

## **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?**

There has been a significant change. Pre-pandemic, the church was in the process of shifting to a micro-church model where we would no longer be based/dependent upon Sunday services, but on the priesthood of all believers. Our vision was for our congregation members to live out the redemptive calling within their circles of influence. The pandemic provided a perfect opportunity to see if this would/could work, allowing us an opportunity to put our vision to a test. We intentionally shut down our Sunday services for 2 years. 90% of the people who were already in small groups didn't skip a beat; these were people who have bought into our mission and trust our leaders. Pre-pandemic, of the 1200-1500 people who attended services across our four campuses, 300-400 were in small groups. Those 300-400 are still actively involved. The remaining 800 people who were not in small groups ... we don't know where they are.

We've realized that church can survive in a non Sunday-dependent context. We finally opened in February of 2022 and the pace is different. In addition, the emphasis of what we communicate on Sundays is our mission. Lighting, hospitality, coffee served, etc ... though still important, are no longer the priority ... they're maybe 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> on the list. Rather, the focus is on connecting with people and seeing where they are in their faith.

Pre-pandemic, I was preaching four out of five Sundays, three to four times each Sunday. I'm an Enneagram 8, a Pentecostal, and Spirit-believing. I love people and love to see the outcome of my/our work. Now, I preach two times a month at two campuses and we have a team of 10 communicators who are not on staff who are a part of our teaching team.

We are having to measure growth differently.

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

As a staff, we collectively took a 20% pay cut, which had a huge impact. I/we didn't want to let anyone go. For me, it was hard to find another job to supplement my income. I've had one pay raise in 14 years ... and now the challenge is that I have two jobs.

My focus has shifted/narrowed. I shepherd our staff, lead the mission/direction of the church, focusing in on mission and multiplication. I love what I get to do, but it's exhausting. I just turned 47 and want to give my best years to my greatest impact in/for the Kingdom.

### **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 has changed. It feels as though there's no room for error, leaving me more guarded with my church community. Compared to before the pandemic, I am much more selective in terms of the people to whom I give my time. There was a lot of church hurt: politics, racial injustice, ... I was there for people in the midst of it, but the moment I wasn't (fill in the blank) enough, or became too (fill in the blank), there was no longer any loyalty. It seemed as though there was no room to agree to disagree. So, now, I shepherd my staff. My staff gets my time, attention and focus.

And, rather than me serving our community as directly as I did pre-pandemic, the mission, vision and values of the church now serve our community.

With my family, I am closer than ever. There's a level of greater intimacy. Shutting my world down was the hardest thing for me mentally. I was on a climb. I loved my life pre-pandemic and never thought I would/could fall into depression and anxiety. Early on in the pandemic, life was difficult, particularly given that we had two teenage boys. Our younger son is introverted and quiet and his social abilities were challenged. Now, I feel as though we know each other better. That we love each other stronger. My kids saw me cry and have a meltdown. They saw a broken dad. But, it fostered greater intimacy. The pandemic has been challenging. My oldest son graduated in June 2020 and it sucked for our family, even though he navigated it well. My wife, an Enneagram 3, wanted to have a plan for our family. Me, as an Enneagram 8, I don't like to be boxed in. We had amazing coaches and therapists who helped us walk through it all. I love where we are now.

With friends, I am no longer interested in growing acquaintances nor engaging in small talk. And, I have stopped pursuing friends that I was responsible for initiating contact with. My inner circle, my "ride and die friends," I have invested in. They are fortitude for my soul, heart and mind; friends that are closer than siblings.

My relationships with my staff and colleagues within our church are the same. I'm intentional about being present with them, doing life with them. We have a non-hierarchical structure and have created a deeper bond and greater mutual respect.

With my colleagues outside of our church, I have learned which were friends and which weren't. With those who weren't, we simply respect one another now, but do not engage as much nor as often as we tried to pre-pandemic.

**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?**

They have changed me as a husband, father and pastor. In my sermon writing, I want to lead people to the cross, not just teach something I know. It's all about the blood of Jesus.

They have changed my relationships. I want to go deeper with fewer people. We have an incredible Board who have cared for us, providing meals and investing in our mental, emotional and spiritual health. They are not just a Board anymore.

They have changed my expectations and responsibilities. I've narrowed my focus and commissioned all other responsibilities to people on our team.

**What are your greatest needs currently?**

Clarity on what is next.

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

Motivation. We are not serving God any more or less than pre-pandemic, but we're not seeing the same outcome. My hope is that we can celebrate the small wins given that the cynicism of people when it comes to church is hard on us. How do we fan the flame of our staff, keeping them inspired and on mission? People are tired, exhausted and discouraged.

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

Depleted: when I think about all of the restarts that have been, and may be, required. When I look at the current state of our church's finances. Not hearing any leader give anything insightful/creative ... keep trusting Jesus, keep moving forward. I am where God wants me to be ... but, it's exhausting.

Energized/fulfilled: Pre-pandemic, I was church planting, I was a traveling worship leader, I had a creative gifting to write songs and express myself through music that was put on a shelf. Over the past 2 years, I've been songwriting. I have an album that I'm dropping in the next 45 days and am having so much fun (photo shoots, music videos, etc.). I'm excited for people to hear my voice ... in English and in Spanish.

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

Concern: on a macro level, the condition of the world, which breaks my heart. On a micro level, the condition of America, with its divisiveness and political agendas. It's getting ugly and uglier ... look at what just happened in Buffalo ... we're desensitized. God's not calling us to "easy." It's a hard season, for everyone. Boomers are having to relinquish their power and resources. I'm also concerned that we have the same people in leadership and that our ideas are old. There ought to be a level of urgency to empower the next generation to lead well, rather than an unwillingness to let go of power fueled by playing into our fears and misleading ourselves based on the critiques of others.

Hope: the Church (God's plan A for the world). I love Jesus, and I love the mission of Jesus. I am far from a perfect leader.