

# YOUR CHURCH & THE

# CORONAVIRUS

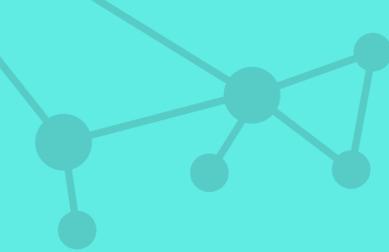
A GUIDE FOR **UNCERTAIN TIMES**



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To say that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has changed our lives is an understatement. Health officials have told us to stay home. People have lost their jobs. And churches have had to close their doors for the time being. We're living in isolation and at a safe "social distance" for we-don't-know how long—and trying to figure out what all that means for us.

So, as we do our best to follow local guidelines during this time, many of us are wondering:

- *When will life get back to normal?*
- *How will the resultant economic downturn affect my community?*
- *Will people miss assembling together at church and want to come back?*
- *How will God use this time for our good and His glory?*

While no one can predict the future, we can help our churches make the most of this unique time God has given to us. While the situation is new, some of the challenges we're facing are not. And there are a number of tips, technologies, and proven strategies that we can apply to make the most of our current circumstances.

# PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING DURING A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

The government canceled flights to Europe. Schools are employing online-only education strategies. And now churches are having to decide how they will respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

There are many great resources available online to help leaders make informed decisions:

- *The Center for Disease Control (CDC) offers [guidelines for community- and faith-based organizations](#).*
- *Christianity Today has a [downloadable guide for churches](#) to help leaders determine what is best for their communities.*
- *Lifeway has put together a [free online training course](#) with checklists to help churches get prepared.*

While the days ahead seem uncertain, there are a few principles we can keep in mind as we work together to “flatten the curve.”

# 1 LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOU WOULD YOURSELF

While the average healthy person may not be physically affected by the coronavirus, other immunocompromised individuals could become deathly ill. As many hospitals are already near capacity battling the flu season, an additional rapid influx of patients could diminish the quality of care for everyone.

So the question isn't, "Will I get sick?" But rather, "Who might I infect?" We need to take reasonable precautions to ensure we care for the most vulnerable in our congregations.

This might mean placing communion wafers into hands rather than on the tongue, temporarily removing holy water, or even suspending weekly services.

# 2 FEAR NOT, HAVE FAITH

As people on television and social media attempt to make sense of this global pandemic, we must remember that this too shall pass. Maybe not as quickly or as quietly as we would like, but it will. And God will still be on His throne. He is neither surprised nor caught off guard.

*We can walk through fearful circumstances and yet not be afraid. We can have peace knowing that our lives—and our futures—are in His hands.*

We have a great opportunity to share God's comfort and love with those who have yet to take their first step of faith. So let us be wise with our words that we might be beacons of hope, not harbingers of despair.

# 3 PRAY

It's often the last thing to be mentioned but the first thing we should do. Seek wisdom from the Lord and ask Him to work in miraculous ways.

*Pray that He would have mercy, protect the immunocompromised, and give strength to the health workers who are bearing much of the burden.*

May our eyes be open to opportunities to share God's love and the hope of salvation during this time. And may we answer His call to care for one another with compassionate hearts. ■





# 6

# WAYS TO USE TECHNOLOGY FOR MINISTRY

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has advised many people to observe “social distancing” as a precautionary tactic for slowing down the spread of the coronavirus.

In practice, it may be as simple as standing 6 feet away and declining to shake hands or as complicated as canceling church events.

But just because you can’t congregate the way you used to doesn’t mean you can’t connect with one another. We have so many resources for communication these days—you may even find it a bit overwhelming.

But don’t worry. We’ve got you covered. Here are 6 ways you can connect with and better serve your community with the help of technology.

# 1

## BE SEEN AND HEARD

You may not think you're much to look at, but your members will find it comforting to see your face.

Share important updates and the words God has laid on your heart by recording or live streaming videos and uploading them to your website and/or platforms like [YouTube](#) and [Facebook Watch](#). If you need help live streaming your regular services, Outreach.com recently launched [Free Church Online](#) to help churches out.

All you need is a [steady tripod](#) and your smartphone.

# 2

## WRITE A LETTER

Share a message of hope and peace. Write a **blog post** or **email** to reassure members and keep them up-to-date on schedule changes and ministry needs. A simple email can also alert congregants when a new video is posted online.

# 3

## TEXT IT TO THEM

Send out notices through your **church app** or via an **SMS texting service**. Apps like [Realm Connect](#) allow church members to chat about needs and concerns in real-time. Small groups can quickly work together to identify and meet one another's needs.

# 4

## MAKE A CALL

Some congregants may not be as comfortable with technology as others. **Enlist church leaders** to call and check in on those in their care. Have them ask if they need any groceries or supplies and offer to deliver them to their home.

# 5

## MEET UP (VIRTUALLY)

Many people are familiar with [Facebook groups](#), and it's fairly easy to start one if you haven't done so before. Use this service to continue to inform and encourage one another to trust the Lord during these uncertain times.

A small group could even "meet" to study God's word using video chat services. [Google Hangout](#) can handle a video call up to 25 participants, and a free personal account with [Zoom](#) allows for up to 100 people.

# 6

## EMPHASIZE ONLINE GIVING

When people don't attend, they often don't give. Use the above methods of communication to share with people the needs of your church and point them to your [easy-to-use online giving webpage](#).

Encourage them to be generous even when no one is looking.



## MIX IT UP

Be sure to use a combination of these options for any given message. For instance, text a link to a new blog post. Send an email with directions for how to join a video chat. Or post a video to answer people's questions about the online giving process.

Most people favor one form of communication over another. So be sure to get your messages out in multiple ways.



***THE KEY FACTOR IN MAKING THESE TECHNOLOGIES WORK FOR YOU IS HAVING EVERYONE'S CURRENT CONTACT INFORMATION.***

Now is a great time to remind everyone to update the church with any changes to their information so they don't miss important communication.

Today's technologies have so much to offer. Let's use them to connect with and serve one another during these uncertain times. ■

# PREPARING THE WAY FOR LOCAL MINISTRY

It's wonderful how technology has made us citizens of a global community. But it can be overwhelming to hear all the news from around the world. European countries on lockdown. Images of empty streets in New York City. Students and travelers stuck in foreign countries.

Where does one begin to look to make a difference when the challenges are widespread and global? And the best thing it seems we can actually do is stay home?

## You start local.

Use existing systems and organizations to identify needs quickly and create a plan. Call them and ask: How can we support you? What do you wish community members knew right now? What do you need the most?

Many of these organizations are extremely busy right now, so be patient. If they don't need your assistance now, they need your prayers—and they might need your help later. Cultivating these relationships now, if you haven't already, will pave the way for ministry in the future.

# 1 GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Contact your local government officials, police officers, and first responders and offer to be of service. Your parish or congregation may be able to provide assistance in ways the government cannot.

# 2 HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Connect with the medical professionals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities in your community, especially those who are members of your congregation. Be a voice for them and help get important messages out to the public. Encourage your people to listen to and follow their health advisor's instructions. Many of the changes we're making to our daily routines are temporary and, if done right, will save lives.

# 3 LOCAL MINISTRIES

Many local organizations already do some kind of ministry that's needed right now. Whether it's feeding children, sheltering the homeless, or teaching life skills, more people than ever are likely to need their services in the coming days. See what assistance your church can provide.

# 4 SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

If you haven't already, reach out to your local schools and colleges. Many have already closed their doors, and students who can't go home have had to scramble for accommodations and meals.

# 5 INDUSTRY LEADERS

Connect with local industry leaders and business owners to see who's facing unforeseen hardships. What are their struggles? Who's had to lay people off? And who can't get enough help?

# 6 CONVERSATION & PRAYER

Keep communicating with your people. Whether through email, text, or your church app, your congregation needs to hear about these conversations, even if there is not something they can do yet. Consider sending out a guiding prayer and/or lists of requests for your congregation to lift up to God. Encourage them to pray for those in authority and the tough decisions they have to make. Ask your congregants to prepare their hearts for the coming days when the needs will be many and the opportunities to share God's love and provision will abound. ■

# 5 TIPS

## FOR MANAGING REMOTE STAFF (AND YOURSELF TOO!)

Working at home is different from working in the office. There's no water cooler talk about the latest Netflix show. And you can't just pop over to a coworker's desk to ask a question.

Not to mention, there are so many more snacks and no one to see you eat them.

But with today's [#QuarentineLife](#), there's more than weight gain to worry about. Many people have out-of-work (or overworked) spouses at home and children who are now doing school remotely. There are fewer meals out and more meals to cook at home. It's a stressful time, and everyone's doing the best they can to make it work.

So, as you and your staff learn to work with one another all over again, here are a few tips to help make the transition go a little smoother.

# 1

## ESTABLISH A DAILY ROUTINE

Create a schedule for yourself and/or your team and let others know what to expect regarding your availability. Some teams require strict office hours. Others do not. Either way, carve out the time you need for the kind of work you need to do. Perhaps you'd like to do deep work like studying and writing in the morning and answer emails and make phone calls in the afternoon.

# 2

## “MEET” REGULARLY

Check in with each of your staff members on an individual basis at least once a week, preferably at the same time and day of the week if possible. Let them know that's their time to ask questions and for you to help them work through challenges they're facing.

Teams will likely benefit from meeting regularly as well. Depending on the work you do, this may mean a daily session or a weekly review.

# 3

## SET CLEAR GOALS & METRICS

You have no idea what people are doing with their time—or what you're to do with your own—unless you have a clear direction. Define the projects that need doing and break them down into manageable parts and deadlines. Always be asking, “**Who** will do **what** by **when**?”

# 4

## INTEGRATE REPORTING

Build reporting into your tasks. This means that when a task is done, the project manager gets notified. And if a task isn't done on time, the project manager is notified as well. This way, if you're the leader, you don't have to hunt down the status of projects. And if you're the employee, you'll build a reputation for being proactive and communicating with efficiency and skill.

# 5

## DON'T FORGET THE FUN

These are tough times, but that doesn't mean you can't have joy and meaningful relationships. Share befitting memes, encouraging posts, and funny videos. Check in on one another personally and do what you can to be helpful and generous. God will do great things even amid hard times when we stay faithful to Him. ■

# WHAT TO DO IN A FINANCIAL **CRISIS**

We are living in an unprecedented time. Because of the coronavirus, people are losing their jobs and can't give like they used to. With a number of churches already struggling to pay the bills, many leaders are having to rethink their financial strategies. Perhaps you're wondering if you'll be able to keep the church running. Or even if you'll have a position with that congregation much longer.

The days ahead are uncertain, but God, in His sovereignty, has called you to complete the work He has set before you. So how should you approach the difficult financial decisions you need to make for yourself and your church?

# 1 SEEK GOD'S GUIDANCE

First, breathe. Examine your heart and acknowledge your fears and concerns. Whatever they are, they're valid in the face of a worldwide pandemic. But then take a moment to remind yourself that God is still in control. He knew you'd have to face this challenge, equipped you for it, and promised to walk with you through it. Seek Him in His Word each day and ask Him to meet your needs as well as provide for the needs of your congregation in miraculous ways.

# 2 BE HONEST WITH YOUR PEOPLE

Don't be tempted to carry this burden alone. Share the financial challenges you're facing with your church leaders. Even if this crisis has brought to light some of your own financial weaknesses or unwise decisions, be humble and admit your mistakes and shortcomings. Ask others who have proven themselves to be good stewards to provide wisdom and advice, for "he who heeds counsel is wise," (Proverbs 12:15).

# 3 MAKE THE **HARD DECISIONS**

Once you've examined your situation and consulted with leadership, it's time to come up with a plan of action. It might not be pretty. You may have to suspend certain ministries, institute a hiring freeze, lay off staff, or postpone building programs. If you can, favor incremental savings over major cuts. But do what needs to be done to stay out of debt and protect your church for the long haul.

# 4 LOOK FOR **OPPORTUNITIES**

Don't be so caught up in the challenges that you don't see the opportunities that are before you. What ministry does this hardship make possible for you and your community? How can you foster community during this time? Here are a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

- Host a "drive-in" church service.
- Send out weekly family devotions.
- Have groups watch Bible studies on Right Now Media and discuss within a Facebook or Realm group.
- Livestream a prayer service.
- Support local food pantries.

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose," said the Apostle Paul (Romans 8:28). So keep an eye out for the good He is calling you to do.

# 5 LET PEOPLE **HELP**

You're not alone in the challenges you're facing. There are people who are listening to God and willing to meet the needs that He is placing before them. And He has equipped them and called them for such a time as this. So make giving easy. Post links to your online giving platform and mailing address. If possible, create a simple graphic and/or post instructions to direct congregants on how they can continue to give generously during these unusual times.

The Lord is not limited by social distancing and there are opportunities He is bringing to light to those who seek Him first. While you might have to make some painful decisions right now, know that God will be with you as you act in ways that will glorify Him. ■



# OVERCOMING FEAR, CONFLICT, AND DIVISION

We all respond differently to fear. Some people suppress their emotions. Others lash out. We're living in unprecedented times and facing an especially unknown future. And everyone is going to have their own emotions and opinions and express them differently.

This can be a great source of contention. "You're overreacting," says one person. "You're not acting enough," says the other. Fear can lead to conflict and division if we're not careful.

***So what should we do?***



# 1 CULTIVATE EMPATHY

Help your community realize that everyone is dealing with this pandemic in their own way. We're all doing the best we can. Encourage them to take a moment to put themselves in others' shoes and consider a few of the common fears people are dealing with right now.

- **I'm afraid others don't care about me and I'll be left to suffer.** It's an especially difficult time to be elderly and/or immunocompromised. Those who are used to taking extra precautions on a good day are facing a new level of susceptibility to disease. Their loved ones and caregivers worry, too, that they may unknowingly contract the virus and pass it on to them.
- **I'm afraid I won't have access to the resources I need.** The hoarding of toilet paper and cleaning products belies a fundamental fear many people have right now. Whether it's because of supply shortages, closed businesses, or job losses, a lot of people are having to find ways to make do without.
- **I'm afraid of losing valuable moments with those I love.** Nursing homes can't have visitors, and patients at healthcare facilities can't have their friends or families visit. Children are unable to see their newborn siblings in the hospital. These constraints are putting an extra strain on people's mental and emotional resources.
- **I'm afraid I don't have what it takes to do what is required of me.** People are being asked to work in ways they've never done before. From home. With limited resources. Without customers coming in the door. Some are suddenly homeschooling their kids for the first time. And those who have lost their jobs are scrambling to find—and learn—new ones.

## **2 MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE**

There are many reasons to be anxious right now. But faith is the antidote to fear. And you have an amazing gift to give the world right now. Look for ways to share hope with people in the grip of fear. Whether it's through your church app, via Facebook or YouTube, or with a simple phone call, share comforting messages of God's love and care for people.

## **3 FOSTER COMPASSION**

Cultivate in yourself and in your congregation compassionate hearts that see the hurting and work to alleviate their pain. Encourage your people to remember how the early church supported one another: "Now all who believed were together," writes the Apostle Paul, "and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need," (Acts 2:44-45).

## **4 SHEPHERD YOUR PEOPLE**

If you're a church leader, your job is still the same. Lead people to the cross of Christ. Teach them to pray and worship the Lord. Walk with them through their fears and direct them towards the source of your hope. And guide them along their faith journey to the glory of God. This is your high calling in Christ Jesus. ■

# LIVING WITH THE

# UNKNOWN

These are stressful times in which to be a leader. Nobody alive has led people through a worldwide pandemic before. We're all in uncharted waters here. All we can do is simply live one day at a time and make the wisest decisions we can make with the information we have today.

But to do that, we have to put forward our best efforts. And we cannot do that unless we care for ourselves well.

# 1

## EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

Some people are very aware of their emotions and are used to riding the ups and downs every day. Others are more reserved and rarely stray from a natural equilibrium. Neither of these coping strategies is wrong. There are no right or wrong emotions to feel. But emotions are powerful indicators of the thoughts and beliefs that rule our minds.

So we must respond to them in godly ways, correcting errant thoughts and expressing truthful ones in a way that edifies others. During stressful times, it may be especially beneficial to journal or in some way intentionally explore the thoughts and feelings we have so they don't lead us astray.

# 2

## SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE

You are no good to others without first surrendering your will and putting your faith into the hands of God the Father. Take time each day to speak with Him and study His Word. Confess your failings and ask Him to cleanse your heart. Pray that He would equip you for the good works He has planned for you and open your eyes to see as He sees that you might serve others as you serve Him.

# 3

## A HEALTHY BODY

If we are to love God with our mind, body, and soul, then we must make a concerted effort to care for our earthly vessel. It's the only one we have. So take walks. Follow a nutritious meal plan. Observe a regular sleep schedule.

Ministry can be demanding, and there are times when we will have to go above and beyond to meet the needs of others. But these times ought to be exceptions to the rule. Trust God to fill in the gaps of your humanity. You're neither essential nor insignificant to His work. He simply calls us to obey Him—no more and no less.

# 4

## FOLLOW HEALTH GUIDELINES

During a public health crisis, one of the most important things you can do to care for yourself is to follow the recommendations of healthcare professionals. They have taken oaths to protect you and those whom you serve. So be sure to take your own personal medications and do what you can to respect the guidelines they set in place. Pray for them as well, that God would protect and provide for them and heal their patients quickly and completely. ■

# A VISION FOR THE **FUTURE**

While it may feel like time is standing still, God is at work. He has called the whole earth to a Sabbath for a time. A ceasing of striving. Complete and utter recognition of our need for Him.

He is present with us in our solitude and preparing us for the other side of this pandemic. Out of a void of human interactions, He is cultivating an appreciation for the body of Christ. (Oh, to hear her sing to her Beloved again!) And stirring up gratitude in our hearts for the things that glorify Him.

So, as we mourn our current losses and struggles, we must not lose sight of the hope we have in Jesus Christ. After all, we do not grieve as others who do not have hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Instead, we can look forward with expectant hopefulness to the moment of deliverance when He will say to us, "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing. Now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert," (Isaiah 43:18-19).



# Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

## **The know-how you need from experts you trust.**

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

## **Tools and support to strengthen churches.**

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

## **Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.**

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

## **A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.**

We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

## **We believe in YOU!**

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

## Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

 1-844-467-3256

 [solutions@acst.com](mailto:solutions@acst.com)

 180 Dunbarton Dr, Florence, SC 29501