

COMING OUT OF THE CORONAVIRUS

Transitioning your
church back to
in-person services



SOLUTION GUIDE

THE NEW (transition to) NORMAL

A lot of talk is going around about the “new normal.” And there will be one. But we’ve got a way to go before we get there. As the country - state by state - rolls back and forth through the three-phase plan that the government has laid out, there will be a lot of transition. Some things will be here to stay, some will go by the wayside. But when this is all said and done, how you handle the transition will determine how healthy your church will be as it wades into the new normal.

This guide has been created to help your church navigate the shifting transition from your current online reality to in-person interactions, service, and meetings.



NORMAL NEEDS



By now most churches and church leaders have discovered that while “church online” certainly has benefits, in-person interactions are still the bedrock of church community. Hopefully your church has taken this opportunity to up its game with online tools for communication, giving, mobile interactions, records, and overall church management. The trending need for technology-driven ministry solutions is only going to increase over the next few years. Nonetheless, people want to gather, see each other, worship together, and just hang out. And for good reason. Here are a few...

CONNECTION

People need to stay connected to each other. In-person interactions are essential to cultivating a connected community. What’s more, people need to stay connected to your church. Physically going to church is an indispensable aspect of staying engaged. When your people can connect in person, it’ll grow their connection to your church leading to greater growth, engagement, and momentum.

MOTIVATION

It's easy to just binge Netflix and stay home. After a few months of working in pajamas and letting things slide, it's all too appealing to stay in a rut instead of pursuing your purpose. Many people in your church might need some motivation to get back on track. We all need to be inspired to be our best. Being around other people helps motivate us toward greater things.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Akin to motivation, accountability is best served in person. When people see others serving, giving, worshipping, and learning together, it inspires them to do the same. No more hiding behind a Zoom call. It's time to emerge and BE the Church!



SERVICE CHANGES

As stated, there will be some new elements in your services that are probably here to stay. We've broken down a few service types that will help you determine your best options through the transition. Use these as you see fit (and refer to the "Guidelines" section later in this guide) to determine the best approach to services.

LIMITED AUDIENCE

If you're currently live-streaming, chances are your church looks more like a studio than a sanctuary. But have you ever heard of a studio audience?

When you're ready to let some people in, but not ready - or allowed - to go all out, why not create limited seating in your studio and treat attendees like a live audience? This will reduce the number of volunteers needed (greeters, children's ministry workers, etc.) and help you take a baby step back to full services.

An added benefit to this scenario is that you can create a sense of scarcity that could foster a desire for inclusiveness, leading to more desire to attend. When people have FOMO (fear of missing out) it urges them to stay included.

We recommend having an online sign-up form that will limit the number of attendees to what your church has decided it will allow in. You can also designate age restrictions and group sizes so you can adjust the sanctuary to accommodate a specific set of guests.

A limited audience attending your live-stream filming will give your congregation a choice on how to attend that meets their current comfort level. It will allow your weekend teams to stop doing services in a vacuum, and it'll start a sense of a return to normalcy. Plus, you can control the attendance to maintain proper safety protocols a little bit easier.

FAMILY SERVICE

If you have a children's service, it will probably be the last allowed element of your weekend worship services. It's obvious as to why - kids are incapable of social distancing. We can barely get them to stop picking their noses and sneezing on their friends. There's no way they are standing 6 feet apart.

Enter the family service, an opportunity for parents and kids to worship together while still alleviating the children's director from figuring out a way to safely return to full kids' church.

All this means is that you let kids stay with parents in lieu of going to kids' church. You probably also want to indicate that families should sit together but stay 6 feet from other families for safe social distancing.





FULL SERVICE

When your state lifts the restrictions and your church leadership is comfortable with going back to full, open services, you might want to make a few considerations. You'll probably still want to over communicate your commitment to safety.

We suggest:

- Sitting at least two chairs away from your closest neighbor
- Avoiding the "meet and greet" time or at least eliminating the handshakes and hugs
- Using discretion when praying for people up close
- Having ushers guide people away from large clusters and crowds
- Making donations into offering boxes or, better, online
- Avoiding long lines at any food, check-in, or kiosk station
- Practicing safe social distancing whenever possible

What you do in your full service will probably change over time. It's up to you to determine what will stay forever, and what will serve its short-term purpose.

MIX IT UP

Think outside the box and don't be afraid to offer multiple service types. When you're primarily live-streaming, maybe you let in a limited audience for that service, then pull the plug on video and do a second family service. Maybe you offer a strict social distancing service for those who are more cautious or vulnerable but offer a more open service for the ones who are up for it.

This is the time to try some different things. You'll have the grace to try things out without setting them in stone.

COLLECTING DONATIONS & SERVING COMMUNION

An important thing to consider for worship services is how to handle donations and communion - the contact points.

A simple solution for communion is to set up stations with individual communion elements that people can cycle through and pick up on their own. Or you can have designated ministers handing out individual elements.

When it comes to giving, there are lots of reasons why online giving is the best solution for almost all churches. Statistically, it's just better for the growth and consistency of giving. For the purposes of this guide, we'll focus on the germ transfer aspect. Giving online doesn't spread germs. Simple.

A mobile app is the most preferred online giving method because it allows giving to be an on-the-spot shared experience. If your church has giving stations or tables, that's fine too, so long as someone is there to disinfect after each visit. Finally, an option to give cash or checks into conveniently located offering boxes should be part of your giving formula.





SANITIZATION

Keep things clean and let people know it will be a new requirement for church services. You've got to have a sanitized environment so people can feel safe and be safe.

GENERAL CLEANLINESS

While it used to be okay to clean your general spaces once a week, they should now be cleaned after every service. As people come and go from your facility, you'll want to stop the spread of germs every day so that various activities are not cross-mingling their germ pattern. This means using bleach and other disinfectants to clean floors, surfaces, bathrooms, etc.

MULTI-USE AREAS

For areas that have heavy traffic, such as coffee stations, guest services tables, door handles, bathrooms, playgrounds, etc., you'll want to have periodic disinfecting throughout the service/day. On the hour or every few hours, you should have someone available to stay on top of the wipe down.

MULTI-TOUCH SURFACES

Things such as giving kiosks and touchscreens for child check-in or maybe even your coffee dispensers should be wiped down after each use. If volunteer staffing is a problem, you could consider providing wipes right next to the surface and a sign indicating your request that users wipe down the surface before each use. Much like the wipes by the shopping carts at stores, people will probably catch on pretty quickly. Or better yet, appoint a single volunteer to manage the sanitation of those areas.

Keeping things clean and disinfected will keep people safe and confident to be in your space.





CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Alright, this is the hard one. You've got to balance parent expectations - and critique, kids' desires, and volunteer concerns, all while trying to figure out the best way to keep kids engaged in services and safe from disease. No small feat. Hopefully, the following ideas will get you headed in the right direction.

CHECK-IN

You'll want to avoid long lines. Consider adding more check-in stations with self-serve options so that people can keep their distance but not be delayed. Self-serve includes the ability - and request - for each person to sanitize their station before or after use.

ROOM SPACING

Take out some of the furniture and toys that cluttered your space. These should include multi-touch toys such as climbing stations and toy cars - anything that multiple kids want to get their hands all over. Create space for kids to play but not be all over each other. Also, consider teachers. More space will allow them to do their jobs without tripping over the other teachers and kids.

PARENT EXPECTATIONS

Clearly communicate all the precautions you are taking to keep the rooms clean and the kids safe. Let parents know that you cannot totally control the actions of their kids, but you are instituting new policies and procedures to reduce the chances of infection. Remind them that the spread of disease is ultimately out of your control, but you're going above and beyond to ensure their safety. Post signs, print handouts, and put into visible practice the new steps you're taking toward better sanitization and social distancing.



NEW HABITS

As a general rule, you'll want to start and keep doing these things:

- Have all teachers use hand sanitizer and restrict parents from entering.
- Have the kids use hand sanitizer several times throughout their stay.
- Disinfect surfaces multiple times throughout the service.
- Spray toys and fabric surfaces with disinfectant spray often.
- Talk about social distancing and proper sanitization with the kids.
- Wipe down toys after each service.
- Install new cleaning protocols and train volunteers on their use.



VOLUNTEERS

If you've been meaning to provide some new training to your existing volunteers, you now have the perfect opportunity. The following are suggested insights for tweaking the responsibilities of your existing teams. You might also want to create new roles specifically for keeping spaces clean, monitoring safe interactions, and guiding traffic flow.

GREETERS & USHERS

They'll need to find another option for hugs and handshakes. That might take a while. Also, greeters and ushers should be instructed to reduce the gathering of people clusters. This might mean spacing greeters farther apart from each other and the doors. It could include having ushers guide people to seats quicker.

While it's probably not appropriate for greeters to wear masks, they are the first model of how new interactions should take place at the church. Thus, they should be trained on how to be friendly and build connections while eliminating close personal contact.

KIDS WORKERS

We already addressed most of what you'll need from kids workers in previous sections. But it's worth saying that kids' church volunteers are the front lines. So it's not just what you want from them but what you want for them. Let them know you are doing what you can to make sure THEY stay safe. So the training you provide needs to consider them. How can you help them reduce disease transmission while still having fun with kids? Facemasks, gloves, and disinfectants are all options, but you should institute a "no sick kids" policy so parents are well aware that they should not bring sick kids to church.

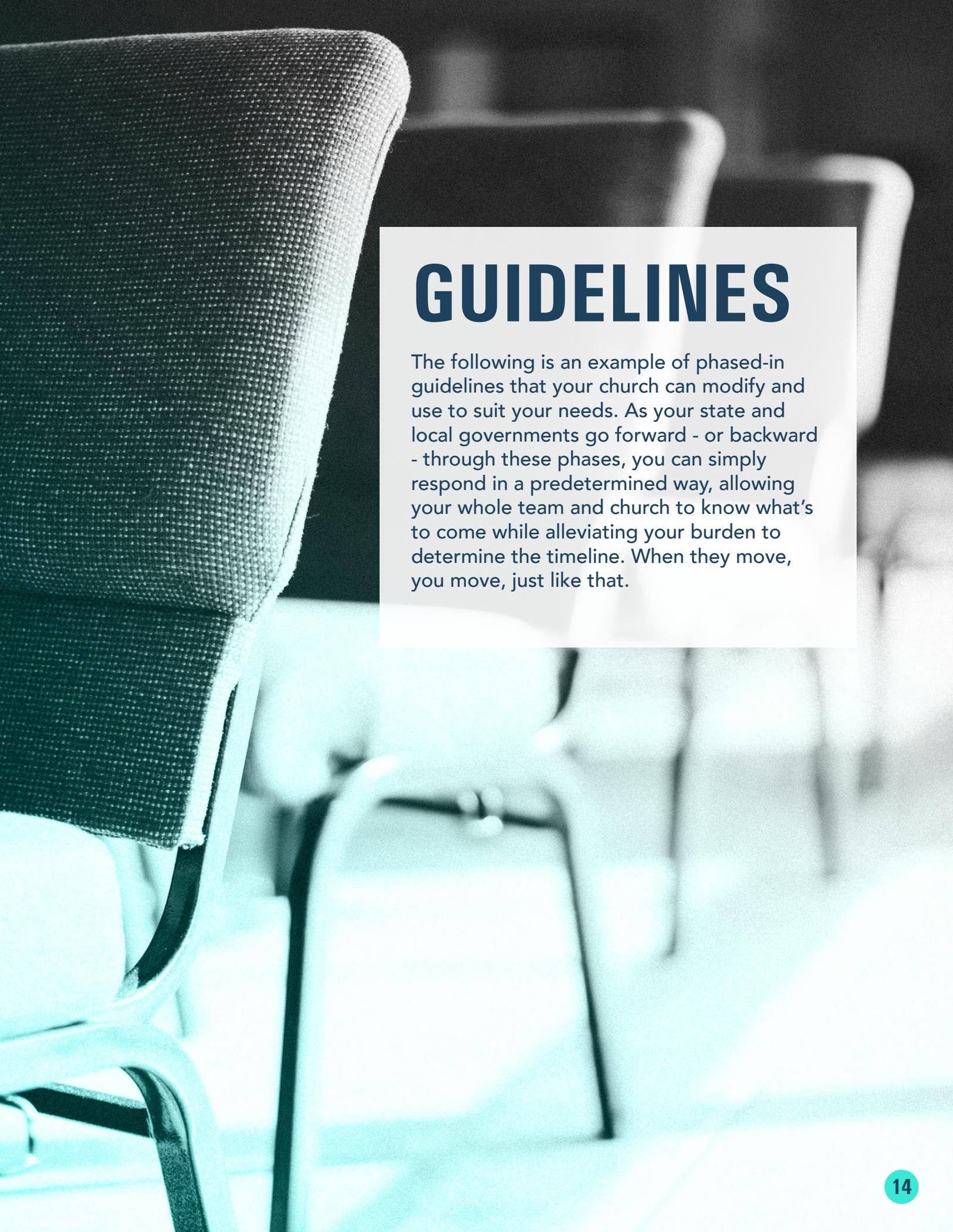
PRAYER & MINISTRY TEAMS

If your church is one that offers personal prayer or in-person ministry - especially the type that's face-to-face or includes laying on of hands, you might need to do that differently. Chances are, people will respond negatively to being touched for a little while. Even if someone is willing to receive prayer or ministry, in the back of their mind they might be feeling uncomfortable. You'll really need to use your discretion here, but you might want to simply communicate to your church that you can still offer prayer and ministry, but avoid the physical contact... and maybe even maintain a few feet of distance between the participants.



TIGHT TEAMS

Kids workers, media teams (in the booth), worship teams, etc. are all required to work closely with each other. In these scenarios, masks could be encouraged. When social distancing isn't possible, increase the availability of protective equipment, disinfectants, and hand sanitizers. Also, make sure they are trained to keep multi-use equipment (soundboard, computers, etc.) disinfected at all times.



GUIDELINES

The following is an example of phased-in guidelines that your church can modify and use to suit your needs. As your state and local governments go forward - or backward - through these phases, you can simply respond in a predetermined way, allowing your whole team and church to know what's to come while alleviating your burden to determine the timeline. When they move, you move, just like that.

COMING OUT OF THE CORONAVIRUS GUIDELINES

PHASES:	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4 - NEW NORMAL
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GOVERNMENT SUGGESTIONS

Social Distancing	Strict	Limited	Modest	TBD
Vulnerable People	Stay Home	Stay Home	Cautious distancing	TBD
Max Crowd	10	50	Use discretion	TBD

MINISTRY RESPONSE

Social Distancing	Strict - 6 feet between people	6 feet when possible	Use discretion	No restrictions
Sanitization	After each use	Daily	Discretionary (see notes)	Diligent
Worship Services	Online only	Multiple services with chairs spread out. 50 people max. Sign up to reserve space and designate chair groupings.	Multiple or single service(s) with rows/ chairs spread out. No sign ups. Limit people in building. Regular service and family service.	Full services. No limitations except as directed by firecode or city ordinance.
Food and Beverage	None	Water bottles	Coffee and water. Individually wrapped snacks.	No restrictions
Prayer for People	Online only	From a distance. Pray over groups.	Near, but no or only limited touching. Facemasks optional.	No restrictions. Use discretion.
Special Events	Cancelled	Limited to 50 people. Non-contact events.	Unlimited. Cautious spacing.	No restrictions. Keep sanitized.
Small Groups	Online via ZOOM	In-person only when 6 feet of distance can be maintained between participants. Online optional.	No restrictions	No restrictions

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MINISTRY RESPONSE

Kids' Church	Online via video	Online via video. Outdoor play and nursery facilities available to parents for family worship service. Church provides monitors. No check-in, no teachers.	Limit room capacity for greater space. Full kids programming in first service. Second service is a family service for cautious parents.	No restrictions
Youth	Online via video	In-person only when 6 feet of distance can be maintained between participants. Online optional.	No restrictions	No restrictions
Meetings/Classes	Online via ZOOM	Arranged with seating to be 6 feet between people. No activities that require close contact or touching same surfaces/objects.	No restrictions	No restrictions

NOTES

Sanitization Standards	The new normal requires ministries to have hand sanitizer readily available. Kiosks and surfaces with multiple touches will be wiped between each use. Bathrooms and common areas will be cleaned frequently, as needed.
Social Distancing	Whenever possible, churches will adapt decor and structures to accommodate social distancing and direct people in a way that limits bottlenecks and inescapably tight situations.
Vulnerable Populations	Definition: Elderly individuals and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.
Worship Service Types	Limited Audience: those present will have to sign up online and church will space chairs to accommodate sign ups. Family service: church will inform people that well-behaved kids are welcome in the service for parents who are still hesitant about having kids in close quarters.

COMING OUT OF THE CORONAVIRUS CHECKLIST

Use this list to ensure you have everything you need to get back to business!

Hand Sanitizer

Put it in visible places where it's secure and readily available.

Paper Products

Make sure you have toilet paper and hand towels.

Clearly Marked Thoroughfares

Use lines on the floor or rope railings to guide traffic.

Standing Indicators in Congestible Places

Keep people from crowding the coffee.

Disinfectant Sprays and Wipes

Make a visible show of keeping surfaces clean.

Facemasks and Gloves for Tight Teams

Inspire confidence among teams working in tight quarters.

Giving Options and Information

Show people how to give online or in offering boxes.

Individually Wrapped Snacks

Offer these if you plan on feeding people.

Ways to Connect Online

Use mobile apps, group communication, social media, etc.

Individual Communion Elements

This will probably be around for a while.



EYE TOWARD THE GOAL

There will be a new normal, but it'll take a while to get there. Keep in mind that churches and ministries will be in flux for a while, but that's okay. Our goal has never changed. Our purpose has always been to love God and love people. Our mission has always been to make disciples and equip the people of faith. During this time of transition, remember that this too shall pass while God's love remains.

The future is bright, so keep following God and working to transition your ministry into the future!



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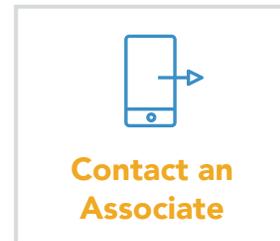
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