



Friends Church of North Carolina

Ministry and Counsel

For many of you it is probably not a stretch to say that right now has been a challenging season to be a pastor or leader in your meeting. Between individual and group conversations, social media, emails, and many conversations with friends in ministry, I see the tremendous difficulty of leading the local meeting in this time. I am so impressed by the ways God has been working in and through you and how you have led with incredible imagination, creativity and love in this moment in time.

One of the best questions that I have heard that helps uncover how people are approaching this period is "How do you and/or your meeting view COVID-19?" Let's talk about the meaning behind that question. If it is an interruption like when you are watching TV and the news comes on and says, "We interrupt your program to bring you breaking news!" You then get your breaking news and then "return to your regularly scheduled program already in progress." (I realize that using this analogy dates me as watching programming on network TV is much rarer than it used to be!). The point is that an interruption hits a pause button and then we return to life as normal. So, some will view COVID-19 as an interruption, approaching the challenge by saying things like, "This pandemic caused us to leave our buildings, and cancel or modify programs. We will have a process of reintegrating these ministries, but eventually we will go back to normal."

Or is COVID-19 a time of disruption and will change the way we do things in the future. The smartphone has forever disrupted the way we communicate with one another. Those who view COVID-19 as a disruption do not feel that they will go back to normal, but that this is a time to ask new questions about what God is doing that might significantly alter the way we "do" meeting. Should the meeting scale down programming and focus more deeply on discipleship? Do we need Sunday morning meeting to make a greater quantity and quality of disciples? (Please hear me – I am not saying Sunday morning meeting isn't a vital aspect of ministry! I am just emphasizing that the Church (our friends) is still the Church (disciples) even when we don't have corporate worship – like we haven't been able to do these last months.)

Has your small group ministry been completely revitalized and needs some more emphasis and energy put towards it? How has this disruption helped us shift to care for singles in our meeting and community? What about seniors? So many questions arise when we pay attention to what God might be up to during and after a disruption.

There are things that have been interrupted that will, at some point, resume to normal. But I also hope we don't miss the disruptive nature of this season and simply long for a return to normalcy. Remember in Acts 1:8 when the disciples are told that they are going to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth? Yet, the disciples stayed in Jerusalem. It wasn't until persecution, which was a disruptive event, that caused the disciples to be scattered into these other areas (Acts 11:19). The gospel then began to multiply greatly and fulfill the initial purpose to which Jesus had called them in the first chapter of Acts.

I know we are tired. I know we are hearing so many voices calling us to do so many different things. My prayer is that we would be attentive first and foremost to the voice of the Lord. Let us allow God to use this time to shape our meetings for his purposes – and not our own. I am so grateful for the ways you have continued to listen to God and continued to flourish in the midst of a seemingly impossible challenge. I cannot wait to see what He continues to do in and through you and your local gatherings.

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