

The Post Quarantine Church – Six Urgent Challenges + Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation

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Synopsis

The Post Quarantine Church by Thom S. Rainer is a great summary of what to expect post pandemic. While the content is primarily a summary of what anyone can read in articles it is helpful to have it compiled in this short book that captures Thom Rainer's own insights as well as experience as he has talked to hundreds of churches during the pandemic. The author's insights are extremely important as we navigate ourselves back to being the church in a Post-Quarantine reality and God driven moment. Rainer focuses on six different challenges for the church including: what it means to gather now, the impact of the digital world on the church, the local community and its connection with the church, prayer, facilities, and the business of fast-paced change during this season. In this quick read Thom Rainer offers the reader hope and help in a book that's easy to understand with practical ways to navigate through the pandemic and beyond!

Introduction – After the Quarantine

- There will be significant differences post quarantine and it will also likely take some time before we even begin to understand what the new era will look like.
- None of this – the pandemic, the quarantine, the post-quarantine period – caught God by surprise. He has a plan ready and waiting for his church. The post-quarantine era is an opportunity to make the necessary positive changes to move our churches forward. It is time for us to enter this new land of possibilities with hope, promise, and enthusiasm.

Challenge 1 – Gather Differently and Better

- The gathered church is important. There are also opportunities in the post-quarantine era to use our facilities for greater and more efficient purposes.
- What if we viewed our church facilities as a tool to reach or community? What if we thought of ways to bring the community in instead of keeping them out? What if asked the community how our church facilities could best serve them? What if the facilities became a place for the community as well as a place in the community?
- During the quarantine, many church leaders and church members discovered that the church was still the church, even without its facilities. Yes, we desired to return to in-person gathering so we could be with our friends again. But we found we could do a lot of things as a church without relying on our buildings. Indeed, the digital world opened up possibilities that many congregations had never considered, much less tried.
- Our facilities are more tools than necessities. What if we now use those tools to reach and minister to our community? We can see them more as a tool for outreach rather than a cocoon for our communities.
- **Three Thoughts**
 - 1) Think of one innovative way your church could use its facilities, perhaps something that has never been done.
 - 2) Think of alternative days and times when your church could gather for worship services. Think creatively to reach people you are not currently reaching.
 - 3) Think of ways your church could possibly partner with the local government or schools to use your facilities.

Challenge 2 – Seize Your Opportunity to Reach the Digital World

- This new era will likely include some blending and balancing between digital and in-person ministry.
- Before the pandemic, most church leaders were not concerned about reaching people in the digital world. They focused their attention on the opportunities available in person. But now things are different. At the core of many of the post-quarantine era is a realization that churches must deal with three groups: what we are calling digital only, digitally transitioning, and dual citizens. The future strategy for churches, must keep in mind these three groups.

- Digital Only – Include people who are physically unable to attend in-person gatherings. They could be anyone from elderly shut-ins to members of the armed forces stationed overseas as well as people who may still consider it too risky to enter a church's physical facilities because of COVID-19, and some who are simply unwilling or unready to attend a church service. How will churches reach and minister to these people?
- Digitally Transitioning – They mostly connect to the church digitally but there are indications they are somewhat open to connecting in person. A strategy to reach out to these people may include specific ways to encourage them to attend an in-person worship service.
- Dual Citizens – They are connected to your congregation both digitally and in-person. This is important because it is pretty rare anymore to find someone who has no digital connections.
- The early church in Jerusalem is instructive for our forays into the digital world today. The Bible indicates that the prayers of the early church were powerful because the people were of one mind. It is easy to become fascinated by the technological possibilities of this newly discovered digital mission field. But we must not allow them to undermine our commitment to prayer and seeking God's guidance. It is an exercise in futility to try to reach and minister to the digital world without prayer as a first step.
- How will you pray for each of the three groups (digital only, digitally transitioning, and dual citizens)? What ways will you make available for the primarily digital groups to share prayer needs with you? How will you involve the dual citizens in praying for the other groups? How will your church leaders and members maintain an active and vibrant prayer ministry in the post-quarantine era?
- As we prayerfully seek ways for our churches to become more potent missional force in the digital world, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of church busyness. Find those areas in the digital world where your church can do a few things well. Do not be lured by the temptations of digital busyness or digital noise. Regularly and ruthlessly evaluate your church's effectiveness, and make shifts when needed. Do not confuse busyness with effectiveness in the digital world.
- The pre-quarantine world and post-quarantine world are not the same. Churches cannot minister effectively using methods for a world that no longer exists. In the post-quarantine era, we must think of our community and our mission field as both/and, not either/or. The common denominator for most churches will still be in-person worship services. But the types and frequency of digital streaming services will vary from one congregation to the next. Some churches found success with digital groups during the quarantine and will continue some form of them in the future. Others will use digital delivery for short-term groups only, favoring in-person gatherings for ongoing groups.
- We know that the world is both digital and physical. For that reason alone, our churches must respond to both. And though the ways we reach these two mission fields will vary and change, it is imperative that we do something and do it well.
- **Three Thoughts**
 - Think of the differences in your community since the pandemic and the implications for how you will do ministry in this new era.
 - Think of which social media channels might be most effective for your church now.
 - Think of how your church could connect best with a non-Christian who has only a digital connection to your church.

Challenge 3 – Reconnect with the Community Near Your Church

- Community churches and neighborhood churches have long been a major component of our nation's heritage and life. It was just natural and common for the church to care for those who lived in the community. Many of these neighborhood churches, however, forgot their purpose over time. In more recent days, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced churches to close the doors of their facilities, an interesting transformation took place in many congregations. They began to rediscover their communities.
- Churches became more people-oriented as their freedom to gather people together was taken away. There were at least four reasons this transformation happened. First, because most of their activities had taken place in the

church building, churches were no longer activity driven. Second, a number of congregations renewed or began prayer ministries, some of which focused intentionally on their neighborhoods and communities. Third, during the quarantine, many churches became more intentional about evangelism. Fourth, because people were largely confined to their homes and neighborhoods, they saw more of their neighbors. Church members had opportunities to connect with neighbors that maybe they had never met.

- Four key lessons learned during the quarantine: 1) Keep church life simple, not so busy with activities that the members cannot do the most important ministries they are supposed to be doing. 2) Make certain your congregation's prayer ministry engages with your community or neighborhood. 3) Be intentional about sharing the gospel. 4) Keep the emphasis on having your members connect with people in the community.
- Jesus gave the first church in Jerusalem a clear command to be outwardly focused – beginning in the city itself and then spreading “throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)
- In our day, God has sent a wave of urgency to the world in the form of COVID-19. It is not a matter of getting beyond Jerusalem – that is going beyond the borders of our local communities. It is first a matter of reaching Jerusalem. We must focus our outward vision on the people who are right around us, in our neighborhoods, cities, and towns.
- For the most part, churches have seen their outward focus slowly erode. We may not have noticed it clearly before the quarantine. But we are certainly aware of it in these post-quarantine days. The challenge has been laid. We cannot and must not return to the days of comfort and routine. We must move forward with Great Commission obedience and sacrifice.
- Potentially, one of the more positive outcomes of the pandemic will be the accelerated comeback of neighborhood churches. A church that serves a very precise area, self-identified by the residents as a unique and distinctive community.
- The comeback of the neighborhood church is part of a larger trend. Churches are reconnecting with their communities. God is truly using a challenging and tragic time to bring things together for his glory.
- **Three Thoughts**
 - Think of some ways your church can be more of a positive influence in the community.
 - Think about the principle of slow erosion, and consider whether this gradual decline is taking place in your church.
 - Think about the comeback of the neighborhood church, and consider whether some of those positive developments are in place in your congregation.

Challenge 4 – Take Prayer to a New and Powerful Level

- During the pandemic and the quarantine, pastors and other church leaders began to seek God in prayer more fervently. Church members became more involved in prayer ministries. In many cases, residents in the community began contacting churches for prayer support.
- Prayer was a unifying force in the early church.
- Times of crisis prompt church members to pray more often and more fervently.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the roadways of digital technology became a major conduit for prayer ministries to travel. It is indeed the modern Roman road to carry the gospel to unreached persons and places. Like any instrument, digital technology can be used for evil. But God uses it for good.
- The post-quarantine church is moving into a time of pervasive and powerful prayer. To miss this opportunity is to miss a clear movement of God.
- As the quarantine eased, we saw a heightened interest in and commitment to prayer. In the days ahead, as the initial enthusiasm gives way to the need for a sustainable, long-term commitment, it will be important for churches to plan for more structured ways to encourage people to pray.
- The keys to a successful prayer ministry are threefold. First, church leadership must be intentional about keeping prayer at the forefront of the congregation's priorities. Second, church leaders should promote periodic prayer emphases to restoke the fire. Third, members should be encouraged to pray and wait.

- **Three Thoughts:**

- Think about the prayer ministries that took place in your church during the pandemic. Think about whether they are still present today.
- Think about other church members who may join you in praying for your church and community on a regular basis.
- Think about the technologies your church used during the pandemic and the ways those technologies can be used for prayer ministries today.

Challenge 5 – Rethink Your Facilities for Emerging Opportunities

- The pandemic brought a shift in mindset about church facilities. Though they were not absolutely required for ministry to occur they were nonetheless God's gifts of resources that could be used for his glory. The post-quarantine church, then, has a vibrant opportunity to rethink how we use our facilities.
- Look at the demographics and psychographics of your community to discover five ways your church facilities can be used to reach your community. Demographics define the statistical characteristics of populations, such as age, income, gender, race, and other factors. Psychographics define the population according to their attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors. The key is to see the church building from the perspective of the community rather than their church members. How can we use our facilities to reach and minister to our community?
- Churches have been using public school space for years, particularly for church plants. Look for the trend to reciprocate with schools making use of church space. Historically, most church leaders have been comfortable sharing space with other nonprofit organizations, particularly if they have a complementary mission. Expect these types of relationships to increase in the months and years ahead. Church leaders must begin to realize that a facility partnership with a local organization is an avenue for the church to truly reach its neighbors. When the church opens its doors to the community by making its buildings available for other uses, the community “comes to church.” Such partnerships have gospel opportunities written all over them.
- What transpired in many churches during the pandemic was a rethinking of how the sanctuary or worship center would be used in the post-quarantine era. In the early stages of regathering, the most common adjustment – and perhaps the least creative was adding to the number of services. Two other early changes were obvious. First, more churches decided they could have worship services at times other than Sunday morning. Second, the online services that either began or were augmented during the quarantine are not going away.
- The pandemic gave church leaders the opportunity to rethink everything, including the use of their physical facilities. God may be waiting for you to write a new story for your church on the blank slate he has provided.
- **Three Thoughts**
 - Think about how your church facilities were used before the pandemic and how that is changing and might change more.
 - Think of ways that your church may partner with another organization in the use of your church facilities?
 - Think about how the digital streaming of services during the pandemic might change the future of your worship services in your physical facilities

Challenge 6 – Make Lasting Changes That Will Make a Difference

- Your church has entered a new era. To be clear your church was already moving in that direction, but the pace has been greatly accelerated by the pandemic. You are navigating uncharted waters, and every day will bring new challenges. To lead successfully, you will have to pivot. To lead successfully, you will need to make some changes on the fly. To lead successfully in the post-quarantine church, you will have to lead without total clarity. You will have to lead with a lot of uncertainty.
- You can no longer lead according to bygone expectations, perspectives, and methodologies. A new era requires a new approach if you want to successfully reach the people God has placed in your path.
- When the apostles faced a time of tremendous change in the earliest days of the church they devoted themselves to prayer and the Word of God. Whatever else may come, prayer and God's Word must be front-and-center priorities for the path ahead.

- In the coming seasons of uncertainty, you will be required to lead change, perhaps like you never have before. You will make decisions one day, embrace some of them the next day, and discard others the day after that.
- Whether, you are a pastor, staff member, lay leader, or other active member, you must be ready to deal with significant changes in your church. The obstacles to change have been around for decades: a) Lack of urgency. We must realize that we cannot do things the way we have always done them. b) Failure to gain influential allies. No church leader can lead this rapid change alone. All must seek the help of influential people in the church who can work with other church members to embrace the need and the means for change. c) No clear vision - In the post-quarantine era, vision casting will be measured in months not years. We cannot see much beyond a year at this point. d) Failure to create short-term wins – Your members will need encouragement more than ever. e) Failure to communicate a thousand times more – It takes multiple iterations of communication over an extended period of time for something to be understood, let alone embraced by followers. f) Giving obstacles too much attention – Love your naysayers. Pray for your naysayers. With discernment, listen to your naysayers. But do not allow them to undermine the momentum of a congregation that is ready and willing to move forward.
- To lead change in these uncertain times effective change leaders will follow seven principles: 1) Remind People of Their Biblical Hope. 2) Remember, Cultural Change Comes Last. 3) Visible Action Steps Are Essential. 4) Allies Are Still Imperative. 5) Communication Must Increase Exponentially – Communication must come from the pulpit. From the church's website. From social media. From newsletters. From informal conversations. From meetings. Repeat. And repeat again. 6) Leaders Must Be Willing to Accept Membership Losses – We want to be certain not to give so much attention to negative members that the healthy church members are neglected. We do not want to expend so much energy on the detractors that the church loses its focus. 7) Leaders Must Align With the Future – Church leaders must consider every decision based on the new realities of the post-quarantine world. If your church has been busy maintaining a lot of programs, consider whether some need to be eliminated or moved to a digital platform. As your church makes decisions about facilities, consider the new realities of the gathered and scattered church. If your church decides to increase the emphasis on small groups, consider whether there are new and better ways for people to gather. In other words, the rules have changed in the post-quarantine era. Get ready to adapt.
- The essence of leading for change is leading for lasting change. Leaders must lead with the new realities in view.
- **Three Thoughts**
 - Think about how receptive to change your church was during the quarantine, and note the lessons you can learn from that period.
 - Think about where some of the most beneficial change has already taken place in your church.
 - Think about where your church may face some of its greatest challenges in adapting and changing in the post-quarantine era.

Concluding Thoughts – From Challenges to Opportunities

- What is not changing in the post-quarantine church: a) The Bible is still the Word of God. b) Christ is still the only way of salvation. c) Prayer is still vital. d) Evangelism is still a mandate.
- For leaders and church members in the post-quarantine era, change is coming at an accelerated pace. I think by now you have probably gotten that message pretty clearly. Churches that refuse to change will inevitably decline or even die.
- **Nine Key Changes for the Post-Quarantine Church:**
 - 1) **Simplicity Will Be Vitaly Important** – Create a process to stringently evaluate everything new as well as every preexisting commitment of the congregation. Healthy churches in the post-quarantine era will be focused churches. They will be congregations that do a few things well, both digitally and in person.
 - 2) **Only Outwardly Focused Churches Will Survive** – If churches are not making focused, intentional, and regular efforts to reach their communities, they will die.
 - 3) **Worship Service Gatherings Will Be Smaller** – The presence and growth of neighborhood churches will play a major role in the post-quarantine era.
 - 4) **“Multi” Will Multiply** – The multi movement was already growing before the pandemic. It cannot be slowed in the post-quarantine era.

- 5) Staff and Leadership Realignment Will Focus More on Digital Proficiency – Watch for churches to allocate greater resources to digital technology and outreach. This is about more than simply having the latest technological toy. What is happening now is an increased awakening to the reality that the digital world is a mission field – a way to reach real people with real needs.
 - 6) “Stragglers” Will Become a Subject of Outreach and Focus – Entirely new strategies will be developed to reach the stragglers. New resources will be created. Church leaders will recognize this group as more receptive to the gospel and to reconnecting with the church than other unchurched people.
 - 7) Digital Worship Services Will Be Newly Purposed – For most churches, digital worship services are still a mainstay among their post-quarantined ministries. Pastors realize they can reach people they would never reach in person. Church leaders are developing strategies that will make these services look significantly different in the future.
 - 8) Ministry Training Will Change Dramatically – Not only is the delivery of ministry training or theological education changing, but so is the content. Certain parts of ministry training should always remain stable, such as new testament, Old Testament theology, church history, and other classical disciplines. But for the past several years many church leaders have been asking for the theological content to be augmented with practical training, particularly in the various forms of leadership training.
 - 9) Pastors Will Leave Their Lead Positions for Second-Chair Roles – Most pastors have not been trained or equipped for leading change on the scale needed for the post-quarantine era. Meanwhile a parallel movement is growing. As more churches join the multi movement, they will be seeking ministers for new sites, venues, and campuses. A number of seasoned pastors will fit these more-limited roles well. They will still be pastoral in nature, they will not include the specific leadership responsibilities of a lead pastor.
- The post-quarantine era may prove to be one of the most challenging seasons for the churches and their leaders. It is a season of opportunity. As we enter this unknown era, we are uncertain about the specifics of what will unfold, but we remain certain that the God of all wisdom and power will be with us every step of the way. After Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28:19-20, he reminded them that they were not going it alone: “Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) With that same assurance, we enter a new era, a new season of opportunity. With the same promise, we lead our churches into the future. And with the same confidence, we know we will not be alone, regardless of what unfolds. When it is all said and done, nothing else that matters.