

New Strategies – Same Mission

Pastor Dan Backens

1. There are two types of pastoral responses to the COVID19 crisis: 1) When will we “go back” to the way things used to be? or 2) How does this disruption help facilitate positive change in the structure, strategy and reach of the church?
2. The mission of the church should not change with new circumstances, but strategies must evolve to meet new threats and opportunities. The *why* remains constant but the *how* must adapt.
3. We must differentiate between biblical *convictions* and cultural *preferences*, and also between the *message* and the *means*.
4. This crisis gives the church permission to make some adjustments that might be overdue. Its time, for many, to move from a *complex* organization to a *simple* one.
5. The church is often way behind the curve of culture and technology. She is slow to recognize the sociological and cultural trends that are affecting society. Let’s get in front of the change during this time. Don’t be reactive but proactive.
6. One key measurement of church health has long been *attendance* but that is shifting now to *engagement*. Online viewership of a church service is not the most revealing measure of reach, but rather the number of engagements. For starters, Facebook provides very helpful analytics to assess engagements.
7. After the crisis subsides, many people will be very slow to return to joining in large gatherings – possibly for a year or longer. Some will undoubtedly find ‘doing church’ at home is now their preference. This requires a new innovative strategy for pastoral care, equipping and discipleship. It will be online and in smaller groups.
8. Phone calls are still very effective for pastoral care especially for older congregants, while texting works best for younger people. The latest statistics say 90% of people read their texts within five minutes. Snail mail also has a role.
9. Doing the Eucharist and prayer online is important. Find a way to do it creatively yet remain true to the Scripture and your values.
10. A good goal would be to have 90% of your contributions given online. Don’t overlook your older congregants, however, who find giving checks and cash meaningful. It will take time but keep at it.
11. Since the financial picture is unclear moving forward, it would be wise to reduce budgets accordingly. With unemployment skyrocketing nationwide, it is reasonable to assume eventually that will be reflected in giving – even if our church has great tithers. A 10% or more reduction in the operating budget might be wise and freeze or reduce staff costs.

12. If a church has multiple staff, it might be a good time to shift more ministry to volunteers and put additional finances towards digital platforms. The novelty of doing church online will wear off and an excellent online presence is essential moving forward. Invest in your digital ministry like you would foreign missions.
13. Think of your website as primarily for guests and your Facebook page more for your members. Guest follow-up is still key, it just must move to an online approach.
14. This is a great time for some life-coaching. During this crisis sharpen your pastoral skills, educate yourself, and deepen key relationships (through one-one Zoom). Exchange ideas and practices with other ministries.
15. The more you can do to help your city during this crisis the better. Do not think self-preservation or think just about your church. Your generosity will be long remembered by food pantries, shelters, parents, the elderly and other non-profits, and churches. Do not stop supporting other ministries (if at all possible) even if things get tight.
16. After the crisis subsides, I believe there will be a deeper longing and greater appreciation for *koinonia*. *Koinonia* can be defined as “a deeply shared life”. The church has prayed together, worshiped together, studied together, and met together for many years but often authentic relationships of love have too often been missing. When we truly ‘value’ our brothers and sisters in the Lord there will be a great release of the gifts of the Spirit – for faith worketh by love.
17. The prophetic and apostolic dimension of the local church give perspective during a crisis. Connections with other leaders are life-giving.
18. Finally, pastors be sensitive to people. Too many leaders are tone deaf. In our world, many are concerned about their health and worried about their finances. Increasing numbers are frightened about the future of our world, stressed out dealing with increased conflict in their homes and fretting over our nation’s toxic political climate. They need you. Be present, be tender, be re-assuring, be self-aware.

You were born for such a time as this