

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've switched roles. The pandemic sped up a transition into a co-lead pastor role. The pandemic made it clear that this is the right time.

There have been layers of challenges including people retiring from and/or quitting their roles. It's been a time of uncertainty.

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

There has been stress at home as my wife is a Physician's Assistant and we've been straddling life between science and faith. Through the pandemic, my wife would share that this is real, it kills people, and that it was hard to see people post non-sensical statements/comments.

At home, I've become a better cook/chef and have had to carry a lot of the home responsibilities. Personally, there's been a health stress. Pastors are non-traditional frontline workers, exposing ourselves to people. Currently, we're dealing with another wave of COVID and have five staff out, causing us to wonder, will this ever end?

I've lost three family members to COVID, one in March 2020 (cousin), one in December 2020 (former pastor) and one in late 2021 (aunt).

In a strange way, it's been a season of stability. We haven't added any children to our family, we've been in the same house, have operated off of the same income and have had the same jobs. It's brought my wife and I closer together as we've been able to spend lots of time together.

Within my new role, I've had additional decision making and policy making regarding masks, indoors/outdoors, etc. We've lost a lot of hard line, conservative people.

I have faith that what I'm doing matters, that the Gospel is more important than anything else ... but, I still don't want to die. I'm convinced that stopping services hurts people's faith and that there is power in the gathering.

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

The loss of face-to-face personal relationships. The experience of preaching into a camera. I'm an extrovert and love being with people. That was stripped away for 18 months to 2 years. As a result, I've sat with questions like, what am I called to do? What is shepherding? What fills my tank?

I've lost tons of relationships with church members who left, many of whom left silently. As Christians, we don't know how to leave/transition well. With silent departures, it's hard to not become resentful and cynical. I've had to guard my heart and have tried to not take it personal. People have blown me off and communicated that they never want to talk again. We've been misunderstood in

the decisions we've had to make, including in staffing decisions we made before and during the pandemic. COVID has added a whole other layer of pain and misunderstanding. With the pastor I mentioned, I saw him one Sunday and then never saw him again. With some congregational members, it's been the same thing.

I've grown closer to the lead pastoral team. We're going through this together and needed to know that we could trust one another (safety and sharing).

I've pressed into friendships on a deeper level, meeting up once a month to talk through pains and gains. These have provided safe spaces, whether with mentors, old high school friends, or others. These relationships have become sweeter.

I've been in a Soul Shepherding group with Dave Rimoldi, allowing space for support and prayer.

And, I've grown in my relationship with my bicycle (since March 2021). I've been bicycling three times a week and have lost 40 pounds. It's provided a holy space for the past year and three months.

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?

I've become more compassionate. I've done more funerals in the past 2 years that I did in the previous seven, only one of which was due to COVID. I've become a better pastor, shepherd, listening. I appreciate my wife more and the work that she does. The leaving of and criticism by former church members has made me a stronger person without becoming cynical. We're committed to deep transformation and discipleship; engaging in more challenging conversations.

It's taught me that life is a vapor ... that I'm a vapor and that I shouldn't take myself too seriously as I'm not all that. It's invited growth and awareness. I'm here to serve, inviting others to follow Jesus, not me. I'm just a vessel. It's been humbling.

What are your greatest needs currently?

Learning how to pursue God with my wife apart from church things/activities. Possibly a retreat for ministers and their spouses? Learning how that part of my life can become more vibrant. Counseling may be helpful, offering an opportunity to dive into the depths of what I've experienced. And, I'd appreciate spaces to be with others in ministry, to simply be humans without any comparisons.

I need to socialize more, to have fun, to engage in more opportunities like what Beth Balmer offers (Psalms retreat at Serra Retreat Center, paid for/subsidized).

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

For our church, to make sure their pastors are doing well. I don't think churches know how to care well for their pastors. Perhaps a dinner with just the Board and the pastors, to explore how to honor/care for one another. Spiritual formation opportunities.

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

Energized: by what we can do. It feels like we're planting a new church made up of new people; new believers, new unchurched, new non-believers. This is exciting. I'm also grateful for the collaboration in the city; a new vision for Long Beach providing opportunities to pray and fundraise together.

Depleted: navigating COVID and the loss of normalcy. Having to restart a lot of things from ground zero. Switching up staff. Feeling as though I'm a fixer all of the time.

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

Hope: young adults and youth taking up their faith and making it their own. Spiritual fervor. Knowing God's not done. The awareness that not every generation is lost/wayward (compared to the harm/hurt by many people in their 50s). For greater/deeper more formational discipleship, not allowing our differences to divide the church.

Concern: another election and how it's going to rip the church apart; politicization