

PASTORPEDIA™

Cutting Edge Conversations for Pastors and Church Leaders

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COVID

The most difficult time to pastor

I am not trying to be dramatic, but I have been at this thing called church leadership for 55 years and I don't think there's ever been a more difficult time to lead a church than now.

It's not just the virus thing, but the mood of the nation, the challenges and problems and prejudices that have risen to the boiling point, and the clearly awful way that even some of our leaders deal with differences – I think all these hurt the church. Or make the challenge greater.

Add to all that the yawning about church attendance on a regular basis that has hit our land. Even the people who say they attend the church all the time, some of them at least, really mean two out of five. Ask Georges Barna and Gallop.

Nevertheless, given what we know and love about our Lord, what a time to lead with grace and love and clarity! What a time to present and live out the fascinating life in combination with Christ that is our privilege, even as we grapple with COVID strategy.

With that in mind, and knowing that our gracious strong shepherding is needed, here we go.

Not reluctantly,

Knute, with Jeff and Jim

How are you handling different opinions about opening up? Is there any way it shows up along party lines?

Jeff Bogue

- We are handling different opinions by simply choosing a strategy that makes sense for the long-term. There is absolutely no way to win everybody over when it comes to opening or remaining closed. We made a decision to deal with the complications of opening, because we felt that it would have a greater long-term benefit for us by learning to function in the new COVID world. We decided to learn our lessons the slow way so that as COVID lifts, we're positioned in a strong way to roar forward with effectiveness.
- I don't know that it shows up along political party lines, but there are definitely the people who are very conscious about wearing masks, and then those who are very stubborn about not wearing masks. And like most things, there's a large middle ground of people who are willing to live with it, regardless if they think it's an overreaction or underreaction.

Jim Brown

- I am listening more and talking less, praying and fasting regularly.
- We are communicating what we believe the Lord has directed us to do and we are staying with those steps.
- You will always have different opinions, but in the end you realize you can't please everyone but you can love everyone.
- I am not seeing a huge difference across party lines either. The biggest difference is in the area of wearing a mask or not doing so. There are some strong opinions on that issue.

Knute Larson

- My answers will be based upon coaching conversations with 30 to 35 pastors I'm involved with during this COVID time. There are many similarities.
- I do think it is a time when you pray for wisdom and consensus must rule and good advisers are as important as board members and staff members. Every locale is different because every governor is, even in October. Just as I have always advised each pastor to have a business advisory group of business owners and generous givers who aren't necessarily on the church board or a committee, I now advise them to have some people who grapple with COVID decisions at work and who bring wisdom to the table. Including doctors but not just medical people.
- I do think it has to be a leadership decision after all the advice—not a survey of the church people. Many have not thought through the issues.
- In churches I have spoken in the last five months, often there are people with masks on sitting in the back rows with folded arms while others are walking around hugging each other before the service starts. By its very picture, this is divisive. The best we can do is usually to make room for everyone's practice.
- I for one think we are to obey the laws of our land, which usually make room for careful church assembling. I know John does not agree with that. 😊

How do you connect with people who have “joined” you online only?

Jeff Bogue

- We have a virtual lobby, so this is where we do a lot of chatting and interacting with people.
- We’ve created social media volunteers who follow-up and interact with people via all of our social media channels as well as our online lobbies.
- We invite them to online Discovery Group, which is an onboarding process for our church. We also invite them to connect to either live or online Connect Groups, and we use a mix of staff and volunteers to engage them personally in these groups.

Jim Brown

- We have a pastor on call during our live streaming that is connecting online with them.
- We called everyone on our attendee list and prayed with them.
- We visited those that have not made it back and delivered ice-cream gift cards and prayed with them.
- We acknowledge their being with us while preaching or teaching.
- We have set up multiple Zoom and “Facebook Live” gatherings to pull them in.
- We stay connected through phone and email.

Knute Larson

- Online. And not in a pushy way. Some have been able to gather at least a strong percentage on an internet call for conversation about the church. I think it helps when you say it’s a 30 minute call so they can make their plans.
- It seems healthy to me in any church of size to have one of the staff members assigned as the “online pastor,” as one of his or her duties.
- And, as always, with new people, patience is key. No one likes to be pushed.

What lessons have you learned about leadership since COVID started?

Jeff Bogue

- Probably more than I could ever state. This has been the largest most difficult leadership lift of *my* career, so lessons like:
- Be on deck. The captain needs to be visible when the ship’s sailing troubled seas. Being around and being in front of people is important.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- Recognize that you’re sailing through an ice field and that icebergs are going to pop up unexpectedly and out of the blue. You must diligently watch the water at all times and look off the bow of the boat to see what may be coming next.

- You have to make tough decisions, and you're not going to be universally celebrated during a time like this. There will be people who will agree with you and those that do not, so walk in the Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you, then to give you the courage to make those decisions.
- Finally, utilize short-term decisions for long-term gain. Don't just play for tomorrow, but play for the long haul. We want to leverage short-term decisions that we either *have* to make or can make so we can piece together a long-term plan.

Jim Brown

- This is the most unique time ever as a pastor.
- Three kinds of leaders: frozen, hesitant, and agile. You must be an agile leader and focus on what can be changed and not on what can't be changed.
- You learn a lot about faith and courage.
- I have not lived in the moment because everything could change tonight, so we must plan in such a way to prepare for that.
- More than ever people need hope. Help them see an end in sight with a road to travel to get there.
- Leaders lead, so don't hesitate!
- Truth must surface, so point people to Jesus and not to another person's opinion.

Knute Larson

- That an advisory group is good.
- That patience and allowance of differences are essential. Six pastors cannot agree on exactly how to do this in a lunch meeting – how can we expect our people to be excited about our decisions in a unanimous way?
- That when it comes to their health, people do not necessarily care what their church leadership thinks.
- Patience has always been a virtue. And this is especially true when leading in an area of uncertainty, and one that involves physical health.
- Unless the people of the church all think the same way, room for various opinions seems necessary. This is not about the inspired Word of God or the deity of Jesus, but about practices that relate to health. I think we should make room for New Testament liberty issues in many areas or opinions.

Pastorpedia is a resource provided to you by CE National, a church effectiveness ministry. Please contact us at cenational@cenational.org or 574.267.6622 if we may be of any help to you or your ministry!

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