

LEADING
MINISTRY
THROUGH
UNCERTAINTY



SOLUTION GUIDE

2020

This year is off to a tumultuous start. No disagreement there.

Where disagreement might rear its head is how to approach the difficulty of the season.

You can approach it as a crisis to fight, a season to get beyond, or a tension to manage. The first two approaches create a sense that things will only be effective, productive, or “normal” once the season is over and behind us. The problem with that perspective is that many churches and ministries will:

- a) miss the opportunities presented at the moment, and
- b) find themselves unprepared to step into the future.

Difficulty has taken a new form in 2020. But difficulty itself is nothing new.

The First Century Church was born out of and into chaos. It experienced harder issues, tougher persecution, more confusion, and greater disagreement than we are experiencing right now. And yet somehow, it flourished.

While the context is different, the opportunities for healing, restoration, and the advancement of the Good News still abound.

This guide has been created to help you put into place some mission-critical components that will help shape your ministry - and the world around it - into the picture God has for it. These key aspects of ministry are essential to leading your church in this new season of ministry.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT **COMMUNICATION**

A lot has been written on the importance of clear, concise, and consistent communication. And for good reason. After all, how will people hear if there is no one to speak?

What's less talked about, is the importance of communicating how you will communicate.

People need to know that you have a voice. But they also need to know what to expect. In a world with a million (more like a billion) messages posted every single second, it's easy for what was intended to be clear to become convoluted.

This problem is amplified by the fact that most people are not consistently tuning into what you're saying. So they might only get fragments of critical information that leave them wanting for clarity.

You can't afford to have confusion when it comes to the cornerstone components of the ministry you're building.

The answer to the problem of fragmented messaging is to lay out to your leaders and teams - as well as to congregants - how and when you'll be speaking. That way they will know what to pay attention to and be brought into the responsibility of staying engaged in the discussion.

Real-world Example:

You want to return to in-person services, but the shifting surges in COVID-19 cases and the corresponding changes to government regulations make a “final” decision a moving target. If all you do is communicate after you’ve made a decision to start, pause, cancel, or resume services, children’s church, and other ministries, people will start to get fatigued from keeping things in sight. However, if you let your church know that you will be providing future updates weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, they will know what to expect and will be better suited to roll with the punches.

Communicating about how you will be communicating will help your leaders and teams be active participants in the ongoing narrative, instead of confused onlookers of a one-way monologue.

CALMING THE FEARS

Fear manifests in many forms. For some, it looks like withdrawing, anger, anxiety, and even depression.

Regardless of how it looks, fear is a constant companion of uncertainty.

In uncertain times, people need to be affirmed; and the best way to assuage fears is to provide the truth that will ground fearful notions.

Fortunately for Christians, we have a solid foundation in the Word of God and the truth of the Gospel!

Remind your people, especially your leaders and teams, that our battle is already won. And although we still contend in the spiritual realms with all manner of enemies that would tear down, injure, and seek to destroy our humanity, God has assured us that Jesus has indeed overcome the world.

It's tempting to follow the narratives of the world, leading everyone to the logical conclusion that there is little that can be done in the face of the monumental challenges we encounter. But remember that Jesus, Paul, and all the early Church leaders faced bigger challenges, and yet the Church and the Gospel flourished in times such as these.

Real-world Example:

At your team meeting people are hemming and hawing as they reflect on the myriad social media posts and news stories they've been grappling with all week. They've heard opinions. They need truth. You need to open up your Bible and read from any of the verses that are chock-full of inspiration. As you remind them of the Psalms, God's purpose in Ephesians, or Jesus' proclamations in John 16, they will become renewed in their minds and will be prepared for transformation instead of tribulation. The same principle can be applied in all your messaging: blog posts, social media, videos, sermons. By weaving scripture into your messaging you will replace fear with faith and impotence with power.

In the midst of tribulation, your people need to be reminded that joy is always an appropriate response because our eternity is certain.

KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBORS

Think smaller, not bigger. 99% of churches will not have a national voice with any real level of influence. And that's OK. The Church was designed to be a local, life-giving organism not a power-seeking political machine.

If we believe that change starts in the human heart, then you have just as much opportunity to make a huge impact by making disciples of Christ. In fact, you might even find yourself with a greater opportunity because people are hungry for hope.

We put the Gospel on display when we love our neighbors. But how can you love them when you don't even know them?

Making an impact on the world around you starts with knowing the makeup of the community that surrounds you.

Tools like MissionInsite™ can help you run a demographics analysis of your surrounding area, revealing valuable information like age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, interests, and preferences. This information will equip you with understanding that will help you better meet the needs of and reach out to the people who need you most.

Real-world Example:

You want to reach out to your community with a service project to help people who've been affected by COVID-19. At your board or committee meeting someone has the great idea of doing a virtual VBS to help parents of young kids give those children something to do in the shut-in summer. The only problem is that you're surrounded by the elderly. If you had done your research, you'd know that a better idea would be offering to go grocery shopping and run errands for elderly shut-ins who are living in fear of contracting COVID-19 but who still need to pick up prescriptions, send out their laundry, and gather essentials for daily life.

If you plan on reaping a harvest, you have to know the field God has given you.

BUILDING DIFFERENT TEAMS

The teams you've had up to this point might have served you well, but things are different now. Not only will you need new teams, but you'll also need new parts on existing teams and new team protocols.

Doing ministry in a different context requires building teams with different structures.

If you plan on going to more services to accommodate smaller crowds, you'll need more greeters and ushers.

If you plan on focusing on online ministry, you'll need online greeters instead of in-person greeters.

You'll likely need a more robust media team, a sanitization team, fewer kids workers if you cancel children's church or religious education, or more kids workers if you need to split up class sizes. And so on.

The point is, your teams are no longer one-size-fits-all. And they need to know it.

Real-world Example:

Your children's church was humming along nicely and you just pulled together enough volunteers to handle the number of kids in your ministry. You had some people at the front, checking in kids and welcoming parents, maybe some "floaters" keeping an eye on things, and of course, your beloved teachers. But now, what are you going to do about keeping the check-in station clean? You know... the one that EVERY SINGLE parent will touch? Plus you can't have too many kids in a single classroom. You know... social distancing? So you have to have more classes and more teachers. And then your church decided to add services to create more space for those in attendance. And just like that, you almost tripled your team. What's more, you have to train this team to follow newly implemented protocols to keep kids safe and parents assured.

The only way to lead into an ever-changing landscape is to rethink, recruit, retrain, and re-inspire your teams.

REINVENTING THE WHEEL

In similar fashion to building new teams, you'll need to rethink how you've done even your most constant ministries.

So many churches avoid re-inventing the wheel because if it ain't broke, don't fix it. While that's true as it relates to the simplicity of the Gospel, everything else is broken at the moment! Pretending like it's not is only going to kick the can of ministry responsibility down the road.

Instead of looking at these new requirements as obstacles, why not see the changes as opportunities to reimagine the way things could be?

Remember that idea you had about a radical new way to approach groups? Or the one about finally going to multiple services? What about focusing on community outreach as a replacement for indoor gatherings? Don't have ideas? Then get some people together - socially distanced of course :-)) - and let God give you some!

One thing to remember: reinventing the wheel doesn't have to be radical. Maybe there is one small change you could make that would have a huge impact.

Real-world Example:

A church in Arizona was struggling to find the right rhythm for small groups. It seemed there was either too much handling of the leaders or not enough consistency. The engagement was average. Fruitfulness was negligible. Because their main focus was on transformation through relationships, they decided to have the next season of groups be more relationally focused. Then COVID-19 hit, almost canceling groups altogether. Then a thought occurred, "What if we let people in the church decide who they were 'safe' with, and encourage them to form groups and have dinner together on their own?" The church found that people were growing in relationships, developing much needed connection. A simple change to an existing structure unlocked amazing potential.

When the wheel was invented, it revolutionized the world. What idea is God giving you for ministry that will revolutionize your church?

KEEPING THE PEACE

Ephesians 4:3 reminds us to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Maintaining unity and peace requires effort.

The most common way for a church to crumble is from within. In fact, most churches thrive in adversity but die through disunity.

Whatever your church is facing - COVID-19, political issues, racial reconciliation, budget woes, lagging attendance, disconnect among team members - greater unity and peace are absolutely essential requirements for overcoming those obstacles.

The effort of maintaining unity and peace is best exerted in the area of keeping your eyes on the prize. It's both tempting and tiring to chase down every problem that the world throws at you. And while relevance is important, what is more relevant than the constancy of the Gospel?

Too many churches try to be the answer to problems that God didn't create them for. So they end up fighting battles they aren't equipped to fight.

The discipline comes in knowing who you are, what you're called to, and what values you've agreed to that shape your approach to that calling.

Real-world Example:

A church was established on the idea that everything good that happens in ministry happens through relationships. First with God, then with others. That guiding principle shaped many aspects of their ministry. Then, the horrific scene of a black man being killed by police roiled the community. The church, in its best intentions, wanted to do something, anything. So its leaders scrambled to listen, speak up, and make a difference. The only problem was, they had never done anything like this before. They weren't activists but they were trying to put on that hat. They had no real influence online. No political connections. Nothing to show for their efforts. Add to that, people in the church had very different ideas of the right approach, so division started to creep in. Eventually they got fatigued from trying to be something they weren't and began to get discouraged that they had failed at being an agent for healing in their community. After some soul-searching and letting go of what they thought was expected of them, they returned to their values and decided to work through relationships. They set up a phone tree and called all the people of color in their church, asking how they could support them through relationships. Amazing ideas emerged and the church was unified by living into what they were for, instead of fighting what they were against.

When you call your church to rise above the fray and focus on the unity that comes with submission to your calling, you'll find that the things that divide you are actually much smaller than the things that unite you.

ENDING IT **WELL**

No matter what next big thing your church is facing, it's important to remember that it will all end well. We are a people of hope, not trusting in what is seen, but what is promised. Remind your people, remind yourself, this too shall pass and it's going to be OK.

So please, carry on with joy, knowing with confidence that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."



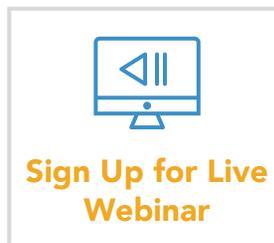
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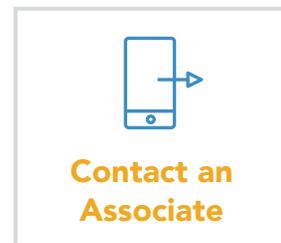
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