

# THE CHURCH: *Unable to Congregate*

**How** can a congregation not congregate? This is the question churches are considering during this time of social distancing and sheltering at home.

Many have offered worship services online through Facebook Live, YouTube, and website streaming. Providing an online option is not new for every church, but many of the results are. The almost universal utilization of online worship services has resulted in many fruits of conversion. For example, one church told of a streaming service that led to an unbelieving spouse of a church member praying to receive Christ right in his living room after years of resistance to the Gospel. This kind of scenario has been repeated numerous times!

Another new option some churches are providing is drive-in church. This is when a church invites people to gather in their cars in the parking lot for a worship service.

Here are some preliminary suggestions and reminders from more than a dozen pastors whose churches have conducted DRIVE-IN SERVICES:

- Provide assistance to direct people to designated parking spots, one space apart.
- Have the parking assistants arrive very early because many attendees will do the same to get a prime spot. Rev. Jonathan Haskew at **Henry Baptist Church** (Henry, VA) advised, "If possible, park the cars so that all can see you."
- Make sure that the service is simple—no announcements and other extras.



- Have special parking for trucks, SUVs, and vans in the back because they block everyone's view behind them.
- Keep the service short (45 minutes max) because just sitting in the car, especially with children, will limit attention spans.



- For instruction signs, use large lettering with limited text because drivers can't read a complex or small-lettered sign while driving.
- If speaking by way of FM radio, remember there is no need to project your voice as you would normally in preaching to reach the back of the room. Dr. Bryan Smith of **First Baptist Church of Roanoke** shared, "Preach for persuasion and personal appeal rather than vocal reach."
- Remind attendees not to get out of their cars.
- A drive-in service is a good supplement for an online sermon but not a substitute (online services reach far more people).
- Regarding online or streaming services, repeat the Gospel throughout because people tune in and tune out. As Dr. Stan Parris of **Franklin Heights Baptist Church** (Rocky Mount, VA) put it, "Make sure that a Gospel appeal is spread through the message rather than waiting for a final culmination."
- Model social distancing with musicians and the person preaching.
- Choose music that people know and can sing along with. Familiar music can be a significant comfort at this time.

These are just a few thoughts from the experience of many pastors. Let us remember our Gospel call "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25, KJV). May God continue to multiply our Gospel efforts! ■