

LEADING IN A TIME OF CRISIS

BY EMMA SYKES

As I write this, we are facing unprecedented times trying to cope with the spread of Covid 19, a global pandemic. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have issued a joint letter acknowledging what an 'unusual and painful time' it is for everyone and as such have requested that all public worship in the Church of England stop for a season and urge us to look at new ways of serving our communities.

The Government has stopped all non-essential travel, social distancing measures are coming into force and with it panic buying and economic uncertainty and ruin for many. And as ever, in times of crisis, it is the most vulnerable in society and in our world who are the first to feel the full force of the impact, bear the greatest cost to life and take the longest to recover economically.

How as church leaders do we enable action in such a time as this? And more fundamentally, WHAT is the action we should be enabling in such unprecedented times?

Chris Green gives seven helpful phrases in a recent blog entitled '[Leading in a time of uncertainty](#)' which I have used to help offer some insight into enabling the most appropriate action in such times as these:

1. 'MODEL TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGN GOODNESS'

I find Ignatian spirituality, centered in Christ, an incredibly deep well to draw on in times of difficulty. It can be summed up as 'finding God in all things' which is easy when life goes well, but much harder in dark times. However, as Christians, we have the conviction

that God is with us in all things and as Christian leaders we need to especially root ourselves in this reality.

We need to model being a non-anxious presence, which means not denying the seriousness of the situation that we face, or becoming panic stricken and fearful, but instead recognizing that 'perfect love drives out fear' (1 John 4:18). As Fr Damian Howard SJ, the Jesuit Provincial writes:

'We need to trust in the Lord, in the power of his grace to bring good out of even the most painful situation, and to remember that this crisis will end, and that life will go on. It is from confidence in Christ that will flow the spirit of tenderness, care and solidarity which we rely on to serve Him as he desires.'

Or as Chris Green writes 'we need to believe our beliefs and apply them'. Now is the time more than ever to demonstrate that the church of Christ Jesus is an instrument of hope and blessing in a broken world.

2. 'BE WELL INFORMED'

In deciding the right action to take and when, it is important to know what the latest advice is. Don't get involved in wild speculation but instead stick to the facts and keep up to date with reliable news sources. Wherever your leadership context is, make sure that you take the advice of the organisation you are part of.



Most larger organisations will have regular updates and give advice. If you are a leader in the Church of England, then take the advice given centrally and keep an eye on helpful tips and resources that you can use in your ministry contexts.

3. 'TALK TO ONE ANOTHER'

Help each other to take the right action by sharing good practice, whether that's as a team, if you are in a larger church context, or across your multi-parish benefice with other clergy and lay leaders, as well as across your chapter, deanery and other networks. I was very encouraged by a church leader recently who had put some worship resources together for her parishioners to use at home and she had already shared it with some lay leaders who were holding a church in vacancy in another part of the diocese. If you come up with an idea that is easily replicated, enable action elsewhere and share it, particularly with the under resourced churches in your area. Likelihood is, they will have to help the most vulnerable with the least amount of resources.

4. 'DUMP NON-ESSENTIAL AND HIGHEST-RISK ACTIVITY'

To a certain extent, this decision has been made for us. All non-essential gatherings have been cancelled and travel is being restricted. However, what is our priority as church leaders, and, more importantly, as Christian hope bearers in this time of crisis? In a recent article from the gospel coalition, drawing on Rodney Stark's book 'The Rise of Christianity', it examines the rise of this 'obscure marginal Jesus movement' and the dramatic impact that the plagues had in contributing to that rise. The common theme in all four historical plagues he looks at is the remarkable response that believers had in caring for the sick, showing compassion and offering real hope in a time of crisis: 'Plagues intensify the natural course of life. They intensify our own sense of mortality and frailty. They also intensify opportunities to display countercultural, counterconditional love.' Our priority is to find ways, within the restrictions given, to display abundant acts of love, particularly to the already isolated and lonely.

5. 'DELEGATE AUTHORITY'

I have been impressed with a number of church leaders I know, who have already held emergency meetings to start planning how to care for the older and vulnerable people in their churches and communities. Vulnerable people have been identified, needs assessed and responsibilities to care for them have been broken down into small and manageable tasks which have ranged from setting up a phone call rota to check in on people, to arranging to shop and deliver food. The church leaders could not possibly manage this task by

themselves, even in a smaller church context, so enlist the help of others.

6. 'ASK THE UNASKABLE QUESTION'

Chris Green suggests, 'One element of leading through uncertainty is always to ask, 'What does this make possible?' We are being urged by the Archbishops to serve our communities and be church in new and creative ways. Now is the time to put those creative ideas into action. Have you wondered if skyping services could be possible, or videoing sermons and live streaming them or conducting a prayer and bible study session via zoom or other similar platform? Find out more, have a go and share with your colleagues.

7. 'BE UMISSEABLY CLEAR'

Communication is key when enabling action, and clear communication is essential. There are a lot of mixed messages, so don't be another confusing voice in amongst it all. More helpful insights from Chris Green:

'End each [likely to be virtual] meeting with those two questions: 'What's the next action?' And 'Who else needs to know?' No-one gets out of the room until you're all agreed.

And then, as you talk to your church, be warm, be positive, and be clear. Remember, we speak in the name of a living God, before whom nothing is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex or Ambiguous. Speak in his name to his people.'

As we head on into this changing landscape:

'So may we:

Point to the sinking sand of the world—the weakness of our flesh, the uncertainty of the markets, the mortality of us all.

Preach and prize Christ the Rock—knowing that he alone can, and he alone will, weather the storms.

Love our neighbors—moving, in Christ, toward those in need.

And may God be pleased to work again through this trial to glorify Christ's name and extend his kingdom.' Amen.

www.thegospelcoalition.org