

THE CHURCH and COVID-19

3.12.2020

Church leaders from around the greater Long Beach area met today, March 12, to discuss how to lead in this challenging time. More than 40 churches participated. We heard from The Garden Church about their preparation, broke into five groups to discuss critical areas (Livestreaming, Policies, Facilities, Communication, and Crisis Teams), and prayed for our churches and our city.

This document is an attempt to capture what we are learning. The last page contains links to helpful websites as your church prepares to serve your congregation and your neighbors. This probably goes without saying, but please pay attention to local leadership (including the Long Beach Health and Human Services website.)

We don't know what the next week (or month or year) will bring, but this is a significant time in the life of our city/country/world and in the church. May we lead with courage and confidence, rooted in the life found in Jesus.

Eric Marsh – Parkcrest Church/CityPastor

Gregory Sanders – Long Beach Ministers' Alliance

The rise of Christianity and marked growth of the church can often be tracked to the care and compassion the church had for its sick. We must be courageous and creative in being the church.

- Darren, The Garden Church



There is a lot of information in this document. It is very normal to feel overwhelmed. We want to encourage you to start with the following:

1. Use this information as a resource, but don't try to do everything today.
2. Begin with two priorities: Come up with a simple communication plan AND Focus on the necessary changes for this Sunday.
3. Join in other Long Beach churches in prayer and fasting on Monday. Churches across the greater Long Beach area will fasting from 6am to 6pm. We will have a centralized prayer time via Facebook Live. Details to come.
4. Get rest, sleep well, and take moments to be still. Jesus is still on the throne.

“It is with great confidence that each of us stands on the promises of the righteousness of the Living God. Stay encouraged Saints. We are in position for such a time as this.”

- Gregory Sanders, The LB Ministers' Alliance

“This moment should not be ignored. This is not a moment to give the world platitudes of well-meaning intentions. The church, God's body on earth, must act. We must act with courage, we must act with faith, and we must lead with compassion. Psalm 29:11 says, 'The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.' May the peace of the Lord be with his people.”

- Darren Rouanzoin, The Garden Church

“I take comfort in the sovereignty of God. He is in control even when it feels out of control to us. We can trust Him, His heart for us, and His love for this world. He will use this for His glory and our good.”

- Jeff Levine, Bethany Church

“I encourage us to remain vigilant and steadfast. This is our opportunity as the church to shine bright. This too shall pass.”

- Pastor Brian Warth, Chapel of Change

“Part of our job as leaders is to help people navigate challenging times with wisdom. We don't want to be governed by fear, rather to make sound decisions in the midst of all that is happening. We are praying for our city, our country, and the world.”

- Noemi Chavez, Revive Church

“May God continue to breathe his creative Spirit upon us in order that we might bear witness to his faithful presence in our churches and our city. May our trust in Jesus Christ--the Good Shepherd--give us the hope and courage required to lead and shepherd others toward him who came that we might have abundant life.”

- Daniel Garcia Long, Grace Long Beach

POLICIES

*Hosted by Jaci Anderson,
Long Beach Christian Fellowship*

AUTHORITY

Identify who is making decisions for your church:

- Elders
- Denomination
- Pastoral staff
- Ministry leaders
- Volunteer coordinators

What are the decision making limits for each of these groups?

Keep insurance liability in mind.

FINANCES

- Review and potentially revise payment and sick leave policies. Consider the differing needs of hourly and salaried staff, 1099 contractors, etc.
- Adjust funding to match the current vision of your church's role in this crisis. For example, can funds be moved to benevolence and bereavement? You should have spending limits in place for all categories recognizing that income may decrease.

UTILIZATION

- As staff and volunteer responsibilities shift, identify how those individuals being underutilized can be reassigned to current needs. For example, if worship services are not being held, how can those who are freed up best help with your community efforts?

LANGUAGE

- Recognize and communicate that these policies are not necessarily permanent, but in effect until decided otherwise.
- Make sure it is clear who each policy is addressing and differentiate between staff and volunteers.
- Adopt a central phrase that vets your policy making such as "abundance of caution"
- Address policy impacts on different size gatherings (i.e. small groups of 10-12 meeting in homes vs. a 50-100 youth group meeting on site.)
- Consider partner ministries that might have different policies than you.

COMMUNICATION

Hosted by Sean Fenner,

Light & Life Christian Fellowship

Communication is key during this time, and it is important that church leadership be on the same page. Though churches should be engaging their congregation through multiple platforms - email, the church website, Facebook - the message should be a unified one.

In all communications, word choice is incredibly important. For example, we should avoid saying that “church is cancelled.” Though Sundays may look different for a while, the church will go on. It is more than a building, it is the people of God. The question is, do we really believe that and how will we act on it?

We are under submission to our government and must adhere to the guidelines they adopt for large gatherings. We may need to be creative with how we interact as a church so that everyone is protected, but we should not let this affect our ability worship God.

We should allow people to be a part of the conversation and decision making process so that they understand why decisions are being made and actions undertaken by the church. It should be a decision by the body, not just a few.

During a time of social distancing, it’s important that our care team – and our entire church – is proactive in maintaining relationships however possible. We should be proactive – not reactive – in reaching out to others and assessing their needs and wellbeing. A simple call to ask how someone is feeling can have a significant impact. Praying with someone over the phone can be profound.

In communicating to our congregation about tithing, it may be pertinent to point out that generosity is not circumstantial, that it is the church’s way need to meet needs.

Most important to communicate is that we don’t live in fear - we live in faith.

CRISIS TEAMS

Hosted by Jon Rosene, The Garden Church

In response to this pandemic, churches may mobilize crisis teams to help vulnerable members of their congregations and the community beyond. There are a number of issues to consider as you move forward. These are some ideas that came out of this discussion.

- Services should be offered in multiple languages when possible.
- Develop a process of tracking the needs of the community and identify someone who can oversee and facilitate connections between those who need help and those who can offer it.
- Measures should be taken to protect the health and safety of those being served. The Garden Church, for example, is developing cleaning procedures for distributable goods both while in storage at their office and before drop off to vulnerable individuals.
- Staff or volunteers who cannot physically interact with the homebound can make phone calls that offer companionship and prayer. Those with counseling backgrounds may be particularly useful, though insurance liability limits should be considered.
- Reimbursement procedures are useful to have in place for those who can afford the goods they need, but cannot leave the house to purchase them due to poor health, quarantine, etc.

In addition to crisis teams, there are other meaningful ways to help in our communities:

- Blood drives
- Assistance with the census
- Church sharing with those who have lost their meeting locations

FACILITIES

*Hosted by Scott Schlatter,
Parkcrest Christian Church*

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Leave doors open when possible or assign door monitors to open and close doors during high traffic times. This eliminates multiple people touching surfaces repeatedly and potentially spreading germs.
- Wipe down and sanitize rails and other frequently touched surfaces frequently.
- Provide adequate gloves for cleanup crews.
- Create eye catching signage to direct people to hand sanitizer and other new precautions. Think "Share Jesus Not Your Germs!" and other catch phrases.
- Look at your internal inventories and see what you truly need. If you're not holding worship services, how much extra toilet paper might you have that could be given to those who need it? What does it look like us being a good steward of the church's possessions at this time?
- Many of these items are best practices that do not need to stop if/when this pandemic recedes.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

- Children's ministry is arguably the dirtiest spot around!
- Require the use of hand sanitizer as a ticket into the door of the classroom.
- Prepare leaders to remove small toys that are not easily cleaned, leaving larger toys that can be sanitized between uses.
- Clean up and wipe down the area after every use.
- Clean and disinfect with hydrogen peroxide or bleach diluted at CDC approved levels.
- Provide adequate tissue paper and encourage its use.
- Teach and encourage proper hand washing techniques.

LIVESTREAMING

Hosted by Seth Wiese, The Garden Church

As large gatherings are curtailed, churches will need to explore alternate methods of worship. Many may choose to livestream their worship services as a way to bring their congregations together virtually during this time.

Livestreaming allows people to connect in a way that simply recording and uploading sermons does not. In fact, the two can go hand in hand as livestreamed sermons can be edited and uploaded after the fact for later viewing.

If the location you will be livestreaming from does not have accessible and reliable internet access, you can purchase a dedicated hot spot from Verizon or another retailer. You should consider blocking others from connecting to this hot spot while you are livestreaming/recording as it can reduce bandwidth and create potential issues.

You will want to make sure your Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) license is up to date if you will be using music during your livestream. While you are unlikely to encounter problems during the livestream itself, your content could be flagged and your video removed if you upload a recording to YouTube or another host without the proper licensing in place.

On a related note, uploading your content to an outside host often opens it up to comments and criticism from both well meaning individuals and faceless trolls. If this becomes an issue, don't be afraid to turn comments off to avoid senseless debate.

Churches have varying access to – and knowledge of – livestreaming technology. Seth Wiese from The Garden Church shared some of his recommended practices and products, though each church should seek to find solutions that fit their requirements and budget. Some are specific to Mac or PC platforms so do your homework before purchasing anything!

At a minimum, a church will need the following components to be able to livestream:

- Audio Capture (Microphone)
- Video Capture (Video Camera)
- Capture Card (Video Input)
- Audio Interface (Audio Input)
- Cords
- Computer
- Internet Connection
- Host/Server

Seth successfully uses the [Blackmagic Design UltraStudio Mini Recorder - Thunderbolt](#) capture card. He also suggests starting your software search with the following products:

- [Ecomm Live](#). MacOS (Simple, Subscription, \$144yr).
- [Wirecast](#). MacOS, PC (Simple, Tiered Price System, \$249, \$449, \$699).
- [OBS Studio](#). MacOS, PC (Free).
- [Live Now](#). iOS.

The Garden Church utilizes Sermon Studio as their host, but YouTube and Facebook Live are other popular options.

RESOURCES

Long Beach Health and Human Services

www.longbeach.gov/health/diseases-and-condition/information-on/coronavirus/

Long Beach Unified School District

www.lbschools.net/District/coronavirus.cfm

Site created by Saddleback and Wheaton College

www.coronavirusthechurch.com

The Garden Church's Response to the Virus

www.garden.church/response

'Love in the time of Coronavirus,' some wise thoughts from Andy Crouch

<https://medium.com/@ahc/love-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-26aaeb0396e3> -

Words from a pastor near the Seattle outbreak whose wife is a deputy health official

<http://hackingchristianity.net/2020/03/i-pastor-a-church-near-a-covid-19-outbreak-this-is-what-churches-can-do.html>