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# The Game Plan Has Changed

**“The largest church one day will be the online church.”**

These words came from Elmer Towns while I was sitting in a seminary class back in 2010. While we wrestled with topics like communion, community, and baptisms, it was difficult for us to grasp just what that may look like. I don't think Dr. Towns had a pandemic in mind, but aren't we currently seeing the largest church in the world as an online church? Needless to say, the past several weeks have ushered in significant change for church planters. Here are some best practices that seem to be working during this COVID-19 crisis.

## BEST PRACTICES DURING COVID-19

**1. Old-Fashioned Phone Calling** — This is perhaps the concept that goes against our cultural shift of texting, emailing, and direct messaging. Many planters right now are reporting that phone calls are gaining them traction with church members. In fact, it's surprising just how long people are willing and able to talk now. Building personal relationships outside of texting and emailing is proving to be essential.

**2. Online Giving** — We've taught this in our SBC of Virginia church planting training for years—the importance of establishing an online giving option when planting. Pastors who balked at the idea of paying the fees for online giving are now rushing to figure out how to do it. For years, the only way to give financially to the church was to come to the church building or mail a check. While some folks are still driving to the church to faithfully drop off their checks, many church plants are now reporting that their online giving percentage has increased. In addition, those planters who created a culture of giving from the beginning have found that giving during this pandemic has not changed as much as they expected.

**3. Online Community** — Churches have often struggled with getting attendees into small group community. However, with the shift to online small groups, churches have seen more people open to gathering online from the comfort of their own homes. The real unknown is just how much community is occurring through a computer screen.

While these are challenging times for church planters, those with flexibility and an entrepreneurial passion, will see ways that God is working through this pandemic and will adapt as necessary. No one ever promised that what we planned on paper would be what would actually transpire. ■

by **Josh Turner**

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