



A CHURCH LEADER TRYING TO NAVIGATE A POST-COVID WORLD

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I love change, I've led through change, I think I'm wired for change, but leading through the Coronavirus crisis has been challenging to say the least! I've had moments of excitement and exhaustion, I've been energised and overwhelmed, I've relished the new opportunities for the kingdom of God and felt waves of sadness over the pain of others and for my own losses and disappointments.

In the middle of it all there are so many voices; from the 'let's hold on till we get back to normal' to the 'nothing will ever be the same again and everything you thought you knew about church is over.'

I'm no expert and I don't want to just add more noise but I do want to add something...

Here's what I think we do know...

- We can't go back to 'normal' we have to go forwards
- We do need to reimagine who we are and how we engage with the post COVID world
- We would be foolish to throw out everything because some of what we were and did still has value
- We need to realise that some of what we've built and thought was essential, may not be, and maybe God wants us to let go of some of what we've held so tightly?

I hear the voices crying out for the end of gathered church as if online church totally replaces and eclipses the need or desire to meet together in person. To me, the gathered church is not just a strategy or a tool for mission it's something way more than that. There's a beauty, a mystery, an intangible jewel when we come together as disparate people trying to muddle our way through life and faith attempting to follow Jesus.



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**LIFECENTRAL
CHURCH**

When we park our cars next to people we've never met, share coffee with people nothing like us, look into the faces of people whose stories inspire us, we realise we were designed and destined for relationship that requires a sense of touch and proximity that Online can never truly give us.

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Stage 1 – REACT

The first few weeks were crazy...we were adrenaline filled and high octane leaders! How do we communicate? How do we get the service online? How do we connect?

So we zoomed and we streamed, we filmed devotionals and went Facebook live in-between every meal it seemed! Speed was the essence and well done all of you who went for it...BUT...we couldn't stay in react mode we needed to move on...

Stage 2 – RESPOND

Good leaders start with the premise, 'the people are not there for me, I am there for the people'. So we didn't just react we responded, we made sure people knew we were there and that we cared.

At our church, we wrote almost 100 cards to elderly and vulnerable people in our church, our staff called people.. yes on a phone!!!

We sent CD's of the talks to those not online, we increased our FoodBank, we set up telephone help lines, we mobilised volunteers for essential deliveries, sewed scrubs for the NHS, we responded. We realised that what counts is connection over production, presence over professionalism so we did our best..well done for all of you who responded!

In this season we also realised our humanity and vulnerability.
We succumbed to many things...

Exhaustion...feelings of being overwhelmed.... the comparison trap...anticipatory loss... but we didn't have to time to grieve or to really process, we were reacting and responding.

Now we must begin to move to the next stage....

Stage 3 – RECOVER

Psalm 23 from the Message says, "...True to your word you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction..."

Leaders we need to recover... we need to let Jesus fill us again with life and joy, we need to remind ourselves that we are not defined by our analytics, our metrics, our likes, shares or retweet's but by who we are in Him!! He doesn't love us because He has to but because He wants to... *'according to his good will and pleasure"* *Philippians 2 v.13*

This next stage of recovery is where we ask ourselves some key questions:

- What are our lockdown learnings?
- What treasures have we found in the darkness of crisis?
- What must travel with us into the post COVID new normal?
- What have we become, or been defined by, that needs to be surrendered?

Stage 4 – REFRAME

Here's where we will begin to ask these kind of questions:

- What will we need to be to meet the needs of the world as it will be post COVID?
- What will we need to be willing to let go of and what must we never let go of?
- What should we stop, start and sustain?

Within these big and difficult questions here's a few of my own personal hunches:

- Online is here to stay, we can't and shouldn't simply go back
- Online is an amazing tool for mission, whole life discipleship, connection and community but human beings are designed for in person contact and connection.
- When God asked Adam "where are you?" He didn't want a virtual relationship with him He wanted to re-establish intimacy!
- My sense is it shouldn't be a binary choice, either/or but it will be both/and... a hybrid of onsite and online, I've heard it referred to as "brick and click"!!



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What will this mean?

Huge changes in how we lead and how we staff our churches..more off site working, learning to lead teams virtually in certain circumstances.

Huge financial and budget implications... it's interesting that 100 years ago the roaring 20's were preceded by the Spanish flu pandemic and ended with the Great Depression!

Most of all... huge mindset changes and shifts – we will pivot frequently.

Here's what is most exciting, there are huge opportunities to reach the world for Jesus like we've never seen before!!!

There's another stage and this will come...

Stage 5 – RESET

I have no idea of how and when this will happen, a few weeks ago we all dreamed of a huge party where even the most introverted wanted a hug as we streamed back into our church buildings. That's unlikely to be the way we reset, but reset must and will come.

My sense is we shouldn't be too quick to rush back into our buildings, while restrictions and uncertainty may still be present what we can offer in the building must be worth people returning for! Plus, I sense Jesus is shaping us during this season, deeper connection, new rhythms and routines, a greater awareness of our neighbours.

So church leader, here's my words to you as together we try to navigate this new terrain:

- Look after yourself, you matter! You cannot give what you do not have
- Count what really counts...engagement, connection, comments, stories
- Stay open to others...ask for help but don't feel you need to listen to every voice
- Remember who you are and whose you are... Jude introduces himself as a servant of Christ Jesus, he could have said 'Jesus is my brother actually' but instead he simply defined himself as a servant of Jesus... called, loved and kept... and so are you.

Finally, and I say this every time I communicate to our church; God is bigger than crisis and COVID, God is bigger than questions and uncertainty, and there's no lockdown in heaven.

So....the next time you wash your hands remember whose hands you're really in!!!

"...this is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out" – Matthew 16 v. 18 Message



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