



Leading In Difficult Times

As you consider the current state and local COVID advisories

It's Thursday morning and the phone is ringing off the hook and the text and emails are piling up. Many of you have questions and frustrations regarding the increasing burdens placed upon your ministries due to state and your county's corona virus concerns. Cities like Columbus, Cleveland, Akron and their county health departments have incorporated resolutions which are challenging and onerous to many of our congregations who are having in person worship services and small group meetings.

First, we are honored when our congregations and shepherd leaders need advice. Thank you for your trust in us! Please know that we are working hard to continue earning that trust. As COGO (Church of God Ohio) Ministries continues to strive to be a service center to both our 200 plus congregations and now over 700 licensed and ordained ministers, we welcome the opportunity to provide counsel, clarity and wisdom.

Second, we know that the Thanksgiving to Christmas season is a particularly special time for many congregations with multiple opportunities to be *salt and light* in your community. The thought of going online only again and missing those opportunities is gut-wrenching. Please know that we are praying for you daily as you serve on the front line. You are an *essential worker!*

Third, we must keep front and center in our thinking and decision-making that we are under a state of emergency but that this is a crisis that will end. Emergencies call for decisions that are temporary, out of the norm, and even feel unnatural but are made to enable us to get to a post-emergency place as healthy as possible. The decisions you make now are not meant to create a pattern for the future. They are meant to meet the crisis.

Fourth, do not let fear of financial loss or even loss of people from your congregation guide your decision-making. Believe that the one who said, "...I'll build my church..." will not allow the gates of hell to prevail against her! Rather join us in asking the Lord to reveal to us why these days have fallen upon us and more importantly what is the way forward.

And lastly, I do not believe that there is one right or one wrong answer that applies to all of the congregations in Ohio. We are diverse in size, geography, space, and demographics. This is where you must do your homework, pray like the church depended upon it (because it does), and make the necessary decisions.

As you, your staff, and church leaders consider and pray through the growing challenges of this crisis and answer the questions surrounding meeting in person, we offer the following counsel ...

- Pastors and Church Leaders, do not carry the burden by yourself, seek to reach agreement among the leadership of your church. Then, with one voice, inform the church of your decision. Remember that Leaders Lead, through the good, the bad and the difficult times of ministry.
- Always check the state health departments website for updated Covid-19 policies. Remember that knowledge is POWER. To date the church has not been mandated any restrictions, but certainly the guidelines are applicable to the local church.
- Check with your local health department to verify if they have modified their local guidelines, that may be stricter than the current state mandates.
- Review your local church Covid-19 “Policies and Procedures” and make whatever adjustments needed to comply with “Policies and Procedures” coming from your local and state government.
- Meet with your Covid team to confer and work toward consensus.
- Put some dates on the calendar for you to re-visit your decisions. Remember we are in a state of emergency so things can and will change quickly. It will help your leadership and the church to know that you are monitoring the situation and ready to take action accordingly.
- If you have no Covid policies or team, please refer to our resource links on our website: cogo.church/Resources-for-pastors. Seek counsel so that you are confident your actions will NOT cause a REPROACH upon your ministry/congregation.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate with your people of your decisions and the rationale for them. Invite them into the solutions. Let them know the challenges that your decision brings.

The Church has lived through many times of uncertainty and onerous burdens placed upon her. She has not only survived those times, but through prayer, patience and commitment to be the “Light of the World”, she was victorious in battle!

Today is our turn to hold up the shield of faith. Through prayer, patience and our unified desire to be the “Light of the World”, we can be victorious in spite of the challenges that surrounds public safety, our religious freedoms, and most importantly our call to be the Church. Now more than ever, may we be found to be a people of prayer and faith. And may we be known for our wisdom, understanding and love!

Whatever your decisions will be, know that both Demetrius and I are here to walk with you. As the Apostle Paul so profoundly exhorted, “Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (I Thes 5:16-18).

Better Together!

Esther

State Pastor and Director of Ministry | COGO Ministries
