

Life and Ministry Pre- and Post-Pandemic

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Has your ministry life/work changed over the course of the past 2 years? If so, how?

I have, and we have, had to pivot. There were several areas we weren't prepared for, including the need for a platform for streaming services, which we eventually found in Zoom. We were meeting at a school pre-pandemic, which then shut down, causing a significant pivot, forcing us to shift where and how we do ministry and how we help people find a place of belonging. As a predominantly Black church, we also found ourselves trying to navigate the issue/implications of George Floyd. We have had to mature, adjust and grow into a new norm. It's been a battle and there have been some casualties, minor and major. COVID is and has been real and we have had to ignore the work of the magicians who have a pattern of distracting, enticing and inviting in through the art of misdirection. I've been drawn to Numbers 16 and the story of Moses and Aaron, Aaron standing between the dead and the living. All of this serves to reposition the Church/church.

Have other aspects of your life changed over the past 2 years? If so, how?

It's taken me to Joshua 5 and the armies of Heaven (neither for us nor against us). The past 2 years have divided us. The Kingdom and believers are to seek, choose and represent the 3rd option, the higher cause. Black is not enough for me anymore. I've needed to find balance in the divisiveness and evaluate which side I find myself on. I've had to change myself when it comes to divisiveness and the energy poured into decisions. The need for and value/importance of healthy living/leadership has been amplified.

Has your relationship with the church (and Church), your family, your friends, your staff/colleagues, ... changed in the last 2 years? If so, how?

My relationship with the church hasn't changed much, if at all. We've continued to find ways to make a big church small. I have always been very available and there aren't many layers someone needs to go through to reach me.

In my relationship with my family, God had a prophetic assignment for me. In September 2019, my doctor recommended I get the flu shot and a pneumonia vaccine and, for some reason, I heard that. I hadn't had a flu vaccine in 30 years and wasn't even aware that there was a pneumonia vaccine. I told my wife and son about what my doctor had recommended and why, that everything (health) began with respiratory wholeness. It was prophetic and protective within my relationship with my family.

With my colleagues at church, we are still mask responsible. We meet in a small space and the problems haven't gone away. Reporting is impacted by at home testing. Prophetically, God hasn't given us freedom to not mask in this community yet. I'm conscious of my 87 year-old mom. We will not give in to the selfishness of the divisive spirit, the always I that threatens to cause us to forget our integratedness.

Have the past two years changed you? Your relationships? The church/congregation you serve? The team you are a part of (and/or lead)? The leadership/elder board? Expectations and responsibilities? If so, how?

Yes, absolutely. The pursuit of an equitable balance between where people are has been amplified. Marriages have been impacted as there's more anxiety and tension because of the demands at home; we've seen one incidence of spousal abuse as a result of the stresses placed on families who are now working and learning from home. Advocacy is always who/what I have been; the result of being the first of six siblings. God has anointed me with the gift of sensitivity; I can never go in a straight line. I am a broken, failed and fragile brother. This has served as a hearing test as I had become tone deaf in certain conversations; I've had to open my ears, repent of my tone deafness and take my filters off. On December 29, 2021, I took a 24 hr vow of silence. I created a card that said, "Today, I'm honoring a vow of silence, ..." I wanted to come into 2022 a better listener, well versed in the art of silence. I needed to close my mouth and listen; lots of other cultures take vows of silence and I wanted to learn from them.

What are your greatest needs currently?

I don't have all that I want, but I think I have all that I need. We would love to have a building of our own, a place we could call home. I'm not sure we want to go back to the school. We'd like to find a place that's affordable and in the areas God has called us to do ministry.

What are the greatest needs of your colleagues, congregation, leadership team, Board, ...?

Within our community, I love how they trust and care for me. I want more resources for them; marriage counseling, parent/child counseling, substance abuse resources. I'd like to have someone who's qualified to engage in conversations about navigating dysfunction and disunity. I'd like greater resources and a deeper well at a professional level; readily available (fluid), internal and/or external. A combination of tangible, sustainable, measurable care that people could lean into. There's an intimacy that I'd love to see where we could encourage one another from our own brokenness, vulnerability and experiences. In order for us to be canals, our reservoirs need to be full. As pastors, we can't be everything.

Where are you feeling most energized/fulfilled? Where are you feeling most depleted?

Energized/fulfilled: my wife calls me the consummate optimist. I've always believed in possibility/potential. I'm wired to work best in times of chaos. I'm energized by beauty from ashes (it's in my DNA). I'm excited about navigating 2022 to 2023 and seeing the maturity that will result.

Depleted: socially. In the areas of justice and equity, there is more work to do outside the church that's flowing into the church. I'm aware of what people are bringing in; their trauma, abuse, injustices, mental illness and agendas.

What currently gives you hope? What currently causes you the greatest concern?

Concern: the legacy of the church that will come out of this era. I'm seeing a great disconnect (among our young people) from the church. I'm reminded of what Dr. King said in 1968, if the church doesn't regain its sense of relevance, ... How does the church show up in today's society/culture?

Hope: that we can avoid the pitter and really focus on the core mission and assignments of the church. That the church can be philanthropic, socially engaged, different ... so much better. That we

can be authentic and unapologetic; listening first, acknowledging our tone deafness and doing the work of opening our ears.