



FROM: THE DESK OF PASTOR CARUANA
TO: The People of Zion
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What Will the Post-Coronavirus Church Look Like?

Where are churches now?

Church leaders and members are, for good reasons, giving much attention to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. In-person church services have been cancelled across the United States, although churches are carefully moving toward re-opening based on CDC guidelines, state guidelines, and common sense. Many churches are worshiping digitally, and small groups are meeting digitally. Some have shuttered their doors for the duration of the pandemic and are waiting for a vaccine.

Church leaders are urging members to support their church financially through digital giving. Churches have created ways to maintain contact with their church members via weekly electronic updates, Zoom meetings and gatherings, phone chains, reflections, and stories of interest,

What about post-pandemic churches?

The coronavirus will move past its pandemic state at some point in the future. I'm more than a little anxious, yet intrigued, to see what our churches will look like on "the other side of the pandemic." Here are eight likely scenarios:

1. Non-digital giving (cash and checks) will become an oddity. Fewer people will want to handle the offering plates. Fewer people will touch cash. Watch for a dramatic decrease in non-digital giving. As a church, we need to make digital giving easily available to church members and encourage them to jump on that band wagon.
2. Smaller worship services will become the norm. We were already seeing a trend of churches moving to smaller worship gatherings before the pandemic. It's anticipated this trend will continue. It is anticipated that many larger churches will attempt to have services limited to around 250 to 300. Smaller churches will, of course, have even smaller gatherings. Whatever the size of a church, the number of services will increase ... each having much smaller numbers in attendance.
3. The 80% rule will become the 60% rule for worship gatherings. The 80% rule states that a church with a capacity of 200 feels full at 160 (80%). The 60% rule says the congregation will want more social distancing, and the 200-capacity church will reach its social distancing capacity at 120. In the case of Zion, as long as social distancing is required, our maximum capacity will remain at 25 per service (20 members sittings in pews and an additional 5 staff/volunteers assisting with various functions during and after each service) due to the sanctuary configuration.

4. The negative economic impact on churches could have long-lasting effects. Church leaders would be wise to begin discussions of “what if?” What if giving was cut by 30% for the next few years? What adjustments would need to be made?
5. Social distancing will permanently change some of the traditions in many churches. For example, the passing of the peace may never return in most churches. Church huggers will no longer be tolerated. Even handshakes will be minimized or eliminated.
6. The death rate within churches is anticipated to increase. Many churches are barely hanging on. These churches will not survive the consequences of the coronavirus. These deaths can be alleviated, however, with an intentional focus on church adoption and church fostering.
7. Church adoption and fostering may increase significantly. Church adoption takes place when a healthier church brings the people and assets of a struggling church into its church family. The adopted church becomes a campus of the adopting church. Church fostering is the process where a healthier church provides assistance and resources to a struggling church for a defined period, typically less than a year. Church fostering may or may not lead to church adoption.
8. Churches will rapidly adopt more virtual practices. Many churches have resisted the migration into the virtual world, but the coronavirus has taken many congregations into a quick immersion into the digital age. The initial inroads have been to move into digital giving more fully and to stream some form of worship services. But coronavirus is the tipping point of much more to come in the digital world. This change may be the most profound of all the changes churches will face after the coronavirus is no longer considered pandemic. Planning for the greater involvement into virtual practices may well require the hiring of technical support and the upgrading or purchasing of equipment.
9. The identify and mission of each church will be challenged and challenging. Churches will need to be ready to reach out to each other, to church members, and to those in need in new ways. Church must think and act outside the box.
10. Church volunteers will be critical to the sustainability of churches. Each member much do their part in whatever way they are able.

For certain, these are trying times. I know you know it, but remember God’s got this situation. He’s got you. And he’s got our church.

†Blessings and peace to all ...

Pastor Caruana