

HOW WILL CHURCHES RE-OPEN?

(by Karl Eastlack)

Whenever this Covid-19 crisis ends and churches are permitted to re-open their facilities and ministries again, what options are there in order to see this period in history as an opportunity to hear from the Lord of the Church and to respond in such a way as to embrace our Mission in the world? I believe that most if not all churches will take a variation of one of the following paths to re-open.

1. RESUME

- Some churches will just go back to what they were doing prior to the pandemic crisis along with making a few minor changes to accommodate the “new normal” of social distancing and cleanliness.
- They will be so glad to get back together that they will just “re-embrace” each other and choose the easier path of going back to what they know and were comfortable with for so long.
- **The good news:** This church will have full hearts and deep joy as they get back together again (absence makes the heart grow fonder”).
- **The challenge:** This approach will most likely serve to increase the risk of irrelevance of their church in today’s world and will not have any measurable impact on closing the Gospel Gap.

2. RESET

- Many (most?) of our churches will re-open “with a twist”: They have been using an on-line presence (livestream, video, Zoom, etc.) during the pandemic crisis and have found a new comfort level with it. They have seen the increased the impact and influence that it brought to their communities.
- **The good news:** They are uncomfortable with the idea of going back to the way things were without an on-line presence.
- **The challenge:** There are limits to what they will do differently. They might not have the resources, the staffing nor the courage nor the creative imagination to keep pivoting to this new environment. So, while this crisis

forced them to use on-line technology to enhance how to do church, they will be tempted to just continue with what they have now become comfortable with.

3. RE-IMAGINE

- Some of our churches will want to actively consider the larger impact of the pandemic on how to carry out the mission of Christ in a way that is relevant to our world today. They will be longing to imagine a very different “church” going forward, and how to disciple their people for that different kind of missional approach.
- They will want to consider all kinds of ways to “be the church” (not just on-line but networks of house churches and “fresh expressions” such as dinner church).
- They will also re-consider how best to use their facilities (even consider IF they should have buildings), staff and budgets to align with this new reality.
- They will place a more profound emphasis on the “priesthood of believers”.
- The Pastor(s) will move toward a more “hero-maker” style of ministry.
- **The good news:** This church will continue to innovate and not to be afraid of change if it has the intended result of Kingdom impact in their communities.
- **The challenge:** This church will naturally gravitate toward any person or organization who will “fan the flame” for them (financially and inspirationally).

RESTART

- There will, sadly, be a hand-full of churches who, because of location, size and median age of their congregation (along with limited income and savings severely affected and exaggerated by the Covid crisis), will not survive long enough to see a reopening of their church.
- These churches were already struggling to stay open prior to Covid-19.
- Most likely, they have not provided for alternative ways for their congregations to give tithes and offerings.

- This crisis will probably do two things to this church:
 1. It will likely cause the resignation of the Pastor, and
 2. It will create a situation whereby their bills cannot be met without serious financial infusion from an outside source for a sustained period.
- **The Challenge:** To walk lovingly through the closing-down process with these faithful longtime attendees.
- **The good news:** While a local church closes, the Church of Jesus does not. Two things:
 1. The faithful attendees will transfer over to another Bible-believing congregation (versus not going to church anymore), and
 2. The facilities will become available to be used strategically for assisting the facility upgrades of a growing congregation or to use toward assisting new church plants in acquiring property/buildings.