

Serious Shepherding During a Pandemic: 10 Ideas

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March 19, 2020



Reading Time: 4 minutes

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Heb. 13:17).

“...for they are keeping watch over your souls,” in the original text, means church elders stay *awake at night*. Thus, elders are constantly praying, contemplating, and planning how they might help Christians in their charge. It is a lofty job. Many elders have labored over the decision to limit or suspend assemblies in the last couple of weeks. It’s a difficult decision because they know how valuable *interaction* is between Christians—seeing, laughing, hugging, singing, praying—delivering, in various ways, those “holy kisses.” And yet, for several somewhat surreal reasons, some degree of *apartness* is now clearly warranted.

This article is written specifically for congregations that have elders. Many congregations do not have shepherds, and thus will need to amend these suggestions to protect the church's spiritual health while we are doing all we can to also protect their physical health. It can be done.

In a sense we are scattering. Our ancient brothers and sisters scattered to avoid the persecution of men like Saul of Tarsus, who was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1; cf. 8:1). Although COVID-19 doesn't involve persecution, church members are scattered in some obvious ways, for safety and to show mercy to those who are the most vulnerable.

Here are 10 suggestions for elders today who are wanting to hold the church together while we are apart.

1. Set up church-wide texting. Within seconds, the elders or preacher can communicate with almost the entire church with encouragement and information in various forms. Visit www.flocknote.com for one idea of how to easily accomplish this.

2. Create a system with your elders, preacher, and deacons in which every family unit in the congregation gets an encouraging call each week. Simply divide the directory by the number of these church leaders and hand each leader his assignments. Draw up general talking points and questions for the conversation: "Is everyone in your house well?" "What is the status of your job?" "Do you need help with power bills or groceries?" "What do you need us to pray about?" After each week, swap assignment sheets so that a different leader is phoning each week. This will sustain the sense of connectedness that Christians need from one another.

3. Assign every member over 70 to someone in the church who will call them twice each week. They should say, "What groceries should I get for you when I go?" "Do you need your medications?" "I'll bring the wine and bread for the Lord's supper so you'll have it for the Lord's Day." "Who do you need me to pray for today?" If possible, to minimize risky contact, leave necessary deliveries by front doors and phone them as you're pulling out of the driveway to let them know.

4. Contact every family in the church and ask, "Do you have a way to Livestream our (or another faithful congregation's) worship and classes?" If they do not, send a member to them who can set them up and show them how to operate it themselves. If you need a

Livestream to recommend I would welcome you to ours:

<https://livestream.com/whcoc/worship>. We all need to be fed spiritually. The elders are charged with this feeding (1 Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20:28).

5. The elders should meet together each week; in person in a home, or in a conference call, to discuss unique needs among the members and to pray for the Christians. When elders speak to various members, they should be sure to mention that they have prayed for them. This would be a good season for elders to go to the empty auditorium and picture where each person or family typically sits for worship in the assembly. Stop at that empty pew—just stand there—and pray for that family by name. What an encouragement if the shepherds communicate to each family that they have thus prayed for them.

6. Offer them options for contributing. You might suggest, for example, auto-transfer each week from personal bank accounts into a church account set up to receive such funds or mailing checks to the church office or delivering contributions to the building at designated times when someone will be there to receive them. Contributions could be momentarily left by the door in some sort of container to avoid personal contact, if necessary. Bear in mind that our financial worship must continue (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The various works of the church are in various degrees supported by the treasury and they depend on our consistency. Needs may be even greater during a time of prevalent sickness. Furthermore, giving always benefits the one who is doing the giving.

7. Women are great comforters. If you have podcasting technologies, encourage women's Bible studies and prayer groups to continue. Women's Facebook prayer groups or texting groups are great places for women to connect and be in diligent prayer for the needs of each other's children and families. This is a large part of the prayer lives of women who participate.

8. Encourage your members to watch the Gospel Broadcasting Network or PTP365. These lessons will give them much needed spiritual stamina in a time when they are needing encouragement. Polishing the Pulpit has just made their amazing library of lessons (usually available for a fee) free for all who are needing a boost during the quarantine. You can open your free account here: <https://free365.polishingthepulpit.com>.

9. Have your minister write a daily encouragement blog from the Word. Include an idea for Family Bible time each day. If you need a sample or would just like to use ours, you may find it here: <https://westhuntsville.org/daily-boost/>.

10. Prepare yourself and the church for the time, perhaps soon, when one or more

of your members is diagnosed with the disease. This will be a shock and should be anticipated. Offer support to the affected family. Update the church about the condition of diagnosed people and make sure they have supplies and food when necessary. We're going through a challenging time, but we're still the Lord's church. 2020 will be remembered in your congregation. Make sure that, as long as this generation lives, 2020 will be remembered with a smile and a tear as we picture Christians pulling together as the Lord's family. We really are brothers and sisters, after all, and our Lord is still on His throne.