

## Responses to COVID 19 By Church Staff and Key Leaders

Georgia Governor Kemp in a press release on March 12, 2020 encouraged churches, especially very large churches, to suspend public meetings for a season to reduce the possible spread of the virus. He indicated that this was not mandatory, but was in the best interest of public health, particularly for elderly with underlying conditions.

Our churches are filled with elderly people that could be placed at unnecessary risk. Here are some possible responses for you to consider:

1. This should be seen as a great opportunity for ministry rather than a crisis to be feared.
2. First realize that while the hype is there and this is a real thing, most of the fear is overplayed. Most people (80%) get a mild case. The fatality rate will be less than 1% once all cases are taken into account. Most of the worst infections will be in vulnerable populations of elderly, those with other respiratory issues. More people will die of flu in US than this virus.
3. But the economic impacts, due to the nature of the contagion and its spread could have negative impacts across the world. This is a key disruption of the supply chain system for products from around the world. Many other industries like travel, conferences and the like will be impacted. Central bankers will pump into the system some money to alleviate impact, but the economy, and your people will not be totally spared.
4. In both comments above it is more about the fear of what could be than actual reality. We have a marvelous opportunity to speak in terms of our hope and confidence in God through this season. Those that address the issues in reality but make a plan to hold up how the Gospel permeates our behaviors, ministries and hope in Christ alone will prosper.
5. This is a psychological, emotional and spiritual battle as much as a physiological battle.
6. We should take normal precautions to protect the vulnerable. This includes announcing of different ways to greet people (elbow bumps), highlighting hand sanitation stations, reminding parents about sick children policies, etc. These may have little real impact on the virus spread but instead act as psychological reinforcement that the church understands and cares.
  - Several churches are setting up task forces with medical professionals to announce slight changes even though they know they may not have real impact. It is the psychology more than the reality.
  - Do not pass out bulletins, but instead have the bulletins where people can pick one up for themselves.
  - Consider suspending coffee stations if you have them.
  - Communion: Consider delaying communion until the spring. As an alternative, you can purchase single-use packets of juice and wafers.

7. IF the government requests large gatherings be suspended, this will mainly impact those that gather over 200 people at one place and time. The opportunity here could be to break up the congregation into multiple services spread throughout a weekend.
8. If this does happen be communicating how you will respond and that this is not a time to not gather due to fear, but to rally together to love and serve one another and our community.
9. This could be an opportunity to multiply your ministry. How would you handle this across your ministry? Feel free to call me for suggestions.
10. This is also an opportunity to expand your online efforts. Many will use simple streaming tactics, but this is also an opportunity to pilot multiple online, digital communication strategies that keep people connected and encouraged. This first starts in worship streaming.
11. IF your church decides NOT to hold any weekend gatherings – THEN I feel the next best step is to encourage small groups in homes to gather and view a stream and have some sermon-based discussion content. This means mobilizing many host homes willing to host gatherings, post locations, and training for hosts potentially also done online. The opportunity here is to expand your current small group system in a rapid way. Next Step is to mobilize a team to establish a plan should this option be needed.
12. Giving and finances. I would be reinforcing this option as well as encouraging people to mail gifts to the church. “Our ministries continue, and our missionaries still need support through this season of irregular meeting. We are still in need of loyal stewards who will walk with us through thick and thin.” Again, this is an opportunity to increase regularity in congregant’s stewardship.
13. Instead of passing the offering plate, have greeters at the door who can collect offerings as the congregants exit. Offer online giving as an alternative.
14. Ministry through congregants to their neighbors. This is a great opportunity to get our congregants focused on caring for friends, neighbors and coworkers. “As you find people impacted that we can serve, would you please let us know?” This reporting system could be met with the response of many possibilities. First, getting that front-line friend to take responsibility for ministering to the family impacted through practical measures of concern. Second, in pastors making phone calls or even visits to those impacted. “I am the pastor of “xyz” church and your friend Mrs. X says you are ill with the virus. How can we pray for you? We think you matter to the world and to God. Can I add you to my regular prayer list.”  
  
Then frequent follow on calls and touches are appropriate. This will be a time to BE BOLD in sharing the gospel.  
  
Boldness rules and Christians have always led the way in times of disaster or crisis as we focus on our hope in the Lord and His providence for us.
15. Finally— consider engagement tactics beyond the normal. Possibilities – Increase in smaller prayer and worship nights for a month where congregants are invited by alphabet to attend a worship/prayer night on every night of the week. For example, if your last name is A-D please attend our special MONDAY service, if E-J attend TUESDAY, etc.

Bulk up a special Spotify list of worship songs focused on God's presence, healing and salvation and share widely via social media.

Consider a "daily dose" audio podcast that is a daily message of prayer, affirmation and teaching. (2-5 minutes)

This can also be done with Instagram and Facebook live techniques and encouraging your congregants to share widely.

The Alternative would be all-day worship hours with every top of the hour having 10 minutes of music, prayer a brief message and then inviting people to pray together.

16. Pray for Revival! Can I be so bold? Crises can also lead to revival. I will never forget the day I witnessed over 400 people being baptized on one day right after September 11, 2001 at a church with a strong military presence. People realized they needed God and were turning to His church for answers. This could be a marvelous harvest season if we respond not from fear but with boldness.

About 25 years ago I led an exercise with large church pastors where we imagined a day that all church buildings were shut down by the government. The solutions the leaders came up with were creative and extensive. They covered leadership development, discipleship development as well as worship....and this was before we had widespread streaming options.

Every time I lead that exercise leaders say, "We should be doing these things anyway."

Let us not grow weary in doing good for in due time we will see a harvest if we do not give up.

Now is not the time to give up. It could be harvest time.

*(The essence of this article is from a Facebook post of Dave Travis, large church consultant with Generis and my predecessor as Missionary of the Stone Mountain Baptist Association)*