

CORONA VIRUS DISEASE: IMPACT ON THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

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Abstract

The church no doubt is part of the society. Hence, whatever that affects the society affects the church. When in the month of April 2020, the government moved for the lockdown of the society, every other facet of the Nigerian society was affected. Mostly affected in this exercise was the church. The church to an average Christian in Nigeria serves as not just an antidote but as an umbrella of relief to myriads of life challenges. This researcher is poised to x-ray many of the impacts of covid19 on both the society and the church. The researcher adopted observational and qualitative method in eliciting relevant data required to do justice to this research. In the course of this research, the writer observed among many impacts that the total lockdown of the society unleashed quantum of economic hardship on the people while the spiritual life of most church members was adversely affected. The paper recommends that in times of pandemic such as covid19, lockdown affecting the church must be avoided because such a trying moment requires the corporate prayers of the church.

Keywords: COVID-19, Church, Nigeria, Prayer, Religion

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had an extremely significant impact on the functioning of societies, as well as many sectors of economic life. It was very difficult to forecast the directions and depth of necessary changes during the development of the pandemic. This was due to the fact that different scenarios and the pace of development of COVID-19 were considered in different countries. Thus, public policies used in the fight against pandemics were also different in individual countries. Assessments of social, economic, and cultural effects of the pandemic must also be multidimensional, and thus, subject to significant uncertainty (Ragheb 2020; Sułkowski 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic developed very rapidly on a global scale. It was understandable that it had a very significant impact on the whole social life, including religious life. Religious practices which have, by their very nature, a community dimension in almost all religions, in Christian denominations as well, all changed under the influence of the pandemic. The purpose of the article is to examine the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on religious behaviour in different Christian denominations and the society. Nearly all Churches introduced strict restrictions that did not result from the decisions taken by state authorities.

For the first time in modern history, places of worship, including churches were closed. In moments of crisis, people look for leadership. Panic causes tunnel vision, which is terrible for decision-making. Strong leadership reminds people that God is in control of every situation, and there is never a reason to panic. The first responsibility leaders are to encourage their followers and or congregants through God's word and teach others also from the Bible. Their mandate is to encourage the fearful. According to a Gallup (2020) report by Frank Newport "the most dramatic result (in religion) was the exceedingly quick shift of religious services from in-person to online worship." While for almost a hundred years, churches have used various communication methods to reach their audiences, such as radio, television and online media, Gallup says the halting of in-person worship "is one of the most significant sudden disruptions in the practice of religion in U.S. history." A Pew Research report from

March 2020 reported a change in their religious habits due to the pandemic. More than half of respondents said they "prayed for an end to the spread of coronavirus," "attended services in person less often" and "watched religious services online or on TV instead of in-person." *Time* magazine reported that drive-in church services achieved a great level of attendance in the COVID-19 outbreak. Regarding whether or not the crisis had an effect on long-term personal religious life, 19% of Americans said their faith was strengthened and only 3% said it got worse.

In a survey conducted in late May - early June 2020 by the American Enterprise Institute, 60% of Americans said they feared they or someone in their household might get COVID-19. Responses differed demographically, however; 69% of Black Protestants and 42% of white evangelicals worried about infection. When it came to weighing the public health risks of returning to normal economic activity, a majority of Black Protestants (84%) and Hispanic Catholics (70%) said they would prioritize public health, while a majority of white evangelicals (65%) and white mainline Protestants and white Catholics (52%) prioritized the economy. In the United Kingdom, Christian denominations including the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Reformed, and Presbyterian Churches, published guidelines on adapting worship in light of the pandemic. In July 2020, North Point Ministries - which, before the pandemic, typically hosted 30,000 churchgoers every Sunday across its seven locations in the Atlanta, Georgia area - said it only offered services digitally through the rest of the year. According to the church's founder contact tracing for coronavirus exposure would be impossible given the church's size.

Strategies for Controlling COVID-19

In order to control the spread of the coronavirus across Africa, efforts were extended beyond the traditional public health measures. Response coordination was also framed around symbols or figures that strengthened national unity in order to sustain community mobilization. Hence, it was crucial African heads of state engaged communities in ways that echoed their shared beliefs and ideologies, and that approach was reflected in planned behavioural change strategies. Many religious authorities closed places of worship or

limited public gatherings. In an extraordinary gesture in February, Saudi Arabia banned foreign arrivals and halted visits to Mecca and Medina for *umrah*, a religious pilgrimage that Muslims can undertake at any time of year. Riyadh also briefly shuttered the Great Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina for disinfection. Many mosques cancelled Friday services, and calls to prayer in countries such as Kuwait and Malaysia were altered to tell people to pray from home. Buddhist New Year celebrations, which often bring thousands of people together for public water fights and other events, was cancelled across South Asia.

Nigeria is a non-secular state, with an equal proportion of both Christians and Muslims, 49 percent respectively. As Ramadan began, convincing faithful Muslims to stay at home was an uphill task. Thus, unequivocal messages from religious leaders were crucial. About 87 million Nigerians live below the poverty line - on less than \$1.90 per day. There was the need to be mindful that about 87 million Nigerians live below the poverty line - on less than \$1.90 per day. For many in this category, they rely on daily income for sustenance and survival. Although the government purportedly created a social safety net in the form of conditional cash transfers to cushion the financial fallout for the poorest of the poor, it was imperative that not only the remote disbursement of such funds be marked with equity, transparency, and accountability - but that the people also perceive it to be so. People were far more likely to support a system that unswervingly protects the lives and welfare of their families and communities. These palliatives will not only go a long way in protecting vulnerable citizens but in addition, may also potentially help in strengthening trust and regaining confidence in the system.

While there were clearly no easy answers to these issues, any measures adapted would not be free from difficulties. Community engagement guarantees two-way communication, and it would give a sense of responsibility during the period. Feedback received from communities on their current perceptions and what rumours are circulating would potentially increase the effectiveness of social mobilization strategies. Nigerians should have a sense of ownership

and participation, that they are playing a part in mitigating the outbreak of this deadly pandemic.

Church and the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

What does a virus have to do with religion? That is, the role of religious practices in spreading SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. As of the end the first week of March 2020 in South Korea, almost two-thirds of coronavirus infections (nearly 5,000 cases) were traced back to “Patient 31,” an individual who worshipped at Shincheonji Church of Jesus in Daegu. The church had insisted on in-person meetings, banning health masks, praying while touching others, and refusing to turn over its membership list to health officials. Routinely accused by mainline Protestant Christian denominations of being a secretive sect, it was blamed for contributing to the local epidemic of COVID-19. It did not help that the church’s leader, explained the epidemic as the Evil One fighting back against the rapid growth of the church he founded. Koreans were outraged and urged the government to prosecute the church leader for murder due to gross willful negligence. The 27% of Koreans who identify as Christian distanced themselves from the Shincheonji Church of Jesus as fast as humanly possible.

In Trinidad in the West Indies, a church leader was contacted for advice by a young man confronting a conflict between government health officials and some pastors of local churches. The health officials were pleading with stores and places of worship to cease gatherings until further notice. Meanwhile, these pastors were continuing to hold in-person services on the basis that a failure to attend worship in person is evidence of a lack of faith - arguably bullying church members to show up against their better judgment. A third example is that of another church leader in Baton Rouge, USA who Explained his defiance of the Louisiana Governor’s order banning meetings of more than fifty people, by saying that, “It’s not a concern. ... The virus, we believe, is politically motivated. We hold our religious rights dear and we are going to assemble no matter what someone says.” About three hundred people gathered on the Tuesday after the ban and over a thousand on the following Sunday with the Reverend handing out anointed handkerchiefs, preaching against fear,

and telling his people, who are mostly bussed in from poor regions all around the city, that this is an extreme test of faithfulness brought on by the spirit of the antichrist. There was also a petition calling for Rev Spell's arrest and prosecution for reckless endangerment which was signed by over 7,000 people.

Stout (2020) likened these three examples resemble the famous snake-handling churches in Appalachia, USA. Those churches pick up on a thread of biblical narrative stretching from the Genesis story of expulsion from the garden of Eden with a divine curse involving enmity between humans and snakes to the New Testament stories of people being bitten by poisonous vipers but remaining unharmed. In a region where rattlesnakes are common and often kept as treasured pets, the members of these churches see themselves as proving their faith and celebrating divine love and care by taking the snake out of its cage and handling it in an ecstatic trance-like state, thereby taking a serious health risk. When handlers are bitten and get sick or die, they are deemed to have suffered the judgment of God. But when a rattler bites one of the faithful in those settings, it is calmly collected before it bites anyone else. In sharp contrast, churches who defy health directives in combating COVID-19 endanger people well beyond congregational boundaries. In a manner of months, the novel coronavirus has spread to every corner of the world. Collective worship is an effective mechanism for accelerating its spread. Is religion, then, complicit in the most daunting global health crisis of our time?

Though recalcitrant religious congregations are accelerating viral transmission, it is notable that most religious groups are innovating in response to opposing demands of collective worship and social distancing. For example, religious communities all over the world are conducting online services, stretching the world's data bandwidth at certain times of the week to stream live videos of suitably modified rituals, sermons, and prayers. Many religious communities are also disseminating practical health information and offering urgent financial help in the wake of rapidly degrading economic conditions. The behaviours of problematic churches are attracting the media's attention, but in many regions of the world religious communities are

more beneficial than harmful. While it is impossible at present to sum over the global diversity of religious communities, the fact that so many religious communities are active in the fight against COVID-19 is a vivid reminder that the concept “religion” does not carve human social behaviours neatly at any joint. For this reason, the question of whether religion is contributing to the global COVID-19 health crisis is poorly formulated.

Of course, science should make informative, insightful generalizations where possible. Though we think the question of whether religion is a force for help or harm is ill-formed, we nevertheless might ask whether there are recurring features across the diversity of religious responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. We think so. Though religious groups do not line up neatly on one or another side of the global pandemic response, religious community-making tends to be an *intensifier of response*, strengthening resolve and motivating action. A similar story can be told about the role of religion during the civil rights movement in the United States. Among Christians, most black churches were agitating for change. They had support from many non-black churches in the North and a few in the South, as well as coalitions of Jewish, Muslim, and secular groups. Yet a large majority of Southern Christian churches were opposed to legislative reform. A century before the civil rights movement, coalitions of religious and secular groups opposed coalitions of religious and secular groups on the issue of slavery. Today, we find alliances of religious and secular groups on both sides of hot-button issues such as women’s rights, marriage equality, abortion, the death penalty, and gun control. Evidently, knowing that people are religious does not tell us as much as we might imagine about their ethical judgments. However, knowing about the depth of religiosity can often predict the level of motivation and interest. Religion makes ethical battles fiercer and the combatants more self-assured on all sides of whatever issues happen to be at stake.

Returning to COVID-19, we can say that religious community-making directly impacts viral spread either by inhibiting or accelerating social transmission, depending on the specific religious group being considered. We think the scientific study of religion can help tease apart reasons for religion making one kind of impact rather

than another. Standard epidemiological models of viral spread don't take account of human factors such as religious ideologies and values. Human beings are complex and the way religion weaves itself through the lattice of human life is incredibly intricate. Surfacing such human value factors is a public obligation. Just as health officials try to explain their recommendations, so experts in the scientific study of religion need to surface religion-abetted value judgments that impact behaviours relevant to viral spread. Experts need to explain where religion is causing problems and find creative ways to communicate alternative ways of thinking.

Effects of Covid-19

Nobody has experienced something like COVID-19 before and nobody prepared for it. We read in History about past epidemics, but could not relate with those who lived at that time. So, when the lockdown began, it was considered more or less a joke. Many people felt it would only last a few days, but as the days dragged on the hardship began to sink in. The Lockdown affected people differently, depending on where they reside. For instance, it affected fulltime pastors differently from part-time pastors. Some pastors did not put all their proverbial eggs in one basket.

For the first two weeks in Lagos, for example, the churches were allowed to maintain social distancing and not have a gathering of more than 25 people. At that time, part-time pastors were still able to get income from their employers or personal businesses, while those who do no other thing than preaching were seriously disadvantaged. After those two weeks, it was extended for yet another two weeks, with the churches under lock this time. Online giving income during this pandemic was extremely low. That was because people were holding on to whatever they had out of fear of the unknown, or because they never really encountered this in the past. Paying salaries of church ministers and other categories of staff became a huge challenge. Worse still is the challenge of providing palliatives to the vulnerable and indeed all parishioners.

The church also struggled to handle normal responsibilities, in addition to providing foodstuffs severally to church members. Then

came the relaxation, which permitted some businesses to operate, while others remained closed. The Church was among those that remained closed. The churches would have been a good platform to educate the people on the need to adhere to these regulations, as they go about their daily routines. But the authorities insisted that churches remain closed. As regards the security of the Church, Jesus said I will build my Church and gates of hell cannot prevail against it. And except the Lord watches over the city, they watch in vain that watch it.

Spiritual Life of Worshippers and the Church Economy

The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented shock that will take years to recover from its impacts. It was unexpected, inconceivable and unbelievable. It was an interruption that shook the world, the economy, the society and church to their fabrics. For the first time in the history of our generation, the church was closed against public worship on Sundays, to the extent that Christians could not go to church on Easter Sunday for worship. It not only affected the worship, the fellowship, the administration and the spiritual life of worshippers but also adversely affected the church's economy. For about seven weeks of the lockdown, no church service was held, no gathering, no meetings, no offerings, no tithes and no thanksgiving offerings. Many pastors, due to the situation, could not feed their families. Church members cried because of hunger. They looked up to the church for aids and palliatives. The government did its best, but that was not enough solve the problem. Therefore, the church was often called upon for help.

COVID-19 adversely affected the Church in two ways. First, it stopped public worship and affected church finances. Second, it demoralised many believers. With the lockdown, there was no public church worship in the various churches.

- The church had to dig deep to cope by devising means of encouraging members to begin Family Worship, which is also called Home Worship. In the early Church, the Christians worshipped in the house of some believers. (Romans 16:5). They usually met in the house of a believer to worship.

- Another through which the church coped is by creating a House fellowship and Home cell units in all areas covered by the church. Even though this had been in practice ever before COVID-19, it proved immensely helpful in coping with the situation.
- A third method the church adopted was to reposition the Church and adapt to the new wave of “Digital Church” through the use of social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and Zoom meetings to undertake church activities. Preachers and other men of God were forced to resort to online church services and media ministry most of the time to reach the people with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through these means, members were encouraged, lifted and empowered. It nullified the effects of the lockdown in the Church’s life.

With regard to church finances, the setback was great. This is because the church considered it inhuman, self-centred and inconsiderate to place demand of the payment of tithes and offerings at such critical time. It was obvious that people could not go to work, buy or sell and even some were not being paid salary. Many of them were hungry and only hoped on the Church. The palliatives distributed by the government were not enough to solve the hunger problem. The church had the responsibility to assist church members to meet their demands.

What the church did was to use the Christian Social Responsibility (CSR) platforms to mobilise comfortable brethren and congregants who have the means and could help the church financially to come to the church’s rescue. Churches were able to raise funds through such means, not only to pay church workers but to also give financial assistance and palliatives to vulnerable church members through the provision charity services, including donating foodstuffs, medical equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to members, communities, and particularly vulnerable groups.

United Methodist Communications Research Team through the National Churches Trust launched a three-phase study to:

- Assess the impact of the coronavirus on local church activity levels, ways churches are adapting and identifying interest in resources and tools to support local church during the crisis.
- Assess more comprehensively how the pandemic is affecting United Methodist congregations at the more advanced stage of the crisis.
- To track attendance, online worship, and giving, and added a series of questions about reopening.

According to Tulasiewicz (2020) the urgent need for information on the impact of COVID-19, how churches are coping during the lockdown, how to aid with future recovery plans, to find out whether digital worship means that church buildings will no longer be so important or, whether having a church building where people can meet for worship and to build community, will in fact be more important than ever after the coronavirus lockdown ends, necessitated the study.

The 18-item online survey which was administered on church leaders and parishioners in the United Kingdom (UK) had question like:

- Have new outreach or support services for local people been set up as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown?
- How many people from churches are volunteering with the NHS and social care as part of the COVID-19 response?
- Will churches become more or less important in the future as a result of COVID-19?
- What are people most looking forward to once the coronavirus lockdown ends: religious services, companionship, being able to help people through volunteering or prayer, visiting churches to connect with history and heritage?

Results suggested a very adaptive United Methodist Church, capable of finding creative solutions of conducting ministry and supporting members. Generally, respondents had a very positive outlook, with some caution as they look forward to the post-pandemic phase.

Church Supports COVID-19 Response Efforts in Nigeria

In support of the efforts aimed at curtailing the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints on April 29, 2020 donated personal protective equipment and other basic necessities to the Lagos State Government through the Ministry of Health. The donated items include 95 masks, disposable facemasks, surgical gowns, protective eye shields, disposable hand gloves, hand sanitizers, antiseptic liquid soaps, disposable shoe covers, veronica buckets and tissue papers. Responding to the question of what the Church was doing for the most vulnerable members of the society, the Regional Welfare and Self-Reliance Manager for the Church in Nigeria stated that the Church, working with government agencies and Community Development Associations will within the week, provide food relief packages to this segment of the society.

Short-term and Long-term Effects of COVID-19 on the Church

As we slowly emerge out from sheltering in place to a “new” normal, what will the new normal look like for churches? There are states, regions, cities, and towns either “reopening” or gearing up to reopen. This means the re-emergence of life from the grasps of “shelter in place.” Thus, people are going back to work, dining in at a restaurant, working out at a gym, receiving a haircut, and even gathering together with the church—but they are doing so with new policies and procedures that seek to protect each other from contracting the virus.

- First, there are those who think this will change church as we know it.
- Second, there are those that believe this crisis has ended the “consumer” model of church.
- Third, there are those who believe this crisis will put an end to the megachurch.

The truth is that at some point - sooner for some than others - our Sunday morning routines will be back to normal. Even the Spanish Flu, one of the most, if not the most, devastating pandemics in history, did not drive believers into smaller groups or house gatherings. So, if this crisis does not change the church as we know it, or put an end to the consumer church, or destroy the megachurch, the potential

changes or effects envisaged on the church may be classified under the short- and long-term effects.

Short-term effects

Short-term effects refer the next 2–15 months (give or take). Referencing the history of the Spanish Flu, there were three waves of the flu. So, in the short-term, the church may be affected in the following ways:

Interruption of our normal way of doing things

Christian leaders have recently talked about how the crisis has disrupted - rather than interrupted - our lives and our churches. That is true. Over the last two months our globe, nation, economy, cities, communities, churches, and our lives have been completely disrupted. How we were living prior to mid-March came to a complete halt. Now that the curve is flattening in many parts of the country, and things are slowly reopening, we will move from disruption and enter into a short-term interruption in both our day-to-day life and how we conduct ministry and even mission. Many church leaders and denominational entities have put out their checklists for the reopening of the church. While some of these procedures and policies may be adopted long term, there may not be a time where all heightened safety measures will no longer be needed, and churches can return to their normal ministry and mission activities.

Caring for seniors and the vulnerable

As we ride out the wave(s) of the virus, and dance the COVID-19 dance, ministry and mission to the more vulnerable population to this virus will definitely be different. As churches make decisions about re-emergence, it is important that those decisions also include the best ways to minister and reach out to their vulnerable population as well as those living in senior communities, senior assisted living, and nursing homes.

Church attendance will fluctuate

Many churches will probably have to adopt some kind of staggered approach to their large gatherings for the short-term. While

this would be considered an interruption to their normal way of doing things, many parishioners may choose to stay home until there is an all-clear signal. There will be some people who will be ready to return to in-person gatherings while practicing physical distancing and other safety precautions such as wearing masks. However, there may be those - possibly those with small children and those who would be more vulnerable - who wait until more dust settles around this virus. As a result, online services will continue to be offered from many churches.

People will be “shell shocked” and tired

This crisis has created great fear among congregants. It will be forever engrained in their memory coming to church and seeing a line outside of people waiting to enter into the building, most of who were wearing masks. In addition, there is a lot of adrenaline keeping people going right now. They are trying to ride out the wave... the storm. But, after it passes, they will be wiped - physically, mentally and emotionally.

Finances will be tight

COVID-19 will affect finances both for the short-term and the long-term. Churches are having to restructure their budgets to operate somewhere between a 50–75 percent capacity to their original operating budget. This means tough decisions will need to be made to ride out the budget year (2020) or to prepare for the upcoming budget year (2020–21). If finances are tight for churches, that means finances are tight for many of their parishioners. Therefore, given this reality, churches will need to be sensitive as they navigate their giving and generosity pushes. In thinking about the restructuring of the budget, it will be wise to have a good benevolent and generosity pipeline to help people in need. People who have the means and the ability may want to be generous in giving to needs - not wants. This is why it will be important to restructure a leaner budget in the short-term so that generous giving can include stewardship to the needs inside and outside the church rather than the wants.

Staffing hires and staffing work patterns

Given the financial strain many churches will experience, they will move towards a leaner staff. Thus, many churches will forgo the support staff they were thinking of hiring. In addition, many churches might see the need to move towards some form of bi-vocational (or co-vocational) model. With regards to staffing work patterns, churches may allow their staff to keep flexible work hours along with offering them the opportunity to work from home.

Short-term mission trips

Summer is approaching and that typically means short-term mission trips - both domestically and internationally. These will either be cancelled or modified in some manner. People may not necessarily travel internationally unless it is essential. There may be modified camps along with Vacation Bible Schools. In other words, rather than operating as they would have in the past, they will modify their schedules and environments to accommodate the fears and hesitations people have in re-emerging into public.

Long-Term Effects

According to Jaime Breitnauer in his book *The Spanish Flu Epidemic and its Influence on History*, “Perhaps the most lasting legacy of Spanish flu is that it barely left a legacy at all. While it has continued to be studied and analysed in niche virology circles, the collective memory seemed to stub it out and hurry to move on.” Barely left a legacy? That is extremely interesting as the Spanish Flu has been labelled the deadliest pandemic in modern history as it claimed the lives of at least 50 million people across the globe and 700,000 Americans. But the reality is, it did have long-term effects. The possible long-term effects of COVID-19 may therefore include:

Churches will shift the way they handle finances

The world after the Spanish Flu experienced a global recession. In addition, not more than a decade later America would enter and go through the Great Depression. Those who lived during the Great Depression became very frugal with their money. The financial frugality of individuals influenced the financial frugality of churches.

The long-term effect may be in how churches steward their finances. There will be leaner staffs, a continued rise in bi-vocational or co-vocational staff members, churches diversifying the way they can fund themselves (think Mark DeYmaz and church economics), and more intentionality around creating rainy day funds.

Churches will adapt hybrid ministry models

With the hard pivot to online church services and small groups, churches have now overcome the hurdle of learning how to conduct ministry on a digital platform. While not advocating for replacing in-person gatherings with online church or “online satellite” campuses churches may however consider leveraging on those tools for the sake of ministry and mission. Churches may utilize live digital platforms to engage people far from God - those who may never darken the doors of a church building (especially in the aftermath of COVID-19). In addition, another hybrid model coming out of COVID-19 will be online small groups. Now that people have overcome the zoom/skype/googlehangout learning curve there will be fewer obstacles that would hinder people from participating in a small group. Churches should position themselves to be a church of small groups rather than churches with small groups.

Churches will have to navigate a deeply divided culture with deep trust issues

In the long-term, the church will have to sensitively, winsomely, and discernibly navigate a politically toxic, highly divisive, vociferously opinionated, and deeply distrusting culture. The church would have to winsomely learn the ways of Jesus who said, “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which is God’s.” In other words, do not fall into the trap of getting entangled on sides that will isolate you from the opposing side; but learn to engage the culture in a manner that points them to another kingdom, a new way of living, and a new way of looking at the world.

The kind of staff churches hire will change

This massive shift to leveraging digital technology - streaming live, online forums, video conferencing, and online content - has opened up the possibilities to many who were hesitant to lead their churches into the new terrain. Though there is this thing called “Zoom Fatigue” and many may be tired of watching and consuming online content - at least for the short-term- Churches are likely to change regarding the kind of staff they hire. More and more churches - aside from the bigger churches who have already gone there - will begin to bring on professional staff who have the knowledge and/or training to help churches maximize their digital and online presence. Such a shift will ultimately lead churches to develop a full online ministry and mission strategy to engage their people and reach the world.

People will still need Jesus more than ever

With all the talk about how the virus will change life as we know it, one thing it will not change is the fact people will still need Jesus more than ever. However, this reality does not mean we resort to evangelistic tactics used in 1984. Our culture is still a post-Christian one, which means that even during this ripe time of harvest, we must seek to engage people in contextualized ways. In the days, months, and years after COVID-19, the world will be rebuilding, the church has an opportunity to give a glimpse of the kingdom of God that was inaugurated at Jesus’ first coming and will be consummated at his return. The glimpse of the King and his kingdom is more than just spiritual reconciliation with God. Obviously, that is of ultimate concern - as we want people to be reconciled to God. However, it also includes both social and cultural dimensions. If the fall of humanity affected every sphere of life, then the redemption that Jesus offers should also affect every sphere of life.

The church must be part of the rebuilding of our communities and cities. We should continue our engagement, participation, even our development of mercy ministries that seek to help the hurting and broken, the vulnerable and marginalized. We should be part of the rebuilding of the economy as we train believers to use their vocation to glorify God for the good of others, support local businesses, offer business incubation programmes (where young businesses can use

church facilities to launch their business), and even launch small business enterprises that seek to offer services to (and jobs for) the community.

As we engage in the holistic mission whereby Jesus is in the process of making all things new - through his death and resurrection - we give the hungry, thirsty, and dark world a holistic vision of a God who cares about their soul, their personhood, and their vocation. People still need Jesus more than ever, but they need a complete Jesus, not an incomplete one.

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