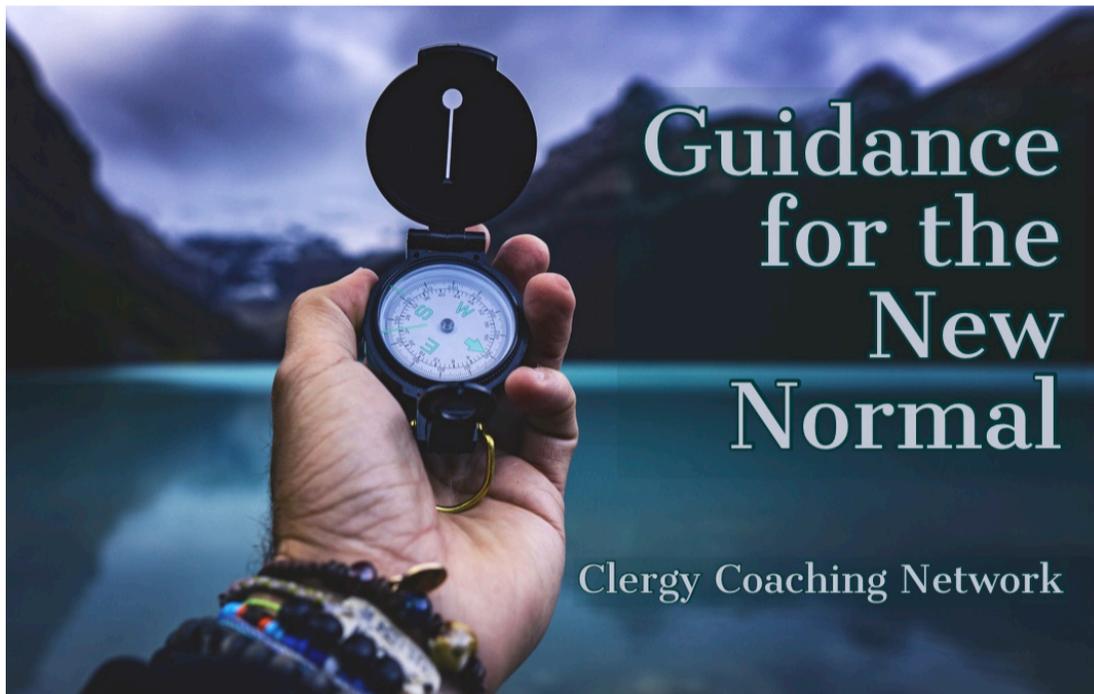


Clergy Coaching Network Blog

Helping clergy and ministry leaders experience the joy of transformative leadership!

Guidance for the New Normal



Rick Kirchoff

At Clergy Coaching Network, we've been curating the best articles about the future of the church in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic. As we've done this work and as we've listened to the challenges and creativity of our coaching clients, we are drawing several conclusions.

What follows is a summary of the insights of the best ideas about the future of the church. (A complete list of our sources is at the end of this article.)

Tony Morgan writes:

"I'm noticing two types of church leaders right now. One type of church leader is just waiting for things to go back to normal so that we can get back to doing church the way we've always done church. The question they're asking me is this: *"When do you think we'll be able to reopen our churches?"*

Then he adds: "I'm hearing many pastors talking about everything returning to normal in May. That could happen in portions of our country, but most of us will not be returning to large social gatherings, including church services until widespread testing and vaccines are available. That's going to be many months from now.

Between now and then, there may be some loosening of guidelines where large social gatherings are allowed. But as cases return and increase again (because widespread testing and vaccines are not

available), the guidelines will tighten again.

I hope I'm wrong, but *I think church leaders need to be planning for a full year before large social gatherings are happening throughout the entire country without restrictions. Are you prepared for that?*"

(The best estimate of epidemiologists is that some social distancing may need to persist into 2022 in the USA to keep the surge of people severely sickened by COVID-19 from overwhelming the health care system. – Journal of Science, April 14, 2020)

Tony Morgan identifies the second type of church leader he's starting to encounter.

"They aren't so concerned about *when* we might return to normal, because they realize what we've experienced...and will continue to experience for many months...is going to force the church to change. *Normal isn't coming back.* The question they're instead asking is this: *'How must the church change for a new normal?'* And they are ready to start making those changes now. They are not waiting for their church doors to reopen.

Susan Beaumont concurs:

"Crisis moments call for strong, decisive action—people want to know that someone is in charge, and things are being managed. But once the initial crisis calms, a period of disorientation sets in as we find our way to a new normal. The resolute leadership style that worked well during the initial crisis won't work well in this ongoing unsettled space.

We are in a liminal season, stuck between an ending and a new beginning. The pathway forward is not knowable. The way we "did church" even two months ago is done. We have literally been thrown out of our buildings by a pandemic. We can reassure people (and ourselves) by pretending the disruption is temporary. "We will resume all normal activity soon." That reassurance is not helpful or truthful."

And in another article, Ken Braddy adds,

"We will not go back to business as usual in our churches. If you think we'll all rush back to church and pick up where we left off, don't kid yourself – it's not going to happen. Or at least it *shouldn't* happen."

If they (and their colleagues) are correct, and we believe they are, how will we begin to adapt to the is new normal? What innovations are needed now and in the future? What questions do we need to address now, before people return to our church facilities?

As I've listened to what others are writing and saying, here are some tentative thoughts. What follows is wide-ranging and is admittedly somewhat overwhelming. But I invite you to examine these ideas, glean what is useful, discard the rest, and build a plan that is right for you and your context.

And realize that no strategy, even the best one, survives intact after it encounters reality and human

frailty. So, my best wisdom is to build a strong prayer team as you venture into this challenge.

In addition, seek to build your plan with a congregational team that includes wise influence leaders and those who will be able to interpret the program to those who are resistant or even obstructionist. This team will help you both gather accurate information and make informed decisions. For more about this team, check out the third point in this article: (<https://outreachmagazine.com/features/leadership/53337-principles-for-leading-through-the-coronavirus-pandemic.html>)

IN LIGHT OF THE CORONAVIRUS, SAFETY CONCERNS (INCLUDING SANITIZING, FACE MASKS, AND SOCIAL DISTANCING) WILL RESHAPE MANY OF OUR CONGREGATIONS.

Some elements of social distancing will become permanent for churches as churches become less “tactile.” Stand and Greet is Dead; church huggers will no longer be tolerated, and for a time, handshakes will be off-limits.

You’ll want to provide hand sanitizing stations and places where people can get a face mask.

Guests/Newcomers will be asking: Is it safe to attend? Hand sanitizing stations are only the beginning. Safety concerns will impact the size of worship attendance, sanitizing of the nursery, restrooms, door handles, stations for hand sanitizer, even the smell. Does it smell clean?

Many churches will need to decide whether to add and/or shorten worship services to accommodate people while allowing for social distancing.

If physical gatherings are limited in size to accommodate the need for social distancing, you have options:

- (1) offer more services
- (2) encourage people to continue worshipping online
- (3) remove pews/chairs from your worship space to help people avoid close contact
- (4) block off pews/chairs so that people no longer sit right behind someone, reducing the chances of them sneezing or coughing directly into the back of the person in front of them.

How will you sanitize and sterilize your entire church building? You’ll likely want to consult your local health department to learn about proper sanitizing measures and their recommendation for your congregation. With that information, you’ll plan to regularly sanitize your worship space and all classrooms (especially those where children meet because of the toys and other items they touch during the course of a Sunday or Wednesday class experience, as well as pre-school).

Have you sprayed or wiped pews and chairs with disinfectant? Who is wiping doorknobs and handles?

Have you had carpet cleaned and disinfected? Now is the time for all this to take place, not the week of the “you can go back to church” announcement by government officials. Will implementation of this gives rise to a new team of people on campus whose ministry it is to walk around wiping doorknobs and other surfaces? Who is going to clean restrooms throughout the time that people are in the facility? Remember, you’ll have hundreds (some of your churches may have thousands) of people touching things while they are on campus.

The Nursery and other children’s spaces will be a top concern for parents. They may view kids’ area as a Petri dish into which they are throwing their children. If we don’t accommodate for sanitized nursery spaces and other children’s rooms, should parents take their kids to worship, practice physical distancing, and keep a close eye on their little ones?

How will safety concerns impact the Choir and other elements of your music ministry? How can social distancing guidelines be maintained when choirs practice and present in spaces that do not provide a 6-foot distance? Does singing help to spread the virus? And what about wearing face masks while trying to sing? What about handbells and keyboards?

Something to consider: In a recent article in Infection Control Today, Dr. Kevin Kavanagh, writes about choirs and singing: “Why am I calling out churches? The answer is asymptomatic spread and aerosolization of the virus from singing. It’s been determined that this virus is much more infectious than the flu. National leaders are now saying 3 times as infectious, giving the epidemic a Ro of approximately 4. This probably requires other methods of transmission than from sneezing and coughing. And if approximately 50% of individuals catch this virus from asymptomatic carriers, one must ask, how are these carriers spreading the virus? They are not coughing and sneezing. The answer is probably aerosolization, were the virus can float in the air and be picked up later by an unsuspecting passerby. The virus has been observed to survive in an aerosol form for up to 3 hours. Thus, singing and church choirs may be the worst practice one can participate in.”

How will you sanitize the multiple TouchPoints in your worship experience? These include door handles, pew or seat backs, hymnals, offering plates, communion practices, worship bulletins, shake hands with the pastor and others, church dinners, classroom gatherings, recreation & fitness facilities, elevator buttons.

How will you provide for Weddings, Baptisms, and Funerals and do it safely?

And what about coffee time? Many churches have invested serious dollars in creating a coffee shop or self-serve coffee experience for groups and classes. Is that still a good idea? Gathering areas with tables and chairs may need to be placed in storage so that people don’t congregate within a couple of feet of one another.

What about your Greeters ministry? Do door greeters do their jobs differently, or at all? Will you have door greeters? Seriously?! But you’ve always had door greeters. But in a COVID-19 world, do you want a door greeter holding the door open while a parishioner walks by within a foot or two of them? The new normal may be to provide automatic door openers and ask greeters to stand back six feet, inside the church

building, and welcome people verbally without opening the door for them.

Some clergy believe that the best way to approach all of this is by developing a “health team,” made up of wise leaders, who will review these recommendations, those of the CDC and local health leaders, and give guidance to the congregation.

Welcome to the new sanitizing world COVID-19 has created.

SMALLER & MULTIPLE WORSHIP SERVICES COULD BECOME NORMAL

What if epidemiologists recommend that social distancing protocols continue and your worship gathering is initially limited to no more than 50 or 100 people? If we are limited to a smaller number by healthcare leaders, what is your plan to provide a place and time for all attendees to worship?

One primary strategy is, of course, to continue to offer worship online.

Another strategy is to add worship services to accommodate attendees.

So, it is likely that smaller worship services will become normal. There is already a trend of churches moving to smaller worship gatherings, even if the church was growing. In a COVID-19 world, we may need to anticipate capping services attendance at a size that allows for proper social distancing. As a result, the 80% rule will become the 50-60% rule for worship gatherings. The 80% rule said that a worship center with a capacity of 200 feels full at 160 (80%). The 50-60% rule will say the congregation will want more social distancing, and thus the 200-capacity worship center will reach its social distancing capacity at 100-120. (T Rainer)

RATHER THAN THE COMMUNITY COMING TO CHURCH, THE CHURCH WILL GO TO THE COMMUNITY

For too long, some church leaders have devised strategies to get guests to “come to church.” The pandemic is forcing us to see that the church building is only a gathering point, not an ultimate destination. How can you lead the churches right now to find ways to be a real ministry and influence in the community? How will you enable the church to go to the community rather than pushing the community to go to church? (Thom Rainer)

James Emery White writes: “Churches have been forced to move from a weekend-centric, crowd approach to a seven-day-a-week, incarnational approach. While every church should embrace, celebrate, and promote corporate worship, too many churches made that celebration the end-all for the life of the church. We say that the church isn’t bricks and mortar, but a community of faith that can be strategically served by bricks and mortar. Yet too many churches were never leaving the building. The goal of the church is to be the church in the community where it resides, attempting to

reach and serve in the name of Jesus. The pandemic has broken us out of our gospel ghettos and holy huddles and into the neighborhoods and streets where we live.”

Churches are being brought back to their mission. When all of your methods and practices have been stripped away, you are left with something raw and unfiltered. It's called your mission. Churches around the world are finding that much of what they had been doing to *fulfill* the mission had *become* the mission. Now, they are beginning to see the actual mission in a new and liberating light.

This includes doing the work of Making Disciples for the Transformation of the World.

And it includes feeding people who are adversely impacted by the Coronavirus Shutdown. So many are out of work, and the need is great! Support your local Food Bank. Our metro area food bank can feed 300 for \$100. If your community has no Food Bank, look at starting your own or doing food distribution cooperatively with other churches and/or service groups.

THE DIGITAL CHURCH IS HERE TO STAY & INTERNET WILL BE A BIG FRONT DOOR

Many churches have resisted the migration into the virtual world, but the coronavirus has taken many congregations into a quick immersion into the digital age. The initial forays have been to introduce digital giving and to Livestream some form of worship services. But coronavirus is the tipping point of much more to come in the digital world.

It seems that Digital is here to stay. And, churches will be shifting to making this a primary platform for everything they do rather than just a stream of their Sunday services.

Carey Nieuwhof writes:

“Some churches may think of their recent foray into Facebook Live as a means to provide a worship experience for their people is a temporary thing – a stop-gap measure during some extraordinary days. They look forward to the day that online services give way to worship experiences on campus. But is that the right strategy? Church leaders say their worship attendance and group attendance are up – significantly – because people are finding them online.

What's kept a lot of church leaders from truly embracing online services or an expanded online ministry?

One main thing: worry about a drop in physical attendance. Until now, too many pastors have concerned about the internet as a back door.

That's because until now, most church leaders have kept score by how many people *physically* attend their church.

I realize numbers matter because people matter, but it's strange that we value the people we can see physically more than we value the people we can see digitally. That's doubly strange if people actually matter to God.

Pastors have resisted online ministry, argued video teaching doesn't work and fails to invest seriously in anything digital because they've been worried it will become a back door through which people walk away.

Church online will continue to grow as a front door for the curious, the skeptic, and the interested. It will be the first stop for almost everyone, and a temporary resting place for people who are a little too afraid to jump in until they muster the courage to jump in through physical attendance.

Your online ministry is also a side door to Christians who, when travel resumes, won't be there on a given Sunday. Ironically, it will help them stay engaged because you're equipping them every day, not just on Sundays.

If you continue to behave like the world doesn't live online, you'll miss the very people you're trying to reach.

The future church (at least future churches that reach unchurched people) will no longer be in-person gathering with a smidge of online thrown in.

If people live every day in need of hope and resources to live out their faith (or to find faith) every day, church leaders have to start coming alongside people every day. Like many are doing right now.

That won't go away when things go back to 'normal.' There will be a new normal, and it will be a seamless interweaving of the digital and analog, just like life is these days.

Starting now, Sunday-focused churches will become every day-focused churches because people need to live out their faith every day."

So, should you be investing in new digital equipment right now? Yes, we've all hopped online and used Facebook Live to broadcast our worship services. Some of us are doing that with iPads and other devices, but is this the time to admit that online worship is probably here to stay? If yes, then it makes sense to invest dollars now so that quality cameras, microphones, and other equipment that will help the church be more engaging in the new online world of worship.

STAFFING FOR ONLINE WILL BE A PRIORITY

For years Carey Nieuwhof has suggested that church leaders asking if online counts is like Sears asking if Amazon counts. Suddenly that conversation seems more real than ever. Of course, online counts. Just because real-life counts doesn't mean that online doesn't, and just because online counts doesn't mean

real-life doesn't. They BOTH matter!

Here's the problem: most churches spend somewhere between 90-100% of their staff dollars on in-person experiences: Sunday gatherings, groups, events, community service.

With only a few exceptions, even in large churches, the paucity of resources given to online resources is staggering.

What usually happens is the senior leader gives the website, streaming, and social media to a teenage volunteer or to some 20-something staffer who 'understands that stuff,' tacking it on to his or her already full-time job description. Alternatively, the senior pastor outsources it as a line item in the budget to some third-party service he doesn't even know the name

Now is the time to rethink how to redistribute staffing for when things go back to 'normal' because normal won't be the way it was. It will be a new normal. Churches that reach people in the future will staff online as though it's real because it is.

OUR ONLINE SERMONS WILL IMPROVE AND TAKE ON A NEW LIFE

A crisis is a cradle for innovation. So, when it comes to the sermon, it is a great time to innovate.

Many pastors are discovering what it's like to see and listen to themselves preach. And for some of us, it is a rude awakening. Speaking into a camera takes a unique skill set, and most leaders are choosing to go shorter rather than longer. But brevity alone is not the answer. The issues are too numerous and lengthy to address here, so here is a link from Carey Nieuwhof that may help us all to be better online communicators. ([Here are some pro-tips on that](#)).

You can easily make messages interactive. Having live-chat during sermons can allow your hosts to engage with people, and at the very end of the service on Sunday, take live questions from people about the message.

You can start to film in advance and make the messages more creative, almost taking a cinematic approach to it.

To help in speaking directly to the camera, some preachers are investing in readily available, low-cost teleprompters that can be used with smartphones and pads.

SOCIAL DISTANCING WILL CHANGE SOME WORSHIP TRADITIONS IN MANY CHURCHES.

As mentioned above, the "stand and greet" time is dead, at least in the way many have done it. This

practice has been on the decline in recent days. Many churches have already abandoned it because of its ineffectiveness with guests, not because of COVID-19 concerns.

Is a physical “pass the plate” offering a thing of the past? How would you feel if you were the 100th person in a worship service to touch the offering plate that 99 other people just touched?

What adjustments will you need to make to Communion, baptisms, and your choir ministry? Do you believe you can conduct communion as you have in the past? Your church’s tradition may involve passing a plate of elements, or it may include drinking from a common cup in some denominations. Will you use the self-contained juice and cracker cups? What about baptism – it’s going to be impossible to practice physical distancing in a baptism pool. And as one reader said, “What do I do about my church’s choir program?” He realizes that people standing side-by-side won’t be practical.

DIGITAL GIVING WILL BE THE NORM

Non-digital giving will become an outlier. Fewer people will want to handle the offering plates or buckets or touch cash. Watch for a dramatic decrease in non-digital giving. Make sure you are moving your church to digital giving.

Have someone in your church who can help the digitally challenged to set up online giving for them.

You and your leadership can explore how to help people understand how to do an automatic bank draft, set up online giving, and even provide a non-pass-the-plate option for those who wish to give their gift when they come to worship.

For a deeper dive into online giving, check out this webinar and summary: <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/online-giving-through-covid19>

SENIOR ADULT MINISTRY WILL UNDERGO DRAMATIC CHANGE

Because older adults are at higher risk from COVID-19, they may be the last to return to in-person worship and other congregational activities. This is not to say that they don’t want to return, but they do not want to take the risk. In a recent post, Carey Nieuwhof asked this poignant question: “For those who lead multi-generational or older congregations, what if a good chunk of your church *shouldn’t* gather for a year or two?”

One older adult friend has remarked that he and his wife do not plan to return to church until there is a proven vaccination. They continue to worship online, connect with church friends, and give, but they will not attend until it is proven safe. They are missing the church, their friends, their volunteer activities in the church. They want to return, but for them, church gatherings can be dangerous. They

are hopeful that their congregation will offer online options, in addition to worship, so that they can fully participate in the community in this strange season.

In many congregations, they have organized service teams to reach out to their senior members to help them with errands, shop for groceries, and pick up medications.

One pastor just told me that in the three weeks, he had made more than 300 phone calls, making it a priority to “reach out and touch” the older members of his congregation.

Clergy can make phone calls and write letters. Phone calls and hand-written letters are low tech and no tech. But there is high value in the personal connection they bring.

Help Seniors access and learn a New technology: This might be FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and more. All sorts of online options exist to talk with family and friends. And you for many of these you don't have to be tech-savvy. Doing the basics is easy, and for most people, fun. If setting up an account is daunting, put together a team that can help, be on call, and give ready tutorials.

In some congregations, where older people do not have the technology, they are buying Chromebooks (costing less than \$300) and purchasing WIFI for those who are not connected. They've solicited donations to do this for unconnected seniors, and then have a servant team that helps older folks get set up and are available by phone to help when the new technology seems overwhelming.

Help older members find a ministry by reaching out to others from their homes. It may sound counterintuitive. How can you remain a part of the community and serve even if you are sheltering at home? Seniors can make phone calls to check in on others. They can write letters of encouragement.

Reaching out to residents of Nursing Homes:

Pick a person and a day and shower that person with greeting cards.

Reach out the nursing home social worker and explore having a 10-15-minute FaceTime meeting with the nursing home resident once a month. In that facetime visit, include a familiar hymn, a scripture, a personal check-in, a devotional thought, and prayer.

WE WILL BECOME CREATIVE & PERSONAL IN OUR DISCIPLESHIP PLANS

Two options: Online Groups & One-on-One Coaching

Online groups: You can begin by taking your current face-to-face classes and groups online.

Many have already done this.

Take your membership class online.

Here's some guidance from someone who's been leading online groups for over a decade: <https://catalystchurchcreative.com/coronavirus-online-groups/>

One-on-One Discipleship Coaching:

One of the most creative approaches to discipleship that we've seen in this time comes from Ken Willard, Director of Discipleship, Leadership, and Congregational Vitality for the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church.

It is called Digital Discipleship Coaching. Discipleship Coaching builds on three foundations:

1. As followers of Jesus Christ, people want and need to grow as disciples. None of us are finished growing into the image of Christ. This is a lifelong process sometimes known as sanctification, or as John Wesley called it, "becoming perfected in love."
2. Spiritual disciplines are the building blocks of discipleship. These behaviors and actions are the means by which we best grow as disciples of Jesus. By taking intentional steps in the spiritual disciplines, over time, we become more fully devoted followers of Christ.
3. Coaching is a partnership process designed to help a disciple best discern their next steps. By asking powerful questions and then actively listening, the coach acts as a spiritual guide.

Discipleship Coaching happens best in one-on-one situations. Most people, no matter how long they have been in church, have never had a one-on-one conversation with anyone about their spiritual growth. With everything suddenly being forced online, now is a perfect time to schedule a conversation. People in our congregations need the connection and the encouragement to continue their discipleship journey. To learn more about this one-on-one discipleship plan, go to <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10205/digital-discipleship-coaching>

If Ken's plan doesn't seem right for you and our context, how could you adapt the program to reflect more of your gift, temperament, and the needs of those in your congregation?

BUDGETS AND STAFFING WILL HAVE TO REFLECT THESE NEW REALITIES

The issues regarding church finances and staffing are too complex and contextual to address here.

So, we will point you to several web resources that offer ideas, models, and plans. What follows is not an exhaustive listing, but it will help you and your leadership to begin a conversation about these critical issues. We encourage you to take a deep dive into these sites and discern what approaches are most helpful for your context.

Finances:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/10-ideas-for-church-financial-leaders-amid-the-covid-19-crisis>

<https://samrainer.com/2020/03/creating-a-financial-plan-for-your-church-during-the-outbreak/>

<https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/leading-staff-reorganizations>

<https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/stewardship-giving-through-crisis>

Staffing:

<https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/critical-components-of-restructuring-staff>

<https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/leading-staff-reorganizations>

The coaches at Clergy Coaching Network are available to assist you and your congregation as you navigate these challenging times. You can learn more about us and our work at www.clergycoachingnetwork.com or you can email me at rickccnet@gmail.com.

Sources:

What will The Post Coronavirus Church Look Like? <https://tinyurl.com/u27wp6o>

The Current Crisis is Accelerating the Future Church: <https://tinyurl.com/u9xmrrpd>

The Church is now a Blank Slate: <https://tinyurl.com/rg5shmb>

5 Predictions About the Future Church: <https://tinyurl.com/rowp53a>

Five Ways You Will be a Different Pastor: <https://tinyurl.com/w8z3qjk>

Seven Shifts the Church Needs to Make: <https://tinyurl.com/y7ku4ov9>

24 Questions Your Church Should Answer: <https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

5 Ways the Pandemic is Saving the Church: <https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2020/4/20/5-ways-the-pandemic-is-saving-the-church>

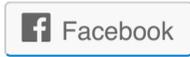
Finding Our New Normal: <https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/finding-our-new-normal/>

A Financial Plan During the Outbreak: <https://samrainer.com/2020/03/creating-a-financial-plan->

[for-your-church-during-the-outbreak/](#)

For a variety of articles and curated webinars about leadership and finances during this crisis: www.vanderbloemen.com/blog

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