

# 10 IDEAS FOR MINISTERING IN A CORONAVIRUS WORLD

*Last week there was a zoom conference for Baptist pastors across Australia. Here are some ideas I gleaned as well as a few of my own.*

*John Sweetman (Interim Director of the QB Movement)*

## 1. Increase phone contacts

In recent times, most churches have down-played personally contacting people by phone. Other means of electronic communication have been seen to be more efficient and face-to-face contact (usually at events) is clearly preferable. But now that face-to-face interaction is not possible, phone calls come into their own, especially for those who are feeling isolated.

Churches are reassigning staff priorities to make sure that time is allocated to personal phone calls. Some churches are regularly calling everyone on their database. Some people may not need this personal contact, but many will greatly benefit from it.

## 2. Plan for a financial downturn

Some churches will be hit harder financially than others. Much depends on the context. Churches with large elderly or young adult populations (who are not as comfortable with regular online giving), with many small-business people (some of whom have lost their businesses), or with retirees dependent on superannuation may find it tough. On the other hand, those with large numbers of government employees or highly-committed wealthy people may do okay. The prediction at the moment is a drop from 20% to 40% in giving in the average church. But this may prove to be overstated with the amount of government support available for those most impacted (both donors and churches).

But most churches will have to minister with less income for some time. Now is the time to work through what this means for your church. What would a drop of 20% in giving mean for you? Are there projects that can be postponed? Are there other costs that can be limited? Will staffing need to be reduced and if so how? These are difficult discussions but it's better to be prepared. And if God works miracles and giving actually increases, then there will be much rejoicing.

## 3. Have some fun

Everything is tough and serious at the moment. All the news is about growing numbers of COVID-19 cases, more deaths, the need for more restrictions, people who are not doing the right thing, and the long-term disastrous outlook for our world. One expert after another is offering more dire predictions. There is not a lot of good news going around. This creates an anxious and stressful environment for people.

So we need to have some fun. This is not downplaying the pain but showing that there is always another side. Some ideas include weekly competitions/prizes for the best joke or for photos around a theme or for ... People could share what they are learning about themselves in cramped environments or new ways in which their children are entertaining themselves. You could have humorous reviews of TV shows/movies people are watching. People could post old photos and you could have a guess the decade competition. Just something to have fun.

#### **4. Dumb down technology as much as you can**

Churches are quickly learning about the communication technologies that are available to us. Words like streaming and zooming are becoming our common language. This is great for those with good internet speeds, modern hardware and sufficient computer skills. But not everyone has a combination of these three requirements. For example, it's very difficult zooming if your computer doesn't have a webcam or a mic, or your internet speed is basic, or you can't work out how to turn your mic on, or you don't even know where to find the link. We have to use the technology, but we need to make it as simple as we can and help people who find it difficult.

For example, a simple text message with a link to the service being streamed (sent just before the service) may be helpful for those who have very limited computer skills. Most people can read a text message on their phone and click on a link. Some churches are even providing computers with basic instructions to those who need them. When you're preparing online material make sure that the files are fairly small so they can easily be downloaded. KISS.

#### **5. Upskill your small group leaders**

Small church will become even more vital in maintaining community if social isolation continues. For this reason, some churches have allocated everyone to a small group (opt-out rather than opt-in). But much of the effectiveness of these groups will depend on the skills of the leaders. Can they maintain contact? Can they build community without a meeting? Can they provide support online? Do they have the technological skills they need? Can they lead an online Bible study?

This is a new world for many small group leaders and they need upskilling to be able to lead and minister effectively in this new context. Now is the time to provide this. The opportunity will be lost in three months.

#### **6. Equip for the challenges**

We need to think carefully about the new challenges that our people are suddenly facing. The new issues are things like: What do I do with lots of spare time when I can't go out? How will I cope being at home with the children or my spouse all day? How do I get a sense of satisfaction when I suddenly don't have a job? How will I handle all the pressure to learn new skills (for work or for church)? What do I do with all my anxiety about the future or present? How much change can I take before I give up? What do I do with all these negative thoughts and fears? What do I say to others about God in this mess? Is it okay to be lonely and what will I do?

These are practical issues that we must address. It shouldn't be our whole focus because there will be many for whom life goes on as (fairly) normal. But new challenges are always a great opportunity for growth when God's word speaks into them. Our role is to equip our people for these new challenges and the opportunities for growth they provide.

#### **7. Provide direction for intentional discipling**

Without social interaction and with significant under-employment, most of us will have lots more spare time. We don't even have any sport to watch. Without guidance, this will probably mean more time spent interacting with family or watching movies or playing computer games. However, it could also provide more time to grow in relationship with God. Some of our church family are already doing this, but many people won't know where to start because this kind of space in daily life has not been available before. These people need some guidance. It could be books to read or podcasts to listen to or Scripture to study or Christian movies to watch or online resources to download or courses to study. But pastors need to provide direction.

In the next few months we are releasing some discipling resources to the QB Movement that may be of help. The first is a discipling course called Christian Foundations that will be available after Easter. It covers the basics of Christian faith over seven or more weeks of daily studies. It would be helpful for any Christian but particularly for those who will disciple new Christians in the future. The second is a leadership development course available in May. It has a similar format – daily studies over 7 weeks that take you through what the Bible says about Christian leadership and what this looks like in practice.

## **8. Mainly try to keep people in familiar habits**

Some would say that this crisis gives us the opportunity to rethink the way we do church. There is certainly truth in this. I expect that the church will emerge from this pandemic with new skills and new approaches and new priorities. We need to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as God calls us forward through this reorienting of our lifestyle and ministry.

But at the same time, too much disorientation raises anxiety levels greatly. So it's helpful if some aspects of the lives of our church family can continue as normal. This may mean streaming the church service at the same time as normal (although people will be able to watch it at other times if that is more suitable) or running small groups on the same night at the same time or offering the youth group Zoom on Friday nights. It's helpful if people can continue with some elements of normality in their week.

## **9. Make sure communication is really happening**

The great advantage of face-to-face communication is that it is two way. You speak with someone and they reply. You lead worship and the congregation responds. You preach (which is mainly one-way) and you study the faces and listen to the responses. In face-to-face communication you have some idea of how you are going and what others are thinking and how they are responding. Most online communication is completely one way. You preach, lead worship, encourage, advertise, inform, challenge, and you have no idea of the response. None at all, apart from maybe a few random emails or messages.

So with face-to-face communication mainly limited to video conferencing, we have to work extra hard at listening. How are people feeling? What are they thinking? How are they responding? What are they really looking for? I mentioned the need for phone calls above and the upskilling of small group leaders to use interactive technology. This will help. Keep asking for responses to your communication and make it as easy as possible. Some churches are asking for God stories and other news that can be included in communications. Share stories around as much as you can. People want to know what's happening with the church family not just with the pastors.

## **10. Look after yourself**

Things may settle down as we adjust to the new regimes, but at the moment it is one new challenge after another. We're all in unfamiliar territory. This is exciting (especially for those who like challenges) but it is also wearing. A million ideas are running around in our head at one time. These include fears and problems as well as new opportunities. If pastors are not careful, they will quickly burnout in this environment. It's so demanding.

It's important to spend time in the Word, take a day off, keep up our exercise regime, make space for God to love us, and keep giving God our problems and church. Jesus understood this. If he kept sending away the crowds to spend time with God and time with his mates, we need to as well. This is God's work not ours. Work hard when needed, but look after yourself, or more importantly, let God look after you.

## PRACTICAL IDEAS AND RESOURCES FROM QB CHURCHES

What are QB Pastors doing in response to the restrictions? What's working? Who has great ideas? To find that out I've connected with over 20 churches from around our State and have collated the ideas shared in the QB Pastors Facebook Group. I've looked at pastoral and community care, community care, discipleship, evangelism, and prayer. Below is a summary for each of those areas.

God bless,  
Mark Westhuyzen (Director of Church Health Services)

### PASTORAL AND CONNECTION CARE

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- **Systematic Phone Calls**
  - Aim to contact everyone in your database on the phone asking: *(adapted from Gateway)*
    - CARE: how are you going? How have you been impacted? How's your soul? What support do you need?
    - CONNECT: who are you connected to (plug into life group, local group, tiny church, care trio etc)
    - CONTACT DETAILS: have we got the right information in file?
    - CONTENT: are you able to access the church service and other media online? Can your kids access our kids ministry content?
    - CONTRIBUTION: how you able to help? Would you like some help with online giving?
    - COMMIT TO PRAYER: offer and pray during the call.
  - Pay particular attention to the isolated and vulnerable and those who have lost their jobs.
  - Phone people in most impacted industries such as travel, retail, and small business.
  - Consider using a colour coded Google Sheet where leaders can all access up to date information. *(Atherton, Bridgeman and Liberti (Darren Dakers) are happy to share their ideas)*
- **Think Local and Group People Together.**
  - Local area leaders the "Suburb Good Samaritans:" allocate local leaders who can provide practical care for people near them, such as getting setup online, shopping for groceries, help around the house. *(Birkdale and Cannon Hill Baptist, Gatton)*
  - "Tiny Church" Allocate EVERYONE into a groups for care and support. Meet with group leaders weekly via ZOOM. *(Lifepoint Rothwell)*
  - Each one call one. Each person makes one call a day to check in with someone from church. Everyone is a carer.
  - Support Trios – put the entire congregation into groups of three for weekly contact, prayer and support.
- **Consider Grouping People by Interests**
  - Ask who would normally hangout together? The gardening guys, the craft ladies, the worship team, playgroup mums? *(Lifepointe Sunshine Coast)*
- **Host a Daily Pastoral Catch Up on Facebook Live in Your Closed Group** *(Steve Meharg from One an All Church Los Angeles, formally at Southpine)*
  - Go live each day at the same time, say midday for 20 minutes.
  - Share a devotional reflection on Scripture.
  - Share a story or two about what God is doing.
  - Ask for prayer requests and pray for people during the stream and share answer to prayer from previous Pastoral Catch Ups.
  - You might like the create a weekly schedule of themes you explore.

- **Record and Share a Daily Devotions.** *(North East Baptist, Rockhampton Tabernacle)*
  - Share your devotion via Facebook, YouTube and your website.
  - Have the pastoral team or other leaders take turns sharing the devotion.
- **Use ZOOM for Leaders Meetings Including Care Team. Weekly!** *(Lifepoint Rothwell, Rockhampton Tabernacle)*
- **Weekly Mailout To Older Members:**
  - Post DVD of service, newsletter, and personal note to older members. *(Rockhampton Tabernacle, Bridgeman Baptist)*
- **Contact People Who Attend Ministries But Who Aren't Regular Attenders**
  - Phone those who connect through your church's ministry such as playgroups, MOPS, youth and kids ministry parents, craft groups etc. *(Lifepointe Sunshine Coast)*
- **Train Life Group Leaders How To Do Pastoral Care. Mobile Your Care Team.**

## COMMUNITY HELP

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- **Decide What You Can Offer** *(Lifepointe Sunshine Coast)*
  - Work out how you are actually able to help ahead of time
  - Make a statement about what you can offer
- **Update your website's landing page to include Community Help.** *(Bridgeman, Lifepointe Sunshine Coast and Liberti)*
  - Create links to online forms
  - I need help (practical help, personal help, someone to talk to)
  - Nominate someone in need *(Bridgeman)*
  - I need prayer
  - I can help
- **Neighbourhood Connect Card**
  - Church families letterbox drop their street with a card including their name, contact, address, and invitation to join a neighbourhood or street Facebook group *(Dan Harding from Meridan Community Church)*
- **Letterbox drop the neighbourhood with information about your church can help.** *(church@the Gabba, Rockhampton Tabernacle)*
- **Connect with School Chaplains**
  - Chaplains often know the needs of the community better than Churches *(Lifepoint Rothwell)*
- **Offer Hampers and Supermarket vouchers for those who are struggling.** *(Kruger, Gateway, Lifepointe Sunshine Coast, Mosaic, church@the Gabba, Cleveland), Bridgeman)*
  - Think about the logistics of drop of and pick up of hamper supplies in light of social distancing measures.
  - Stock your foodbank / freezer
- **Boredom Busters** *(Gateway)*

- Create a “boredom buster bag” for primary age kids. Place activities, games, challenges, puzzles etc in zip lock bags and hang them in trees around the neighbourhood in front of church house members house.
- Let locals know through the community Facebook pages

## DISCIPLESHIP

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- **ZOOM – STREAM – ZOOM. Bookend your service with small group connection. (*Lifepoint Rothwell*)**
  - Have groups meet via Zoom 10 minutes before life stream / service time to connect, pray and invite others
  - Then move across to online streaming via YouTube, Church Online Platform, Vimeo or Facebook for actual service.
  - After the service everyone moves back into their Zoom groups to connect, discuss, share, prayer, “post church hangs” etc.
- **ZOOM Life Groups**
  - Host can share video content via screen share (such as RightNow Media teaching or Bible Project)
  - Tips for Life Groups on Zoom
    - The Zoom host / Group Leader needs to take a more direct role in managing the chat in the group, like a panel host, in order to stop everyone talking at once.
    - Share 10-15min of input. This can be via video screensharing.
    - Host controls the discussion
    - Use breakout rooms for prayer / accountability
- **One on One online Discipleship**
  - Mobilize your church to disciple others online, find a resource that works for you.
  - One hour once a week.
- **Make Use of Malyon College.**
  - Encourage church attenders and leaders to enrol in theological Study by distance.
- **Put Links on Your Website. Create a Resources Tab**
  - Life Group materials
  - RightNow Media content (*Brackenridge, Bridgeman, Bowen*)
  - Ministry Grid online content (*Hertford Street*)
  - YouVersion Bible reading plans
  - children’s ministry material
  - Easter devotions
  - prayer requests etc.
- **Kids Channel (*Gateway, Wynnum, Bridgeman, Lifepointe Sunshine Coast*)**
  - Create a YouTube Playlist for kids that plays during your service
  - Utilise RightNow Media for streaming Kids Content
  - Create a dedicated Kids YouTube Channel for your church
- **Use Churchwide Devotion to Keep Everyone on the Same Journey**
  - Make use of Bible Reading Plans and Devotional Material (like John Sweetman’s excellent Easter Devotion
  - Record and post video of pastors leading a devotion

- **Run Courses Online Through Zoom**
  - Re:Form
  - Emotionally Healthy Spirituality
  - Finding your Gifts and Place to Serve
  - Membership Course
  - Alpha Marriage Enrichment
  - Parenting Courses etc.

## EVANGELISM

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- **Preach the Gospel on in Your Sunday Services with Action Steps.** (*Gateway, Bridgeman, Lifepointe Sunshine Coast*)
  - Offer and invitation to Follow Jesus every week
  - Include next steps for gospel enquirers in your sermons
  - Make a “I made a decide to follow Jesus” link in your feed or video description. Everyone watching should be able to see where to click if they want to follow Jesus. The link goes to an online form to capture details so a church leader can follow up quickly
- **Record a Clear Gospel Message (sermon video) and place it on your website, Facebook page, YouTube Channel.**
  - Potential Titles:
    - A Message of Hope
    - Good News in Anxious Times
    - What Next?
    - Making Sense of 2020
  - Include I have decided to follow Jesus button/link
- **Encourage your Church Share the link to Sunday Services. Expect Fruit.**
- **Run Alpha online through Zoom** <https://www.alpha.org/alpha-online/>
  - Encourage church to invite friends, neighbours, colleagues, family through personal contact and social media.
  - Use social media to advertise including paid ads through Facebook/Instagram.
  - Focus on the grieving, anxious, confused, and hurting.
  - Create sharable invitations for Alpha or similar. Share. Share. Share.
- **Remind your Church About Missional Opportunities on Their Frontlines** (*Birkdale and Cannon Hill*)
  - Look for easy access into conversations about world events, needs, anxiety and uncertainty.
  - There is a great opportunity!

## PRAYER

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- **Use Zoom for Regular Prayer Meetings (Daily)** (*Bridgeman, Birkdale and Cannon Hill, Gateway*)
  - Have a pastor or leader host the prayer meeting on Zoom. Ensure you have chosen to mute microphones as people join the meeting
  - Use breakout rooms to split up larger groups into smaller groups

- **Use Email and Social Media Channels.**
  - Use social media channels to distribute prayer points, notify of prayer meeting times, and sharing stories for answered prayer.
  - Remember to include those on your postal mailing list. Post prayer information.
- **Stay Abreast of Wider Prayer Initiatives**
- **Direct People to Prayer Meetings After Services**