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MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP AND THE NEW NORMAL OCCASSIONED BY COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

It's no more news that covid-19 struck when no one expected and its devastating effect is still causing ripples till date. Without gainsaying, it is clear that the Church is one of the worst prepared for this pandemic. Going by our weak response to the sudden event, tells volume of stories of woes which is a direct product of our unpreparedness. Never a time will there be any evil that will visit a city without God's knowledge. The disruption is known to Him but why is the Church not in the know? This is a serious question still begging for answer till date. We are facing an unprecedented crisis of public understanding. Western digital corporations and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Reddit) and their Chinese equivalents (WeChat, Weibo, Tencent and Toutiao) are at the heart of this crisis. These platforms act as facilitators and multipliers of COVID-19-related misinformation.

Let me start by defining the key words of this topic namely ministry, leadership and new normal

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ministry

In Christianity, **ministry** is an activity carried out by Christians to express or spread their faith, the prototype being the Great Commission. The Encyclopedia of Christianity defines it as "carrying forth Christ's mission in the world", indicating that it is "conferred on each Christian in baptism."[1] It is performed by most Christians. This is distinguished from the "office of minister", to which specific individuals who feel a certain vocation.[2] It can signify this activity as a whole, or specific activities, or organizations within a church dedicated to specific activities. Some ministries are identified formally as such, and some are not; some ministry is directed towards members of the church, and some towards non-members – Wikipedia.

Leader & Leadership

According to a panel discussion at Regent University in 2002 during a doctoral residency program attempted to answer the question "What is Christian Leadership," and while concepts of qualities, characteristics, capabilities, and behaviors were addressed, the question seemed to be unanswered at the end. The discussion examines the role of calling (doing what God wants you to), competence (being good at what you do), confidence (knowing what you can accomplish in the context), and character ("good" traits) with the purpose of showing that character, while important, is the fourth in the sequence of the four. The paper draws from both Old Testament and New Testament examples of success based on each of the four Cs. The premise of the paper is that with each successful level of the four Cs, greater success happens. An organization's leadership development program may be informed by this paper in that developing-leaders should first be filtered/selected by their sense of calling, followed then by education and training

to increase their competence. Then, developing leaders can receive counseling and education to increase their confidence and finally, developing leaders can be coached, measured, critiqued, and developed in character traits. However, it is with keen interest that I rather prefer we look at the 5 Cs of Leadership as against the 4 Cs earlier presented. The Last C is capacity which was seen in the definition of the word *influence*.

What is Influence?

noun

1. the <u>capacity</u> to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.

From this definition came another important word CAPACITY which determines to a large extent ability to carry out certain task(s). This ability is not limited to your gifting alone, but other acquired skill-sets along the journey of life. Capacity is seen displayed in other 3 Cs described below:

Command, Commandment & Commission

Evidently, these 3 Cs were noticed in the life, times and activities of Jesus Christ. Exclusively, the first Adam lived with **Commands** (sets of instructions) that was flouted and led to his fall. This led to the introduction of **Commandments** (guiding rules) meant to be obeyed but was disregarded by His chosen people. Now, comes the **Commission** (set-forth assignment) made know and available to all believers by the last Adam for the accomplishment of His purpose here on earth. We are to appropriate these 3Cs and imbibe them in our daily living with a view to ensure promptness to the gospel message and delivering same to other.

New normal

A **new normal** is a state to which an economy, society, etc. settles following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. The term has been used in relation to the <u>financial crisis of 2007-2008</u>, the aftermath of the <u>2008–2012 global recession</u>, and the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u> - <u>"There's nothing new about the 'new normal' - and here's why"</u>. *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved 26 September 2020.

Through the weeks of this pandemic that has ravaged the entire world's health and economy, *being* church has eclipsed *doing* church as the way for the church to connect with the culture. Jesus-followers have been finding enormous spiritual satisfaction in their intensified efforts on loving their neighbors. "Church" has become more a verb – a way of being in the world – rather than in its typical use as a noun designating a place or an organization. This dynamic points to the way forward for the church: moving from *church-as-institution* as its primary expression to *church-as-movement*. Nothing less than a church culture shift will support this transformation. The new normal will require that church leaders make three significant changes.

First, we must change our STORY

The prevailing assumption among church leaders has been that those serious in their pursuit of God would conform their lifestyle and habits to congregational expressions and rhythms, activities that would largely be supervised by church leaders, carried out on church real estate, and involve mostly other church people.

Second, we must change our Scorecard

Church leaders shaped by a church-as-institution narrative are driven to assess progress in church-centric numbers: how many show up for gatherings, how much money comes in for operating, the number of participants who support church programs, etc. I am not naïve – we will always count

these inputs. Church leaders must find the courage to have a kingdom-biased scorecard for ministry. This means going beyond mere inputs (activities, participation) into measuring outcomes. We must look for and measure results. Meaning: how many people are experiencing life as God intends (spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally, economically, every aspect of human experience)? This question includes everyone: those who already identify as Jesus-followers as well as those who are our neighbors.

Finally, we must change the scope of our Stewardship

The *ecclesias* of Jesus' day—the word that he chose to describe the role of the movement he was founding—had responsibility for the welfare of the community they were part of. Which means that God holds the church responsible for the well-being of the communities we're in. Stewardship that only extends to the limits of church programming misses the point. By changing the scope of church stewardship, a different leadership paradigm comes into play, calling for an additional set of competencies for church leadership portfolios. We would also build leadership teams with a different composition, driven by a different ministry agenda. A church-centric stewardship calls for leaders who are drawn to support a church-centric agenda.

The Future Church Through Digital Media

According to a very recent research publication during this pandemic by *Stephen Kabah, the pastor of the Katy church in the Houston, Texas area. He is also a digital media professional who is completing a PhD in Communication and Media Studies* who stated that we are hoping and praying that the global Corona Virus (Covid-19) pandemic will slow down and eventually disappear. The pandemic has significantly forced us to change how we conduct church resulting in increased streaming of services on different digital communications platforms. The future of the church has already been altered. The good news is that we live in a media-frenzied society that is marked by rapid digital and communication technological change and extensive social media usage. For the last couple of weeks, churches have been forced by circumstances to stream their services on different communication platforms while pastors globally have conformed and have accepted the changes. The Christian approach to technology seems to have drastically changed. Derek Schuurman, in his book *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer technology* outlines four approaches Christians take on technology which includes (1) rejection of technology, (2) indifference to technology, (3) embracing technology, and (4) cultivating responsible technology. [1] With the rapid increase of Corona Virus cases, and the recommendation from the government to avoid human interaction, the global church has embraced technology as well as attempted to

cultivate responsible technology. Even those who have been skeptical of using social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube have suddenly become champions of what they detested a few weeks ago. What changed? It took a global crisis to shift our minds and have a different perspective.

How we interact with each other will be forever changed. Even if we could go back to normalcy and have our worship services in our church buildings, it will never be the same again. We have to come to a place where we see the future of the church through the lens of digital media as it is the norm of society (new normal). Digital communication technologies and culture and society are now inseparable. Neil Postman in his book, Amusing ourselves to death rightly claims that we have surrendered ourselves to technology. The last few weeks have been a proof that digital media works. The church left the building! It seems to me that the church will have a difficult time going back to the building. As pastors and church leaders, how are we supposed to respond? Are we prepared for the "future church"?

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are a few recommendations that were proposed for any ministerial leader in the wake of Covid-19 (new normal) as urgent measures to mitigate the effect occasioned by this disruption.

1. Accept the Reality & Plan Ahead

As pastors, publicity experts and church leaders, we must embrace the reality that the church has left the building. Though there is a considerable possibility that we will have regular worship services in our churches again, it will never be the same. We can take advantage of the fact that the world has embraced technology. Stig Hjavard states that "contemporary society is permeated by media, to an extent that media may no longer be conceived as being separate from culture and other social institutions" [3] In other words, all kinds of media are part of our culture. Since church will never be the same, we can plan ahead. Church institutions will need to hire developers and digital communication professionals to develop unique platforms that churches and pastors can use to minister. If we don't do it now, someone will do it and we will have to pay them so that we can use their platforms.

2. Redefine Community

As a local church pastor, I have always been passionate about reaching out to my community and meeting their needs. The devastating global Corona Virus pandemic has forced us into a 'new normal' world of social distancing. At first, the government recommended people to social distance, but as the virus continued to spread rapidly, the government compelled people to practice social distancing. This social distancing mandate led to the suspension of sporting events, major gatherings and of course church services. David Savage, an associate professor of behavioral economics at the University of Newcastle in Australia admits that "we are seeing the rise of virtual socializing to replace the physical" while researchers from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health claimed that "Intermittent distancing may be required into 2022 unless critical care capacity is increased substantially or a treatment or vaccine becomes available"

For the last few weeks, this phenomenon has been observed in church. The new norm of social distancing is the reality. What I knew as a Christian community has completely morphed into something else – an online community. The realization that our church's services are now being watched by people all over the world, has left me wondering how I need to minister to my newfound community. Just like those in my zip code, my online community has needs too. Bankole Falade, a social psychologist at Stellenbosch University states that the world will not be the same after this crisis "and the use of online tools, which has increased significantly, may be retained for the long run". As pastors and church leaders, we have to find new and innovative ways to minister to our online community.

3. Create a Social Media Following

Just like any other organization today, the church is faced with the challenge of being relevant in a world where traditional communication has significantly morphed. In order to sell or increase product awareness, companies today are growing their social media following in order to have a competitive edge. For the last few weeks, the church has seen the need for having a social media following. Consider these statistics by Ominscore: Facebook has 2.5 billion monthly active users, Instagram has over 1 billion monthly users with over 50 billion photos shared to date, Snapchat has 360 million active monthly users and Twitter has 300 million active users with over 500 million tweets sent per day [4]. Should we not meet people where they are? Those who have been skeptical of social media platforms have at least now seen that they can be used for good. I still believe in traditional evangelism where I have to knock on people's doors or pass literature in the streets, etc. But let us not ignore the power of a social media following if rightly used. This digital neighborhood is where people are. We can play the game on their home tuff. A church without an integrated social media strategy in today's technological world is on the verge of dying or declining in relevance. The use of social media is the church's opportunity to engage with the community in real-time. A quick fix to this will be to appeal to all ministers to embrace training, starting with Computer Appreciation – a video file of my free webinar via zoom will accompany this lecture, where participants are introduced to the ABC of computing and upgrade to internet/social media platforms usage during this pandemic.

4. Create Content that Matters

Indeed Covid-19 has been a wake-up call. I have seen pastors now sharing the gospel via online platforms. The question is, will this be sustainable? The reason why companies use social media is because they know they can reach a vast number of people. But at the same time, they are conscious of content. Content matters! The more your share content that is not relevant, the quicker you will lose your audience. Having valuable and sharable content would only amplify your church's brand. Through content, the community will be able to know the nature of the church, the programs that the church has and whether they will experience meaningful worship if they decide to visit the church. If the content is not engaging and thought-provoking, it will have less effect. On the other hand, I have seen pastors with very good content but they do not know the best channel in which to disseminate the content/material.

5. Be Emotionally Connected with Your Members

Emotional intelligence is key now, especially during this pandemic. Everything possible should be done by you and I as minister of the gospel to be attached to our members by checking on them

through all the platforms available. A dedicated, well-structured SMS messages may do the magic of connecting you with your members at least six to eight times a week. This is seen employed by organizations today to woo in their customers into buying into their products and services.

ADVICE TO ALL BELIEVERS, ESPECIALLY LEADERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN ANY CAPACITY

As enumerated above, Ministerial leaders are advised to tackle the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic dynamically. Therefore, these additional recommendations are made:

1. Every Ministerial Leader/pastor should study the uniqueness of his congregation and locality and fashion out how to respond to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed in the context of the peculiarity of his congregation and locality.

2. Ministerial Leader/Pastors should embrace the use of the Internet and other technological tools in their pastoral ministry. While the traditional physical means of pastoral ministry should be continued as much as possible, pastors should be thinking of how to make Internet ministry not only an alternative ministry, but also as supplementary to the traditional ways of pastoral ministry.

3. Churches should invest more in their multimedia ministry by training pastors on how to use several tools to enhance the multimedia ministry, and by training some church members to assist the pastors and the church in the use of technological tools for ministry.

4. Ministerial Leader/Pastors should consciously teach church members to be able to stand without depending on the pastors or church activities during trying times.

5. Ministerial Leader/Pastors should train some committed church members on rudiments of pastoral ministry so that such trained people will be able to assist the pastors in the pastoral ministry.

6. Multi-staff ministry (that will involve a group of Christian persons – not necessarily trained pastors – who are committed to serve God by serving other members of the church to enable the church achieve its missions and responsibilities) should be encouraged even in the remote or smallest churches.

7. Less emphasis should be placed on large congregational gathering while more emphasis should be place on small groups in forms of cell churches, house fellowships, home fellowships, and the likes.

8. Less emphasis should also be placed on constructing large auditoria while more emphasis should place on activities that will build the church members up in their spiritual lives.

9. More efforts should be given to visitation and caring of church members through phone calls and sending of text messages.

10. Traditional leadership style will not be appropriate for this new normal. Rather, spirited efforts at reinventing the leadership style based on adoption and leveraging on digital tools will be more effective during this era (post pandemic)

Also some practical ways to support this shift toward greater kingdom stewardship [5].

11.   Start elder meetings with prayer for the community and exploration of church engagement and initiatives that manifest in the community-at-large.

12.   Move church-as-institution items to the bottom of the agenda.

13.   Invite community leaders on a regular basis to leadership meetings and worship gatherings. Have them share their perspectives, needs, challenges and opportunities. Doing this will support both the narrative and scorecard changes you are making.

14.   Make sure that stories of church leaders' engagement in the community are told.

15.   Conduct an influence audit by surveying the congregation on their current involvement in community agencies and boards to figure out where you already have people in leadership. Ask them how you can help them achieve the mission they are invested in.

16.   Above all, a constant reminder of Christs' second coming should be in the front burner of all our plans, teachings and activities as a Church especially during this pandemic and beyond.

CONCLUSION

God is not caught off guard by COVID-19 outbreak nor the digital age revolution. He is not struggling to catch up. But he is waiting on the church to do just that! These critical shifts by church leaders will help us get there. A good grasp of recommendations and advices to ministerial leaders at this critical time will not only address the myriads of challenges posed by COVID-19 but will to a large extent ameliorate its effect both on short- and long-term basis.

References

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[3] Hjarvard, S. P. (2013). *The Mediatization of Culture and Society.* London: Routledge

[4] https://www.omnicoreagency.com/category/internet-stats/

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