



## How Churches and Their Leaders Can Respond To COVID-19

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### 1. Update your congregation and community frequently.

In the days ahead, spiritual leadership can play a significant role in society.

Churches can speak to and assuage the collective fear in their communities with a message of hope and peace. By doing so, pastors and church leaders can positively contribute to the emotional and mental health in our culture. By encouraging your people to follow the [CDC's guidelines](#) for health and safety, and by obeying the orders of local, state, and national government officials, we can also help flatten the curve and stem the spread of this coronavirus.

While this crisis has presented us with innumerable challenges, the call of leadership demands that we run toward the pain we see in our world today. Never have the ears and eyes of our world been more attuned to hear the good news of the gospel.

*So, how can churches respond with hope and not fear during this season of uncertainty?*

If you have not done so already, consider creating an official COVID-19 (coronavirus) statement page where your congregation and community can learn how your church is responding to this pandemic.

Here is a great example from [McClellan Bible Church](#).

Update this page regularly and craft your response in a way that answers these questions:

- **What method(s) of communication will we use to update everyone during this season?**
  - ✓ Most churches are using Facebook, their website, and email as their primary digital channels for communication.
  - ✓ Using an [email signature](#) will also increase the amount of weight given to your correspondence.
  - ✓ A [press release](#) is also a proven and effective way to notify media outlets (local news, radio, newspaper) about your plans.

- ✓ [A local church in West Orange, NJ](#) did such a great job at getting the word out last week that the local media wrote an article about their move to online services.

- **When can your people expect to hear from you?**

- ✓ Establish a rhythm of communication that feels manageable and repeatable over the next couple of months.
- ✓ Keep in mind that over-saturating your social media feed or bombarding people's inboxes with more information will actually cause them to tune you out.
- ✓ More than anything, consistently deliver on your promise!

Remember these 4 C's when communicating on this issue: *Clarity, Compassion, Confidence, and Consistency.*

## **2. Use technology to bring you closer to the people God has called you to serve.**

As more and more of the population becomes homebound in the coming weeks and months, people's screen time will drastically increase. Because everyone has a multi-channel digital device in their hands, this means we still have access to everyone who cannot physically attend our churches right now.

*The opportunities to use technology to point people to the hope of the gospel have never been greater!*

The future belongs to the churches who choose to play the long-game when it comes to their digital communications strategy.

Increasingly, church leaders are offering a live stream of their worship service.

**Here's a guide to using [Facebook Live](#)**

**Here's a guide to using [Youtube Live](#)**

**Here's a helpful link if you're considering using [livestream.com](#)**

Keep in mind that copyright issues will come into play if you choose to post any worship songs or media that are protected under copyright laws.

Do not forget to check your CCLI agreement to ensure you are covered. <https://us.ccli.com/ccli-news/five-questions/>

Most churches have already made the conscious decision to not gather for the foreseeable future. While everyone will feel the strain of “social distancing” in the days ahead, this is a time for church leaders to leverage technology to combat social isolation.

Depending on your resources, you can execute virtual services, [like this church](#), by either prerecording everything and posting at set times or presenting live via one of the platforms listed above. You can also use live video platforms to facilitate prayer meetings, Bible studies, worship, and other gatherings.

While our definition of *gatherings* will undoubtedly look different in the days ahead, our command to “go into all the world” remains the same. The Church has never been a building we meet in, a service we perform, or a program that we run. What God is doing in your church (people) could never be contained to an hour of worship on the weekend.

*The Church has left the building, and that's a good thing!*

### **3. Publish. Don't polish.**

The abrupt and disruptive nature of this pandemic has forced church leaders to become experts in Communications overnight. The days of abdicating the responsibility of communication to a trained professional are now long gone. The new normal says that everyone is now deputized to be a digital first-responder.

Church leaders typically spend countless hours planning and creating content for weekend worship services. For that reason, *excellence*, as a programming value will need to be redefined for your team.

In our new reality, right-sizing expectations for *excellence* means “we will give our very best and trust God with the rest.”

Because more people will have access to churches through digital media during this season, it will be tempting for church leaders to spend a lot of time (and money) polishing their content.

Let me encourage you that this is a time to **publish**, not **polish**!

This is not a time to compare yourself to the church down the street, nor feel excessive pressure to spend thousands of dollars to engage your audience.

Keep in mind that Lady Gaga's latest music video, Stupid Love, was shot entirely with an iPhone 11 Pro. You don't have to watch it to understand the fact that you've probably got most, if not all, of the tools you already need to do this!

You may be wondering what equipment you need to pull off a live stream or post a live video of your pastor(s) on Youtube or Facebook. While some churches have what they need, those with fewer resources might want to consider to add a few low-cost add-ons to their production equipment.

Here's a low-cost video production kit that includes a tripod and mic that will work with an iPhone: [Shure MV88 + Video Kit](#)

You may also want to pick up an inexpensive lighting solution to ensure your video does not appear grainy or low quality. Check out this cost-effective [lighting ring](#) or [studio kit](#) that will help improve the overall look and feel of your videos and photos.

## **4. Convert digital platforms from channels of communication to environments of engagement.**

Churches often use digital platforms like their website and social media to inform people about what they're doing. And, most of this is about driving attendance. But, in the absence of physical gatherings, what will we, as church leaders, measure?

One of the most critical pivots church leaders can make during this season is to **measure digital engagement over physical attendance.**

Leaders who commit to being *present* and *engaged* on digital channels can demonstrate God's love to more people than ever before.

Church leaders can create digital environments by using social media to:

- Ask questions
- Facilitate discussions
- Receive prayer requests
- Meet virtually with small groups.

An unfair advantage exists for the churches who are thinking about how to shepherd people in the digital space. Church leaders can bring a pastoral presence to digital environments by assigning staff hours to engage people on digital platforms. Committing to increased response time for comments on posts and direct messages will also increase people's trust in your team.

Additionally, this may be an opportune time for your Communications Director or Social Media Strategist to train your team on how to use social media effectively.

The good news is, you don't need a fog machine or a lighting console to create an engaging digital environment. However, shifting your mentality from digital channels to digital environments will require using a robust social media management tool. This will allow you to create an on-time delivery system for all your messages while giving you a dashboard to measure engagement on every post you make.

Here's a helpful article that compares two such pieces of software and how to use them effectively.

### [Hootsuite vs. Sprout Social](#)

The people in your community need digital alternatives to physical participation in the weeks ahead. Because our churches are more than just the sum total of what happens on weekends, church leaders can use digital as a means of extending a lifeline to those who are increasingly isolated and lonely.

Consider creating virtual gatherings for auxiliary ministries using a video conferencing tool like [Zoom](#). The standard (free) version allows up to 100 people to join for 45-minutes per session. Our team at Slingshot Group has been using this tool for years as a way of keeping 50+ associates connected to one other and the thousands of churches we serve across the country.

As you publish relevant content, people will consistently see you in their social media feed. Remember that what stops the scroll is an invitation to participate and the opportunity to engage. Church leaders—let's put the *social* back in social media!

## **5. Keep inviting people to take their next step.**

Let's face it. Right now, every church leader in America is concerned that someone will fall through the cracks during this season of social distancing. However, this crisis has also presented church leaders with an unprecedented moment to extend their reach beyond their four walls. There has never been a more opportune time to align all your communication efforts across all your digital and traditional media platforms to share Christ in your community!

Be intentional during your physical and virtual gatherings with clear "calls to action" that encourage people to go deeper in community and grow spiritually.

- Invite people to opt in to [SMS/Text](#) and [email campaigns](#).
- Consider challenging your people to a new Bible reading plan during this season via YouVersion.
- Consider using a service like RightNow Media to stream a library of Bible study videos to your people.
- Encourage digital giving. Here are three great platforms for churches: [Pushpay](#), [Gyve](#), [Tithe.ly](#)

Many people in our communities are scared about the future. Others are apathetic to this because it hasn't affected someone they know, yet. This is not a time for uncertainty from spiritual leadership. Fear is a powerfully destructive force that has unleashed havoc in the world's economy and on people's everyday lives. Rather than acquiesce to the culture of fear, church leaders can exercise an attitude of faith by encouraging and inviting people to take their next step in the journey.

If anything, this conversation has forced church leaders to think digitally in a way that we otherwise would have kept ignoring.

As fellow Slingshot Communications associate [Phil Bowdle](#) says,

“Communication isn't someone's job. It's everyone's job. Everyone has a role to play. Jesus gave us a mission. Jesus gave us a message. Now, it's up to us to think like missionaries to the culture that God has placed us in so we can leverage the greatest opportunities we've ever had to communicate the message of Jesus.”

Be intentional during your physical and virtual gatherings with clear “calls to action” that encourage people to go deeper in community and grow spiritually.

To find out more about Slingshot Group and how we are helping churches, nonprofits, and their leaders navigate these uncharted waters visit: <https://slingshotgroup.org>

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- Widely-trusted software solutions and platforms.
- Best practices for short-term, mid-range AVL solutions.
- Churches who exemplified a candid, warm and robust response to this crisis.

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