(RE)OPENING
THE DOORS OF THE CHURCH
(RE)Opening the Church Doors

How to do church in a post COVID-19 world

Church Community Builder

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The familiar creak of hinges as someone enters the sanctuary. No words need to be spoken. The whoosh of air escaping the pneumatic opener says plenty. The gentle thud of door-meeting-jamb. That small sweep of weather-stripping brushing over the threshold. Maybe even the faint rattle of loose hardware. Whatever it sounds like in your church. Whether it happens fifteen times on a Sunday morning or fifteen thousand times. The music of Church Doors opening has ceased over the past few months. The silence has left a deafening void.

Though it may have become white noise over the years, it’s likely you know the sound of your church doors opening. It’s familiar. It can be comforting. That sound is welcoming. It symbolizes a soul entering a sanctuary. That unique little racket represents someone seeking to serve and seeking to be served.
The sound of church doors isn’t the only thing we’ve taken for granted. For years, we took for granted how church was being done. Before this novel coronavirus pandemic, it had been centuries since the Church (capital ‘C’) has simultaneously made such a shift.

As the conversation surrounding the COVID-19 crisis has rapidly shifted from “shelter-in-place” to “return-to-work,” church leaders are wrestling with the questions of how to re-open the church.

How do we safely allow folks to gather once again?

How do we retain the surprising blessings discovered doing digital-only church?

How do we find our “new normal?”

How do we care for those who’ve suffered most during the outbreak?

How do we, by God’s grace, strike up that symphony of squeaks, creaks, and thuds?

How do we (Re)Open the Church?

Let’s try and answer some of those questions.
How do we safely worship together again?

There is an air of excitement mixed with trepidation. The idea of joining together in worship once more is joyous. However, that joy is tinged with fear. We all know the risks are still very real. So, as businesses, governments, and of course, churches begin to once again open up to the public, we need to be very thoughtful and strategic about how we allow congregants to re-enter church spaces.

The most common approach being explored is a tiered approach. Essentially, dip your toe in the water before you jump in with both feet.

Here is a sample plan, distilled from a few different churches we talked to. (Yeah, you can steal it. We want to help you out!)
STEP 1 Status Quo. Continue worshiping via livestream and maintain physical distancing protocol.

STEP 2 Livestream services. Small groups resume at a scale that conforms to recommended gathering sizes. High-risk members and attendees continue to quarantine.

STEP 3 Worship at your church begins again, with some added protocol and procedure. — See the Consideration Questions below for more. Continue offering livestreams for high-risk and ill congregants who choose to maintain minimum public exposure.

STEP 4 Services resume with fewer restrictions. Some programs and church functions become available again.

STEP 5 All programs, departments, classes, and functions of the church resume without restriction.

This plan is a framework. It is meant to be used as a guide. We encourage you to remind your people that any and all plans to re-open are tentative. Depending on how things go in your particular town/county/state, permissions and policies might be rolled back.

Before you publish your re-opening plan, please ensure it coincides with your state and local government’s guidelines.
Don’t be afraid of over-communication in this season. It would be a great idea to determine your steps and let your congregation know these "steps". It is helpful to let them know you're planning for the current situation AND the future... and have a plan.

**Considerations**

We've compiled some questions and suggestions that will hopefully spark thought and help you craft a re-opening plan that works for your church:

- Analyze how many people you can realistically and safely accommodate and still maintain physical distancing guidelines.
- Do you have church chairs or pews? Should you rope off sections? Remove seats?
- Will your people realistically abide by the standards set forth within your municipality/county/state? Set the example.

PRO TIP

Striving for specificity and clarity in your communications will only serve to make church openings safer and more accessible.
• Think about the flow of “traffic.” Do a walkthrough of your space and design a one-way path for people to walk. Maybe you’ll need to get creative with the ingress and egress.

• Your people will appreciate your forethought, clarity, and the focus on safety.

• Don’t immediately re-open youth, children’s ministry, nursery, and Sunday School. Focus on keeping your central Sunday Services safe and effective.

• Consider shortening and adding services on Sundays. This will help control group sizes.

• What are your cleaning and sanitizing plans?

• How can you express your appreciation for your staff and volunteers for all they've done during the crisis?
What do we keep?

How do we hold on to what worked during quarantine? The surprise blessings. How do we retain the good that has come from pivoting to digital-only church?

Since this pandemic has made “remote church” a necessity, we didn’t really have a choice about how to do church. Essentially, it’s virtual or not at all. And, whether you have had a largely positive experience (regarding the forced embrace of a digital approach), or it’s been a bumpy ride...you’ve done it! Your church may be down, but she’s not out.

As things transition out of quarantine, what’s going to stick? What lessons did you learn from the virtual church experience? Which practices are you going to continue going forward?
Three things come to our mind:

1. Needs.

Being hyper-aware of peoples’ needs. The universal uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 has helped to infuse us all with a little more empathy. We have come up with creative ways to stay connected with what our people are going through, what needs they have, and how we can help meet those needs.

In fact, one of the earliest updates to Church Community Builder software, during the crisis, was the Needs feature of our church management software.

Take a moment to check out all of the updates we’ve made during the coronavirus pandemic. Many of which you and your fellow church leaders suggested!

We have seen a number of heart-warming and positive results come from these—and other similar—updates.
Click below to explore how Church Community Builder can help you reach more people with the Gospel.

Get Your Demo

2. Continue streaming your services.

It seems that the pros far outweigh the cons in this category.

You already have the hardware, the software, and the experience you need to stream.

Reflect on the positive feedback you’ve gotten when it comes to live streaming your services.

Many pastors have told us that they have been able to reach people that previously they couldn’t. In fact, the Gospel is reaching people that were nowhere on the radar prior to the coronavirus quarantine.

Steve Cockram, a speaker, author, and consultant to top-level executives and leaders around the world, said it like this in a recent interview with William Vanderbloemen: “Churches will have to have a high-tech and a high-touch strategy.” Check out the interview.

If you already have shut-in members — and for those who might be in the future — continuing to live stream will give you a direct channel to them.
"Churches will have to have a high-tech and high touch strategy".

Not only will you be able to better serve your current parishioners, but you will exponentially grow your circle of interaction by maintaining a digital presence. You are allowing your ministry to be seen and heard by folks you could never reach through a traditional word-of-mouth model.

We all know how the internet ‘rabbit trail’ works. (“How did I go from sermon prep to a video lesson on sourdough starter?!”) Instead of stumbling onto random videos of baking, TikTok dances, or cats, your potential future members will stumble upon a video of your church service. Not a trivial video, but internet content with ultimate truth.

Try reaching an endless audience, across continents with a billboard.

The choice to continue streaming your Sunday services isn’t a choice to add one more thing to your plate. You’re already doing it! Keep doing it.

**3. Remain human.**

Maybe you don’t need a reminder to do this. There are many authentic leaders in Christ’s Church today. Honest and transparent leadership anchors any successful endeavor. But, it’s especially crucial in your line of work.
The restraints of stay-at-home orders have required us all to utilize video meetings and other virtual platforms. One result is that all of us have virtually invited our peers, colleagues, and sometimes even strangers into our homes and lives. We have had glitches and errors. We’ve encountered issues with dropped signals. Spouses, kids, and pets have interrupted important work moments. Work/life boundaries have blurred. In short, we’ve all had to drop the facade a little bit.

The cumulative effect of all the difficulty and the knocking down of proverbial walls? Humanity. By-and-large, people are extending a little more grace, a little more understanding, a little more encouragement, and a little more love than before.

If nothing else from your “remote church” experience sticks, at least keep the love.
Disruption

COVID-19 has permanently altered how we do church. We will be back together. We will worship alongside one another, sooner than later.

But, it is good that we embrace the positive changes.

If you want to hear how some of today’s most prominent and innovative church leaders have changed the way they minister, consider registering for Pushpay’s upcoming virtual conference — Church Disrupt, May 13, 2020!

You can join 10,000 of your fellow ministers and leaders as we prayerfully and thoughtfully unpack how to more effectively reach people for Jesus.

It’s free. And you won’t believe who will be there, and what you’ll get for that price.
Quick & Free Conference Registration
How long until we get back to normal?

This is a question we have all been asking. It’s one that it seems we all feel, even if we don’t voice it openly.

Unfortunately, it’s the wrong question.

The question we should be asking is: When will we get to our new normal?

Estimates from major news sources, leading scientists, thinkers, government officials, and business owners range widely. Some hopefuls are looking forward to a summer full of the typical dips in the pool, road trips, and barbecues.
Other, more moderate, projections are stated in terms of several months—some in terms of years—before restrictions are lifted, and we return to a more “pre-quarantine” way of life.

We all long to be back together with our families, friends, and colleagues. But we can’t rush it.

Patience is the key to a strategic, clearly-communicated, and safe (re)opening of church doors.

*Godspeed*

The familiar passage from Hebrews 10 has been at top of mind for a lot of us lately.

Verses 23-25:
“Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”

Our hope is that we can all strive to live out the vision cast in this passage. We look forward to meeting together, encouraging one another, and to once again hearing the beautiful music of church doors opening.