

18  
Leaving the Building  
to Reap a Harvest  
Malcolm Burleigh

20  
Cultivating a  
Politically Diverse  
Church  
Charles Drew

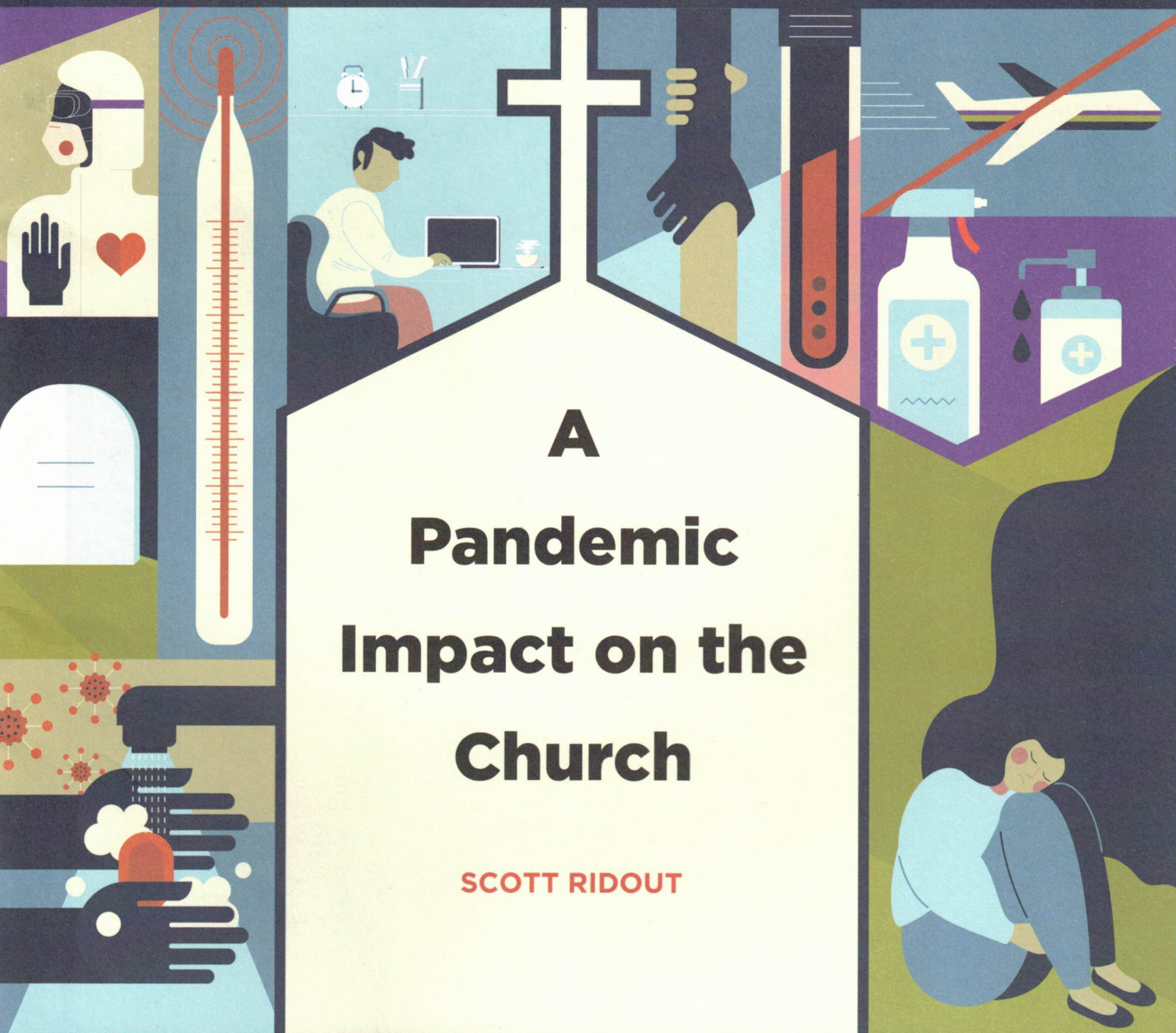
23  
Where Do We Go  
From Here?  
N.T. Wright

24  
On Christian  
College Survival  
Shirley Hoogstra

26  
Complicated for Us,  
Not for God  
Walter Kim

# Evangelicals

Magazine | Winter 2020/21 | Vol. 6 No. 3



## A Pandemic Impact on the Church

SCOTT RIDOUT

*“Here is a vibrant evangelicalism—commitment to think within the limits laid down in Scripture.”*

—Vernon Grounds,  
President Denver Seminary, circa 1965



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# Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals

## Also in This Issue

- 6 Comment**  
Christian leaders consider the place of politics for Christians and the impact of the coronavirus on churches.
- 9 Calendar**  
Here's your guide to compelling evangelical events.
- 10 Worth Noting**  
The NAE issues a call to civic responsibility, and churches host dialogues between police and other members of the community.
- 12 Timely and Effective Resources Help Leaders Navigate the COVID Crisis**  
"We didn't have concrete next steps about what to do. I was looking for something that would provide direction. Amid the challenges of COVID-19, the Humanitarian Disaster Institute and the National Association of Evangelicals served as first responders," said Tom Grosh of the Christian Medical and Dental Association.

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Today's Conversation provides opportunities for you to hear from leading thinkers, theologians, activists, culture-makers and more.

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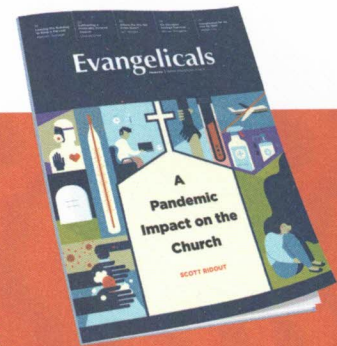
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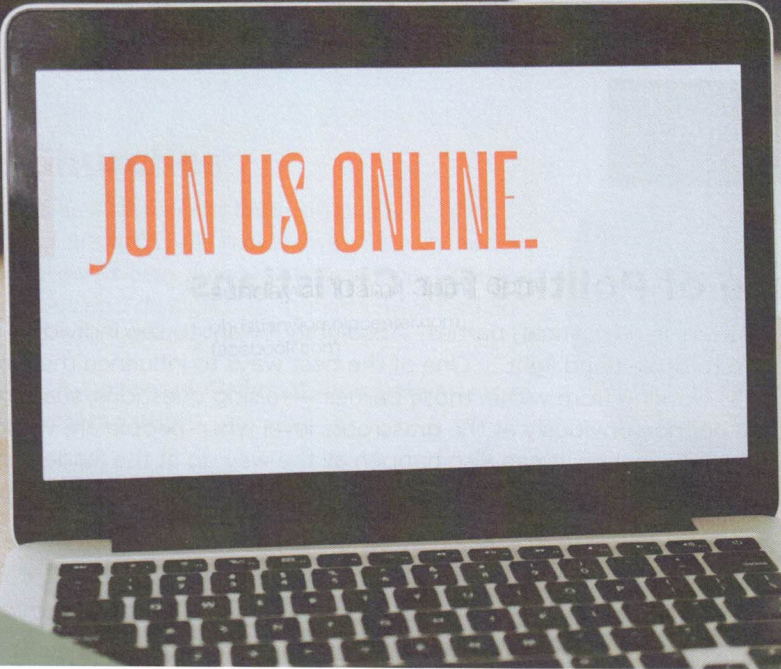
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Many have likened the coronavirus pandemic to 9/11 as one of those events that is seared to memory and defines a generation. Life after 9/11 was not the same. It altered practicalities of life (e.g., airport security protocols) and fundamentally reshaped our thinking on security, politics, foreign affairs and many other things. The immediate impact of the coronavirus on our churches and in our world does not need to be detailed here. But like 9/11, we anticipate life after the coronavirus will not be the same. Church life will not be the same.

In these pages, we start a conversation around the long-term impacts of the coronavirus on church life. What has changed? What will continue to change? What concepts about church have been reshaped? What are the good things we need to fight to keep? What do we need to leave behind? How can we — as Malcolm Burleigh puts in his article (Page 18) — be marked by unity, an understanding of the times, and knowledge of what to do next?

In the cover article, Scott Ridout points out that after the coronavirus hit, church leaders “instinctively began to define ‘church’ not as a building we meet in, but as people of God doing the work of God for the glory of God.” Burleigh’s article detailing new opportunities for ministry outreach is a great picture of that calling in action. Church and ministry leaders found innovative solutions, adapted and moved forward in mission with clarity.

But no doubt about it, social-distancing mandates created challenges for sustained church life — even as they opened opportunities. The long-term impacts on pastor resiliency, church attendance and engagement, and leadership development are yet to be determined. In the Q&A with Shirley Hoogstra, we consider the impact of the coronavirus on Christian colleges and universities that seek to train the next generation of culture-shapers and witnesses for Christ.

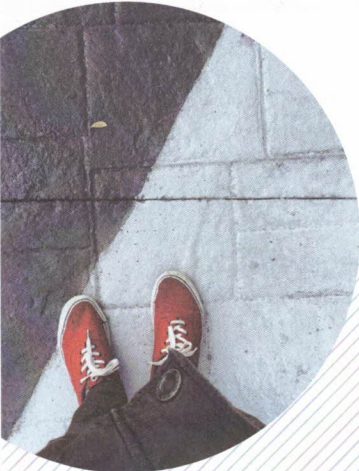
We also recognize that for those of us in the United States, the backdrop of the coronavirus has been a politically divided country. This has led to increased tension in churches. Part of moving forward from the pandemic will include learning how to deal with political differences in our churches (see Charles Drew’s article on Page 20).

Church life after the coronavirus will not be the same. We pray it will be even better. **✉**

## The Place of Politics for Christians

“Should believers join [political] parties? Absolutely. I want to see individual believers active in political parties. I want them to be salt and light .... One of the best ways to influence the direction of political parties and of elected officials, is working from within those parties — raising questions, sharing ideas, offering critiques when needed. This can happen obviously at the grassroots level when people are working on campaigns or they’re part of a county party organization. It can also happen all the way up at the leadership level, helping direct priorities and policy choices. I want to see Christians involved in both parties at all those levels.”

**Amy Black, professor of political science at Wheaton College, in Today’s Conversation at [NAE.net/blackpodcast](http://NAE.net/blackpodcast)**



“My major grief in this election is not who will win the election, but that the mission of Christ has become secondary to swathes of believers. The Church is fractured, not even by the evil one, but by God’s own people! Votes and political affiliations have caused believers to question the salvation of others. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians, ‘Shame on us! The enemies of the cross are relishing the Church division.’”

**Alejandro Mandes, executive director of EFCA All People Ministry, in “Watch and Pray, and Obey”**

“I think a church ought to be solidly purple. Our identity should be in Jesus, not in anything else. Our political persuasion should not be our primary identity.”

**Chris Rea, pastor of Church of the Savior, a Christian Reformed Church in South Bend, Indiana**

“The Church’s task, then, is to begin the baby steps of relearning how to be an alternative *polis* — a different kind of community that embodies a different kind of politics. Drawing from the early church and from the Scriptures, we can reconstruct a truer, more faithful, and more beautiful political theology from the ground up. This work of reconstruction will take decades, so we’d better get going. The state of the Church’s mission in America will be determined less by what happens in this one election and more by who we become over the coming decades.”

**Tish Harrison Warren, author of “Liturgy of the Ordinary,” in Christianity Today**

## America’s Faith

“What’s going down is faith among the American people. The percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has been declining. The number of Americans of faith is declining. The concern to us is not how many Christians are registered voters but how many voters are Christians.”

**Galen Carey, NAE vice president of government relations, responding to Pew Research Center research showing that the share of registered voters in the United States who say they are Christian has declined by about 15 percent since 2008**

# COVID Impacts on Churches

“ Many churches have viewed this as a disruption that can be leveraged to catalyze health and positive change. COVID has allowed church leaders to make changes that may not have been as easy if not for this season. Churches that had clarity on mission, vision, values and discipleship markers have had an easier time learning how to adapt and while holding onto the core.”

**Dana Allin, synod executive of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, in the Evangelical Leaders Survey**



“ The greatest toll, which is mounting, is on pastors who are doing their best to navigate unknowns and maintain congregations’ identities, connections and ministries. The leadership load on pastors is immense. They are valiantly doing their best, adapting to massive forced change, and working harder than ever to do so.”

**Randall Bach, president of Open Bible Churches, in the Evangelical Leaders Survey**

Read the full “A Call to Civic Responsibility” statement by @WorldRelief @NAEvangelicals here: <https://buff.ly/30zGU9V> and in the Washington Post: <https://buff.ly/3d771Js>  
Derwin Gray @DerwinLGray



I really appreciate this statement from World Relief and the National Association of Evangelicals. I’m onboard ... Hope you are, too!  
ForTheHealth.net  
Phil Vischer @philvischer

As we trust in God, we the undersigned commit to the biblical calling to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Grateful to partner with @WorldRelief and @NAEvangelicals for the sake of the gospel and the health of the nation. ForTheHealth.net  
Eugene Cho @EugeneCho

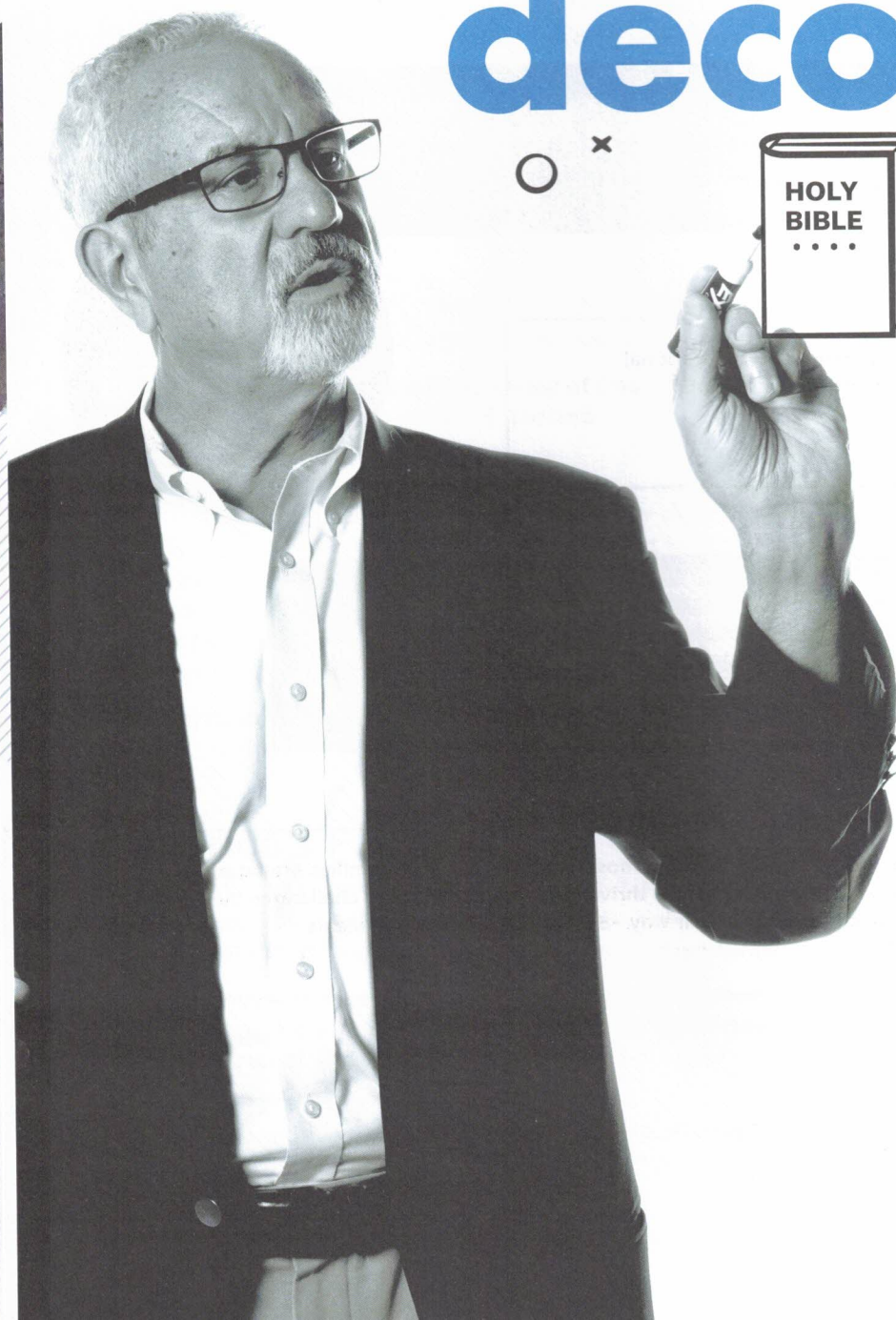


These new findings show that most churches and their families are figuring out ways to survive and even thrive in the midst of all the challenges that the pandemic has thrown their way. -Brian Kluth, @NAEvangelicals  
Baptist Press @BaptistPress



# Old Testament scholar mentor

# Bible decoder



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# EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

FEBRUARY 3-4, 2021

## The Psalms: The Undershepherds' Shepherd

Virtual

Evangelical Free Church of America  
[EFCA.org](http://EFCA.org)

The Psalms are the Church's song and prayer book. Christians have rightly been drawn to them during these days filled with changes and challenges. Thankfully, God remains the same. For this reason, the Psalms will be at the center of this year's Theology Conference for the Evangelical Free Church of America.

FEBRUARY 7-14, 2021

## National Marriage Week

Let's Strengthen Marriage  
[NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org](http://NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org)

Join with others across the country to organize a marriage event or online programming during the week leading up to Valentine's Day. Focus on practical ways to strengthen marriages in your church and community.

FEBRUARY 8 & 15, 2021

## Christian Student Leadership Conference

Virtual

National Association of Evangelicals  
[NAE.net/csle](http://NAE.net/csle)

This year's Christian Student Leadership Conference will be held virtually on two evenings in February. Sessions will consider how Christians can find ways to work together for healing our divided nation. College student leaders will also wrestle with today's complex policy issues and learn from experts. This year's conference is free to all college students.

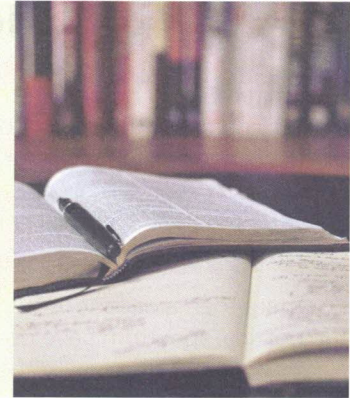
FEBRUARY 27, 2021

## Jubilee Conference

Virtual

Coalition for Christian Outreach  
[JubileeConference.com](http://JubileeConference.com)

This conference is designed to break down the four-part gospel narrative for college students so they can discover how every square inch of creation, including their own lives, is the Lord's. College students will leave Jubilee with a vision for their lives, equipped with the tools to transform the world in the name of Jesus Christ.



APRIL 9-11, 2021

## Steadfast: A Women's Conference on the Book of James

Indianapolis, IN

The Gospel Coalition  
[TheGospelCoalition.org/tgcw20](http://TheGospelCoalition.org/tgcw20)

Women from around the world will gather for a three-day conference to study the book of James and worship our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, together.

APRIL 27-29, 2021

## The Outcomes Conference

Jacksonville, FL

Christian Leadership Alliance  
[OutcomesConference.org](http://OutcomesConference.org)

The Outcomes Conference is the premier leadership training event for those who are called to the faithful stewardship of Christ-centered nonprofits, churches, educational institutions and businesses.



APRIL 28-30, 2021

## EPA Christian Media Convention

Lancaster, PA

Evangelical Press Association  
[EPAconvention.com](http://EPAconvention.com)

The annual Evangelical Press Association convention is a source of creative innovations and practical skills for Christian communicators. From writers to designers, editors to publishers, and seasoned veterans to emerging talents, the EPA convention provides an opportunity to grow and become something greater. NAE President Walter Kim will be the closing speaker.

APRIL 28-30, 2021

## Orange Conference

Location TBD

Orange Conference  
[ThinkOrange.com](http://ThinkOrange.com)

This family ministries team conference will consider how Christians and leaders can lean into their potential to show a generation what it looks like to be like Jesus — to be the kind of humans that God designed us to be.

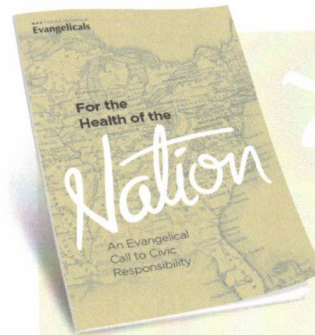
## ✓ A Call to Civic Responsibility

The United States is hardly removed from one of the closest and contentious elections in history. Regardless of who the president is now or who will take the seat in the future, evangelical Christians are called to be consistent in their response — love God and love our neighbor.

For more than a decade, evangelical Christians across the political spectrum have used “For the Health of the Nation,” the policy guide of the National Association of Evangelicals, to apply biblical principles to complex issues. As a resource for Christian discipleship, it is designed to encourage positive conversations, commitments and actions as we work together for the health of the nation.

Along with World Relief, the National Association of Evangelicals published a short statement based on “For the Health of the Nation” in The Washington Post in October 2020. We sought to encourage a faithful evangelical witness and to gain a respectful hearing

for the gospel by those who are not yet believers. We continue to invite all followers of Jesus — whether Democrats, Republicans or Independents — to sign the statement and join us in seeking the health of the nation for the good of all people.



### For the Health of the Nation

Read “For the Health of the Nation” at [ForTheHealth.net](https://ForTheHealth.net), where you can also sign the national statement, download a free PDF copy, order printed copies, get discussion questions, watch a short video, and more.

## ✓ Churches Facilitate Conversations Between Police and Community

According to the September Evangelical Leaders Survey, most believe churches have a responsibility to promote peace, restoration and healing in their communities. An overwhelming majority (97 percent) of evangelical leaders support churches facilitating conversations between police and others in their communities.

Several churches have already opened the dialogue between public servants and community members. They are seeing positive connections and relationships being built between the two groups. Pastor Kevin McBride has spent years developing a trusted partnership between his church, Raymond Baptist Church, the community and law enforcement.

“We have been able to broker conversations at times when needed. The foundation of trust has been

laid over multiple years of hosting a ‘thank-you-to-those-who-serve’ meal as part of the National Day of Prayer. Every local, state and national public servant are recognized and thanked for their service to our communities. This has built trust throughout the area for us being a ‘safe’ partner,” he said.



Read the Evangelical Leaders Survey summary at [NAE.net/police-church-dialogue](https://NAE.net/police-church-dialogue).

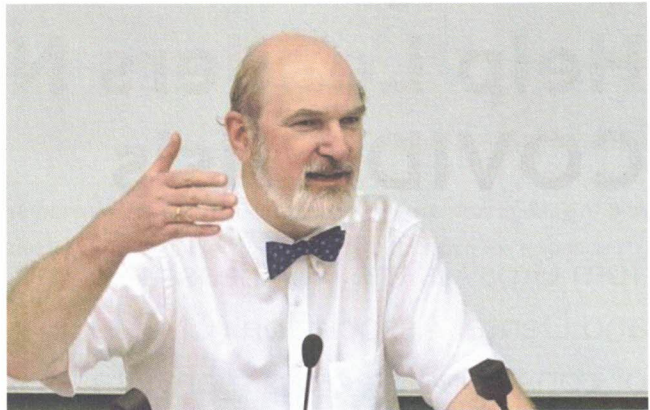
Get involved at [FaithAndBlue.org](https://FaithAndBlue.org).

## ✔ Schirmmacher Tapped to Lead World Evangelical Alliance

The International Council of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) recently appointed Thomas Schirmmacher as its next secretary general and CEO. Schirmmacher has served with the WEA since 1999 and is currently associate secretary general for theological concerns. Prior to this, he was a member of the Religious Liberty Commission, developed the International Institute for Religious Freedom, and built the WEA's Office for Intrafaith and Interfaith Relations. Schirmmacher will begin the new role in March 2021.

Schirmmacher said, "I am humbled that so many esteemed leaders are putting their trust in me. Having been part of the leadership for a long time, I already feel very much at home in the WEA. Beside all my academic and socio-political involvement, the center of my convictions has always been the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for each individual and the

whole world." The National Association of Evangelicals connects to the global Body of Christ through our membership in the World Evangelical Alliance.



## ✔ Over \$825k Given to Pastors Through NAE Campaign

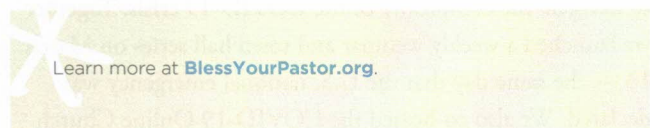
Bless Your Pastor, a campaign of the National Association of Evangelicals, offered three steps to help churches be a blessing to their pastors. First, churches who participated in Bless Your Pastor shared a list of "50 Creative Ways to Bless Your Pastor" with their church families. Churches then collected appreciation offerings for their pastors, and some churches extended these offerings to church staff. After churches took these first steps and reported their offerings, the NAE sent their senior pastors a \$250 Amazon gift card to be an additional blessing (with thanks to a generous grant).

As part of the 2020 campaign, churches collected over \$825,000 in appreciation offerings for their pastors and church staff members. The NAE sent more than 1,375 gift cards to senior pastors. In addition, about 200,000 Christians received the list of "50 Creative Ways to Bless Your Pastor," inspiring kindness and generosity to pastors and church staff members across America.

A pastor's spouse at a Foursquare Church in California shared how their church participated during October

Pastor Appreciation month. "My pastor husband and I had no idea what people were doing. They did it all on their own accord — posters made by youth girls, cards from several families with gift cards and cash, other cards with words of encouragement and appreciation, and last, but certainly not least, we received text messages with words of affirmation! All of these kinds of things kept happening all month long!" she said.

A business manager at a church in North Carolina added, "Your thoughtful Bless Your Pastor program was providential for our church. This is an unprecedented time for churches and especially for senior pastors. Many people don't truly understand the extra stress pastors are facing both within their homes and within the church during COVID. Everything has been amplified, and pastors need to be encouraged to continue to run the race set before them."





# Timely and Effective Resources Help Leaders Navigate the COVID Crisis

Tom Grosh is the Northeast regional director for the Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA). In his role, he interacts with a wide range of constituents across many states — from healthcare professionals to student leaders of CMDA chapters at medical schools to local pastors. Grosh shared about the confusion during the early stages of the pandemic and the uncertainty about whether we were dealing with a short-term or long-term crisis. “We didn’t have concrete next steps about what to do. I was looking for something that would provide direction. Amid the challenges of COVID-19, the Humanitarian Disaster Institute and the National Association of Evangelicals served as first responders,” he said.

## First Responders

From the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the NAE has developed resources and facilitated access for Christian communities across the country to be equipped for this unprecedented crisis. Two initiatives that we deployed for this purpose were Care Package for the Church (NAEcarepackage.com) and Reopening the Church (ReopeningTheChurch.com).

In addition, the NAE participated with Wheaton College’s Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) in a multifaceted effort to equip churches and Christian leaders to navigate the complexity of the COVID-19 crisis. Together we launched a weekly webinar and town hall series on March 13 — the same day that the U.S. national emergency was declared. We also co-hosted the COVID-19 Online Church

Summit in late March. HDI produced a host of print and multimedia resources that resulted in nearly 30,000 trained people all over the world. The impact of these resources has been profound, and the resilience of Christian communities has shone brightly.

## Critical Communication

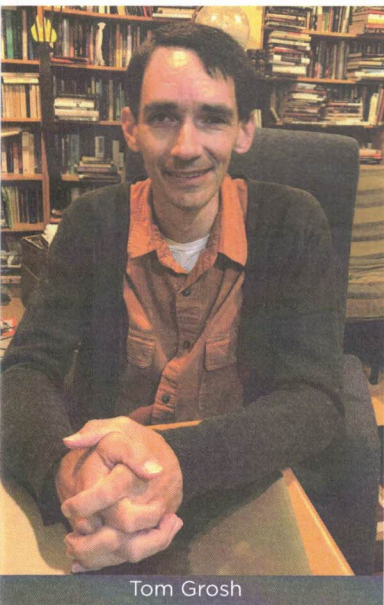
What became evident fairly quickly was that the COVID-19 crisis was not simply a short-term issue. In their March 20, 2020, article “Leading Beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization is Now a Start-Up,” Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker and Dave Blanchard provided a framework for understanding the pandemic as much more than a short-term crisis. They outlined the implications for churches, ministries and organizations as the immediate crisis that appears to be



a “blizzard” is sometimes more accurately understood as a “winter,” and in some cases, might even represent an “ice age” — signaling a longer-term state of affairs.

Referencing that article, Grosh identified how critical it is for leaders to adapt to this progression by pacing themselves. Just as important is how they calibrate the expectations of their constituents through accurate and frequent communication. “What I found is that the conversation needs to happen slowly,” he said.

Grosh found the weekly webinars co-hosted by the NAE and Wheaton’s HDI to be very helpful and insightful in two important ways. First, they featured a diversity of perspectives from leaders in different contexts, which was essential for understanding the complexity of the crisis and that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be effective.



Tom Grosh

Second, the webinars equipped Grosh with not only the scientific information but also the language to use in communicating clearly with pastors and ministry leaders. “We live in such a polarized age,” Grosh said. The NAE-HDI webinars helped him articulate clear and sound reasoning to church leaders for taking certain actions, such as masking, social distancing and moving to online services. “As the COVID-19 sprint became a marathon, I confidently recommended not only HDI’s

ongoing weekly webinars and Spiritual First Aid Summit, but also their timely and thorough handbooks.”

Grosh summed up the impact of the NAE-HDI resources in the following way: “My ability to give wise counsel to: a) my colleagues as we struggled to make decisions in how to offer campus ministry across the Northeast; and b) healthcare professionals as they sought to respond to inquiries by their church boards was a direct result of the valuable and thoughtful content presented by HDI. I anticipate HDI’s ongoing partnership with the National Association of Evangelicals, especially in the area of spiritual and mental health, will be invaluable. Furthermore, a number of HDI’s

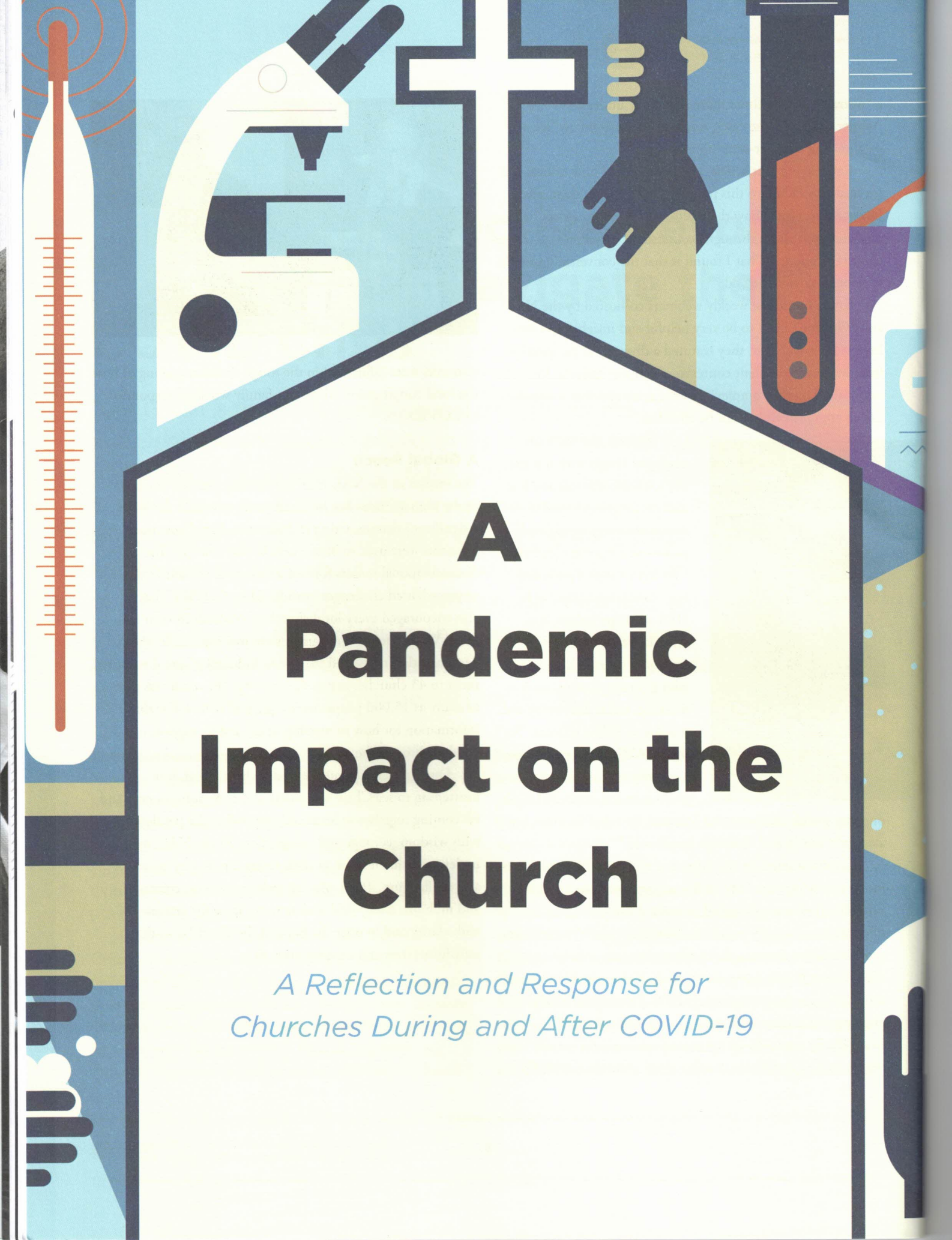


resources were influential in the tough decision making of how the local congregation where our family worships responded to COVID-19.”

### A Global Reach

The impact of the NAE-HDI partnership was felt not only in the United States but internationally as well. A leader of a significant denomination in Indonesia shared how these resources were used to bless many in that country. The denominational leaders formed a task force to address the unprecedented challenges introduced by COVID. They also encouraged every local church to establish its own task force. When the HDI resources were made available, the denomination translated them into Indonesian and distributed them to 43 churches across the country. The result was that as many as 15,000 people were equipped with actionable information for how to worship safely and to support one another through the crisis.

During such a tumultuous and chaotic year, it is heartening to see Christian leaders and communities near and far coming together to learn and respond to the pandemic with wisdom, courage and compassion. At the NAE, we understand that leading in these times can be very complex and challenging. That’s why we seek to resource, connect and mobilize evangelical leaders to navigate the complexity with clarity and to offer the hope of the Good News that transforms lives and communities. **E**

The graphic features a stylized house shape with a white interior and a dark blue outline. The roof is divided into three sections: a microscope on the left, a white cross in the center, and a hand holding a test tube on the right. The background is a collage of blue, green, and purple geometric shapes, including a thermometer on the left and a hand holding a test tube on the right. The text is centered within the white house shape.

# **A Pandemic Impact on the Church**

*A Reflection and Response for  
Churches During and After COVID-19*



**Scott Ridout** is president of Converge, a movement of churches working to help people meet, know and follow Jesus

On March 11, 2020, I arrived in Connecticut to work with a church on developing a long-term strategic plan. News of the advance of the COVID-19 virus in Washington and California had unsettled many in our country. Earlier that morning, I texted several of Converge’s larger churches, asking what adjustments they were making as a result of the spread. The mindset of all was “business as usual.” At least until that evening. That night my host and I watched President Trump address the nation on this issue. By the weekend, nine of the 10 pastors I had contacted transitioned to online-only for their worship services. Little did we know the impact of the coming storm.

### **Guides for the Course**

Over the last few months, all of us sought understanding and answers on how to navigate the new normal. I gained significant help from three sources. First, Scripture. I have most often reflected on Philippians 1:12–14. Paul, writing from jail, addressed the church’s concerns about the effects of his “stay at home” scenario. He reminded them that while he was chained, the gospel was not. He chose to see God’s hand in his circumstances and was encouraged by the faith of other believers who saw his efforts to stay on mission. What some thought was a barrier, Paul saw as a bridge. What others saw as disruption, Paul recognized as dispersion.

The second source of help came from Henry Cloud, who hosted an online conversation on the Psychology of Crisis. In this webinar, he talked about the personal impact of crisis on individuals and specifically addressed the losses we all experience — rhythm of life, connection and purpose. He challenged his listener to help others re-establish these essentials.

Finally, I listened to Andy Crouch, a partner for culture and theology at Praxis. He shared his thoughts in a conversation called “Leading Beyond the Blizzard,” where he

postulated that this could be a blizzard (last a few weeks), winter (lasting months) or a mini-ice age (having an impact for years to come). Little did we know how COVID-19 would have elements of all three. These three sources, the Apostle Paul, Henry Cloud and Andy Crouch, set a framework for how I would choose to approach the pandemic from spiritual, psychological and circumstantial angles.

### Clarity and Innovation

Since March, we've seen the good, bad and ugly of the American church and society. In the church world, leaders instinctively began to define "church" not as a building we meet in, but as people of God doing the work of God for the glory of God. Leaders understand that, in times of uncertainty, the greatest need is clarity. Most ministries took the season to prioritize and simplify, discerning which ministries were "mission critical" and which were mission "supplemental or deficient."

Mandated social-distancing requirements had a massive impact on church health. Groups, whether Sunday school or home groups, are the center of church life and health, as well as key components in disciple and leader reproduction. These limitations brought much-needed innovation, including the emergence of online options for services and giving, even by those who consistently rejected these methods in the past (Secondary issues in theology are sometimes adjusted by necessity). As I heard one of our pastors note, "In a time of instability, a key to leadership is agility."

### Caution Ahead

Despite some innovations, we are also experiencing significant negative effects. This crisis forced insulation, which many interpreted as isolation. While enjoying the convenience of online church, our

The Bible says God's Church is unstoppable (Matthew 16:18). Crisis turns people inward, but God sent the Church outward. This is not a time to survive but thrive.

individualistic, consumeristic society brought people to question the value of gathering for fellowship. While our faith is foundationally relational and incarnational, the view of church in the minds of some moved from the center of life to service provider. The devastating long-term impact of those who choose to "do church" on their own or exclusively online has yet to be experienced.

The most consistent negative impact of COVID-19 has been its impact on the church leader. Leaders speak of the heavier weight of leadership, the pressure of constant change, the drain of the unknown and the fear of not leading effectively. Many experience increased inner circle conflict, greater spiritual warfare and decreased personal patience and endurance. Add to that our lack of understanding of how to deal with the political polarity, social unrest and growing cancel culture of our time, and we have a perfect recipe for fail out, walk out and burnout of leaders.

### Wisdom for What's Next

Despite all this, I am hopeful. After all, the gospel continues to advance and the Church continues to prevail. For 2,000 years, the Church has prospered in persecution, plague, poverty and war. Why should this season be any different? The Bible says God's Church is unstoppable (Matthew 16:18). Crisis turns people inward, but God sent the Church





outward. This is not a time to survive but thrive. So, we continue to ask God for wisdom to find new ways.

When leaders ask, I suggest a course for navigating this next season.

### *1. Renew your personal rhythms.*

Healthy churches are led by healthy leaders. New challenges, added pressure, greater restrictions and reduced connection have broken our mental, social and spiritual rhythms, yet most leaders continue in normal routines. We can't expect "business as usual" regimens will suffice in a season that has been anything but routine! Rhythms of rest and work, exercise and diet, reflection and ministry, family and friends all need to be re-evaluated to find the right blend. We must find ways to develop life-giving thoughts, build life-giving relationships and engage in life-giving activities.

### *2. Reconnect people.*

Churches have begun to meet in person in limited capacities. Pastors who have been taught about sensing "critical mass, momentum and morale" in crowd dynamics have expressed their concerns about the weekend experience. While the rooms have not been full, the hearts of those who attend are.

God has designed people for relationship. There is a power to presence, a joy to joining with others. This is why, regardless of the form — services,

small groups, Sunday school, home groups or hangouts, we have to get people together. In those settings, we will see spiritual, social, emotional and mental health and life re-emerge as they build friendships centered on God's Word.

### *3. Redesign the road for two lanes.*

Digital ministry is here to stay. Having experienced the convenience of digital offerings, people are more likely to change lanes between online and onsite. Knowing this, church leaders are

charged to redefine and design the pathways to maturity.

We understand that true spiritual maturity is living out the priorities of God in the character of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, it would be wise for leaders to define the marks of maturity in the life of a believer — attitudes, values, belief and behaviors regarding their relationships with God, self, family, work and world — and afterward to look at their programming, both online and in-person, to determine if believers can grow in maturity in either/both lanes.

### *4. Recast the vision.*

Henry Cloud stated we lose purpose in crisis. Recasting vision renews the sense of purpose, moves us from a mindset of "survive" to "thrive" and refocuses our lives to live on mission. Most of all, vision creates hope and reminds us that God designed us to live for something bigger than ourselves. Reestablishing vision, direction and hope gives meaning, purpose and energy to life.

### *5. Refuel your joy.*

The unrivaled power of our faith comes from adopting a mindset of humility, gratefulness and generosity. Humility shows our dependence on God. We should be more prayerful, more studious in God's Word and more considerate of others. Gratitude focuses us on what we have, not what we don't have or what we lost. It reminds us that God is in control. Gratitude is the path through grief and worship is the way to overcome fear. Generosity grounds our faith in God's power and provision. It increases our impact and gives us a greater opportunity to talk about the hope that is within us. Humility, gratefulness and generosity are the elements necessary to navigate our present challenges, showing dependence, confidence and courage in God.

We've got a job to do. My prayer is that God will give you the wisdom and courage you need to accomplish all he has for the Church in this next season. **E**





**Malcolm Burleigh** is executive director for U.S. missions for the Assemblies of God.

# Leaving the Building to Reap a Harvest

## The Impact of Coronavirus on U.S. Missions

Has the Church left the building? That is, are Christians still being the Church even if they aren't meeting in buildings? Many of us in ministry and leadership have asked ourselves this at some point during 2020. And it continues to be an important question as we see that even for those whose locales have allowed in-person gatherings again, many churches are seeing only a fraction of their pre-COVID attendees return with no guarantee of going back to normal.

As much as any time in history, I believe the Church today must be marked by unity and — as was said about the tribe of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32 — an understanding of the times and the knowledge of what to do next. So, what are we to do?

### 1. Start a New Chapter

I will be the first to say I don't have all the answers. What I do know is if COVID-19 has taught us anything, we must be prepared for transition. Change is a decision. Transition is a process. Deciding to make a change to migrate what you were already doing pre-COVID to a digital format is a relatively easy decision. However, fully transitioning your ministry (and resources) to adapt to this new season — that's a process!

One important and often overlooked part of the transition process includes grieving, and too often we fail to do that. Some of what we had to let go of in 2020 was significant — painful even. Change is increasingly difficult when decisions have names and faces and history tied to them. We must take time and find ways to grieve. If you've already turned the page and begun a new chapter in your church,

ministry or organization, make sure you've properly grieved that which you've left behind. Doing so isn't weak; it's healthy.

At the same time, this is a new season. As leaders in his Church, God isn't looking to us to recreate what's now dead. He seeks to breathe life into what's new. If you're trying to reach a 2021 world with outdated or ill-informed perspective or with yesterday's methods, I challenge you to grieve, let go and turn the page. There's a beautiful new chapter full of divine solutions to your community's needs just ahead!

### 2. Remember That Opportunity Awaits

Evangelizing during hard times and to difficult places is in the DNA of the individuals and teams within Assemblies of God U.S. Missions. The very reason we exist is to mobilize people to reach the challenging and neglected people and places in our country. That's not just a phrase in a mission statement — it's who we are!

I don't want to downplay the negative impact this pandemic has had on some churches. However, our missions personnel have repeatedly seen how the pandemic has opened doors for ministry in ways they haven't previously experienced.

The Church is called for such times like this one. We are to be the light in the darkness. We are to look with the eyes of Christ to see the lost, the broken and the hurting among us. Too often, we don't see them because we aren't looking for them.

In broader culture, adaptability and innovation have seen meteoric rises to become some of the most prized traits of a leader. These have been decades-long necessities for people in ministry and missions. Really, these have been part of the mandate for followers of Christ for millennia.

Sometimes I think we need to take our eyes off what we currently see to allow our ears to hear what God has already said. Jesus didn't call us to a fixed singular method. He left us with a dynamic, global kingdom mission. Culture will always change. His Word is what remains. It's only right then to believe that our ways of reaching and impacting culture with the good news of Christ must adapt.

As leaders in his Church, God isn't looking to us to recreate what's now dead. He seeks to breathe life into what's new. If you're trying to reach a 2021 world with outdated or ill-informed perspective or with yesterday's methods, I challenge you to grieve, let go and turn the page.

### 3. Steward the Moment

One thing I've noticed over my years of ministry is that during times of national or global crisis, something shifts in the spiritual realm and in the hearts of those who do not yet know Christ. Receptivity seems to increase. Loss, brokenness and despair beg for hope. Questions and search for meaning are brought to the forefront.

Outside of prayer and fasting, one of the best things we can do during moments like this is to be present, engaged and respond to needs. Our U.S. missions team has found this to be especially true during this moment. One study by the

CDC showed that rates of adverse mental health conditions, substance abuse and suicidal ideation were anywhere from 2-4 times higher than pre-pandemic levels. Months into the pandemic, 40 percent of surveyed U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance abuse. Amidst these new realities, leaders in Adult and Teen Challenge have responded to resource and provide hope and recovery to this increased need.

Our chaplains have put themselves in harm's way to minister to those in hospitals and medical facilities, in military and law enforcement contexts and also amongst first responders to crisis events such as the numerous hurricanes and wildfires. Not to mention, we have many ministering within the great areas of need in our nation related to human trafficking, foster care and adoption.

Education in our country has undergone enormous transformation. This has provided opportunity for missionaries with Youth Alive to help students in junior high and high school transform the way they share the gospel with their peers. In higher education — with nearly half of U.S. colleges primarily or fully online — missionaries with Chi Alpha have traded in-person gatherings for digital evangelism and discipleship of college students. We have Chi Alpha groups on over 300 campuses, and dozens have actually reported increases in the number of students they're discipling compared with pre-pandemic in-person metrics.

Missionaries with Intercultural Ministries are reaching the diverse people groups that are often unnoticed or underserved during normal times in America. The need magnifies during times of crisis when levels and layers of support within these communities are disrupted. And finally, Church Mobilization has responded by mobilizing more missionaries, church teams and volunteers to respond to the greatest needs of our churches and communities.

### Final Thoughts

God was not surprised by 2020. In a year that was marked with much change, difficulty and transition, it also provided us many new opportunities to steward as his plan and purposes advance. Through it all, his mandate for missions remains. And, as a laborer with you in his kingdom, I choose to remain present and engaged in the field and work with his promised harvest in sight. **E**



**Charles Drew** was founding pastor of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and is author of *Surprised by Community: Republicans and Democrats in the Same Pew*.

# Cultivating a Politically Diverse Church

## Strategies for Church Community in an Us vs. Them Culture

When at last the American church shakes off her COVID-induced isolation, will her fellowship improve? Or will we simply see with even more clarity how politics has driven us apart?

Less than a month before the national election in 2016 our church held a congregational forum. Two members — a Republican and a Democrat — shared how they were going to vote and why. They then answered questions from me, each other, and the congregation about their political thinking and what shaped it.

Following my brief talk on turning down political heat at church, we broke into small groups to discuss hot topics. We went home relieved, and happily surprised, that we had been able to talk so honestly and amicably with each other. One participant wrote: “I felt a sense of liberation from the fear of having an open discussion about topics that can often be divisive within the Church.”

The 2016 forum did not happen in a vacuum. We sponsored similar events prior to the national elections every cycle since 2004. For each one we chose the panel participants carefully. They were all people of character and grace with good public standing so as to assure that they would receive a hearing. They were also from inside the church community, so as to avoid the impression that we were “selling” something

from outsiders. In no case were they church officers (we sought to keep church power out of the mix). In every case the panelists had, prior to the meeting, shared with each other what they were going to say and prayed together. This arrangement avoided surprises, celebrated their deep unity in Christ, and helped pre-empt the dehumanizing that can happen in political talk.

Our practice has included more than the forums. Bible truth rather than current events has set the agenda for our weekly teaching, reminding us of the high and humbling truths that bind us rather than the lesser truths that divide us. Some prominent humbling truths: our wisdom is finite, our motives are mixed, and our insights are heavily influenced by our own stories and agendas. Some prominent high truths: God is infinitely wise and powerful, he is loving and good, he has walked and suffered among us for our good, and he will one day put everything right. We have found that we are less likely to fight with each other over politics when we are routinely alerted to our fallibilities and comforted by God’s sufficiency and plan.





We have taught a good bit about idolatry. Our stories and agendas, which are so influential in our political behavior and thinking, are themselves influenced by the tendency to make substitute gods out of the good things in life. Because those good things are fragile, easily broken or stolen, they set us up for fear and anger. This happens, for example, when we put too much hope in political solutions or in America as we imagine she once was or hope she might be.

We will never agree completely on how best to love our neighbors. But we can amicably navigate our differences as we seek to, making of ourselves the sort of community that draws in our friends.

Distinguishing between moral principles and political strategies has proven helpful as we have framed our teaching about public responsibility. The former, which we promote, are the high commands of God: love God with all you've got and love your neighbor as yourself. The latter, which we do not champion, are fallible human efforts to nudge the culture in the direction of greater conformity to moral principles.

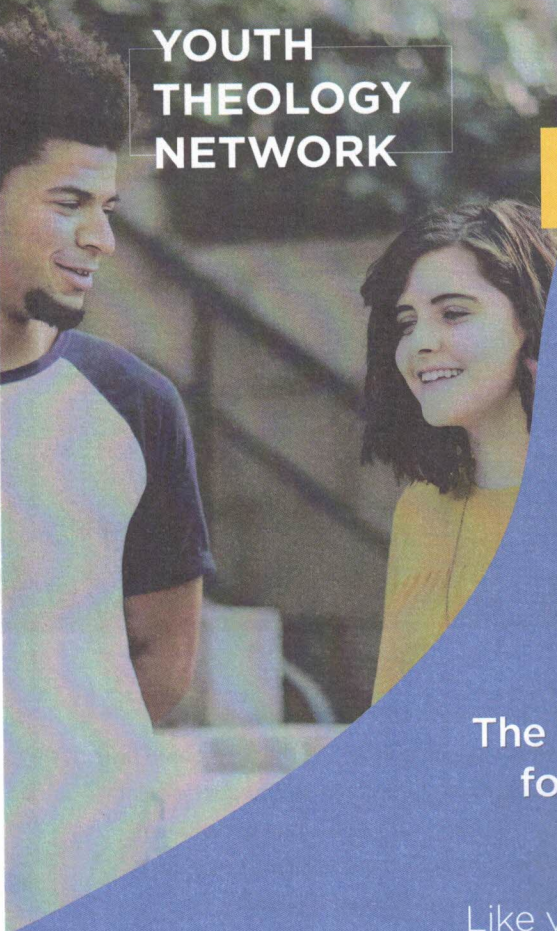
Take, for example, care for the poor. This we have advocated. But when it has come to the matter of

implementation, we have taught that there can be honest disagreement over which public policies are the best. Some say that the preferred strategy is to increase taxes and government spending on behalf of the poor. Others say that government should get out of the way and allow a deregulated economy expand to everyone's (including the poor's) benefit.

Distinguishing between principles and strategies has helped us to become a community where we can safely argue with each other over the merits of strategies, because we have chosen not to absolutize them. We are less apt to see the friend with an opposing strategy as the enemy of God, and therefore as our enemy in some essential way. With less at stake, we can keep talking and listening.

We have periodically urged our people to meet for a "political cup of coffee" with someone in the church whose politics differs from theirs. The rules of engagement: Promise to listen rather than argue; keep your promise; look for common ground in moral principle; agree to disagree where you must; pray for one another where you can; celebrate the God who binds you above your differences by taking the Lord's Supper together as soon as possible.

We will never agree completely on how best to love our neighbors. But we can amicably navigate our differences as we seek to, making of ourselves the sort of community that draws in our friends. So many of them don't need another intellectual argument; they need a social argument. They need to see love working. **E**



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*Is helping high school students understand God's call on their lives part of your personal mission?*



# Where Do We Go From Here?

The Church's mission began (according to John 20) with three things which have become very familiar to us in recent days. It began with tears, with locked doors and with doubt.

**O**n the first Easter day, Mary Magdalene was weeping in the garden outside Jesus' empty tomb (John 20:1–18). To her astonishment, Jesus met her, spoke to her and gave her a commission. She was to go and tell the disciples, who were in hiding, that he was alive and that he was now to be enthroned as Lord of the world.

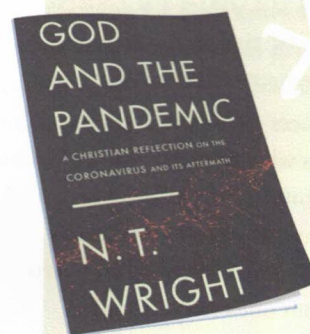
That same evening the disciples were still in hiding with the doors locked (John 20:19–23). They were naturally afraid that the people who had come after Jesus would soon be coming after them too. But the locked doors didn't stop Jesus. He came and stood with them. He shared a meal with them. He gave them their mission: "As the Father has sent me," he said, "so I'm sending you." What did that mean? The most obvious way of taking it, as we'll see below, is to say: as Jesus was to Israel, so the Church is to the world.

The next week the disciples were in the same room, locked in once more. Thomas spent the week telling the others he'd never believe it until Jesus showed up and proved it was really him (John 20:24–29). Jesus came again and invited Thomas to touch and see the wounds in his hands and his side — the scars which proved his identity and the wounds that revealed his love.

Tears, locked doors and doubt seem to go together. Different ways of saying similar things. Together they sum up a lot of where we are globally, at the time I'm writing this. Tears in plenty, of course — so many lives cut short. Locked

doors — well, precisely. The fear isn't just of certain people who may have it in for us; it's a larger, more nebulous fear that every stranger in the street might, without knowing it, give me a sickness which could kill me within a week. I might be able to give it to them as well. So, lockdown. Like a weed growing between the weeping and the lockdown, there is doubt. What's this all about? Is there any room left for faith or for hope? If we are locked away from all but a few is there any room for love? These are hard and pressing questions.

They are the kind of questions the Church ought to be good at answering. At answering, not just verbally (who's listening anyway?) but symbolically. If the earliest disciples found Jesus coming to meet them in their tears, fears and doubt, perhaps we can too. **E**



N.T. Wright shows that a careful reading of the Bible and Christian history offers ample guidance for how Christians are to respond to the coronavirus. This excerpt from "God and the Pandemic" © 2020 by Tom Wright is used by permission of Zondervan. **Order at [Zondervan.com](http://Zondervan.com)**



## On Christian College Survival

Since 2014, Shirley Hoogstra has been the president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), which serves as the leading national voice of Christian higher education, representing more than 180 Christian institutions around the world. Before joining the CCCU, she served as vice president for student life at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for 15 years. She also practiced law for more than a decade as a partner at a firm in Connecticut.

### HOW DO CHURCHES AND THE BROADER CULTURE BENEFIT FROM HAVING LEADERS AND MEMBERS WHO HAVE RECEIVED A CHRIST-CENTERED COLLEGE EDUCATION?

Christian higher education produces committed, compassionate, convicted citizens who want to engage deeply in this world, not in spite of their faith but because of their faith. Christian colleges and universities focus on developing resilient faith in their students. Academic experts mentor students on how to live out one's faith in his/her vocation. There is an emphasis on belonging and contributing

to the local church after graduation. Christian higher education helps students develop a Christian worldview, gain tools for being in a secular culture, and establish a support network of mentors, friends and pastors, so they can be culture-shapers and effective witnesses for Christ.

### CAN YOU GIVE SOME EXAMPLES OF GRADUATES OF CCCU MEMBER SCHOOLS WHO HAVE GONE ON TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WELL-BEING OF OUR WORLD?





There are so many, but I'll offer a few. First, Angie Thomas is a graduate of Belhaven University. Her debut novel, "The Hate U Give," is a #1 New York Times bestseller and major motion picture. "The Hate U Give" actually started as her senior project while at Belhaven, written as a short story to help her classmates understand the conversations and unrest following the death of Oscar Grant, who lost his life in Oakland, California, at the hands of police officers.

Second, Kent Brantly is an American doctor perhaps best known as an Ebola survivor. When he began his career as a physician at Abilene Christian University, he wanted to treat patients in areas of the world with little access to medical care. That led him to Liberia during the 2014 Ebola crisis. His decision to continue caring for his patients — despite the risks to himself — led Time magazine to name him as one of the Persons of the Year in 2014.

### **WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE TOP CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES TODAY?**

COVID-19 is certainly changing the landscape of higher education. There is still much unknown about the long-term impact, but it has added to existing financial challenges, including unanticipated expenses to both support students and pivot to online learning, financial losses from room and board, less income from donors who face their own economic challenges, and catastrophic losses to endowments.

A crisis of this magnitude creates monumental challenges, but also provides Christian leaders the opportunity to pivot and adapt. Now, more than ever, we need higher education leaders who can respond to a new generation of financially insecure students; collaborate with other higher education institutions in new ways; continue to understand what specific vocations need to be supported through higher education and how to best serve students; and champion increased racial and ethnic diversity on our campuses in the midst of widening inequalities.

### **HOW HAVE CHRISTIAN COLLEGES ADAPTED TO THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19?**

In an instant, the coronavirus turned campus life upside down this past spring. CCCU campuses were not only forced to quickly close, but also to make an immediate pivot to online learning. As I write this, the majority of our campuses are open and students are rising to the challenge — generally

through a hybrid model of in-person and virtual learning and with significant health and safety protocols in place. I have been so encouraged by the innovation on our campuses and above all else, the care and compassion shown for students, faculty and staff. They are amazing! Truly.

The medical director on one of our campuses shared this first-hand report with me recently: "It's really all about our students. I don't care what anybody says but it is all about our students. You would be so proud of them. The words of appreciation ... they are practically tripping over themselves with gratitude. They are so hungry for community. And their compliance. What amazing students! Makes me love coming to work every day!"

### **CONSIDERING THE UNCERTAINTY IN THE JOB MARKET AND COST OF CHRISTIAN COLLEGE EDUCATION, WHY SHOULD YOUNG CHRISTIANS STILL CONSIDER ATTENDING A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE?**

Christian colleges and universities provide a unique and valuable place for students to discern their vocation through the study of their chosen discipline. They also develop a deeper relationship with God, with their peers and professors, and with their surrounding communities. Students who want to investigate their faith and deeply delve into the idea of spirituality would be well-served at a Christian college. The integration of faith and learning is a key factor in the decision process, and students who desire to integrate biblical truth into their academic careers and throughout their lives are often drawn to Christian colleges.

### **WHY SHOULD WE FIGHT TO KEEP OUR SCHOOLS OPEN?**

David Brooks said it best: "You [Christian colleges] have what everybody else is desperate to have: a way of talking about and educating the human person in a way that integrates faith, emotion and intellect. You have a recipe to nurture human beings who have a devoted heart, a courageous mind and a purposeful soul. Almost no other set of institutions in American society has that, and everyone wants it." **E**



# Complicated for Us, Not for God


“It’s complicated.” Parents deploy this phrase strategically to avoid answering an inconvenient question from a child. Yet, over these many months, we’ve heard, uttered, or even groaned these words many times to one another. When do we close or reopen our church buildings? How do we foster community or mission in a time of isolation? How will real and lasting solutions to racial injustice be achieved? Will the economic recovery be shaped like a V, U, or squiggly line? What does that mean for our strategic plans? Well, it’s complicated.

**B**ut God specializes in the complicated. The gospel thrives in the complicated. A common hubris of modernity is assuming that we live in unprecedented times. We must remember that the Church was birthed amidst multiple complexities. Through conquests and consolidation, the Roman empire precipitated the greatest mass migration of people that the world had known. Local economic patterns were disrupted with globalization made possible by a revolutionary system of highways and the common currency. Urban centers rose and fell. The celebrated Pax Romana promised political unity and economic prosperity, but it masked the constant rebellions and could not prevent famines and plagues. Religious pluralism, urbanization that created economic disparities, multiculturalism, political unrest, breakdown of old worldviews, and the imposition of a global imperialism. A lot was going on!

These apparent obstacles became opportunities for the

gospel to be proclaimed, as highways for commerce became highways for missions. They were the conditions in which the Spirit creatively planted churches throughout the empire. And thus, the apostle Paul prayed: “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people — the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world — just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace” (Colossians 1:3–7).

The gospel is still bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world — and among us. So, in the midst of today’s challenging and complicated circumstances, we join together in Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving and certain hope in Christ. **E**



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