

# CORONAVIRUS PLAYBOOK



*A Communication Guide  
For Churches*



**Form &  
Function**

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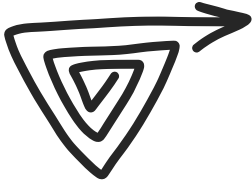
# HELLO

*Many of our clients, friends, and partners have contacted us for advice regarding communication during the Coronavirus outbreak. Therefore, we decided to create a document to help you navigate this extraordinary moment in history.*

*At the time of this writing, the NBA, MLB, NHL, NCAA, Broadway musicals, major music tours, most universities, and even Disney's theme parks have shut down. Some governors have banned gatherings of more than 100 people, forcing churches in those states to close their doors this Sunday and for the foreseeable future. Even for those of you who remain open, many (probably most) people will decide that church this week (and maybe for several weeks) is simply not worth the risk.*

*However, this crisis provides a unique opportunity for the church to reinsert itself as a relevant and essential part of American life. We've all read the articles, seen the data, and experienced the reality that God and the church are less important to people today. Times of crisis have a way of sobering people up and reminding them that they are not in control.*

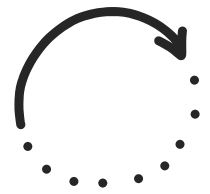




*If your church schedule is flexible enough to focus on the current needs of your community, empathetic enough to feel the anxiety of your congregation, and open to creatively use technology to share the gospel, you have an opportunity to demonstrate just how vital the church is to our culture. With some strategic planning, your church can be the calming, steady presence people desperately need right now.*

*There is no one size fits all method. You'll need to create your plan based on your region of the country, demographics, staff size and ability, and your current digital platforms. We've listed some principles to help guide your strategy. At the end of this guide, we've included some general guidelines to help you understand how to use different communication channels.*

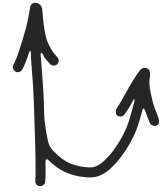




# 01

## **BE PROACTIVE IN COMMUNICATING YOUR PLANS**

- Reassure your community that you are taking the outbreak seriously, are in prayer, and are adhering to the recommendations of health experts.
- If you have Sunday services, explain why you are doing so. Many in today's culture will either assume that you are putting the finances of the church ahead of the wellbeing of the congregation, or they may think you're not taking the virus seriously.
- If you have weekly services, explain how you are keeping people safe, use examples like deep cleaning, no handshaking, not passing the offering bucket, making hand sanitizer available for adults and mandatory for kids.
- Use video, graphics, and written copy to distribute the messaging across all communication channels, including social media, email, texting, and phone calls.



## 02

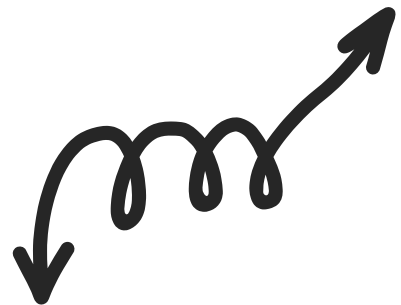
## UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY

- Church attendance always rises during times of national crises. While people may not physically attend, their anxiety and isolation will drive their need to connect to a community and seek God. For the first time, we can bring the church to them. We can reach inside of their homes and minister through online services, phone/text prayer groups, email, and social media.
- Don't expect them to come to you, though. In the digital world, you need to figure out how to insert yourself into people's media streams. Use the tools available on Facebook, Instagram, and Google to meet people where they are with messages relevant to their lives.
- Part of living in a prosperous, modern society is that people don't see God and the church as essential. A crisis like this will give many a new perspective, but only for a short time. Make sure you take advantage of that window.
- Consider creating windows of time throughout the week that congregants can call and receive prayer over the phone. Find opportunities to make the church accessible in a time when people will be practicing social distancing.

# 03

## **CONSIDER ADJUSTING YOUR SERMON SERIES TO SPEAK TO PEOPLE'S FEAR, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION.**

- We know that you work hard to craft your series. But the church is uniquely positioned to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of our nation at this moment.
- People watching online, who may make up the majority of people who see your sermon, are there because it's too dangerous to leave their homes. If you can bring them peace through Christ, chances are when the threat has subsided, it's your church they'll want to visit.





## 04 BE EMPATHETIC

- Let people know that you feel the same anxiety they have about the virus and its effect on the economy, education, careers, etc.
- Let them know that these feelings are real and OK. It's important that they don't confuse being cautious with not having "enough faith".
- Don't belittle people's fears.
  - Yes, only 2% - 3% of those infected have died. Yes, most of those were over 70 years old. But it doesn't matter. Their anxiety is real, and telling people that they shouldn't feel a certain way is the quickest path to them shutting you out.
- Listen: Create ways through social media, email, and phone for people to express their needs.
- When possible, provide for those in need. Hourly workers and those who can't work from home may be hit hard financially. With school being out, some kids may not get lunches, and parents may have to miss work.

# 05

## BE TRANSPARENT WITH YOUR ANXIETY AND THE CHURCH'S NEEDS

- People don't expect perfection. They don't need a superhero pastor who has every answer. What they need, and what they want is honesty.
- People want to know you're in this with them. Living by faith doesn't mean living without concern.
- You will make some mistakes. We are all doing the best we can with the information we have. So if on Wednesday you tell people that Sunday services are on, but on Friday new information changes your mind, it's OK—just explain.
- Take a few minutes this Sunday to remind people that even though you may not all be in the same building, ministry is still happening 24/7. If applicable, tell a story or two about the work that needs to continue to serve the local community during this time.
- Be open with your congregation about finances. If this Sunday giving is down 50%, send an email to the congregation on Monday or Tuesday explaining the situation and asking people to consider helping fill the gap. This kind of ask is best positioned in the context of the needs in your community that people can help fuel through their financial contributions.
- Have easy ways for people to give who are watching online.
- Don't ask for money on social media. That will send the wrong message to people outside of your church.







## 06

### **HAVE A PLAN OF HOW TO MINISTER TO INFECTED PEOPLE**

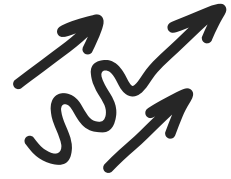
- People in your church will be affected. Dr. Brian Monahan, the attending physician of Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court, said he expects 70 million to 150 million people in the U.S. will become infected with COVID-19. If the mortality rate holds, that means 1.4 million - 4.5 million Americans will die. Another 25 million may get seriously ill.
- Unlike other illnesses, we can't just rush out and lay hands on the sick. So what will you do?
- Consider creating Facebook groups where people can add their names or the names of their loved ones (first name only if they're posting for someone else) who are infected. Use staff or trusted volunteers to monitor and moderate the groups.
- On your website and social accounts, list a phone number, text number, and email where people can ask for prayer.
- Communicate all of these things to your community multiple times through multiple communication channels.

# 07

## **HAVE A PLAN TO COMMUNICATE AN INFECTION OF A STAFF MEMBER AND/OR SOMEONE AT ONE OF YOUR SERVICES**

- If you are going to have services, there is a chance that someone attending or working at one of your services is infected but doesn't know it yet. What will you do if, on Tuesday, you learn that someone at a Sunday service was infected? How will you communicate that to the church? What is your legal responsibility, and what are your legal restraints when informing the people who may have been in contact with the infected person?
- Handling this poorly could permanently damage the reputation of the church, not to mention potentially making the church liable.
- Creating a plan and understanding your legal responsibilities now, before an emergency happens, will help you communicate clearly when you find yourself in those circumstances.





### **Social Media**

The whole world sees your social media posts. Don't use this as a bulletin board for all of your updates. We recommend not putting any updates or announcements on social, except in rare circumstances and only if it applies to the full church. So an announcement that church on Sunday is canceled is fine. But telling people that moms-day-out on Wednesday is canceled, is not.

Social media should tell your brand story and engage people. Remember that social media is a stage that everyone inside and outside of your church will see. So don't use church speak and make sure your posts are engaging (comments and shares) and tell the story you want people to know about you. Since we are in a crisis, ask yourself, "How can we bring something of value to the people who see this post? What would compel people to engage with us?"

### **Email**

Email is still the best way to communicate with your congregation. It's a great "family" communication tool because it is from the church to the church. Every time you have an update on services, prayer needs, etc., use email.

However, as much as possible, try not to email people information that doesn't apply to them. The more they receive the less they pay attention. So, if a Saturday morning men's group is canceled, if possible, send it to the men in the church. But if all Saturday gatherings are canceled, you can send that to the whole church because it applies to the entire church.

### **Texting**

Use texts sparingly so that you don't get blocked or annoy people. Focus texts on significant things such as a Sunday service cancellation and notices about infections at the church.

# ABOUT

## FORM & FUNCTION



Form & Function is a brand development and communication agency based in Nashville, TN. In addition to working with many popular musicians and authors, as well as international corporations and non-profits, we consult many leading churches across the country in the areas of branding, marketing, and communications.

If you are a client or partner of F&F and would like to further discuss your strategy during this crisis, please email Taylor Benson at [taylor@formandfunctionmedia.com](mailto:taylor@formandfunctionmedia.com) to set up a phone call.

If you are not a current client of F&F and would like to discuss our services, please email your name, your church's name, and your contact information to [admin@formandfunctionmedia.com](mailto:admin@formandfunctionmedia.com). One of our team members will quickly reach out to you to discuss your needs.

