

10 Stewardship “Do’s” during the pandemic and one “Do NOT”

1. **Pray.** It’s what we do. I won’t belabor this point.

2. **Cut yourself some slack.**

The last time leaders in the Church had to navigate post-Christendom, during a global pandemic is only right now. There’s no rule book. Trying to lead a community, sustain its ministries financially, all the while experiencing and processing the pandemic, yourself is going to be tough. Rest and give yourself patience, mercy and grace.

3. **Talk with your session about being spiritual leaders at this time of crisis**

A session isn’t a non-profit board, and no time proves it quite like the present. **The pastor and the Elders are the spiritual leaders of the congregation.** Open up conversations with your session that engage, not just WHAT you will DO, but HOW you will be together. The session of the church might need to make difficult decisions in the near and long-terms, and the consistency and grace displayed by your session will help lead your congregation how ever long this crisis lasts. In the church, every tactical conversation is in relationship with God’s story. Listen, together, for what is creating feelings of togetherness and common vision. It might be part of where God calls you next.

4. **Reach out to every member of your congregation.**

Utilize church leadership past and present who will help reach out through whatever means you have at your disposal. Just check in.

- Announce that you will do this.
- Do it: Let each person know that you hold them in prayer, let them know how you are doing and that the church is continuing in ministries of worship, teaching and compassion.
- Tell people you did it: Celebrate in your communications when everyone has reported in and share joys and concerns as appropriate.

5. **Listen for the story:**

Scripture. How are you hearing the story of the faith differently in light of this current crisis? Is this a moment where the wilderness stories are speaking loudly? Do you find yourself in new relationship to resurrection and deliverance narratives? Is this the time where you find yourself studying the psalms? The story of scripture and the Christian faith have endured through many challenges and shifts. Each time, the characters, stories, and truths have been seen through new lenses and with new insight. In a world lurching toward what comes after this crisis, whose story are you hearing, again, in new ways?

6. Listen for your story: How people are showing what they value in church.

People. Listen deeply for what people hunger for in this time. Connections? Learning? Making sense of all this? The things people value might not be where church leaders have spent most of their time or where the budget has been directing financial and staff resources. To any degree possible, let things go that aren't serving your members true needs. Pick a later date to which of the now not-so-sacred-cows comes back.

7. Make a mission commitment.

Churches are unique in that they both receive gifts and contribute gifts. Now is a good time to make a commitment of what you have toward those suffering in this pandemic. While many members and many community groups are scrambling and searching for ways to recover and to help, your congregation's call remains to be a place of refuge and hope for your members and also a place of help and healing for people experiencing needs.

Tie your commitment to those who are suffering directly with your appeal to continuing relational and formation ministries that are essential at times of crisis and only provided by the church. While there is surely overlap, this also signal to the broader community that you intend to be a help in this time of need, rather than retracting.

Part of this can be your commitment to participate in One Great Hour of Sharing. For over 70 years it has been the largest way Presbyterians have engaged in ministries with the most vulnerable. In addition, consider a local ministry doing direct service.

Your members and your community need to know that you intend to be a place of spiritual help and compassion no matter what happens as a result of this crisis.

8. Ask for Help.

One of the wonderful things that is coming out of this dry place, is the creativity and willingness of many church leaders and those who attend church on Sunday. Individuals are also sharing, freely, of what they have discovered, learned, or known all along. Asking for help might allow you time and space for other things you need to attend to, or permit you to really pursue a priority from the above.

9. Let all members know, and especially your strongest financial supporters, know what you are planning and doing in terms of ministry and what you are seeing in terms of current financial support for the church.

This is less about resetting your priorities to reflect the wishes of big donors as much as it is ensuring your strongest and most faithful financial supporters hear things from you and can ask questions, provide advice, guidance, affirmations, and concerns with you. A short conversation on the front end might prevent drama that is the result of misunderstandings. No need to be shy about inviting continued and increased support during this time. Many will feel called to be generous at this time of difficulty.

10. Attend to all stewardship conversations as issues of discipleship.

Some people are experiencing illness, lost jobs, and lost income. Assure people who fear they won't be able to make their pledge or other commitments that they are loved, seen, and supported. We do know that times of crisis evoke increased giving. Give people, especially your strongest donors, an opportunity to step up their financial commitment and realize the joy of making a difference. This is why point 7 can be so important at this time.

One Do *NOT*.

1. Cut your budget

- a. The church, YOUR church exists for "such a time as this". Be the church. None of us know what all will shake out of this. While you might delay or forgo certain expenses at this time (Easter flowers for the sanctuary, for instance) cutting budgets and attempting to 'manage' this crisis will ultimately prove futile. Any conversations about the budget should be held in light of the above and not upon financial fears.