



COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Leadership Recommendations For Pastors and Church Leaders Navigating Crisis

By Sean Morgan, Vice President CDF Capital

In the midst of a global pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO), we wanted to share a few insights and recommendations for pastors and church leaders navigating these unsettling times.

Caution Not Panic

Our position at CDF Capital is one of concern and caution, not panic. We want to be discerning and encourage you to be the same. We're not medical professionals, so we'll do my best to avoid giving you advice that you deserve to hear directly from those professionals.

We are, however very interested in your church making sound decisions and being a trusted part of the lives of your church family and broader community of influence for the sake of the gospel.

I served as a member of the US Air Force for 24 years; and with 4 combat deployments and 600+ combat hours later, I've developed an ability to consider and assess risks that pose a threat and those that pose a concern. In the military, we have well-developed plans for every conceivable action an enemy could take against the United States. While it's true that no combat plan ever

survives contact with the enemy, it is nice going to bed at night knowing we've thought about and planned how to act when things escalate. We can know a risk exists and develop plans based on a concern without going into panic about an overbearing threat.

Recently, I had the privilege of being with a cohort of many wise pastors in America. These cohort gatherings allow us to be transparent with each other and deal with current issues that face our churches. As you would imagine, a fair amount of the leadership discussions we have had recently were about the ways we ought to respond to the coronavirus.

We are writing this article as a way to relay what we have learned from some of the top leaders in the Church.

Change is Here. Be Prepared and Lead Well.

One thing is abundantly clear: it is likely your church and your community will see a noticeable changes in spending and giving.

The day-to-day activities we are all accustom to has drastically changed for the time being. With growing postponements and cancellations of larger public gatherings including schools, sporting events, concerts, and travel, we could see hundreds of billions of dollars of economic impact as a result of COVID-19. While this is all

concerning, it is certainly not a call to panic. The truth is, we don't know what that will mean for your church. What we're confident of, is that it will probably affect the giving of your church.

You can begin to do some things today to prepare and respond to this—in fact, we would highly recommend it.

Develop a Tiered Plan

A great place to begin is by developing a tiered plan that allows you to make appropriate responses now and also have the confidence of clear next steps if/when things progress.

Do not do this alone. Invite top thinkers and trusted advisors in your leadership and congregation to do this with you. If you task this out to top staff members and/or elders, we would recommend lead pastors have some involvement and avoid complete abdication.

This is not going to be an exact science; however, we think the structure of these tiered scenarios will help you ask and answer key questions.

We believe, as of March 13, 2020, most of us are already in Tier 1. Meaning, all churches will be affected in some way, even if you are still meeting this weekend. We may well be beyond that shortly.

WEEKEND ATTENDANCE DROP : 0-25%

Tier 1

GIVING DROP : 0-12%

Considerations:

- What have your local and state authorities declared for large gatherings in your area?
- Have they indicated they will make new declarations in the coming days?
- How do you, staff, and elders think about continuing to gather vs. moving people toward online?
 - Do you have the capability to live stream? Even through social media apps like Facebook live, IGTV, Periscope, etc.?
- Do you have online giving?
 - Can you contact cash/check givers and move them to online giving this week?
 - How will you help online givers become recurring online givers?

WEEKEND ATTENDANCE DROP : 26-99%

Tier 2

GIVING DROP : 13-20%

Considerations:

- Do you believe you'll see these attendance numbers and giving drop naturally or due to governmental regulations setting the cap of attendance for gatherings?
- Have you implemented the ability to live stream, either temporarily or a more permanent solution?
- How can you communicate with your church family who are not attending in person? How often will you reach out to them and through which channels?
- Have you implemented online giving?
 - Have you contacted your cash/check givers to transition to online giving?
 - Have you worked with your online givers to set up recurring giving?
 - Can you contact cash/check givers and move them to online giving this week?
 - How will you help online givers become recurring online givers?

WEEKEND ATTENDANCE DROP : 100%

Tier 3

GIVING DROP : 21+%

Considerations:

- Have you put into place a regular communication plan for your church family to connect with them daily or weekly? Have you made it easy for them to get information from you and your church? Do you have pastors involved in communicating/chatting online? Receiving prayer requests, etc.?
- Are you engaging your givers in a more direct way to transition them to online and recurring giving?

How Long?

Given that we are in Tier 1 now and many churches are already moving toward online only services, we may see a rapid shift toward Tier 3. The question then becomes duration—how long will this last?

Again, we are not medical professionals, but it is unclear when we will see containment or a decrease in new cases. Until that time, we simply won't know. Yes, that means that this is going to affect Easter.

With a duration with no clear end, I would recommend church leaders consider several steps to begin preparing fiscally. Cash management is absolutely critical.

Stewarding Resources in Uncertain Times

Here are some steps you can consider:

WAYS TO SAVE IMMEDIATELY

- **Pause to all discretionary spending**
 - Travel (you probably don't want to travel for other reasons too)
 - Cell phone upgrades
 - Ministry related meals
 - New computers and other personal technology purchases
 - Lights, sound, and tech equipment purchases ✕
- **Pause all new hiring. If a spot is empty, don't fill it. Find a volunteer or have other key staff share the load**

SHORT-TERM WAYS TO SAVE

- **Review all your existing service contracts.**
- **Cancel or pause contracts you can do without. Many vendors have small or no penalties for pausing or cancelling.**
- **Consider cancelling contracts that have penalties or contact the vendor to find a mutually acceptable savings.**

LONGER TERM SAVINGS

- **403(b) matching and other retirement contributions may need to be paused.**
- **Hold off on giving bonuses.**
- **Hold off on giving raises.**
- **Layoffs. As painful as they are, may you need to be considering ways to reduce your largest expense, which is your staff.**

We recommend contacting your lender as soon as possible and talking to them about your cash situation. If you are worried, they need to hear that from you. It is better to talk about solutions in advance.

Given the timing of this and the uncertainty around containment, we speculate that churches are unlikely to see attendance patterns rise significantly from the almost certain drop off as we head into summer. This means it may be September before we have the potential to get things back on track with attendance and giving.

Ask yourself what type of fiscal steps do you need to take to survive up to a potential 30% drop in giving for the remainder of 2020.

Be Courageous, Loving and Wise

I encourage you to hold onto the truth of 2 Timothy 1:7 through this: God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power love and a sound mind. And Psalm 91, that God is our protector and in complete control of the universe.

We have not included much as far as:

- Specific ministries like kids, youth, groups, etc. We would ask that you task your ministry team leaders to develop more specific things for their area that fit within the overall guidance.
- Churchwide communication. We would err on the side of being more open and transparent with communication. Providing more communication is better than offering too little.

Every crisis has an opportunity. If you lose sleep about anything, lose sleep finding ways to increase Kingdom impact through loving people and leading well. God consistently uses crisis to draw people to Him and His church. Let's pray together that He will use this crisis for His glory.