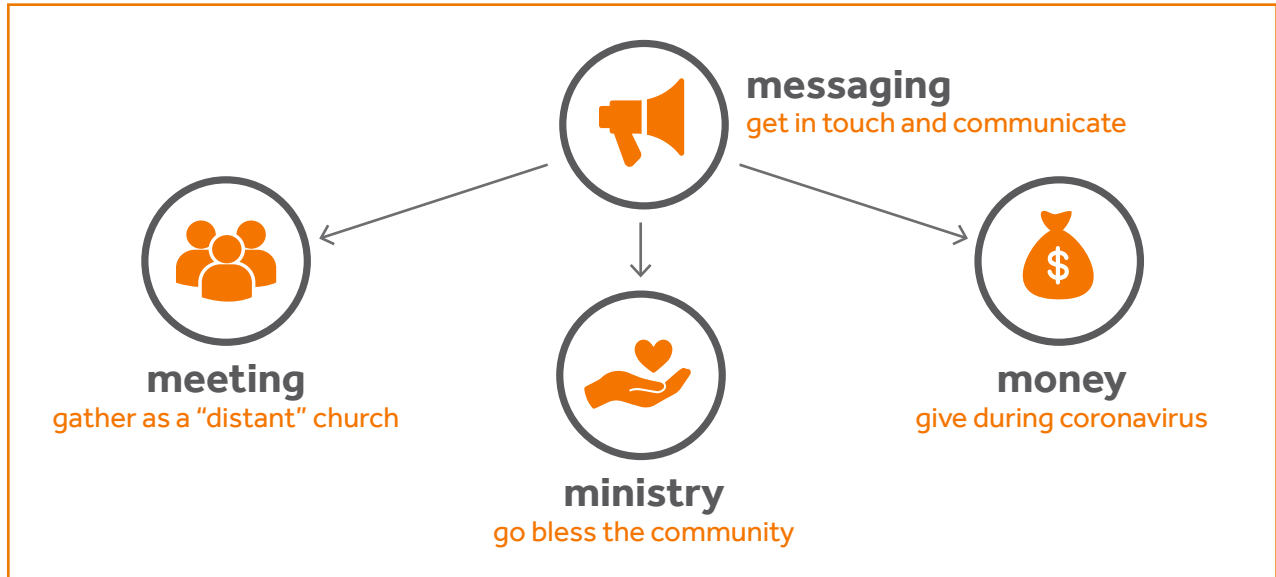
Together, we are forming new ways to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples, and to be a community of faith in the midst of fear, confusion, inconvenience, and skepticism. Recent weeks have truly been uncharted territory for us all—not just churches. Social distancing, pandemic, and quarantine were not topics covered in our training and education. Leaders have the responsibility and privilege to serve congregations and communities as the “new normal” continues to take shape for the unforeseen future.

The needs of our communities and congregations will continue to change—so should our ministries. We need to quickly help one another stabilize and strategize. Leaders will need to make decisions quickly and prayerfully, but they can be informed by wisdom, experiences, and outside-the-box ideas from other churches.


Quick decisions can still be
informed decisions.



We've identified the most important steps for withstanding the sudden winds of change and then moving forward. The following represent the most common questions to date:



This guide is a map-in-the-making to navigate the challenges we are all facing. We've collected best practices, real church examples, and insanely practical tools to equip you for what's ahead. The most common questions and pressing needs will lead you through the four topics that form the following sections of this resource.



1.
messaging

How can we get in touch and communicate?


i.e. website, email, social media, graphics, mail, print



2.
meeting

How can we gather while social distancing?


i.e. live-stream, music, groups and classes, children and students.



3.
ministry

How can we go out and bless the community?

mobilizing people, benevolence, prayer



4.
money

How can our giving survive the coronavirus?

Technology, communication, budgets, salaries, and fixed expenses

Messaging

How can we get in touch and communicate?



On any given day, the number one complaint or problem that any organization has is communication. Add sudden changes in most people's daily routines, empty shelves in the grocery stores, and growing concerns about a mysterious pandemic and you have the perfect recipe for a real mess.

Immediately as the news of school closings began trickling through the grapevine, the first questions raised by leaders were related to knowing how to get in touch with staff for prayerful and informed decision making, looping key leaders/volunteers into the conversation, and then communicating with the congregation at large.

Surely you had some or all of these questions and countless more as the answer was "Yes" to the disbelief of "Is this really happening?"

- How do you talk to your staff or leaders?
- How do you talk to the church at large?
- How do church members get in touch with you or other leaders?
- How can the community get in touch for prayer or material needs?
- Does everyone know what's going on . . . even among your most faithful members?

The top priority for churches was and still is to set the rules of engagement for life and ministry in the new reality of COVID-19. It's vital to set clear expectations and instructions for the primary channels of outgoing and incoming communication. Establishing the ground rules as soon as possible will provide everyone with a sense of stability, ease concerns, and lessen the likelihood of misinformation and unnecessary drama.

Step 1

Recognize and respond to immediate needs, communicating the temporary plan.

Step 2

Consider how to "not only survive but thrive" under the current circumstances. Nobody knows how long this season will last. Putting everything on hold isn't an option. You want to be careful while making practical decisions that they will align with your philosophy of ministry. Ideally, this is an opportunity to evaluate both your ministry philosophy and practices. As clumsy and awkward as the adjustment period may be, it can truly be a time of fresh growth, appreciation, and enthusiasm.



As a church, you want to be a source of peace, hope, and stability in uncertain times. As preachers, teachers, and gospel-believing church leaders, we know the power of words. Now more than ever, people in our congregations and communities need a word of encouragement and clarity, without downplaying or dismissing the seriousness and complexity of the situation. We simply aren't experts when it comes to handling a health crisis . . . no matter how many podcasts, articles, posts, or tweets we've been exposed to. We are, however, called by God and empowered by His Spirit to lead our churches in love for the glory of Jesus' name.

Be sure that words and tone of church communication relay a message of unwavering hope and unselfish love. You love your community and the church wants to take necessary precautions to promote the wellbeing of everyone in your zip code and beyond.

For the time being,
this is our new normal.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23–25)

Website

Your home page is the front door to your church. Today's best practices emphasize the power of first impression and ease of finding relevant information on your website. If that's right under normal circumstances, the importance of that fact just grew exponentially in size. Right now, just about any site you visit has COVID-19 information front and center. This should especially be the case for churches—a place for gathering and for seeking help and hope in tough times.

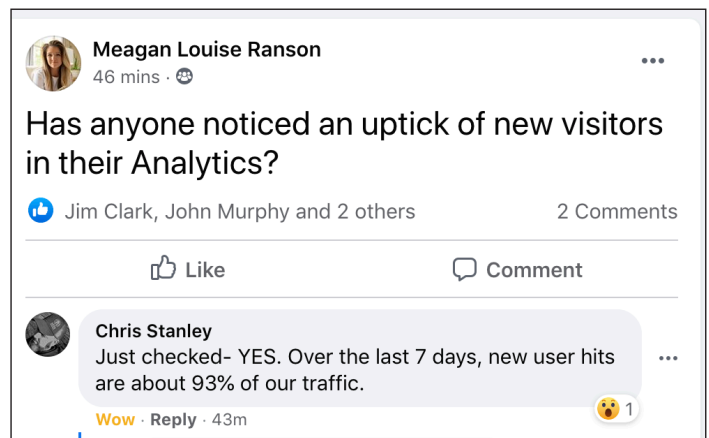
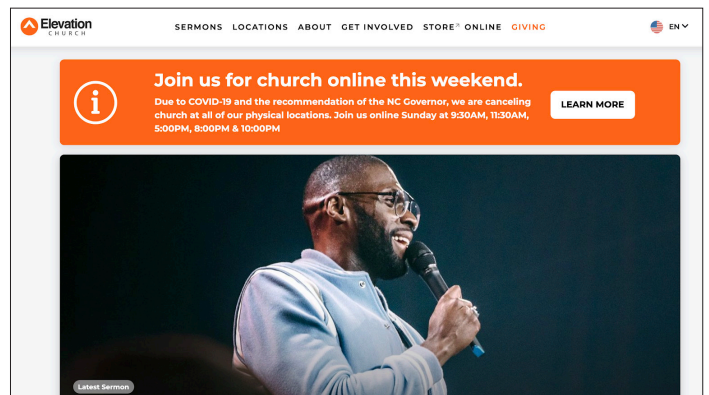
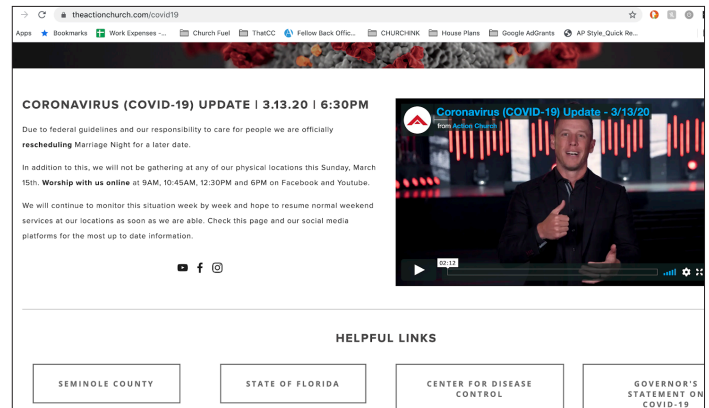
- Provide a clear message and plan for how you will communicate and meet, along with how people can get in touch with you too.
- Update your landing page to share the most important and urgent information. This is an opportunity to be informative and connective.
- Review your analytics to see what people are looking for by noticing what pages they're visiting. Most likely they are searching for *service information* and *resources*.



Examples of Website Messaging

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches are using their websites. (What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

- Create a page just for COVID-19 updates, and *keep it updated*. Link to your county's health department at least, so people know where to go for information. Look at how [The Action Church](#) has positioned themselves as a source of information.
- Link to local resources (food banks, social services, clothing donations, benevolence, transportation help, small groups that are offering help, emergency phone numbers, etc...)
- Make one of your main CTA's prayers. Add it to the copy of your page, or as a menu item. Tools like YouVersion's new Prayer app can help your church pray together, even if you can't meet together. Add service information on the landing page. Whether it's a "watch live" button, or a link to another page detailing service information, you need to make the information that people are looking for insanely easy to find.
- Check out [Elevation Church's](#) CTA.
- You can expect that you'll have a lot of new visitors on your website. A church in Virginia noted that of their recent website visitors, 93% of them were brand new. Make sure that you're prepared to capture their attention and information so you can connect with them.





Email

Even though most communications professionals talk about social media, email is still the best way to communicate with your congregation, particularly during times of crisis.

Any communications strategy should certainly include social media, but you might not want to rely solely on it. Email, even though it's boring, is your best opportunity to share your message. It gives you more space to expand your thoughts, share important information, and tell stories.

- You can include multiple links.
- It doesn't disappear from feeds quite so easily.
- People can easily save.
- It's easy to forward and share.

Even as you look to communicate instantly on social media, don't forget that email is one of your most useful tools during this time.

On the first Sunday of digital services, one of the largest churches in the country closed the online service with this encouragement: "If you're not on our email list, make sure you go to our website and give us your email address . . . it's how we can stay in touch and share important updates with your family."

Even in one of the nation's largest churches, with more resources and creativity than most, they still encourage viewers to sign up for email updates. They know email is one of the most effective communication methods.

Times of uncertainty are not the best times to experiment with new communications platforms and mediums. Instead, you want to rely on approaches that are familiar to your congregation.

Email Tools

If you use a Church Management System like Planning Center, Church Community Builder, Realm or one of the many providers, you have the ability to email your congregation. Keeping this database accurate and up-to-date is an important responsibility as your email database will be a primary source of communication.

In some cases, you can connect your database to a third party software like Mailchimp, MailerLite or Convert. Email lists like this give you the ability to create quick sign up forms and will help you understand who is opening your emails. Here are some email marketing companies that do a great job.

- [Mailerlite](#) - Free up to 1k subscribers
- [Mailchimp](#) - Free up to 2k subscribers, robust, use if planning to segment audiences
- [Send In Blue](#) - Free up to 300
- [Convert Kit](#) - Free up to 1k subscribers



Email Style

When you create your email updates, know that you don't have to use a ton of graphics, templates, or fancy style.

Think about the emails that hit your Inbox. You immediately think the ones with a bunch of graphics and formatting are from companies selling something. The messages from a real person with mostly words feel more like a personal message.

Here are some other tips for crafting email messages to your congregation:

Write like a person.

When you're crafting your emails, write like a regular human being, using regular words and phrasing. You're not writing a dissertation or a government report...keep it personal.

Send church emails from a person.

Don't use admin@churchname.com or worse, noreply@churchname.org as your sender. These emails are more likely to go to the spam folder.

Write to a person.

Just like you should write like a real person, imagine you're writing to a real person (not a group of people).

Build an Email List for Your Church

You need to be able to reach out to your church and let them know about changes or how you're addressing concerns. Email is a great tool for that.

But how powerful would it be if you could email thousands of people in your community to answer their questions or let them know how you're here to serve? Imagine the power of being able to connect with them directly, not through media outlets or press releases.

GREAT EXAMPLES OF EMAIL MESSAGING

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches have announced major changes via email.

○ **Permission to Stay Home, Andy Stanley.** This email was sent before services were canceled.

○ **COVID 19 Update, Andy Stanley.** Email announcing the move to digital with three reasons.

○ **No Services This Sunday, Dan Sweaza.** Great email announcing the change and answering questions.

○ **A Pandemic Is A Terrible Thing To Waste, Andy Stanley.** Connected people to their livestream, and encouraged people to invite their friends.

○ **Are You Remotely Prepared?, App Sumo.** Practical life advice laid out in a way that is helpful, informative, and high value.

○ **A Note To Our Community, Fab Fit Fun.** A message of hope that continues their company's mission statement of bringing "happiness and well-being to your doorstep".

○ **How To Help . . . A Note of Encouragement, Light & Airy.** An empathetic and practical approach to how you can help others and find joy or be productive when you're at home. Practical value add with a message of hope and help.

○ **Cancelling Easter, Restoration Presbyterian Church.**



For years, we've advocated that churches invest in building an email database not just of church members, but of people who live in the community. Think of your member database as your internal list and an email list of people who live in your community (who don't go to your church) as an external list.

If you don't have an external list like this, now is a great time to start one. Use one of the email marketing tools to start a new list. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Add an opt-in form to your website. Opt-in Monster is a powerful and popular tool for lead generation.

Create resources that would be helpful to your community, then give them away for free on your website. These could be resources for parents and kids, devotional guides, or community-driven news. Ask for an email address in return.

Keep your community email list separate from your church database.



Social media doesn't have to be complicated, and it doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be relational.

Social Media

Social media is one of the best tools we have to continue ministry outside of the hour on Sunday. Any the time is a great time to spread the gospel of love and hope, but people are listening now more than ever. It is vital that we are active on our social media accounts. Post in the feed, go live, share stories, ask questions, and comment on other people's posts.

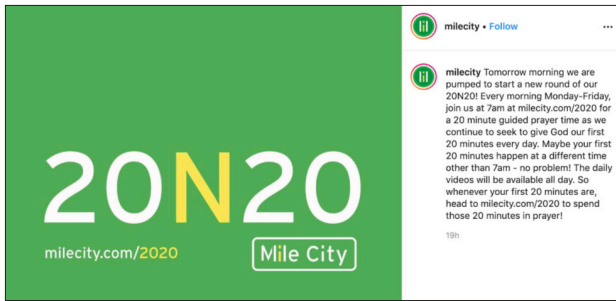


Consider the emotional ramifications of social distancing. We're asking people to isolate themselves and stay home. How can we work against the effects of loneliness, boredom, stress, anxiety, or hopelessness? We can help by being present. We can help by sharing information that isn't based in fear, but based in hope.

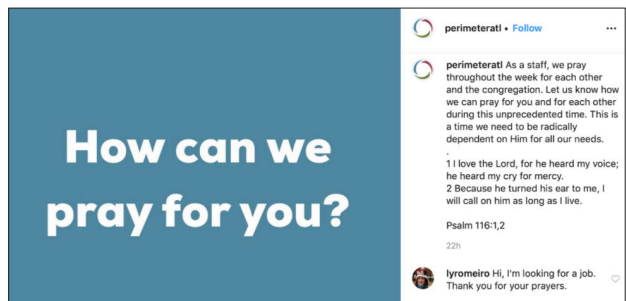
Examples of Social Media Messaging

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches are leveraging social media. Find and share more ideas online at covid.church.

Mile City Church has a scheduled guided prayer time every morning at 7am for their church.



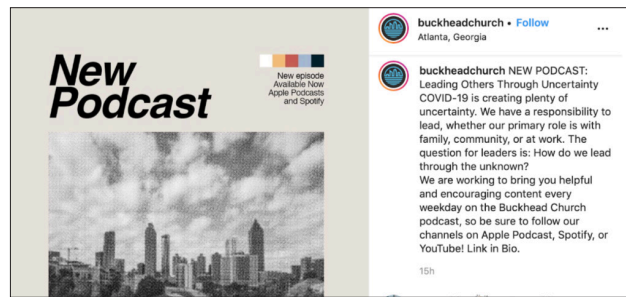
Perimeter Church is opening up Instagram for prayer requests.



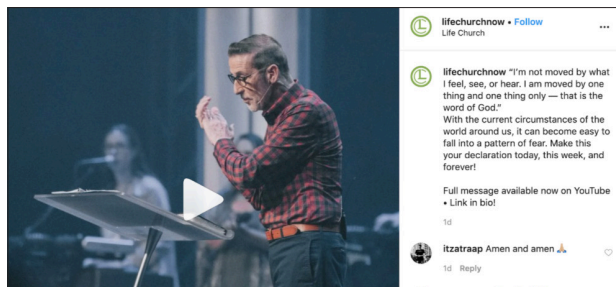
Brownsbridge Church highlighted a need in their local community.



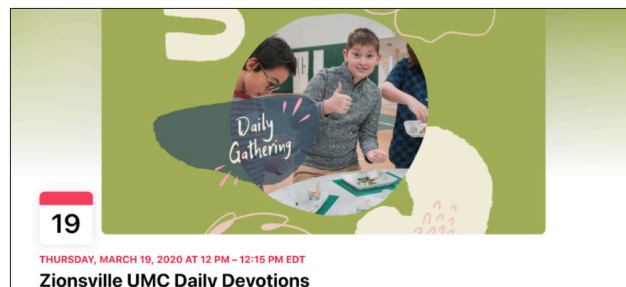
Buckhead Church is producing a podcast to lead us through uncertainty.



Life Church is posting messages of hope and encouragement.



Zionsville United Methodist Church created a Facebook Group with daily devotions.





Text Messages

Email is a great way to connect with everyone about major updates and information. But it can feel overloaded with people sharing their COVID-19 responses, and it's not nearly as personal. However, if you send a text message, 98% of people will open it and read it.

If you don't have people's numbers, pull the information from your church database or ask on social media. You can also utilize a texting service like [Text In Church](#), and have people text a unique number to "sign up".

Whatever you do, be wise about the information you share. No one wants to be spammed, so make sure you have permission to text, and only text urgent and important information.

TOOLS & TIPS FOR TEXTING

- [Text In Church](#)
- [Pastor's Line](#)
- Use a [Google Phone Number](#) so you don't have to share yours
- [Superphone](#) texting service
- [Community](#) text-in service

Shareable Graphics

In the wake of the pandemic, being able to communicate digitally is even more important. If you don't have a graphic designer, companies are offering free social media and announcement slide graphics to help you get messages out to your church members and community.



Websites With Free Graphics

There are many companies creating and providing graphics to help you communicate with your congregation and community. Two of the best sources are [Church Media Squad](#) and [Church Motion Graphics](#).

Necessity is the mother of invention.





Use Snail Mail

Even though there are incredible digital solutions to help you gather online and stay connected, don't forget about the old fashioned mail.

Redirect some of your ministry budgets to send packets to families in your kids ministry. Include things you would normally have available on the weekend, like coloring sheets, and memory verses. If you're able, include a handwritten note to the child for a personalized touch that will carry a huge impact.

IDEAS FOR HOME PACKETS

- Coloring Sheets
- Memory Verses
- A recipe for [homemade playdough](#)
- **Bunny Bags:**
Brown Paper Bag, 2 googly eyes, and construction paper
- **Paper Plate Rainbow:**
A paper plate, cotton balls and construction paper
- Stickers
- A handwritten note goes a long way

Meeting

How Can We Gather Digitally as a “Distant” Church?



The second priority for churches, is figuring out a plan for weekly worship, followed closely by ministry areas within the church like small groups, kids and student ministry, etc. Churches need a plan for regular meetings with staff/leaders during this season.

When it's not considered safe to gather in person, it's time to get creative, utilize technology, and be the Church outside of the building in new ways. We have to think of ways beyond Sunday mornings' "in house" to love on our faith family.

You are the light of the world.
A city on a hill cannot be
hidden. (Matthew 5:14)

Live Streaming is one way to broadcast your church services. If your church is starting from scratch with live streaming, we've put together the things that you'll need to know. If you've been livestreaming for a while now, you are still probably considering new ways to engage people in the new dynamic of "church at home."

Live Streaming Best Practices

Although people can't hug and smile at each other as they would in person, you still want your livestreaming church's experience to be edifying and engaging.

Most live streaming services have a chat feature that makes the online service interactive. Have staff or volunteers log into the chat and respond to comments and questions and ask questions to engage the online audience.

Comments and questions to engage a livestream audience:

- Let us know where you're watching from today!
- What were your biggest takeaways from the sermon?
- Remember to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and share your notes to encourage someone!



The chat feature is also a wonderful way to make sure that the service is accessible for everyone. For example, one church set up tech support to help senior adults get set up to view the service. Another sent snail mail to every household with instructions on how to watch their service on multiple platforms.

Keep it simple.
Don't overthink it.
Most smartphones can do this.

The same rules don't apply in the livestreaming world, and your streaming times don't have to be the same time as your normal church service times. You can choose your livestreaming times based on when your audience is online. Most streaming services have audience insights and for using Facebook live, your page's Facebook Insights can help you see the most popular online times for your audience.

It's important to know your congregation and try to anticipate needs and questions. But don't overthink it—most of this can be done from a smartphone. No matter how simple your setup (even if you're streaming from an iPhone on your desk), people will appreciate the sharpening and consolation of a sermon and the ability to connect with others.

Getting Started with Live Streaming

In a matter of days, thousands of churches realized the need to livestream or hold services online.

Big Principle #1: You don't have to replicate, you can innovate.

- Too many churches are trying to reproduce everything from their in-person gathering online. It doesn't work and it's a mistake to try. At least for most churches.
- If you're new to services online, don't try to recreate everything. An online service can become something new, something fresh.
- You can show pre-produced music. Or you can downplay music and corporate worship.
- You can share an informal message from home rather than a polished sermon from a stage.
- These things are not better or worse . . . they are different. And it's okay to be different.

Big Principle #2: Start where you are.

- It's easier than ever to show up online, and you don't need fancy equipment and expensive tools to go live online.
- Some good news in a time of widespread distress: there's no shortage of options for live streaming your church services and continuing to share the real good news about Jesus.





Examples of Live Streaming Options

Check out the insanely practical tools that churches use to live stream. Find and share more ideas online at covid.church.

- [Church Online Platform](#) – This streaming tool is a free resource from Life.Church that includes features for real-time chat, live prayer, chat moderation, and more.
- [Facebook Live](#) – Streaming through Facebook Live is a simple option and a great place to start if you're new to livestreaming. While it does have its drawbacks, such as the difficulty embedding a replay onto your website and the pressure to pay to reach most of the pressure to pay to reach most of your followers
- The best way to get started is easy and free, right? These are not only free to and easy for you to use, they're easy for people to watch as well.
- Before you throw up a camera and start live streaming everything that you would normally do in a worship service, there is one major topic to consider first: music.

Copyrighted Material

Christian Copyright Solutions provides many churches with the licenses they need each week. Did you know that each of the following may require a license by law?

- Playing pre-recorded music
- Performing songs live in person
- Projecting or printing song lyrics
- Live Streaming any / all of the above

A lot of churches assume that if they have one of these licenses, everything is covered. This isn't the case. For example, many churches use CCLI to cover their in-person worship music. CCLI also has a live streaming add-on license that you'll need to check into, since that's what we're talking about here. Here's a quick breakdown of what they are along with links to more detailed information and action steps (in their own words, since this is all specific legal language).





Streaming Licenses

The WORSHIPcast Streaming License covers more than 25 million secular and Christian songs across all genres from ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC, including holiday and patriotic music.

The CCLI Streaming License covers more than 300,000 Christian songs from the CCLI catalog. If your plans are only to stream Christian music, and your church already has a CCL Copyright License, the CCLI streaming license is a good fit. If your church or ministry plans on streaming any music outside the Christian genre, you will need WORSHIPcast.

If you plan on streaming just your worship services, the CCLI streaming license has you covered. For streaming worship services, special events, and guest performances, your church will need the WORSHIPcast license.

Don't Forget the Lyrics

Need to show lyrics? This feature is only available with the CCLI license and only for the titles in the CCLI catalog. There is no blanket lyric streaming license for secular music available currently. Neither license allows you to stream sound recordings.

A Quiz For Your Specific Needs

If right now you're thinking that you went to Bible college or seminary, not law school, then there's the perfect solution for making sure that you're streaming service is presented with total integrity and consideration for the other men and women who bless our churches by writing the songs we love to sing.

CCS has put together a super-helpful [quiz and also free guide](#) to help you make any decisions for your church.

Examples of Worship and Music

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches have adjusted their worship for streaming. Find and share more ideas online at [covid.church](#).

ROYALTY-FREE MUSIC LIBRARIES

- [Church On the Move Seeds Music Library](#)
- [Facebook Sound Collection](#)
- [YouTube Audio Library](#)
- Paid Music Libraries
- [Artist](#)
- [Soundstripe](#)
- [AudioJungle](#)
- Additionally and for a limited time, [One License](#) is offering a free one month license to help ease the transition period for churches dealing with COVID-19.



- Whether you're a small church that isn't sure about licensing or performing via livestream, or a larger church looking to try something new with people at home, one creative idea submitted was to create a Spotify playlist that people can play in their own homes before and after the preaching or teaching.
- Consider a more casual and stripped-down "living room" feel for musical worship. It may help people feel less self-conscious about singing along from home. A good tip for both worship leading and preaching is to make "eye contact" with viewers by looking at the camera to build a sense of connection. Avoid creative but unnatural camera angles that remind viewers that they are spectators to something happening somewhere else.
- Don't feel like you have to pretend that things aren't "business as usual." Pastors can and maybe should address viewers at home. It may even be a good idea to rework the setting for worship services. Whether more traditional and formal or modern with more stage production, ask yourself if it's helpful or hurtful to continue a "stage" presence. Some churches are incorporating at least one more kid-friendly song in the worship set. Remember that whole families will be worshipping together, maybe for the first time!
- Speaking of family worship, the first week meeting via livestream only, Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL incorporated more scripture readings, prompting parents to read their Bibles aloud. What a beautiful example for their kids!
- Bobby Smith, a modern worship pastor in the Atlanta area promoted a #HouseChurchJF hashtag, "collected the different posts of people worshipping . . . and compiled them to build a sense of togetherness in the midst of dispersion. Pretty cool to see so many people dig in."

Ideas and Best Practices

Here are some good ideas and best practices for your church service live stream:

- Use a tool like [Typeform](#) to ask a question or two before people actually enter your live stream. It's a great way to gather information and serve better.
- Don't forget about the people who show up early. Have something playing in the background before the service officially starts.

Small Groups Online

Connection and community may not be happening at the campuses, but we can make sure that it's happening online. It is our job to come alongside our people and equip them throughout the week. It may not happen in the lobby, but it can happen online in digital groups. It's not a building that makes the church, it is the people.



When it comes to Sunday services, we're seeing churches use language like this . . .

- Church isn't canceled, we're just meeting online.
- The church is open, the building is closed.

That same thing can apply to your small groups or Sunday School classes. You don't have to cancel your groups, you can just move them online.

Here are the best solutions for online groups . . .

- [Zoom](#). We've talked about zoom before, but this is a great solution for your groups.
- [Google Hangouts](#). This is another group conference solution that will work great for online small groups.

Staying Connected

Just like you want your church to stay connected outside of the Sunday service, you want your small group to stay connected outside of group meetings.

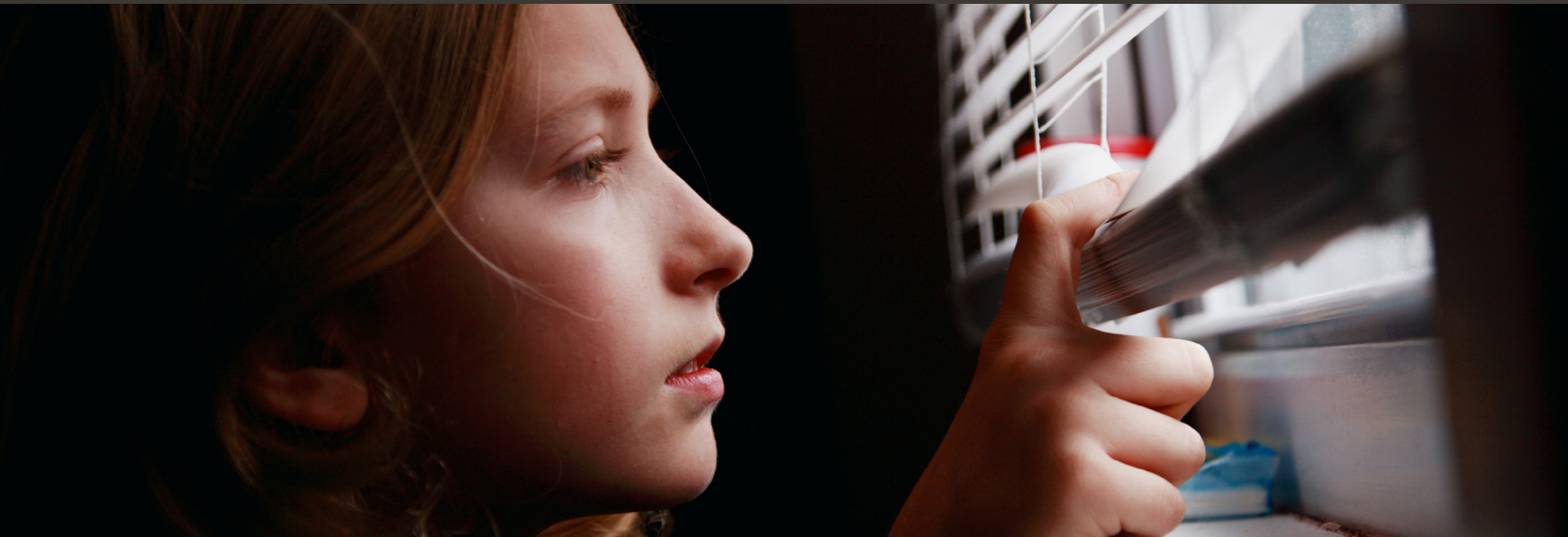
Here are some tools for this . . .

- **Group Me.** This app is a great way for groups to stay in touch throughout the week. Leaders can ask questions, share prayer requests, and more. [Getting Started with GroupMe](#)
- **Facebook Group.** Each small group could set up their own Facebook group and stay in touch that way. Your church might also have a private Facebook group so your members can stay connected.
- **Group text.** Some people love them, some people hate them. But if the group isn't too big, group texts are great ways to stay in touch.

Group leaders need to be encouraged to *lean in* to their small group. Pastor and shepherd people, which means staying connected.

The key isn't the technology; it's the intentionality.





Student Ministry Online

When the news about COVID-19 began influencing large gatherings, all churches scrambled to figure out what to do when they couldn't gather in person on Sunday. That realization quickly extended to other ministries too. We need to get our student service online, too. And we need to create new opportunities for students to stay connected.

Students' lives have been significantly affected during this time—nearly every environment in their lives has been disrupted. School, friends, work, and church have all been affected. This can be really tough on young people. It's important to provide a sense of normalcy and minister to students.

This is a new frontier for many youth groups. Here's Kenny Campbell, co-founder of *Stuff You Can Use: A Youth Ministry Community*:

"To be honest, 'adult' church is actually way ahead of kids/student ministry when it comes to live streaming. 99.9% of youth ministries haven't started live streaming until this week whereas adults have been doing it for years.

"Kids/youth ministry online is new. There's some people like Tj McConahay who have been killing it on social media (TJ specifically is great with TikTok), but those are more like bonus material. Doing kids/youth ministry 100% remote is new territory.

"But we'll be keeping our eyes open and paying attention to what people are doing in the Stuff You Can Use Facebook groups, and sharing all the new ideas that will be popping up in the coming weeks."



Examples of Live Streaming in Student Ministry

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches are using technology for student ministry. Find and share more ideas online at [covid.church](https://www.covid.church).

Most of the livestreaming advice that applies to church services will also apply to your student ministry. But there are a few student-specific pointers that will help you serve student better.

- Doug Fields, co-founder of Download Youth Ministry and the Youth Pastor at Mariner's Church shared a [helpful video about how they are responding with a YouTube Live service.](#)
- [Addison Roberts has a great tutorial video on how to get started with live streaming.](#)
- Josh McLemore, Student Pastor at Douglas First UMC in Douglas, Georgia and one of the trailers of the Grow Curriculum, put together a simple guide for going live with Zoom, one of the tools we're recommending to all churches during this time. [Download Josh's guide here.](#)

ADDITIONAL LIVESTREAMING OPTIONS

- [Twitch](#)
- [Google Hangouts](#)
- [Instagram Live](#)

Staying Connected to Students

If your student ministry has small groups, it's not a huge jump to shift them to online meeting using a tool like [Zoom](#). It's one of the more popular video call solutions and has been helping people work remotely for years. But it's also a great tool for online small groups. Right now, they are extending their free trial, essentially removing their 40-minute limit. One of the cool features of Zoom is breakout rooms. You could have a large group teaching time and then split students up into their respective small groups.

Relationships, more than programming, have always been the driving force behind student ministry. As great as it is to provide an online service or digital gathering, it might be more important to stay connected throughout the week. This just might be one place where student ministry is ahead of adult ministry.





[Brian Lawson](#) shares some great ideas:

Send students personalized text messages. Let them know that you have not forgotten them and that even when they feel alone, they are never alone.

- Call your students! Yes, call them. It seems weird, and it may be awkward, but give them a good old fashioned phone call.
- Use Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom to video call several students at once. Most of these services are free and can have 10+ people on the call. Why not play a game? Pull out the classic games and conversation starters like Two Truths and A Lie, Never Have I Ever, or Good Thing, Bad Thing.
- [GroupMe](#) is a great way to stay connected to students outside of events, even during times when you can gather. Many students already use this for school, sports, or church.

More than ever, students need caring adults to lean in and facilitate connections. They already live their lives digitally, but this is a new opportunity for the church.

Cameron Pedicord and Jonathan McKee [have some great ideas](#) for how you can help students grow spiritually and stay connected during this time which we've listed in the sidebar to the right.

Children's Ministry Online

Elementary-aged children will be among the most impacted groups during this time. They aren't able to go to school and see their friends. They aren't able to be around other kids which can create a lot of issues.

How should churches respond?

IDEAS FOR HELPING STUDENTS GROW

Cameron Pedicord, Jonathan McKee

- Post a short devotional video every day. Make it fun. Give a tour of your house. Show them that you actually have toilet paper.
- Jump on Zoom or some other meeting app and take a small group through one of our free YouTube discussions or free Music Discussions.
- Challenge your students to read the Bible in a month. Send a group text with comments about what you read.
- Have your musically inclined students spend time writing new worship songs. Post them to YouTube and share with the group.
- Video Game Tournament. Ask your students... they'll tell you how.
- Short Story or Book writing competition. Seriously. They have nothing else to do. How much Netflix can one student actually watch?
- Binge watch a Netflix, Disney+, Hulu show and discuss. Did you know we have a Bible discussion posted for every single episode of The Walking Dead and Stranger Things?
- Coffee Time: Everyone brews a cup of coffee at home and hangs out virtually. Video conference and share your secret coffee recipe.



Programming

Just like you're taking your adult services online and going live for students, elementary aged children can have online experiences. The LifeKids team from LifeChurch is creating full-length video services that include interactive elements, pauses, and worship that can be streamed online. These experiences will be relevant for children from ages two through six grade. These videos have no Life.Church branding and use license-free music. [Here's where you get these resources.](#)

Resourcing Parents

While you can't gather in person, you can still be a major support and source for parents at home. Consider creating a Facebook group for your kids ministry to post ideas, updates, and a place to ask questions.

One of the biggest ways you can show up with your families is by providing practical and useful resources for parents. So many parents are trying to balance working from home, being a teacher, and being a parent. It's really tough. Step into their world by becoming a trusted source for quality and helpful information.

Ask your parents what they need and either find or create resources to help them during this time. Take the time you would spend preparing rooms or creating lessons and funnel that energy toward resourcing parents.

Here are some ideas of things you can share:

- Homeschooling Tips like [When Homeschooling is Your Temporary New Reality! - Letty Rising](#)
- Mo Williams (Author of *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*) is hosting a Youtube Live, every day 1 1pm called, [Doodling With a Friend - Mo Williams](#)
- [The Cincinnati Zoo](#) is offering videos of the zoo and different animals with facts about them every day at 3pm.





- Share a Pinterest board with activity ideas like [this one](#):
- Share helpful articles for navigating a pandemic with kids like this one: [Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)

Staying Connected

Write letters to your children. Since you can't see them on Sunday, send them postcards, letters, or coloring sheets via the US Postal Service.

Elder, Leadership, and Team Meetings

These groups can still meet, pray, and make decisions by meeting online using tools like Zoom or Google Hangouts. Since travel isn't required, it might be even easier to have full participation.

You can still meet with people. You can still gather your leaders. You can still have service planning meetings.

Shifting everything online might have an adjustment period but there are plenty of people who do this and *prefer* this.

If you're working remotely or want to consider extending the option beyond the time it's required, don't forget about one of your most valuable resources: the people in your congregation. Chances are, you have members who have been working remotely for years. Call on their expertise. Ask for their help. Not only will it create great conversations, you'll get to know some of your members better.

Membership Class

Using a tool like Gloop's Growth Plan Builder, you can string together a series of videos, assessments, lessons, or conversations to guide a prospective new member through your membership process. Alternatively, your membership class could meet online.

If you have a series of classes for new attenders or new members, don't cancel them. Just move them online. Teachers can still facilitate and participants can still ask questions or share with the group. It might even be easier for people to participate from home

TIP: You don't have to gather face to face to pray. Tools like YouVersion's new Prayer app can help your church pray together, even if you can't meet together.



Thoughts About Virtual Meetings

Streaming video isn't just a solution for the Sunday morning problem; it's the quick 2–4 person conversation problem. Virtual meetings and working remotely due to social distancing have their upsides. Some things might be better this way.

It's not as huge of an adjustment as it would've been even a few years ago. With advances in wifi and cellular technologies, smartphones, tablets, and personal computers, many of us spend a pretty shocking amount of time looking at our screens already. Have you ever checked the screen time clock on your phone? It's pretty sobering.

The bright side however is that we're familiar with the technology, most have access to streaming video from some kind of personal device, and it'd be a great improvement to interact with actual people in real time about meaningful things as opposed to crushing candy, scrolling and swiping through feeds, or reading some article about the unthinkable things that someone we'll never meet is saying.

Let's make that the first things on a quick list of positive things about virtual meetings.

It could redeem our use of technology.

Like Pavlovian dogs, perhaps we can retrain our brains to immediately crave connection with other people rather than consuming impersonal streams of data for ourselves. Please, Lord. Amen.

It could be more productive.

From an efficiency standpoint, it's a better use of time. There's no lost margin walking or driving between meetings. In fact, The Wall Street Journal reported a few years ago that 40% of all employees waste 30 minutes per day looking for a meeting room. You also don't waste time in large meetings where your input isn't needed. The same report found that 73% of meetings were only 2–4 people.

It can help you juggle schedules.

When you're only trying to connect with 1–3 other people and there's no traveltime, it's a lot easier to find available times to meet.

Digital solutions might be better solutions in the long run. Even when things return to normal, offering digital alternatives might be a smart move. Right now you're forced to consider these options, but you, your teams, and your church might benefit from the discoveries.



Working Remotely

One of the positive things that comes out of this time will be an appreciation for working remotely. It's something forced upon millions of people. But when things have quieted down, we will look back and be thankful that we learned some new skills and built some new habits.

Many people in your congregation suddenly find themselves working from home, and it will be a big adjustment. In addition, thousands of parents are unsure about how they are supposed to do their job from home while being a parent at the same time. It's a strange new world for a lot of people.

Many churches are encouraging staff members to work from home. While there are some challenges, it's a good thing.

No commute. Comfortable environment. Cost-effective. Fewer distractions. Okay, at least different distractions. Not spreading viruses.

I believe many churches will see the value of working remotely and will continue to offer it as

an option to employees, at least some days. Let's talk about some ways to make it work for you.

Technology

There are so many tools and services that make it possible for a lot of people to work from home. Here are some of the most popular tools.

- **Slack**—This is the #1 work messaging platform and it works great to stay in touch throughout the day.
- **Basecamp**—This is a project management and communication tool. Many people like the “all in one” nature.
- **Microsoft Teams**—Chat, file-sharing, video calling, plus the Office Suite built in.

There are plenty of others: Asana, Trello, Monday.com, and the list goes on and on. The bottom line is there are tools and services to help you manage nearly every aspect of working remotely.

Experiment quickly with a few tools but go ahead and make a decision. A lot of tools will work for you and the sooner you start mastering some, the more effective you will be.



Psychology of Working From Home

The biggest challenges in working from home are not choosing the right tools but developing a new pattern. Many people in your church are struggling through this. You might be facing it, too.

Church Fuel began as a remote company and working from home is in our DNA. In the right sidebar, I've listed some things I've learned firsthand along the way.

Remember, the people in your church who are affected by a change in work location are also struggling to stay connected with people. They are more isolated, which means they need connection to their church community even more.

Examples of Tools for Remote Work

Check out the insanely practical tools that churches use to manage ministry teams remotely. Find and share more ideas online at [covid.church](https://www.covid.church).

- [Basecamp Guide to Internal Communication](#). Not only is Basecamp an excellent tool, but they set a precedent for company culture. This internal guide is full of helpful advice on working remotely.
- [27 Apps and Tools for Working Remotely](#). This is a decent list of several tools and services helpful for those who work remotely.
- [Critical Components for Working from Home](#). This resource from Belay (the virtual staffing company we use at Church Fuel for bookkeeping) is great.
- This list of [how to get set up working from home in one week](#).

HELPFUL TIPS FOR WORKING FROM HOME

- **Set a schedule.** Even if you don't have to be "in the office" at 9am, determine a schedule and stick to it. Work/home boundaries can be tough when it's all the same thing so start with your schedule. Run your morning routine, get dressed, and go to work just like you're working in an office.
- **Create a work space.** Whether you have a home office or find space for a desk in the corner of a room, create a space that's dedicated to your work. Not only will this help you reinforce your routine, it will help others in your house understand when you're at work and when you're at home.
- **Get support and buy in from others in your home.** Speaking of others in your house, this just might be the most important thing. If you're working from home and there are others in the house, you need to help them understand and support your work reality. You need boundaries so you can focus on work and not get distracted with laundry, entertainment or projects. But others need to understand and support your space, too.
- **Stay connected.** One of the toughest things for people leaving a traditional office environment to work from home is the feeling of isolation. This is a very real thing.

Ministry

How Can We Go Out and Bless the Community?



In a time when our society is gripped by panic and fear of the unknown, people look to the Church to remind them of a God who is caring and certain. We might be afraid too, but we're in a prime position to channel our concern into loving and serving both God and people. As John Wesley put it, "Since [God] is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve Him in our neighbor; which he receives as if done to Himself in person, standing visibly before us."

As churches establish new norms for communicating and meeting with one another, it's important to pay attention to the needs around them. What are you doing to meet the real-life needs of people within your church and within your community? The situation is creating opportunities to love our neighbors in tangible and noticeable ways.

The same way you have multiple ministries in-house, develop a plan to have those same ministries through virtual platforms.

We need to start adjusting our energy from the Sunday services to how you can help your community. Mother Teresa didn't hold Sunday services, she lived them.

This is an opportunity to be informative. Offer a list of local food banks, here are local clothing donations, job services, etc... Let your community know that you're not only a source for spiritual growth, but you're also a source for community connection and empowerment.

Equipping Your Church to Serve

Remind your church that times like this are a unique opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus. But don't stop there—tell them how.

Identify needs in your community that your church can help fill. Send out creative ideas for ways the people in your church can use their resources to make an impact. Make it easy for your church to connect with serving opportunities that have come up in your community, such as volunteering at food pantries and for other local relief efforts.

For example, the city of Atlanta isn't terminating water service for non-payment for 60 days. And those who can't pay likely have other needs too, like utility and food costs.



To find out about the needs in your community, you can encourage those who have needs to text or email to ask for help. To start responding to the needs, your church could receive a text or email notification about the current needs in your community that they can respond to.

Your church could receive a text or email notification of needs and work together to fulfill them. You can also mobilize your people by creating a community response team or take up a special offering to help families make it through this tough season.

Ask yourself, “What can I do with what people are giving?” and “How is giving to our church also giving *through* our church?”

Serving Children

In a crisis, unexpected and unprecedented needs arise for children and their parents. For many parents, school closings can lead to devastating financial loss and hunger. But that’s where the church can step in. Here are just a few ideas for how your church can help ease the burden.

- Make a food list, share it with your congregation, and ask people to drop off donations at the church. Post what you’re doing on social media to help identify more people with needs and people who want to help.
- Create an online form for parents to fill out and arrange to have church members deliver groceries to them.
- Offer to provide childcare for parents who can’t afford to take off work.

Not only will stepping up to help families in need give them some financial relief, but you’ll also help fill emotional needs for the children. You’ll show them that there are people in their community who care about them, that Jesus cares about them, and protect them from the sadness and frustration of neglect or hunger.

Serving Seniors

Senior citizens are some of the most vulnerable among us. They can be in grave danger if they catch a virus like COVID-19, but churches can serve them by making sure they still have what they need.

If looking for a silver lining, the church has finally left the building. We’ve been talking about it for years, now we’re forced to live it.

[Sign Up Genius](#) and [Meal Train](#) are great online tools for coordinating grocery store trips or meals for seniors. They may also need errands run, such as getting prescriptions from the pharmacy or picking up their mail. A bit of online coordination among church members can make sure that these tasks are taken care of.





Many seniors will need technology support to help them stay connected when they can't leave home or other resources for spiritual nourishment. When you set up a livestream for your church, offer a conference call option that they can take advantage of. [This website](#) offers conference calls for religious services.

But technology isn't the only way. You can print and send newsletters, CDs, and DVDs of sermons. You can assemble a team to make phone calls to check in on seniors. When the church surrounds seniors in this way, it makes sure they don't feel alone or forgotten.



Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Romans 12:12-13)

Prayer

There's power in numbers, and there's even more power in prayer. In these non-touch times, tools like [YouVersion's Prayer app](#) are a digital way to start prayer chains, share prayer requests, and keep track of what and who you're praying for.

You can record a video where you pray over different people and places and post it to social media or pray on a live stream. Using [Facebook Live](#) is a great way to pray for people online. Many people are stuck in their homes with access to little else other than the internet, feeling a loss financially and socially. Now is the time to minister to them and utilizing online prayer tools allows you to reach them far and wide.





Examples of Creative Prayer Tools

Check out this prayer guide from Lifeway. Find and share more ideas online at covid.church.

A 7-DAY CORONAVIRUS PRAYER GUIDE

PRAY FOR THE SICK
 Pray for those who are sick, and their families, that the Lord would heal and comfort them.

PRAY FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS
 Pray for those on the frontlines treating those who are sick, that the Lord would protect and strengthen them. 

PRAY FOR THE VULNERABLE
 Pray for those who are especially vulnerable to disease, that the sickness would pass over them and that they would rely on others for help.

PRAY FOR THE UNEMPLOYED
 Pray for those who have lost work, that God would provide through their families and communities. 

PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS
 Pray for national and local government leaders, that they would have wisdom to do what is best for all.

PRAY FOR STUDENTS & FAMILIES
 Pray for students who are out of school, and their families, that the Lord would give them patience and discipline. 

PRAY FOR CHURCHES
 Pray for churches and ministry leaders, that they would know how to best show the love of Christ in this time.

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful."
JOHN 14:27

Lifeway



Communion

Before official recommendations for “social distancing” were announced, many churches had already changed the way they handle communion. Though some churches who meet in smaller settings for Eucharist are continuing their usual practices at the time this was written, and no official restriction forbids the practice, many churches are not observing the Lord’s Supper—at least not in their usual way. Those who typically partake in a large corporate setting have to answer the question of what to do now. This is a time to reiterate two rules-of-thumb during this season:

What do you believe about _____ ?

Can this be done simply and differently?

To elaborate on those two key questions, use the following questions as a filter for thinking through communion (or anything else) in this new season.

What do you believe about communion?

- How does your theology and ecclesiology shape the practice of sacraments like communion, baptism, etc.?
- How can this provide opportunities to teach people about the meaning and significance of communion (and other things about faith and fellowship)?
- How could you explain, demonstrate, and honor the act of communion if changing any of the “usual” details of the observance?
- What is essential and cannot be changed for any reason?





Can this be done simply and differently?

- Can this be done without the presence or activity of a church leader?
- Can this be done using normal, everyday items?
- Can this be done in normal, everyday places?
- How might I do this if I was a missionary in a foreign country with few known believers? What if practicing Christianity was illegal?
- What if I was training church planters here in our own community?
- How might I do this if I wanted to strengthen families at home? If I wanted parents to grow more confident in discipling their children? If I wanted couples to grow comfortable discussing their faith and praying together?
- How might I do this if I wanted to reach other parts of the community? If I wanted to develop members into new leaders?

This is a great time to reiterate the fact that things don't have to be complicated. If your theology and ecclesiology allow for changes in your observance of communion, then focus on the essentials, the teachable moment, and the heart of worship.

For example, the campuses of Rockbridge Community Church in Georgia and Tennessee had typically invited people to tear from a common loaf and dip or drink from a common cup.

As public awareness began to peak, stressing the importance of covering a cough and washing hands, volunteers prepared pre-cut pieces or wafers and filled plastic party cups for individuals. It doesn't get less fancy than red solo cups. But it was a worshipful time all the same and members were reminded that any changes were out of love for our neighbors in the community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR RETHINKING COMMUNION

- [Family Supper: Reclaiming Community Through Communion](#)
- [6 Names for Communion and How They Shape Our Worship](#)
- [Ten Creative Ways to Celebrate the Lord's Supper](#)
- [Teaching Kids About Communion](#)



Now that groups are discouraged from gathering, churches will have to decide whether communion is something that can be led by video and/or by providing printable resources to walk families or smaller groups through on their own, using whatever you feel is appropriate. Some churches and Christians may use bread and wine in a formal or celebratory way—as a distinct act or as part of a meal. Others may have animal crackers and fruit punch. These decisions will depend on how you answer the two key questions.

Continuing to take communion can be a powerful encouragement as people pause and remember Christ through daunting times. After all, Jesus instituted the meal in one of the most emotionally intense and lonely times in his life—the bread as his broken body and the cup as his own blood.

Spreading the Love with Shareable Content

Social media is always a popular place to be, but it's even more so when people are confined to their homes. During a pandemic like COVID-19, you can bring encouragement to millions of people through a device that's in their hands for multiple hours per day.

Post shareable content—such as sermons that you or another church leader has preached on fear, hope, and seasons of struggle or waiting—that would minister to people in uncertain, frightening times. Share graphics with Bible verses or quotes that would help Bridgetown Church is a great example. [This Portland, OR church](#) is doing a “Bridgetown Daily” series on their podcast, where they share a daily scripture, quote, or the life of a saint in order to help ground people in the midst of the pandemic. We've shared a few more examples on the next page.

Share ways that people are helping each other in your community. Share books to read and prayers to pray. Whatever you do, point people to Jesus and help them focus on Him and not the pandemic. If we replace “atomic bomb” with “coronavirus” in this quote from C.S. Lewis, it sure puts it into perspective (and gives us a great word to share online with people who are in dismay!):

“This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by [coronavirus], let that [virus] when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a [virus] can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.”





Sunday Service
NOT CANCELED

Checking in on a neighbor
NOT CANCELED

Time alone with God
NOT CANCELED

Calling a friend
NOT CANCELED

Reading your Bible
NOT CANCELED

Quality time with your family
NOT CANCELED

**We are the Church
No matter where we meet.**

2 CORINTHIANS 6:16

20 SECONDS OF HAND WASHING

Lyrics & Prayers

Amazing Grace
Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see

Oceans
I will call upon Your Name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

The Doxology
Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Fairest Lord Jesus
Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature
O Thou of God and man the Son
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown!

You Say
You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh, You say that I am Yours
And I believe

Chain Breaker
If you've got pain, He's a pain taker
If you feel lost, He's a waymaker
If you need freedom or saving
He's a prison-shaking Savior

The Lord's Prayer
Our father who art in Heaven
Hallowed be thy name.
They kingdom come, they will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory, forever
and ever.
Amen.

**DO YOU NEED
CHILDCARE**
WE CAN HELP YOU FIND SOMEONE

NEED HELP GETTING GROCERIES?
WE CAN GET THEM FOR YOU.

Money

How Can Our Giving Survive the Coronavirus?



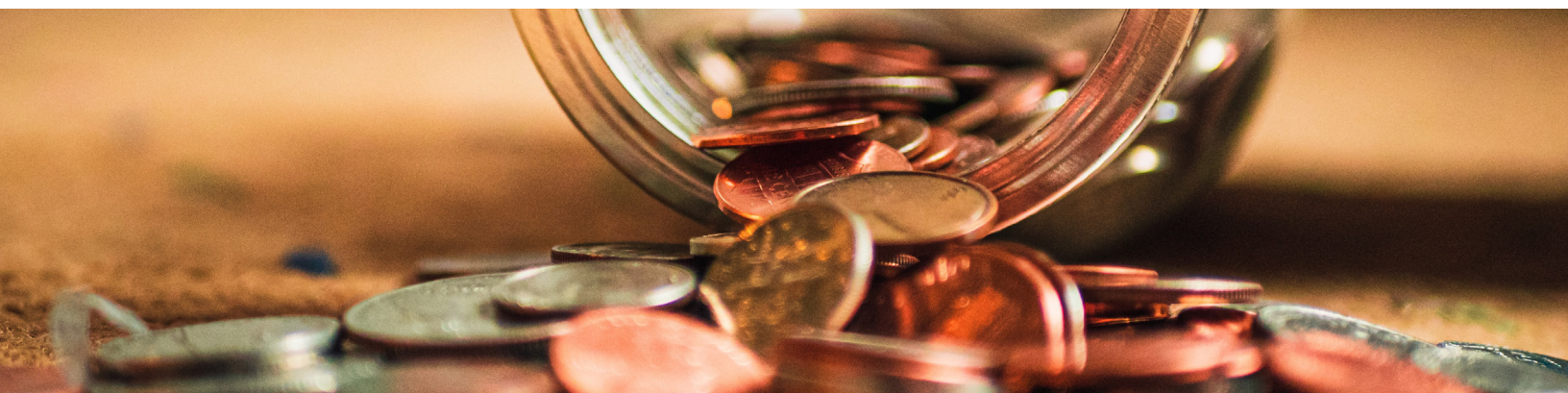
For many of you, the giant elephant in the room is giving. What's going to happen during the indeterminate amount of time that churches can't safely gather? The question raises a very real need and a serious challenge. Honestly, a lot of pastors and church leaders today aren't great at talking about money outside of our own inner circles. Publicly and from the pulpit there may be a fear of not wanting to take airtime away from Christ to talk about cash. This simply isn't a fair contrast. And most churches have swung the pendulum so far away from teaching regularly on handling our finances that churchgoers may rarely, if ever, hear a sermon on giving.

A little voice in our heads, the cartoon devil on our shoulders, argues that it'd be self-serving or a lack of faith to preach, teach, or even ask members to continue giving regularly, if not to increase their giving. There will be more needs than usual from a benevolence standpoint alone. If you're not hearing that voice, it may be the one that is genuinely scared of running people off if you talk about money. But you not only need to talk about it, you need to make a clear and consistent ask. In fact, the resistance you might be feeling right now may give us a peak behind the curtain, spiritually, at an object of worship in our culture. Arguably, it's the object of highest praise and devotion in our communities.

Hard Truths:

- Giving will likely be down beyond the impact timeframe. People give out of their discretionary income.
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- People are worried about the economy and there will be long-term effects.

As you move through these next few months and into the new normal, understand that giving may not return to January 2020 levels until well into 2021. You might be in for a long road. It's a reason to pay attention, not a time to despair. Your church needs your leadership and your focus. There is true joy to be found in giving. Jesus spoke plenty on the subject, as has God throughout Scripture.





Who Owns This Responsibility?

You need to make sure one real and specific person is responsible for the overall giving levels in your church. It might be the senior pastor or the head of a finance team, but someone needs to take up the mantle.

It can't be the responsibility of a committee. "We" is not a person, it's a recipe to pass the buck. It's everybody's worry because it's nobody's job.

- Keeping the pulse on generosity needs to be a real person's job. Not "somebody" or "someone."
- Who is going to make sure the right message gets to the people?
- Who is going to make sure communication is positive and constant?
- Who is going to make sure processes are up to date?
- Who is going to keep emphasizing recurring contributions?

It will take the combined efforts from several people to weather the storm, but we recommend *one person* serve as the point person for all things generosity in your church

Digital giving options are worth it.

For years, we've been encouraging people to not just offer digital giving, but emphasize it and make it the primary giving method in your church.

Many churches pushed back because of tradition or fees.

Now the need is obvious.

And many churches wish they had taken action years ago.

Conversely, some churches were able to responsibly cancel services without a fear of where the money would come from because they were prepared.

If you find yourself without the ability to meet and a congregation who isn't set up to give digitally, it's not too late. You'll face some tough challenges, but you can lead your way through them.

If you don't offer digital giving (with recurring capabilities so that people can set up automatic contributions), you need to get set up immediately. It was a necessary step a decade ago, but it's even more imperative today.



Choosing your best option

Here's the progression I would go through if you are looking to get started.

- If you use a database provider like Church Community Builder, Realm, or Rock, start there. Most of these software solution companies offer digital giving as a part of a package. Since you're already using their services, this will be the quickest way to get started.
- If you already use Planning Center for volunteers or people, then add their giving module. It's good. And there would be some natural familiarity.
- Look at giving-specific solutions like Push Pay, Tithe.ly, or Easy Tithe. These solutions will all work fine.

When choosing your giving solutions providers, here are the features I would absolutely require. I would not even consider a solution that didn't offer these

Recurring transactions

This is the most important feature and it's a must-have. You need a solution that would allow someone to set up automatic, recurring contributions so they can make one decision and support your church every month.

Accepts all forms of payment

You need to accept ACH payments but also every form of credit card including American Express. I know some churches don't like to promote debt, but American's don't GIVE their way into debt.

Mobile friendly

Even when people are not sitting in your service, they will use their mobile phone to give. So whatever you're using needs to look great and work great from a mobile phone.

It would be easy to discuss, debate, and dissect every feature and cost of these providers. Get a few smart people together and just make a decision. You're going to be okay and you can live with whatever decision you make. The important thing is that you get up and running.

What about fees?

Fees for digital giving come in two parts. First, there are monthly fees charged by some service providers. This flat fee is sometimes based on church size. Second, there are transaction fees on each donation. The church pays this fee, similar to how every merchant or restaurant pays the fee when you use your card. Some solutions give you the option to pass this fee on to the donor. While it might work to offer that as an option during the donation process, we don't recommend forcing it.



Quite simply, fees are the cost of doing business. Be wise and be a good steward, but don't be shortsighted either. For most churches, a .05% difference in transaction fees is not reason enough to avoid digital giving or make a switch.

Casey Fulghezi built a tool called [Giving Fees](#) that will show you what your monthly and transaction fees would be on each platform at various volume levels. Grab the link and don't be afraid to share it out on your feeds, put it out as a lower third. We need to be okay with expressing our needs, not only for our church to stay open but also so we can meet the needs of our community.

Depending on what ChMS (Church Management Software) you're using, you may or may not already have the capability to promote online giving. If your ChMS offers digital giving, make sure it's enabled and easily accessible.

If your church management software doesn't handle online giving, consider making the change now so you don't have to change again later. Even if your current software doesn't support online giving, there are several options for services that will enable online giving as an option that are simple enough to incorporate with your existing ChMs. We've listed them in the right sidebar.



POPULAR CHURCH MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- [Church Community Builder](#)
- [Tithe.ly](#)
- [Aware3](#)
- [Breeze ChMS](#)
- [Planning Center](#)

ONLINE GIVING SYSTEMS

- [Tithe.ly](#)—Within a couple minutes, you'll get a link that you can send out.
- [PushPay](#)
- [Tithe.Online](#)
- [SecureGive](#)



How to Have “The Talk”

If this is new to your church, create a communications plan to make people aware of the new opportunity. Carefully consider your wording, and make it easy to find.

If you have a mostly older population in your church, you can always encourage them to mail their tithe in. The most important piece here is safety, and you need to reiterate it.

Sample Social Media Post:

“GREAT NEWS! We’re mobilizing our church so we can be the church when you need it most. We are continuing to be faithful with what God has given us, and are grateful that we get to be the church together. If you need help during this difficult time, please reach out. We’re here to help.”

PLACES TO COMMUNICATE

- In an email
- On social media
- Landing page of your website
- Menu on the landing page of your website
- In your email signatures

Sample Email Copy:

“Dear _____,

Introduction: *Thank them for being a part of (church name). We are so grateful for you, and all you bring to our church home.*

Share the Update: *As you know, we’ve been making a lot of changes to keep our whole church family safe, cared for, and protected. So far we’ve implemented:*

- *Thing 1*
- *Thing 2*
- *And we’ve just set up our online giving through (company name). Please create an account and set up either a one-time tithe or ongoing tithe so we can not only attend to the needs of our church, but also our greater community.*
- *INSERT STORY OF A NEED YOU’VE RECENTLY MET*

Conclusion: *Whether we are meeting in person or online, we are still called to be the Church. While I’m saddened that we are walking through such a difficult time, I am encouraged that this is when the Church shines its brightest.*

May we be the light together.

(Your Name)



It Doesn't Have to be Awkward

Choosing the right tool is an important decision, but it's actually not the most important opportunity in front of you. A lot of tools will work. It's how you introduce or emphasize them that makes the difference.

The best digital giving tool in the world that isn't used by your congregation won't move the needle.

So let's talk practically about what to do.

1. Ask your people to give online.

The first thing to do is to clearly ask your people to give. Let them know your church is still meeting, you're just meeting in a different place. Let them know you're still doing ministry. Keep the conversation focused on ministry, not just bills.

Here's some great language from RECHURCH:

"While our public services are cancelled for now, the mission and ministry of RECHURCH is moving forward! If you would like to invest in what God is doing in and through Restoration Church, you can click below to give online (it takes just a minute or two)."

When you ask them to give online, make sure you're making the process as quick and easy as it can be. Remember, the easier something is the more likely people are to follow through. People give up after too many clicks. Amazon knows about the power of one-click purchases. They know every additional step is a barrier. The same is true for online giving.

When you catch your breath, take a few minutes to make a donation on your own website. Hit a timer and go through the process on your own. Do the very thing you're asking others to do.

2. Ask your people to set up automatic, recurring contributions.

Not only do you want people to give online, you want them to set up automatic, recurring contributions. This is where you want to slow down and really talk them through how to do this. Explain how it really is best for the church. Show people the exact steps to take.

Recurring donations are better than digital donations.

3. Communicate REGULARLY with your donor segments.

At first, this will seem like a next level task or something to get to once things quiet down. But this is a really powerful principle and an important step to take now.



All who give to your church are all equally important to God. Everyone matters! But there are people who fund your church at a deeper level. Wise leaders understand this principle and recognize they have a significant opportunity to speak to regular supporters differently.

The 20% of the people who fund 80% of your ministry are more like family.

You can be more parental or pastoral with them. You can be a little more straightforward and authentic. It's to communicate with your whole congregation, but this group of people needs more personal and more heartfelt communication. They probably feel more connected to the church so they need a little more attention.

This is not a value question, it's just good leadership. You can also anonymize any reports and not see names and amounts. There's a way to do this and still not show favoritism.

4. Help people who might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

No matter the average age of your congregation, there will likely be people in your church who are just unfamiliar or uncomfortable about making transactions online. Don't pressure or guilt them, but offer to help them.

We've seen churches set up tech support lines for seniors (or really anyone) who need help logging onto a webcast or zoom meeting. And the same thing can apply to helping people get set up with digital giving. Let people know you can walk them through the steps without seeing their banking information or giving amounts. Help them make a \$1 donation if necessary.

It's important to remember that people are also worried about their personal financial situation. While your donors certainly care about the church, there is a lot on their minds. They need to hear positive, encouraging messages.





Balance Your Budget

Part of your financial reality in the next several months might be trimming the budget.

Even with proper communication and a good plan, people in your community may have fewer resources at their disposal. Even delivering a message of hope in a time of uncertainty, people may hold tighter to what they have.

It's human nature.

Wise leaders understand leaner times are coming and make adjustments even before they are necessary.

If you're in that situation, here are some practical places to trim expenses.

Evaluate all of your long-term contracts, including your mortgage.

These large, on-going expenses are a great place to start. You may not be able to completely eliminate them, but it's possible for adjustments to be made. We're already hearing stories of businesses being willing to work with churches.

Call your mortgage company now and ask what kind of flexibility you have in the months ahead. You don't always have to go through an entire refinancing process to receive a modification. And some companies are more than willing to work with you, particularly if you're being proactive. Don't wait until you're behind to reach out.

You can apply this same decision making process to any long term contract you have. Maybe it's the church van or the copier. Maybe it's your insurance. Look at all of your long term expenses and see if you can make adjustments.

Look at your short-term building expenses.

If you're not going to be meeting in person for the next few weeks, what expenses can you cut. Like airlines parking planes that wouldn't be used to full capacity, can you shutter certain parts of your building or your entire building and reduce auxiliary costs.

Take a look at personnel expenses.

For many churches, this is the first or second largest expense in the budget. Simon Sinek told the story of a company whose employees collectively decided to take four weeks of unpaid vacation sometime during the year. They decided to share the burden this way to mitigate the risk to any one person.



Be honest about importance.

Not every ministry in your church is equally important. It sounds mean at first, but if you're honest, you know there are things that could go away from your church that would not seriously affect your DNA. Conversely, there are ministries and programs that if they went away, your church would fundamentally be changed for the worse.

It sounds simple, but when you make cuts, start with those non-essential programs and ministries first. Rather than knocking down everything equally, maybe you should completely eliminate things that are not core to who you are.

Tony Morgan talks more about making budget cuts in a healthy way [in this article](#).



Benevolence Policy

When unexpected situations arise—such as a global pandemic—both believers and nonbelievers in your community are looking for support. Having a written benevolence policy helps provide clarity for your church's staff, congregation, and outside community, prevent misunderstandings, and puts a system in place for how to respond.

You will be asked for help. Do you have a clear plan?

Send a copy of the policy by email to ensure that key leaders are familiar with guidelines and the process. Ask everyone to review it carefully, asking any questions they can imagine coming up in conversations about the church's assistance with food, housing, bills, etc. It's better to ask questions now than to get into a situation that potentially puts the church in an awkward or problematic situation later.



The last thing you or your church needs in a time of crisis is the added strain of requests and responses feeling personal, discriminatory, or forgotten about. Not having an approved policy in place sets people up for emotional decisions in the heat of the moment. Don't risk potentially turning someone away that could have been helped or making a promise for help that can't or shouldn't be provided.

On the other hand, the positive benefit of having and knowing a benevolence policy is the freedom and joy of knowing exactly how you can help an individual or family in need. Blessing someone through tangible means is a clear picture of the love of Christ and our heavenly Father's heartbeat throughout Scripture.

Your benevolence policy should include:

- A list of needs that the church will and will not cover
- Information needed for financial records (amount, purpose, relationship, etc.)
- The maximum amount that can be given and to whom
- A well-documented policy and record of benevolence gifts also helps protect the church in audits and give your financial team a guide to making consistent reviews of requests.

[Click here to download an example Benevolence Policy.](#)

More

Rapid Change. Unprecedented Opportunity.



Each day that passes will raise
new questions and new solutions.

Go to covid.church
for updates, more ideas,
or to share your own experiences.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4–9)
