



The Ordinary Church in Extraordinary Times: The Life of the Church—Inside and Out!

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EPC Small (Ordinary) Church Workshop

The Ordinary Church in Extraordinary Times

Segment 2: The Life of the Church – inside and out! (May 28th)

1 Thessalonians 1:2-7

²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. ⁴ Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

Matthew 5: 14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that [b] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

I. Now, more than ever, the ordinary church will play a significant part in the work of the kingdom.

Enormous challenges as well as opportunities.

What have been some of the hurdles, some of the unexpected successes, things we have discovered about ourselves and our willingness to continue to focus on our mission?

II. On the Inside – the community of believers, your church.

Maintaining Relationships. It hasn't been easy, but we have discovered some things about the importance and power of these relationships.

Struggles - despite our best efforts

Struggle to stay connected – email, texts, phone, Facebook, and an older generation that is tech challenged.

One of our EPC Church plants reports struggling to feel as connected as before. *We only have 3 months of regular meeting prior to the quarantine so our relationships were still quite new when this happened. We have a few immune-compromised elderly folks and several pregnant moms, so our core team is highly concerned about meeting again.*

The Positive

One of the negatives of the small church that gets talked about a lot is the tendency to focus too much on internal relationships – inward focus that closes off the community around us. However, this has a positive side – the sense of community. In times like these, any crisis, that sense of community is a powerfully sustaining force and a great gift that small church has to offer – not only its own members, but others who are hurting now.

Another EPC pastor commented

We divided up our congregation among our five elders and they call each member once or twice a month in addition to my pastoral care calls.

We started a weekly prayer gathering on Zoom and that has kept us connected.

Prayer chains, newsletters,

Meals to the sick and those unable to get to the store. Shopping

It's relationships, showing up for one another across generational lines and theological differences, that make this possible. That's the richness of small church. We belong to one another because we've come to discover that every person is needed. And that takes time. – Melissa Bixler

Even in our Leadership

A time to plant seeds to enhance leadership, taking deeper dives into what we believe, who we are as the church and what we are called to do.

We have pushed ministry down to where it should always be – including deacons and elders in pastoral care; and in shared planning, discernment.

Pastoral expectations – grown more insistent because of anxiety (heightened sense of it being the pastors church, or working as a hired hand) Other places – greater care as pastors are in that group who are working longer hours than the already long hours they worked before.

Anne Horton -EPC pastor in Ohio, commented on a FB post: *A few weeks ago, webinars and articles began popping up about "how to pastor during a pandemic." First, we already are...no pastor I know is sitting around doing nothing. Second, no one has done this before, so no one has special knowledge. Third...most of us don't have the technology or staff to do what is suggested. One pastor I talked to has a staff of three clergy and four full-time support staff, all of*

whom were working at the church the entire time. She began telling me about all the things they were doing to minister to people...several Zoom Bible studies, small groups, a daily video in an email (my people do NOT need to hear from me that often), etc. It does feel overwhelming and I have at times fallen into the comparison trap and thought, "I need to be doing more, more, more." My Session has been a good voice of reason for me and has said...you've overdone it. Stop. I'm taking Mon-Fri off next week as a stay-cation (I had a vacation planned that obviously got cancelled since where I was going is a hotbed of COVID), and my personnel chair is going to be on-call for me.

This is the testimony of HOW we are that is the foundation for what we do in our neighborhoods. (How they love one another)

III. On the Outside – let's celebrate the ministry that has gone on beyond the walls, our ability to stay on mission and the significance of that work.

The power of the local church is that it is a visible representation of the kingdom. This is a missional moment and we need to recognize that ministry precedes message.

In this time of crisis, how is the ordinary church making itself felt in the community? Hunkered down or reaching out?

Often, in our own eyes, the ministry work we do can seem quite insignificant. I want to share some instances where significant work is going on. These may be representative of what you are doing.

One church said: We've held drive-in services, done some small group neighborhood clean-ups, gone from zero to 60 with our Facebook Live streaming services and Zoom Bible studies. We passed out Easter bags instead of a hunt, we have distributed food to the needy, assisted Gleaners distributions and DPS home-education fliers. We have tutored kids virtually

Support of front-line workers, Seniors in community – projects and food

Another church reported: We have been able to collect food and toiletries for needy families in our community.

Food Pantry's

In lieu of our summer mission project to Appalachia we donated the money for the trip and work to their new food pantry.

There have been drive-by handouts of food, school supplies, games, library books

Benevolence funds have become critically important to help those in need.

Never forget your mission. This is an essential time to engage – not recklessly, but thoughtfully. It is a chance to do Gospel Work on a very local and personal level – non-anxious, trusting, as people of peace.

IV. Opportunities

What do we want to carry forward that we have learned during this time?

An opportunity to build on our deeply felt need to be in community.

An opportunity to serve the “least of these.”

Josh Laxton – shared in a recent blog post on the Short- and Long-Term effects of COVID -19: *Caring for seniors and the vulnerable populations in senior communities, senior assisted living, and nursing homes will be a vital need.*

An opportunity to care for those who are struggling emotionally, as well as spiritually. Need to have the possibility of a type of PTSD on our radar. Everyone will be wondering when it will be ok to hug our friends. Get your Deacons, Stephens Ministry, Counselors and Coaches lined up.

Churches will have to navigate a deeply divided culture with deep trust issues.

An opportunity to be an integral part of the solution, the re-building. Live and act in truly gospel, grace centered ways – more than we ever have before. Forefront of mercy ministries, support for those who will be trying to find new employment and careers, engagement with the marginalized in our communities.

An opportunity to move from going it on our own. (Silo) Access other organizations

Convoy of Hope

City Serve

Network, build relationships

Rural Matters Institute

Small Church organizations (95 Network, etc.)

An opportunity to look forward instead of back. (Mr. Petrie)

V. Questions

Is this a time to be defined not by “We are the people who go to THAT church”, but rather, we are the people who are the church?

As we emerge, how will our neighbors define us? How will we be in the real new normal ahead of us?

How has this time helped you to know your community better?

How are we helping our congregations look forward instead of backward?