



The Church Response to COVID-19

Ministering in the New Reality

Go to covid.church for updates, more ideas, or to share your own experience.



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COVID-19 and the Church

The coronavirus (COVID-19) presents unprecedented challenges. Nobody has ever dealt with anything like it. As a result, our churches now have unexpected opportunities. Never in history has the chance to demonstrate the heart of Christ and the mission of the Church been greater.

Not since 9/11 have Americans collectively experienced a comparable level of uncertainty and change in social norms. This season will shape future generations and the rest of our own lives. It will also shape the way we “do church” now and, most likely, in the future too. We have the opportunity to not only reevaluate existing norms as a church in order to meet temporary needs but to potentially realign ministry practices with mission statements, values, and core beliefs. Prayerfully, this season will reignite the passion of our people (and perhaps ourselves) for gathering as a church for worship and for living in our communities as witnesses to the peace and hope we have in Jesus.

New challenges mean new opportunities.

Most of us have wrestled with questions about how to continue doing things as normally as possible. Almost overnight, certain aspects of ministry shifted from “What’s our philosophy?” to “What’s practical?” Attention has shifted across the country from “How can we get people into our churches?” to “How can our churches get out to people?” The question is: So what do we do now? Where do we go from here?

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Together, we are forming new ways to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples, and to be a community of faith in the midst of fear, confusion, inconvenience, and skepticism. Recent weeks have truly been uncharted territory for us all—not just churches. Social distancing, pandemic, and quarantine were not topics covered in our training and education. Leaders have the responsibility and privilege to serve congregations and communities as the “new normal” continues to take shape for the unforeseen future.

The needs of our communities and congregations will continue to change—so should our ministries. We need to quickly help one another stabilize and strategize. Leaders will need to make decisions quickly and prayerfully, but

Quick decisions can still be informed decisions.

they can be informed by wisdom, experiences, and outside-the-box ideas from other churches. We've identified the most important steps for withstanding the sudden winds of change and then moving forward. The following represent the most common questions to date:



Together, we are forming new ways to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples, and to be a community of faith in the midst of fear, confusion, inconvenience, and skepticism. Recent weeks have truly been uncharted territory for us all—not just churches. Social distancing, pandemic, and quarantine were not topics covered in our training and education. Leaders have the responsibility and privilege to serve congregations and communities as the “new normal” continues to take shape for the unforeseen future.

This guide is a map-in-the-making to navigate the challenges we are all facing. We've collected best practices, real church examples, and insanely practical tools to equip you for what's ahead. The most common questions and pressing needs will lead you through the four topics that form the following sections of this resource.

1. Messaging

How can we get in touch and communicate?
website, email, social media, graphics, mail, print... and examples.

2. Meeting

How can we gather while social distancing as a church?
Live-streaming, music, groups and classes, children and students... and examples.

3. Ministry

How can we go out and bless the community?
mobilizing people, benevolence, prayer... and examples.

4. Money

How can our giving survive the coronavirus?
Technology, communication, budgets, salaries and fixed expenses... and examples.



Section 1: Messaging

How Can We Get In Touch and Communicate?

On any given day, the number one complaint or problem that any organization has is communication. Add sudden changes in most people's daily routines, empty shelves in the grocery stores, and growing concerns about a mysterious pandemic and you have the perfect recipe for a real mess.

Immediately as the news of school closings began trickling through the grapevine, the first questions raised by leaders were related to knowing how to get in touch with staff for prayerful and informed decision making, looping key leaders/volunteers into the conversation, and then communicating with the congregation at large.

Surely you had some or all of these questions and countless more as the answer was YES. to the disbelief of Is this really happening?

- How do you talk to your staff or leaders?
- How do you talk to the church at large?
- How do church members get in touch with you or other leaders?
- How can the community get in touch for prayer or material needs?
- Does everyone know what's going on... even among your most faithful members?

The top priority for churches was and still is to set the rules of engagement for life and ministry in the new reality of COVID-19. It's vital to set clear expectations and instructions for the primary channels of outgoing and incoming communication. Establishing the ground rules as soon as possible will provide everyone with a sense of stability, ease concerns, and lessen the likelihood of misinformation and unnecessary drama.

- **Step 1** is to recognize and respond to immediate needs, communicating the temporary plan.
- **Step 2** is to consider how to "not only survive but thrive" under the current circumstances. Nobody knows how long this season will last. Putting everything on hold isn't an option. You want to be careful while making practical decisions that they will align with your philosophy of ministry. Ideally, this is an opportunity to evaluate both your ministry philosophy and practices. As clumsy and awkward as the adjustment period may be, it can truly be a time of fresh growth, appreciation, and enthusiasm.

For the time being, this is our new normal.

As a church, you want to be a source of peace, hope, and stability in uncertain times. As preachers, teachers, and gospel-believing church leaders, we know the power of words. Now more than ever, people in our congregations and communities need a word of encouragement and clarity, without downplaying or

dismissing the seriousness and complexity of the situation. We simply aren't experts when it comes to handling a health crisis... no matter how many podcasts, articles, posts, or tweets we've been exposed to. We are, however, called by God and empowered by His Spirit to lead our churches in love for the glory of Jesus' name.

Be sure that words and tone of church communication relay a message of unwavering hope and unselfish love. You love your community and the church wants to take necessary precautions to promote the wellbeing of everyone in your zipcode and beyond.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:23–25

Website

Your home page is the front door to your church. Today's best practices emphasize the power of first impression and ease of finding relevant information on your website. If that's right under normal circumstances, the importance of that fact just grew exponentially in size. Right now, just about any site you visit has COVID-19 information front and center. This should especially be the case for churches—a place for gathering and for seeking help and hope in tough times. Provide a clear message and plan for how you will communicate and meet, along with how people can get in touch with you too.

Update your landing page to share the most important and urgent information. This is an opportunity to be informative and connective.

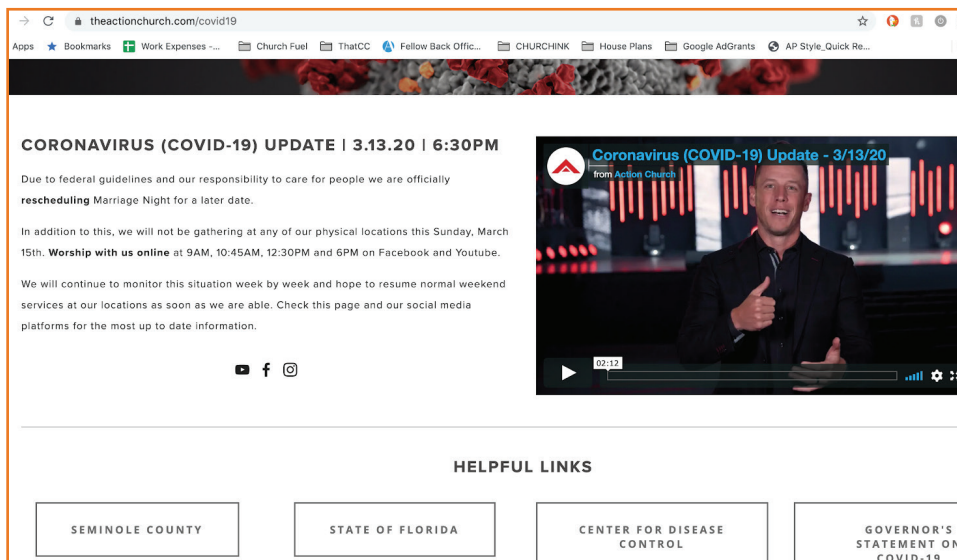
Review your analytics to see what people are looking for by noticing what pages they're visiting. Most likely they are searching for *service information* and *resources*.

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Examples of Website Messaging

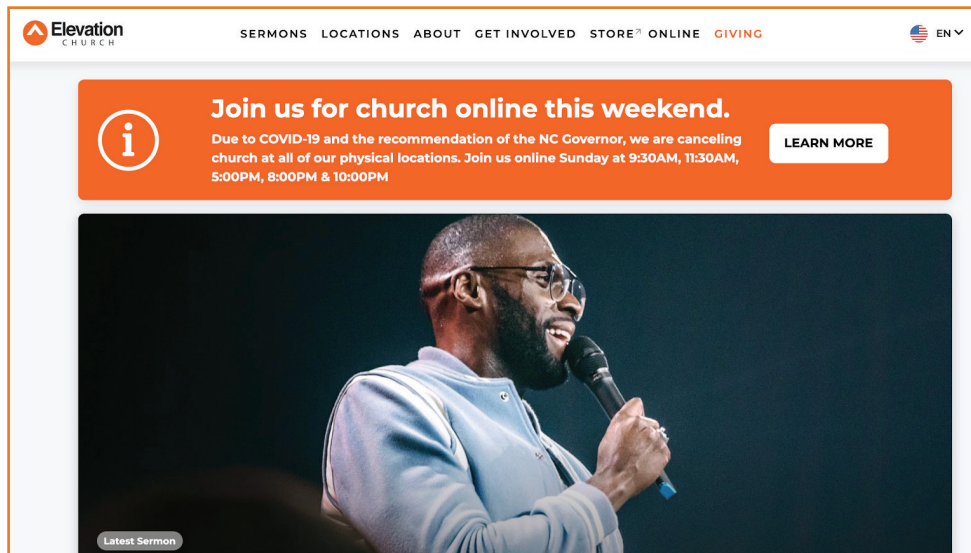
Check out the insanely practical ways that churches are using their websites.
(What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

- Create a page just for COVID-19 updates, and **KEEP IT UPDATED**. Link to your county's health department at least, so people know where to go for information. Look at how The Action Church has positioned themselves as a source of information: <https://www.theactionchurch.com/>

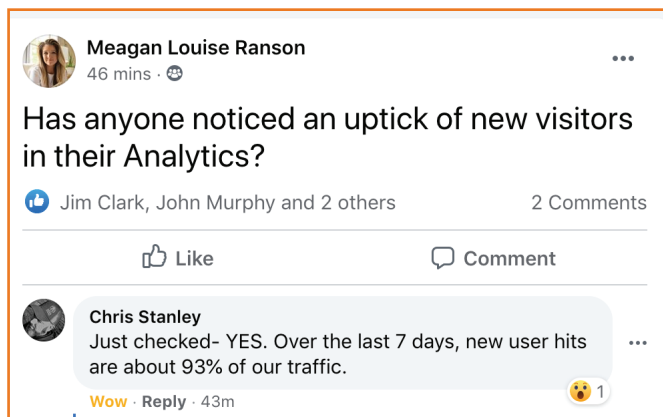


- Link to local resources (food banks, social services, clothing donations, benevolence, transportation help, small groups that are offering help, emergency phone numbers, etc...)
- Make one of your main CTA's prayers. Add it to the copy of your page, or as a menu item. Tools like YouVersion's new Prayer app can help your church pray together, even if you can't meet together.
Add service information on the landing page. Whether it's a "watch live" button, or a link to another page detailing service information, you need to make the information that people are looking for insanely easy to find.

- Elevations CTA: <https://elevationchurch.org/>



You can expect that you'll have a lot of new visitors on your website. A church in Virginia noted that of their recent website visitors, 93% of them were brand new. Make sure that you're prepared to capture their attention and information so you can connect with them.



Email

Even though most communications professionals talk about social media, email is still the best way to communicate with your congregation, particularly during times of crisis.

Any communications strategy should certainly include social media, but you might not want to rely solely on it. Email, even though it's boring, is your best opportunity to share your message. It gives you more space to expand your thoughts, share important information, and tell stories.

- You can include multiple links.
- It doesn't disappear from feeds quite so easily.
- People can easily save.
- It's easy to forward and share.

Even as you look to communicate instantly on social media, don't forget that email is one of your most useful tools during this time.

On the first Sunday of digital services, one of the largest churches in the country closed the online service with this encouragement: "If you're not on our email list, make sure you go to our website and give us your email address...it's how we can stay in touch and share important updates with your family."

Here is one of the nation's largest churches, with more resources and creativity than most, encourage viewers to sign up for email updates. They know email is one of the most effective communication methods.

Times of uncertainty are not the best times to experiment with new communications platforms and mediums. Instead, you want to rely on approaches that are familiar to your congregation.

Email Tools

If you use a Church Management System like Planning Center, Church Community Builder, Realm or one of the many providers, you have the ability to email your congregation.

Keeping this database accurate and up-to-date is an important responsibility as your email database will be a primary source of communication.

In some cases, you can connect your database to a third party software like Mailchimp, MailerLite or Convert. Email lists like this give you the ability to create quick sign up forms and will help you understand who is opening your emails.

Here are some email marketing companies that do a great job.

- [Mailerlite](#) - Free up to 1k subscribers
- [Mailchimp](#) - Free up to 2k subscribers, robust, use if planning to segment audiences
- [Send In Blue](#) - Free up to 300
- [Convert Kit](#) - Free up to 1k subscribers

Email Style

When you create your email updates, know that you don't have to use a ton of graphics, templates, or fancy style.

Think about the emails that hit your Inbox. You immediately think the ones with a bunch of graphics and formatting are from companies selling something. The messages from a real person with mostly words feel more like a personal message.

Here are some other tips for crafting email messages to your congregation.

- 1. Write like a person.**

When you're crafting your emails, write like a regular human being, using regular words and phrasing. You're not writing a dissertation or a government report... keep it personal.

- 2. Send church emails from a person.**

Don't use admin@churchname.com or worse, noreply@churchname.org as your sender. These emails are more likely to go to the spam folder.

- 3. Write to a person.**

Just like you should write like a real person, imagine you're writing to a real person (not a group of people).

Great Examples of Email Messaging

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches have announced major changes via email. (What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

- Permission to Stay Home, Andy Stanley. *This email went out the week before services were cancelled.*
- COVID 19 Update, Andy Stanley. *This email announced the move to digital and gave three reasons. <https://cfresourcelibrary.s3.amazonaws.com/eBooks/COVID19/Emails/North+Point+COVID19+Update.pdf>*
- No Services This Sunday, Dan Sweaza. *Great email announcing the change and answering questions.*
- A Pandemic Is A Terrible Thing To Waste, Andy Stanley. *Connected people to their livestream, and encouraged people to invite their friends.*
- Are You Remotely Prepared?, App Sumo. *Practical life advice laid out in a way that is helpful, informative, and high value.*
- A Note To Our Community, Fab Fit Fun. *A message of hope that continues their company's mission statement of bringing "happiness and well-being to your doorstep".*
- How To Help...A Note of Encouragement, Light & Airy. *With the mission of helping people find & capture the magic in the everyday, they took an empathetic and practical approach to how you can do things you can do to help others and ways to find joy or be productive when you're at home. Practical value add with a message of hope and help.*
- Cancelling Easter, Restoration Presbyterian Church.

Build an Email List for Your Community

You need to be able to reach out to your church and let them know about changes or how you're addressing concerns. Email is a great tool for that.

But how powerful would it be if you could email thousands of people in your community to answer their questions or let them know how you're here to serve? Imagine the power of being able to connect with them directly, not through media outlets or press releases.

For years, we've advocated that churches invest in building an email database not just of church members, but of people that live in the community. Think of your database of members as your internal list and an email list of people who live in your community (who don't go to your church) as an external list.

If you don't have an external list like this, now is a great time to start one. Use one of the email marketing tools to start a new list.

Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Add an optin form to your website. [Opt-in Monster](#) is a powerful and popular tool for lead generation.
- Create resources that would be helpful to your community and give them away for free on your website. It could be resources for parents and kids, devotional guides, or community-driven news. Ask for an email address in return.
- Keep your community email list separate from your church database.

Social Media

Social Media is one of the best tools we have to continue ministry outside of the hour on Sunday. All the time is a great time to spread the gospel of love and hope, but people are listening now more than ever.

It is vital that we are active on our social media accounts. Post in the feed, go live, share stories, ask questions, and comment on other people's posts.

Consider the emotional ramifications of social distancing. We're asking people to isolate themselves and stay home. How can we work against the effects of loneliness, boredom, stress, anxiety, or hopelessness?

We can help by being present. We can help by sharing information that isn't based in fear, but based in hope.

Social media doesn't have to be complicated, and it doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be relational.

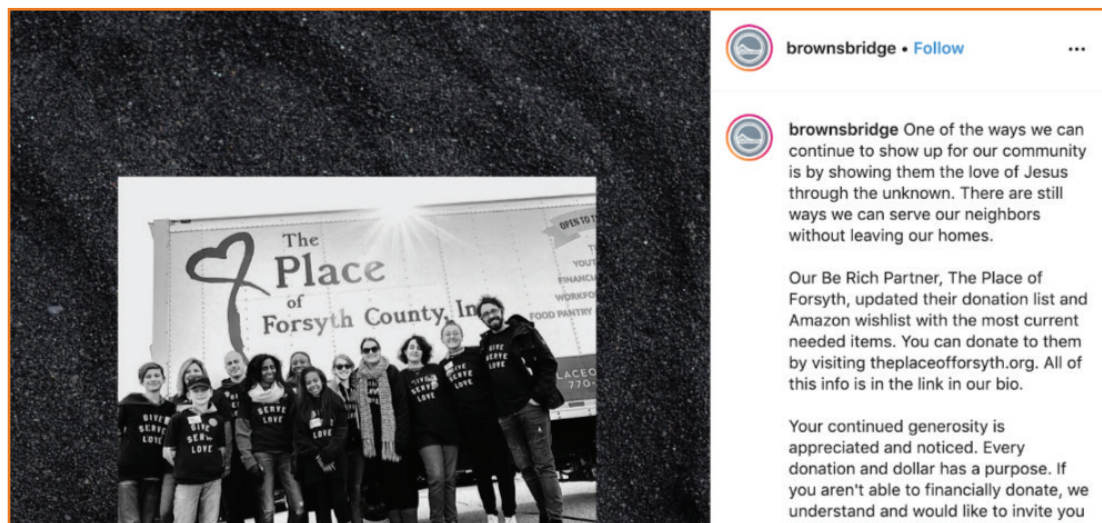
Examples of Social Media Messaging

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches are leveraging social media. (Add your voice. Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

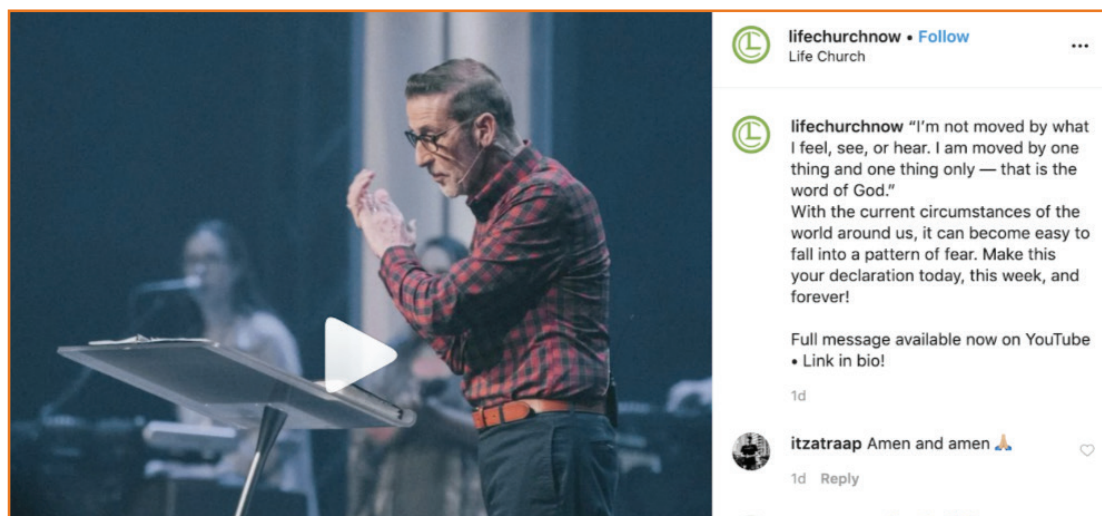
- Mile City Church has a scheduled guided prayer time every morning at 7am for their church members to join.



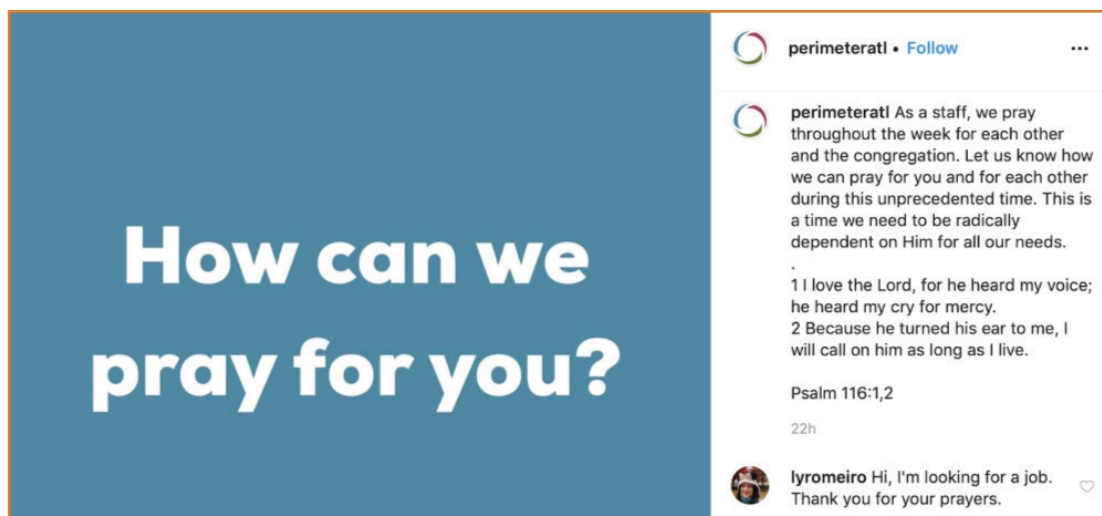
- Brownsbridge Church highlighted a local need



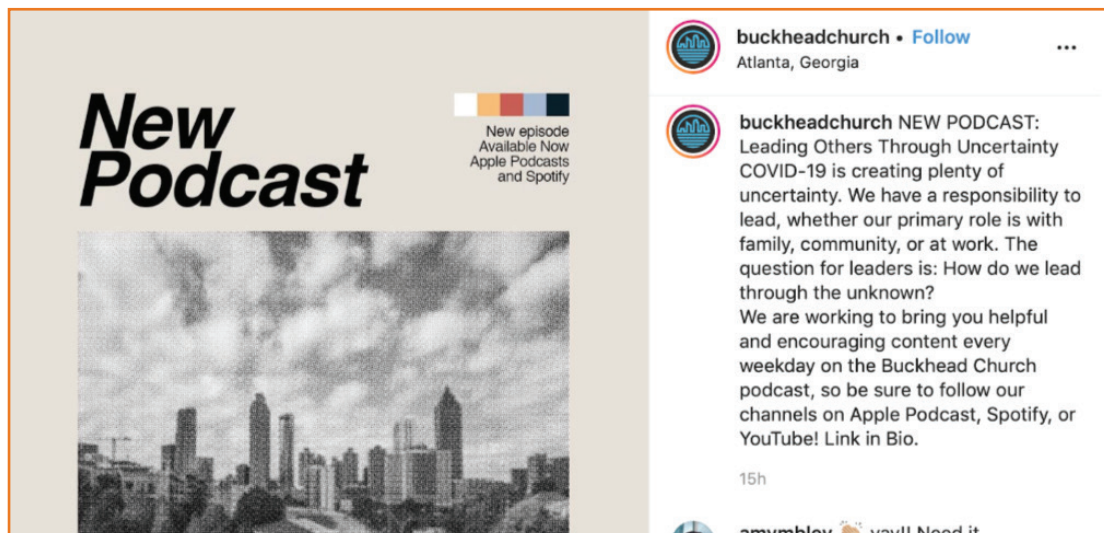
- Life Church is posting messages of hope.



- Perimeter Church is opening up Instagram for prayer requests



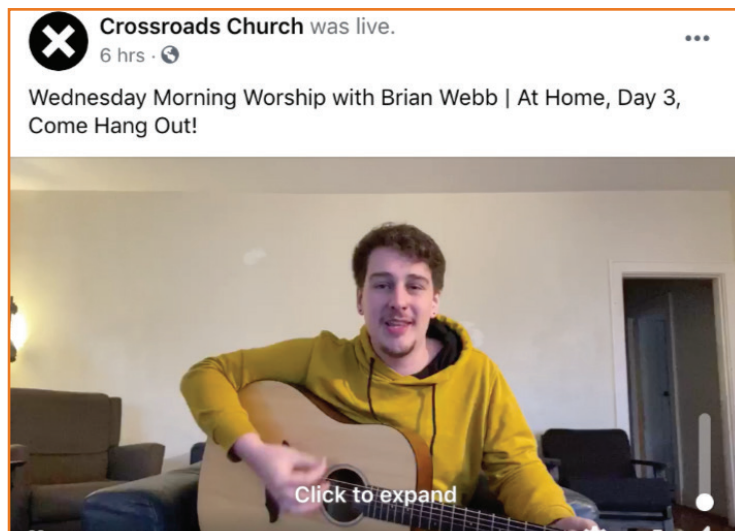
- Buckhead Church is producing a podcast to lead us through uncertainty.



- Zionsville United Methodist Church created a Facebook Group with scheduled daily devotions.



- Crossroads Church is going live with worship on their Facebook page



Text Messages

Email is a great way to connect with everyone about major updates and information. But it can feel overloaded with people sharing their COVID-19 responses, and it's not nearly as personal. However, if you send a text message, 98% of people will open it and read it.

If you don't have people's numbers, pull the information from your church database, or make the ask on social media.

You can also utilize a texting service like Text In Church, and have people text a unique number to "sign up".

Whatever you do, be wise about the information you share. No one wants to be spammed, so make sure you have permission to text, and only text urgent and important information.

Tools and Tips for Texting:

- [Text In Church](#)
- [Pastor's Line](#)
- Use a [Google Phone Number](#) so you don't have to share yours
- [Superphone](#) texting service
- [Community](#) textin service

Shareable Graphics

In the wake of the pandemic, being able to communicate digitally is even more important. If you don't have a graphic designer, companies are offering free social media and announcement slide graphics to help you get messages out to your church members and community.

Necessity is the mother of invention.

Websites With Free Graphics

There are many companies creating and providing graphics to help you communicate with your congregation and community. Here are some of the best sources:

- [Church Media Squad](#)
- [Church Motion Graphics](#)



Use Snail Mail

Even though there are incredible digital solutions to help you gather online and stay connected, don't forget about the old fashioned mail.

Redirect some of your ministry budgets to send packets to families in your kids ministry. Include things you would normally have available on the weekend, like coloring sheets, and memory verses. If you're able, add a handwritten note to the child for a personalized touch that will carry a huge impact.

Ideas for Home Packets:

- Coloring Sheets
- Memory Verses
- A recipe for homemade playdough
- Bunny Bags: Brown Paper Bag, 2 googly eyes, and construction paper
- Paper Plate Rainbow: A paper plate, cotton balls and construction paper
- Stickers
- A handwritten note goes a long way



Section 2: Meeting

How Can We Gather Digitally as a “Distant” Church?

The second priority for churches, is figuring out a plan for weekly worship, followed closely by ministry areas within the church like small groups, kids and student ministry, etc. Churches need a plan for regular meetings with staff/leaders during this season.

When it's not considered safe to gather in person, it's time to get creative, utilize technology, and be the Church outside of the building in new ways. We have to think of ways beyond Sunday mornings' "in house" to love on our faith family.

Live Streaming is one way to broadcast your church services. If your church is starting from scratch with live streaming, we've put together the things that you'll need to know. If you've been livestreaming for a while now, you are still probably considering new ways to engage people in the new dynamic of "church at home."

Live Streaming Best Practices

Although people can't hug and smile at each other as they would in person, you still want your livestreaming church's experience to be edifying and engaging.

Most live streaming services have a chat feature that makes the online service interactive. Have staff or volunteers log into the chat and respond to comments and questions and ask questions to engage the online audience.

Comments and questions to engage a livestream audience:

- Let us know where you're watching from today!
- What were your biggest takeaways from the sermon?
- Remember to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and share your notes to encourage someone!

The chat feature is also a wonderful way to make sure that the service is accessible for everyone. For example, one church set up tech support to help senior adults get set up to view the service. Another sent snail mail to every household with instructions on how to watch their service on multiple platforms.

You are the light of the world.
A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.
Matthew 5:14

The same rules don't apply in the livestreaming world, and your streaming times don't have to be the same time as your normal church service times. You can choose your livestreaming times based on when your audience is online. Most

streaming services have audience insights and for using Facebook live, your page's Facebook Insights can help you see the most popular online times for your audience.

**KEEP IT SIMPLE. Don't overthink it.
Most smartphones can do this.**

It's important to know your congregation and try to anticipate needs and questions. But don't overthink it—most of this can be done from a smartphone. No matter how simple your setup (even if you're streaming from an iPhone on your desk), people will appreciate the sharpening and consolation of a sermon and the ability to connect with others.

Getting Started with Live Streaming

In a matter of days, thousands of churches realized the need to livestream or hold services online.

Big Principle #1: You don't have to replicate, you can innovate.

- Too many churches are trying to reproduce everything from their in-person gathering online. It doesn't work and it's a mistake to try. At least for most churches.
- If you're new to services online, don't try to recreate everything. An online service can become something new, something fresh.
- You can show pre-produced music. Or you can downplay music and corporate worship.
- You can share an informal message from home rather than a polished sermon from a stage.
- These things are not better or worse...they are different. And it's okay to be different.

Big Principle #2: Start where you are.

- It's easier than ever to show up online, and you don't need fancy equipment and expensive tools to go live online.
- Some good news in a time of widespread distress: there's no shortage of options for live streaming your church services and continuing to share the real good news about Jesus.

Examples of Live Streaming Options

Check out the insanely practical tools that churches use to live stream.

(What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

- [Church Online Platform](#) – This streaming tool is a free resource from Life.Church that includes features for real-time chat, live prayer, chat moderation, and more.
- [Facebook Live](#) – Streaming through Facebook Live is a simple option and a great place to start if you're new to livestreaming. While it does have its drawbacks, such as the difficulty embedding a replay onto your website and the pressure to pay to reach most of
- The best way to get started is easy and free, right? These are not only free to and easy for you to use, they're easy for people to watch as well.
- Before you throw up a camera and start live streaming everything that you would normally do in a worship service, there is one major topic to consider first: music.

Copyrighted Material

Christian Copyright Solutions provides many churches with the licenses they need each week.

Did you know that each of the following may require a license by law?

- Playing pre-recorded music
- Performing songs live in person
- Projecting or printing song lyrics
- Live Streaming any / all of the above

A lot of churches assume that if they have one of these licenses, everything is covered. This isn't the case. For example, many churches use CCLI to cover their in-person worship music. CCLI also has a live streaming add-on license that you'll need to check into, since that's what we're talking about here. Here's a quick breakdown of what they are along with links to more detailed information and action steps (in their own words, since this is all specific legal language).

Streaming Licenses

The WORSHIPcast Streaming License covers more than 25 million secular and Christian songs across all genres from ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC, including holiday and patriotic music.

The CCLI Streaming License covers more than 300,000 Christian songs from the CCLI catalog. If your plans are only to stream Christian music, and your church already has a CCL Copyright License, the CCLI streaming license is a good fit. If your church or ministry plans on streaming any music outside the Christian genre, you will need WORSHIPcast.

If you plan on streaming just your worship services, the CCLI streaming license has you covered. For streaming worship services, special events, and guest performances, your church will need the WORSHIPcast license.

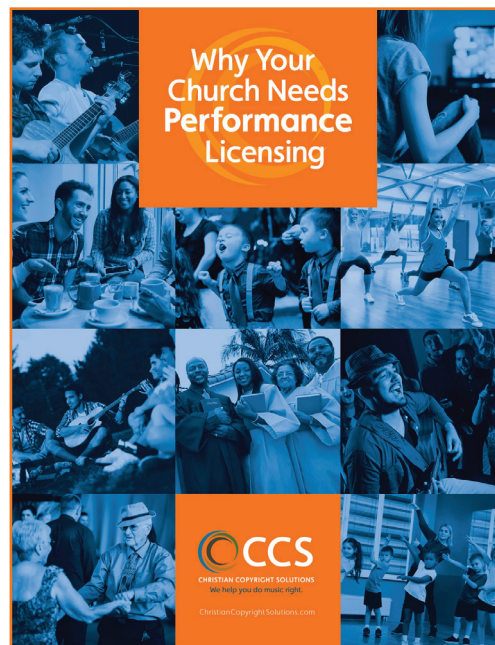
Don't Forget the Lyrics

Need to show lyrics? This feature is only available with the CCLI license and only for the titles in the CCLI catalog. There is no blanket lyric streaming license for secular music available currently. Neither license allows you to stream sound recordings.

A Quiz For Your Specific Needs

If right now you're thinking that you went to Bible college or seminary, not law school, then there's the perfect solution for making sure that you're streaming service is presented with total integrity and consideration for the other men and women who bless our churches by writing the songs we love to sing.

CCS has put together a super-helpful [quiz](#) and also [free guide](#) to help you make any decisions for your church.



Royalty-Free Music Libraries

- [Church On the Move Seeds Music Library](#)
- [Facebook Sound Collection](#)
- [YouTube Audio Library](#)
- Paid Music Libraries
- [Artlist](#)
- [Soundstripe](#)
- [AudioJungle](#)
- Additionally and for a limited time, [One License](#) is offering a free one month license to help ease the transition period for churches dealing with COVID-19.

Examples of Worship and Music

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches have adjusted their worship for streaming. (What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

- Whether you're a small church that isn't sure about licensing or performing via livestream, or a larger church looking to try something new with people at home, one creative idea submitted was to create a Spotify playlist that people can play in their own homes before and after the preaching or teaching.
- Consider a more casual and stripped-down "living room" feel for musical worship. It may help people feel less self conscious about singing along from home. A good tip for both worship leading and preaching is to make "eye contact" with viewers by looking at the camera to build a sense of connection. Avoid creative but unnatural camera angles that remind viewers that they are spectators to something happening somewhere else.
- Don't feel like you have to pretend that things aren't "business as usual." Pastors can and maybe should address viewers at home. It may even be a good idea to rework the setting for worship services. Whether more traditional and formal or modern with more stage production, ask yourself if it's helpful or hurtful to continue a "stage" presence. Some churches are incorporating at least one more kid-friendly song in the worship set. Remember that whole families will be worshipping together, maybe for the first time!
- Speaking of family worship, the first week meeting via livestream only, Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL incorporated more scripture readings, prompting parents to read their Bibles aloud. What a beautiful example for their kids!
- Bobby Smith, a modern worship pastor in the Atlanta area promoted a #HouseChurchJF hashtag, "collected the different posts of people worshipping all around, and compiled them to build a sense of togetherness in the midst of dispersion. Pretty cool to see so many people dig in."

Ideas and Best Practices

Here are some good ideas and best practices for your church service live stream:

- Use a tool like Typeform to ask a question or two before people actually enter your live stream. It's a great way to gather information and serve better.
- Don't forget about the people who show up early. Have something playing in the background before the service officially starts.

Small Groups Online

Connection and community may not be happening at the campuses, but we can make sure that it's happening online. It is our job to come alongside our people and equip them throughout the week. It may not happen in the lobby, but it can happen online in digital groups. It's not a building that makes the church, it is the people.

When it comes to Sunday services, we're seeing churches use language like this...

- Church isn't cancelled, we're just meeting online.
- The church is open, the building is closed.

That same thing can apply to your small groups or Sunday School classes. You don't have to cancel your groups, you can just move them online.

Here are the best solutions for online groups...

- Zoom. We've talked about zoom before, but this is a great solution for your groups.
- Google Hangouts. This is another group conference solution that will work great for online small groups.

Staying Connected

Just like you want your church to stay connected outside of the Sunday service, you want your small group to stay connected outside of group meetings.

Here are some tools for this...

- Group Me. This app is a great way for groups to stay in touch throughout the week. Leaders can ask questions, share prayer requests, and more. [Getting Started with GroupMe](#)
- Facebook Group. Each small group could set up their own Facebook group and stay in touch that way. Your church might also have a private Facebook group so your members can stay connected.
- Group text. Some people love them, some people hate them. But if the group isn't too big, group texts are great ways to stay in touch.

Group leaders need to be encouraged to LEAN IN to their small group. Pastor and shepherd people, which means staying connected.

**The key isn't the technology,
it's intentionality.**

Ideas for Small Groups

Even though your group may not be able to physically meet, you can still stay connected and serve together. Find a need in your community and meet it together.

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Student Ministry Online

When the news about COVID-19 began influencing large gatherings, all churches scrambled to figure out what to do when they couldn't gather in person on Sunday.

That realization quickly extended to other ministries too. We need to get our student service online, too. And we need to create new opportunities for students to stay connected.

Students' lives have been significantly affected during this time – nearly every environment in their lives has been disrupted. School, friends, work, and church have all been affected. This can be really tough on young people.

It's important to provide a sense of normalcy and minister to students.

This is a new frontier for many youth groups.

Here's Kenny Campbell, co-founder of Stuff You Can Use: A Youth Ministry Community...

To be honest, "adult" church is actually way ahead of kids/student ministry when it comes to live streaming. 99.9% of youth ministries haven't started live streaming until this week whereas adults have been doing it for years.

Kids/youth ministry online is new. There's some people like Tj McConahay who have been killing it on social media (TJ specifically is great with TikTok), but those are more like bonus material. Doing kids/youth ministry 100% remote is new territory.

But we'll be keeping our eyes open and paying attention to what people are doing in the Stuff You Can Use Facebook groups, and sharing all the new ideas that will be popping up in the coming weeks.

Examples of Live Streaming in Student Ministry

Check out the insanely practical ways that churches are using technology for student ministry. (What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

Most of the livestreaming advice that applies to church services will also apply to your student ministry. But there are a few student-specific pointers that will help you serve student better.

Doug Fields, co-founder of Download Youth Ministry and the Youth Pastor at Mariner's Church shared a [helpful video about how they are responding with a YouTube Live service.](#)

- [Addison Roberts has a great tutorial video on how to get started with live streaming.](#)

Josh McLemore, Student Pastor at Douglas First UMC in Douglas, Georgia and one of the trailers of the Grow Curriculum, put together a simple guide for going live with Zoom, one of the tools we're recommending to all churches during this time.

- [Download Josh's guide here.](#)

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Other live streaming options for students include...

- Twitch
- Google Hangouts
- Instagram Live

Staying Connected to Students

If your student ministry has small groups, it's not a huge jump to shift them online meeting using a tool like Zoom.

It's one of the more popular video call solutions and has been helping people work remotely for years. But it's also a great tool for online small groups.

Right now, they are extending their free trial, essentially removing their 40-minute limit. One of the cool features of Zoom is breakout rooms. You could have a large group teaching time and then split students up into their respective small groups.

Relationships, more than programming, have always been the driving force behind student ministry. As great as it is to provide an online service or digital gathering, it might be more important to stay connected throughout the week. This just might be one place where student ministry is ahead of adult ministry.

Brian Lawson shares some great ideas....

- Send students personalized text messages. Let them know that you have not forgotten them and that even when they feel alone, they are never alone.
- Call your students! Yes, call them. It seems weird, and it may be awkward, but give them a good old fashioned phone call.
- Use Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom to video call several students at once. Most of these services are free and can have 10+ people on the call. Why not play a game with them? Pull out the classic games and conversation starters like Two Truths and A Lie, Never Have I Ever, or Good Thing, Bad Thing.

GroupMe is a great way to stay connected to students outside of events, even during times when you can gather. Many students already use this for school, sports, or church.

More than ever, students need caring adults to lean in and facilitate connections. Students already live their lives digitally, but this is a new opportunity for the church.

Cameron Pedicord and Jonathan McKee have some great ideas for how you can help students grow spiritually and stay connected during this time.

Here are some good ones:

1. Post a short devotional video every day. Make it fun. Give a tour of your house. Show them that you actually have toilet paper.
2. Jump on Zoom or some other meeting app and take a small group through one of our free YouTube discussions (yes, these each have small group questions and scripture) or free Music Discussions (yes, Billie Eilish, Bieber, Mercy Me, For King & Country... they all have scripture and small group questions, and they're all free).
3. Challenge your students to read the Bible in a month. Send a group text with comments about what you read.
4. Have your musically inclined students spend time writing new worship songs. Post them to YouTube and share them with the group.
5. Video Game Tournament. Ask your students... they'll tell you how.
6. Short Story or Book writing competition. Seriously. They have nothing else to do. How much Netflix can one student actually watch? Binge watch a Netflix, Disney+, Hulu show and discuss. Did you know we have a Bible discussion posted for every single episode of The Walking Dead and Stranger Things?
7. Coffee Time: Everyone brews a cup of coffee at home and hangs out virtually. Video conference and share your secret coffee recipe.

Children's Ministry Online

Elementary-aged children will be among the most impacted groups during this time. They aren't able to go to school and see their friends. They aren't able to be around other kids which can create a lot of issues. How should churches respond?

Programming

Just like you're taking your adult services online and going live for students, elementary aged children can have online experiences.

The LifeKids team from LifeChurch is creating full-length video services that include interactive elements, pauses, and worship that can be streamed online. These experiences will be relevant for children from ages two through six grade.

These videos have no Life.Church branding and use license-free music.

- [Here's where you get these resources.](#)

Resourcing Parents

While you can't gather in person, you can still be a major support and source for parents at home. Consider creating a Facebook group for your kids ministry to post ideas, updates, and a place to ask questions.

One of the biggest ways you can show up with your families is by providing practical and useful resources for parents.

So many parents are trying to balance working from home, being a teacher, and being a parent. It's really tough.

Step into their world by becoming a trusted source for quality and helpful information. Ask your parents what they need and either find or create resources to help them during this time. Take the time you would spend preparing rooms or creating lessons and funnel that energy toward resourcing parents.

Here are some ideas of things you can share.

- Homeschooling Tips like this one [When Homeschooling is Your Temporary New Reality! - Letty Rising](#)
- Mo Williams (Author of 'Don't let the pigeon drive the bus') is hosting a Youtube Live, every day 1 1pm called "Doodling with a friend" [Doodling With a Friend - Mo Williams](#)
- The Cincinnati Zoo is offering videos of the zoo and different animals with facts about them every day at 3pm www.facebook.com/cincinnati_zoo/
- Share a pinterest board with activity ideas like this one: <https://www.pinterest.com/lizziec21/last-friday/spring-fever/>
- Share helpful articles for navigating a pandemic with kids like this one: [Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)

Staying Connected

Write letters to your children. Since you can't see them on Sunday, send them postcards, letters, or coloring sheets via the US Postal Service.

Elder, Leadership, and Team Meetings

These groups can still meet, pray, and make decisions by meeting online using tools like Zoom or Google Hangouts. Since travel isn't required, it might be even easier to have full participation

You can still meet with people.

You can still gather your leaders.

You can still have service planning meetings.

Shifting everything online might have an adjustment period but there are plenty of people who do this and PREFER this.

If you're working remotely or want to consider extending the option beyond the time it's required, don't forget about one of your most valuable resources: the people in your congregation.

Chances are, you have members who have been working remotely for years. Call on their expertise. Ask for their help. Not only will it create great conversations, you'll get to know some of your members better.

Membership class

Using a tool like Gloo's Growth Plan Builder, you can string together a series of videos, assessments, lessons, or conversations to guide a prospective new member through your membership process. Alternatively, your membership class could meet online.

If you have a series of classes for new attenders or new members, don't cancel them. Just move them online. Teachers can still facilitate and participants can still ask questions or share with the group. It might even be easier for people to participate from home

TIP: You don't have to gather face to face to pray. Tools like YouVersion's new Prayer app can help your church pray together, even if you can't meet together.

Thoughts About Virtual Meetings

Streaming video isn't just a solution for the Sunday morning problem; it's the quick 2–4 person conversation problem. Virtual meetings and working remotely due to social distancing have their upsides. Some things might be better this way.

It's not as huge of an adjustment as it would've been even a few years ago. With advances in wifi and cellular technologies, smartphones, tablets, and personal computers, many of us spend a pretty shocking amount of time looking at our screens already. Have you ever checked the screen time clock on your phone? It's pretty sobering. The bright side however is that we're familiar with the technology, most have access to streaming video from some kind of personal device, and it'd be a great improvement to interact with actual people in real time about meaningful things as opposed to crushing candy, scrolling and swiping through feeds, or reading some article about the unthinkable things that someone we'll never meet is saying.

Let's make that the first things on a quick list of positive things about virtual meetings.

1. It could redeem our use of technology.

Like pavlovian dogs, perhaps we can retrain our brains to immediately crave connection with other people rather than consuming impersonal streams of data for ourselves. Please, Lord. Amen.

2. It could be more productive.

From an efficiency standpoint, it's a better use of time. There's no lost margin walking or driving between meetings. In fact, The Wall Street Journal reported a few years ago that 40% of all employees waste 30 minutes per day looking for a meeting room. You also don't waste time in large meetings where your input isn't needed. The same report found that 73% of meetings were only 2–4 people.

3. It can help you juggle schedules.

When you're only trying to connect with 1–3 other people and there's no traveltime, it's a lot easier to find available times to meet.

Digital solutions might be better solutions in the long run. Even when things return to normal, offering digital alternatives might be a smart move. Right now you're forced to consider these options, but you, your teams, and your church might benefit from the discoveries.

Working Remotely

One of the positive things that comes out of this time will be an appreciation for working remotely. It's something forced upon millions of people. But when things have quieted down, we will look back and be thankful that we learned some new skills and built some new habits.

Many people in your congregation suddenly find themselves working from home, and it will be a big adjustment. In addition, thousands of parents are unsure about how they are supposed to do their job from home while being a parent at the same time. It's a strange new world for a lot of people.

and you might be facing this challenge yourself.

Many churches are encouraging staff members to work from home. While there are some challenges, it's a good thing.

No commute.
Comfortable environment.
Cost-effective.
Fewer distractions. Okay, at least different distractions.
Not spreading viruses.

I believe many churches will see the value of working remotely and will continue to offer it as an option to employees, at least some days.

Let's talk about some ways to make it work for you.

Technology

There are so many tools and services that make it possible for a lot of people to work from home. Here are some of the most popular tools.

- **Slack** - This is the #1 work messaging platform and it works great to stay in touch throughout the day.
- **Basecamp** - This is a project management and communication tool. Many people like the "all in one" nature.
- **Microsoft Teams** - Chat, file-sharing, video calling, plus the Office Suite built right in.

There are plenty of others: Asana, Trello, Monday.com, and the list goes on and on. The bottom line is there are tools and services to help you manage nearly every aspect of working remotely.

Experiment quickly with a few tools but go ahead and make a decision. A lot of tools will work for you and the sooner you start mastering some, the more effective you will be.

Psychology of Working From Home

The biggest challenges in working from home are not choosing the right tools but developing a new pattern. Many people in your church are struggling through this. You might be facing it, too.

Church Fuel began as a remote company and working from home is in our DNA. Here are some things I've learned first-hand along the way.

1. **Set a schedule.** Even if you don't have to be "in the office" at 9am, determine a schedule and stick to it. Work/home boundaries can be tough when it's all the same thing so start with your schedule. Run your morning routine, get dressed, and go to work just like you're working in an office.
2. **Create a work space.** Whether you have a home office or find space for a desk in the corner of a room, create a space that's dedicated to your work. Not only will this help you reinforce your routine, it will help others in your house understand when you're at work and when you're at home.

3. **Get support and buy in from others in your home.** Speaking of others in your house, this just might be the most important thing. If you're working from home and there are others in the house, you need to help them understand and support your work reality. You need boundaries so you can focus on work and not get distracted with laundry, entertainment or projects. But others need to understand and support your space, too.
4. **Stay connected.** One of the toughest things for people leaving a traditional office environment to work from home is the feeling of isolation. This is a very real thing.

Remember, the people in your church who are affected by a change in work location are also struggling to stay connected with people. They are more isolated, which means they need connection to their church community even more.

Examples of Tools for Remote Work

Check out the insanely practical tools that churches use to manage ministry teams remotely. (What about you? Find and share more ideas online at covid.church)

- Basecamp Guide to Internal Communication. Not only is Basecamp an excellent tool, but they set a precedent for company culture. This internal guide is full of helpful advice on working remotely.
- 27 Apps and Tools for Working Remotely. This is a decent list of several tools and services helpful for those who work remotely.
- Critical Components for Working from Home. This resource from Belay (the virtual staffing company we use at Church Fuel for bookkeeping) is great.
- This list of how to get set up working from home in one week