

Having a plan to reopen the church is something pastors need to develop now, if they haven't already done so.

If you've struggled to respond, even with the [practical tips for churches during COVID-19](#), you're not alone. All churches have entered a new, temporary realm of ministry that no one expected.

Most notably was the reality that for the first time in our lifetime, churches couldn't meet on Easter Sunday. Many pastors looked for last-minute [Easter ideas for churches](#), and it was great to hear how many churches adapted. Even still, the COVID-19 virus has affected every church.

People have felt disconnected from one another. Church members have lost jobs. The church has had no choice but to pay for new technology to connect with members, all while the church's giving has decreased.

Certainly, we could go on about the difficulties of this season of ministry. Fortunately, though, this season will soon come to an end. When it does, will you be ready?

What's Your Plan to Reopen the Church?

In reality, when people are allowed to re-enter society, you need a plan to reopen the church. You could just go back to a typical Sunday that you previously had prior to the social distancing requirements.

However, I suggest to you this upcoming re-entry for churches is one of the biggest opportunities for the church to create momentum.

As a leader in ministry, it's vital that you look for and seize every opportunity you can to help build God's Church. And the reopening of churches is one of those opportunities.

If building momentum does not come naturally to you, or you'd like some ideas of how to capitalize on it, then I'd suggest signing up for the free, 14-day access pass to the [Leveraging Momentum video series](#). (This video series was created for Leaders.Church members, but during this unique time we wanted to make it available to the public, too.)

On the other hand, if you do feel ready to gain a boost of momentum and maximize this upcoming re-entry of society, then you must develop a plan.

This cannot be done on a whim. It needs careful attention among your entire team, so that you adequately prepare for one of the biggest opportunities the Church has had in decades.

This can be equally as big (*if not bigger*) than Easter. Yes, you heard that right! That is, if you do it right.

As you know with Easter, all of the folks who call themselves part of your church family show up on that day. They sporadically attend on other weekends in the year, but *everyone* shows up on Easter Sunday because of its significance to Christianity.

The same principle will happen in the coming weeks. *Everyone* will show up. On that first day the doors will open, everyone will come, because people are excited to be with the church family.

But you can't just hope it will happen. You need to be intentional. You need to use strategy.

That's why I'd encourage you to gather your team of leaders virtually and begin talking through how you can maximize this unique opportunity. [Set up a church meeting with Zoom](#) and get this agenda on the calendar as soon as possible.

While there are a variety of nuances every church has to deal with, I've developed a list of 8 steps most churches need to think about as they prepare to reopen. Certainly, the context of each church will vary slightly, but these principles largely apply regardless of location, size of church, or age of church.

The 8-Step Plan to Reopen the Church

1. Pray

Get your church leadership praying specifically. Ask God how He might direct you to maximize this opportunity, leverage the potential momentum, and make an impact in your community.

Your focus needs to have two elements to it. One aspect is praying for the people of your church (those who regularly attend). Many have lost jobs. Many have experienced emotional challenges and desperately need adult interaction and community.

Pray that God helps them navigate the current times and this upcoming new chapter after the coronavirus subsides.

The second element of your prayer focus needs to be on the community. Your church has a great opportunity to reach the community. Ask God how He might lead you to bless the community.

Pray also for those who are far from God to find life in Him.

We have a profound opportunity to help people and reach people. It all starts when we go to the Lord in prayer and dependence on Him for clarity and direction.

2. Get the Resources You Need

Reading this blog post is a first great step. What else might you need to do to prepare?

It could be getting the free, [14-day access pass to the Leveraging Momentum video series](#) as mentioned above. It might mean learning to think different as a leader like we talk about in the [5-Day Leadership Challenge for Pastors](#).

Maybe it's figuring out how to cut the budget without losing, in which case you need to check out the [13 Budget Cut Ideas for Churches](#). I've heard of churches losing up to 75% of their giving as a result of the coronavirus.

I'd even recommend you [join the Leaders.Church membership](#). Some would say they can't afford it right now, and I completely understand that mentality. It's a scarcity mindset, which is a battle for so many of us to overcome.

Yet, I would argue pastors can't afford *not* to invest in themselves through something like the Leaders.Church membership. Having access to over 300 videos to level-up your leadership and improve your ministry skills is essential if you want to navigate the greatest pandemic of our lifetime.

In reality, you have one shot at maximizing this upcoming season of ministry. If you aren't equipped mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, then you will miss out on the opportunity that is literally falling in your lap.

You can't capitalize on an opportunity without being equipped. This is your chance to prepare before the COVID-19 virus slowly subsides and we reopen churches across the world.

3. Prepare to Help Those Who Lost Jobs

Countless people in the U.S. alone (not to mention around the world) have lost jobs. They can't pay their utilities or mortgages. They can barely put food on the table. They've racked up credit card debt. They need help.

As we know from 1 Corinthians 12:26a, "If one part [of the body of Christ] suffers, every part suffers with it." Right now, we have a lot of suffering.

How can your church help its people? How can you help those who find themselves in this difficult circumstance? I can't think of a more appropriate action the church can take than to care for one another during this time.

The question is... how? Well, I can't answer that for you, but I can give you ideas to prime the pump.

- Put together a community job board.
- Gather a list of those who lost jobs and connect them with people who know where to find a job.
- Get all the business owners in your church on a call and see if any have the capacity to offer even part-time, temp work (if they're not looking to hire full-time).

It all starts when you prepare, though. Create a way to help those in need right now. If you don't prepare, you won't adequately meet their needs because the church is ill-equipped. As the saying goes, "Prior preparation prevents poor performance."

4. Communicate to Your Church People

Communication is critical during this time as you've probably noticed. If you want to use this upcoming re-entry for churches as a momentum booster, then you need to over-communicate. You can't assume a one-time communication will do the trick.

I recommend communicating in the following ways:

a. Phone Blitz

Mobilize your key leaders and have them touch base with every person on your church database, no matter the size. The larger the church, the more people you need to recruit to make phone calls. You can use this [Calling Script](#) as a starting point, but you'll need to modify it because your focus during these calls is 1) checking in and 2) building anticipation for church to open up.

b. Send Multiple Emails

One email does not suffice. On average, people receive 147 emails per day. So to get the visibility you need in their email inbox, you need to email them multiple times in a week. Don't be annoying, but keep consistent communication coming to them. And do it in a way that's clear, concise, and valuable to them.

Keep the focus of these emails on what your plan is, what they can expect, and what to look forward to when the church reopens. This builds anticipation and enthusiasm.

c. Send Text Messages

If you didn't collect phone numbers for sending text messages prior to now, you probably learned the value of this important communication tool. Sending mass text messages has great value when done right. On average, 9 out of 10 text messages get read. This means you need to incorporate this strategy into your overall church communication both now and in the future.

There are a variety of apps out there to send bulk text messages, and I encourage you do your research on which is best for you. We have a partnership with Text In Church, and right now they are giving churches a [60-day free trial](#) due to COVID-19. Use text messaging to connect with your people. That will help you build-up anticipation for the first Sunday back together.

d. Video Update from the Pastor

I recommend shooting periodic, quick video updates from the pastor highlighting the various elements of your upcoming time together. This again builds anticipation, and it's another medium in which people can connect with the pastor. Plus, it simply keeps people in the loop.

This video update can be included in the emails or text messages, and you can also post it in your church's Facebook group or on various social media platforms.

e. Social Media Posts

Hopefully you've been posting on social media to keep connected. You'll want to continue to do so. In fact, a great way to help connect with the unchurched in your community is by posting shareable content on social media that your church body will share with their friends and followers.

Highlight some of the upcoming plans you have for the church and how it's going to benefit those in the community. This communication is a great way to reach new people, and at the same time, keep connected with your current church members.

One final thought on communication...

Re-iterate to the church that you want people feeling illness of any kind (*even if they don't have COVID-19 symptoms*) to stay home. You want to ensure your church members feel confident and comfortable coming back together in-person. If there's any hesitancy on their part, some will simply decide to stay home.

You can overcome that by proactively communicating to everyone your expectations of what the re-entry to church life should look like. It's okay to ask people with illness to stay home. In fact, I'd argue it's an essential part of your plan to reopen church.

5. Make the First Sunday Back a Big Celebration

Make this a memorable experience for people. The time of society re-engaging and churches reopening is the wrap-up of the greatest (and only) world-wide pandemic we've seen in our lifetime.

Now for some, it might feel odd to celebrate when they are jobless. So try to focus on the key elements that *are* worth celebrating. Most obvious, of course, is being together in-person (*even if people still have on masks or are a little apprehensive*).

You could do an Easter encore celebration. You could even have a meal together (or even just appetizers). I might suggest making the sermon on this particular weekend unique, even if you've been in a sermon-series.

One caveat I have to mention, though. You can't allow this celebration with the church family to override your preparedness for and focus on potential guests. You don't want this to feel like a family reunion at the exclusion of guests who might consider making your church their new spiritual family.

6. Maintain Healthy Best Practices in the Church Building

When people come back to the church building, they need to know you've done all you can to keep the facility clean and germ-free. Part of your communication I mentioned above should include what you've done to disinfect the kids rooms, etc. Then, of course, you actually need to do that.

Have hand sanitizer out and accessible throughout the facility when the church reopens. Have masks available for those who might want one. Think through other areas of concern people might have and do all you can to maintain the cleanliness of your facility and health of your people.

You might even need to recruit a few extra helping hands to keep your facility clean throughout the morning. And if you have more than one church service, you might disinfect the rooms in between the services.

While considered extreme under normal circumstances, during this unique time in our history, it's better to take extreme measures than to minimize your effort.

The last thing you need is for a person to become very ill (and possibly die), and then for people to come to the church and say it was your fault for not cleaning. I'm not a lawyer, but people will do anything they can to get free money, and the last thing you need is a lawsuit filed for your negligence.

(Could that actually happen? I don't know. This is not legal advice. I'm purely speculating, but if you follow the best practices for health and cleanliness in your facility, I'd suspect it won't be an issue.)

7. Get Your Ministry Teams Fully Rostered

Now is the time to recruit volunteers to serve on that first weekend back. No church should be less than fully rostered. Even though you may not know exactly which weekend you plan to reopen the church, you can ask people to commit to serve anyway.

Most likely, everyone you ask will plan to attend that Sunday. Think about it... What else are they going to do? They *might* plan a mini getaway, but in most cases, they'll be free and will gladly commit to an unknown date.

PRO TIP: Have more people rostered than you actually need. You may find a few people have to cancel at the last minute. Planning for extra volunteers ensures you still maintain a full roster and every slot remains filled, even after the cancellations.

Remember, you may find your church sees an influx of visitors during this re-engagement period. People have had time to think about life, and I believe God has used this pandemic to draw people toward Himself.

Many who had control of their lives lost control, and they recognize the need for the One who is in control.

This is why we exist, to help people far from God find life in Him. So, be ready for visitors. Have your ministry teams in place and ready to go. Make sure every person is on their A-game, focused on serving everyone (both the regulars and visitors alike).

8. Take a Special Offering

Churches have a huge opportunity to financially bless those in need. Whether those who lost jobs (as I mentioned above) or people facing other financial burdens, the church can be a major blessing to people.

When you plan to reopen the church, people who've survived financially will be willing (and even longing) to help those in need. So as you prepare for the reopening, even now you could begin planting seeds to your congregation about how they can participate in helping one another through their giving.

I'd probably suggest, for this to be most effective, you look to help a particular cause in your community or segment of your congregation (e.g. widows, single moms, etc.). You need a vision people want to get behind in order for this offering to have its greatest possible impact.

We teach more on how to tie vision to giving inside the [Cultivating Generosity video series](#), but I'll give you a little hint on what not to do. Don't use this offering opportunity to pay the bills or talk about how you're so behind in your budget. That's not a vision people want to get behind.

People want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to know their tithe and extra offerings are going to something that's helping reach and serve people (*and not to pay the electric bill*).

Now I know you need to pay the bills, but the special offering I'm suggesting here isn't that. It's to bless people who financially need it as result of COVID-19.

Can you do more than this?

Sure! But this will keep you busy for the next little while. And frankly, these are the important things to consider.

Great days are ahead for your church. While it still seems hard to imagine when we'll be able to meet again, in reality this day is soon approaching. When you give careful consideration to these steps, you've stewarded well the resources and opportunity God is giving His church.

If there's any way we can help along the way, please [contact us](#). We want to do all we can to help you maximize this massive opportunity.