



BEYOND PREACHING

Pastoring+

Church Closure:

Open, Close, Reopen,
Reclose, Re-reopen,

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Dennis L. Marshall
Truth Teaching Ministries

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INTRODUCTION

PREMISE: God continues to dispatched His church to bring hope and love regardless the challenges His church faces.

With premise as the backdrop, this ebook poses important questions and provides some useful responses regarding church activities during the coronavirus pandemic.

The local church response to closed or open restrictions has varied widely. Some churches have adopted strict precautions and some plan not to reopen until it is absolutely clear that it is safe to do so. Some have adopted little restrictions at all with the belief God will not let them come to any harm. In contrast, one pastor declared, “We will not reopen until the Governor’s Mansion and the White House are reopened to tourists.” Albeit, many churches are using technology and nostalgic venues like the drive-in theater concept and the like to maintain connections between the congregation and community. Whichever position your church takes, we cannot overemphasize the need for the people to fellowship whether physically or virtually. Equally important is the heartfelt sense of safety, hope, and love.

LOSS CONNECTION



The loss connection has impacted Christian disciplines, fellowship, and a sense of closeness. The need for human contact and personal interactions have grown in intensity. In response, pastors and congregations have used a variety of methods and

technologies in an attempt to bridge the gap, but with varying degrees of success. The church must continue to improve its ability to care for its members and the communities it serves whether opened, closed, reopened, or re-reclosed.

This ebook speaks to the pastors and church leaders who weigh-in on the reopen-reclose strategies, approaches, and decisions. Again, the congregant's safety and spiritual pursuits must remain paramount, because we are our brother's keeper.

CONTINGUENCY SCENARIOS

Has your church developed contingency plans related to several scenarios that may occur? Possible scenarios include:

- No appreciable immunization is reached until mid-2021
- A member or guest may have infected others in the congregation.
- One or more spiritual leaders become sick and are quarantined or isolated.
- Violence has escalated and impacts the church facilities and/or congregants.
- Food supplies have become scarce or their costs have skyrocketed.
- Homelessness and unemployment continue to climb.
- Insufficient finances regardless if it is that of the church or households.
- Chaos is consuming the city.



CONSIDERATIONS

It may seem appropriate to return to the norms of the past, but conditions will never be the same. The following considerations may be helpful as you define your plans and contingencies:

- Short services are still a good idea. The longer you meet, the more bathroom breaks are likely to occur. Will you disinfect after each use? What do you do if the smell of the disinfectant is bothersome to the people?
- Err in favor of caution since our human nature is to return to that which feels normal. Remember, these are not normal times. Do not contribute to the sense of relaxation the people may be craving. The consistent message must be, “Watch as well as pray. Be vigilant and don’t let your guard down.”
- Create a desire for the people to stay engaged with God throughout the week. If the church is open, should the attendees disinfect their vehicle afterwards? Should the attendees shower and change clothes when they arrive home?
- How can you minimize the physical contact with the monetary donations? The use of electronic giving options, gloves, and sanitizer are advisable.

NO ONE IS EXPENDABLE

The common concern shared by many pastors is the difficulty in fostering connections with everyone. Yet, some pastors have faithfully called members and visitors or sent email and letters to convey the message of love. In a parable, Jesus mentioned the Good Shepherd that left the 99 to retrieve the one. Likewise, pastors must exercise the same care for EVERY MEMBER, with none left out. But the question should be raised - what about evangelism? What are the best ways to reach those you do not know yet? At a minimum, some pastors have encouraged their members to keep in touch with their neighbors. What a great opportunity to LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF! Doing so will undoubtedly create better bonds in neighborhoods and likely create a curiosity in the neighbors. Perhaps the curious neighbor will visit your church one day, whether physically or virtually.



PASTORING+

Like it or not, a new normal is being established. Pastors must now morph into "**Pastor+**". Gone are the days of merely preaching, teaching, leading, counseling, consoling, and more. Needed is **Pastor+** who is driven and equipped by God to willingly venture into untested waters, to both try and learn new things. **Pastor+** learns new technologies/approaches for reaching the people. **Pastoring+ means:**

- Keeps the focus on God and the spiritual outcomes that nurture a personal connection among the people and with God.
- Ensures everyone is accounted for, and leaves no one behind.
- Always complies with CDC and local authorities' requirements.
- Utilizes appropriate safeguards such as sanitizer, disinfectant, masks, gloves, tape (for marking off safe distances), and helpful signage.
- Considers solos and/or pre-recorded songs instead of live choirs.
- Discourages physical contact such as hugging and the shaking of hands.
- Makes it possible for family members to sit together even if the children would rather sit with their friends.
- Ensures the church is disinfected before and after services if it is open.
- Adopts a minimal touch strategy (e.g., eliminated hymnals books and handouts).
- Explores and leverages technology and best practices that can help foster hope, love, and spiritual development.

You can proceed with the honor system, hoping everyone will self-regulate or be more direct and facilitative, but what do you do when someone has contracted the coronavirus and others may have been infected? Is there an obligation to inform the congregation so each person may take the appropriate precautions? At a minimum they may wish to pray for those infected and those possibly exposed.

CLOSING

This ebook proposed questions and possible solutions for consideration. NOTICE, this ebook did not provide strict instructions and rules for how to best respond to all the questions offered. In fact, it is likely there are many more questions to be asked. The intent of this publication was to encourage church leadership to define pandemic strategies in a thoughtful and prayerful way on behalf of the people they serve. The strategies you adopt must advance the work of God and protect the people of God. TTM would love to hear your thoughts on how you are responding. Drop us a line so we may continue engaging on these key challenges. Peace, blessings, and safety to you and yours in the name of Jesus Christ!

Dennis L. Marshall

wrote this ebook in response to the coronavirus restriction challenges facing the church. Questions are proposed so pastors and church leadership may define the right strategies that best fit their local needs.

Rev. Marshall is the founder of Truth Teaching Ministries, a nonprofit incorporation that ministers to pastors. Through consultation, coaching, workshops, media, networks, and more, Rev. Marshall has supported pastors in fulfilling God's call on their lives. Visit our website at truthteaching.org to learn more.

