

20 LESSONS LEARNED BECAUSE OF COVID-19

This list was developed from conversations with SBC of Virginia pastors walking through the COVID-19 crisis. It includes, in no particular order, what pastors have shared they are discovering in this crisis.

- 1 A quality website and a social media presence, along with an up-to-date email and call list for church members, are of utmost importance.
- 2 There is the potential for small off-site groups to develop during this time of social distancing, which could form the basis for thriving small groups in the future. Surprisingly, in a time of social distancing, the Church is coming to terms with genuine community.
- 3 Churches are learning the best practices of online worship services, such as good sound and video work. Churches are also realizing that an online service should not be constructed like an in-person service. The congregation is not in the room; therefore, the service must be oriented to the viewing audience on the other side of the camera. An online worship service should be shorter (45 minutes max). Ministers and worship teams must say/sing more with less time.
- 4 Churches are discovering the potential for leadership development while leading closely through a crisis time. New leaders are also stepping up to meet the demands of this moment. Therefore, this is a good time for leadership identification and development.
- 5 Online worship services have a greater outreach than in-person worship services, thus there is a greater possibility for evangelism. Many unchurched people will listen to an online worship service. These views can sometimes be traced and followed-up on.
- 6 Longer intentional phone conversations are creating a unique pastoral connection between the pastor/ministry leaders to the congregation at large.
- 7 The slowing pace of ministry and the forced reduction of ministry offerings are allowing an opportunity to evaluate ministries of greatest importance. This is causing some pastors to think about simplifying ministry offerings on the other side of this crisis.
- 8 Online ministry and teaching happen beyond the Sunday morning message. Shorter online vignettes can often create more Gospel touches and online engagement.
- 9 Creative ministries are growing during this time. For example, drive-in diaper giveaways, drive-through prayer, drive-in services, and new means of mercy ministries like feeding and clothing are taking place. Furthermore, some churches and denominations are making or donating medical equipment such as masks.

- 10 The need for secure and easily utilized online giving is a must during this time. Churches are learning the need to have a financial margin in their budget and to develop a rainy-day fund. Churches are also learning that church staff need flexible responsibilities and skillsets, especially in times like these. Having a financial margin and flexible staff is critical in a crisis.
- 11 Ministers are learning the need for proper financial planning, including their own personal emergency fund and appropriate savings. Ministers are having to contemplate financial sacrifice as the crisis lingers on.
- 12 In the midst of a slower pace, some ministers have become reflective concerning their own calling and convictions when things go back to normal. Many ministers are directly or indirectly experiencing the "COVID-19 sabbatical."
- 13 This crisis is allowing a new context where church cliques and trivialities are set aside for partnership and community contribution. These new behavioral patterns could hold beyond this crisis.
- 14 Forced social media use is merging virtual groups with actual groups. This could be the start of a large-scale blending of virtual and actual groups--where in-person groups may have members who attend virtually even after social distancing is over.
- 15 Ministers have a unique opportunity to teach families in their church the discipline of family devotions and quality personal devotions. Church members report having more time for Bible study and prayer and that they feel more compelled to do so during this time of crisis.
- 16 Churches are learning about the possibility of leading evangelistic and discipleship opportunities in an online platform. This potentially will cause us to see the online platform as a key area of evangelism and discipleship. Potential new church staff positions could be created to oversee online ministry where primary and ongoing engagement will occur.
- 17 This time allows for unique alignment in the ministry philosophy between the pastor, staff, and ministry leadership while ministry is not happening as normal.
- 18 A potential pitfall is that members are learning how to participate in church online and may potentially continue to attend church online while multi-tasking other activities when schedules return to normal. Churches will need to learn how to mitigate this phenomenon.
- 19 Multi-site churches could continue to explode in numbers due to the familiarity church members now have to watch "the pastor on a screen." Multiple sites allow for church community with social distancing in small settings. The "packed-room church" may be resisted for a while after the crisis is over.
- 20 Churches are unexpectedly becoming more connected with other churches because, on Sundays, ministers and church members can now binge-watch multiple church services. Many are now more aware of what is happening in the other churches in their communities.