

The home is now the church

In his article published in this column on 14 July 2020, titled “Creative Leadership” my colleague, Russell Viljoen makes the very valid point that even church leaders will have to come to terms with the changes in a post Covid-19 world.

Not all church leaders see the need to change.

There are some who see the regulations as an all-out demonic attack on the church of Jesus Christ and also of mankind.

Other leaders have more pragmatic issues, affected directly by the accompanying financial crisis, and thus impacting their security as most of their revenue comes from congregants who pay tithes and offerings.

Then there is the apparent unfair and unequal application of the regulations, where meetings of a maximum of 50 people are allowed irrespective of the size and facilities of the buildings of a local congregation.

Hence, some congregations have chosen not to start Sunday services again but to continue with online communication with their members.

Many congregations, especially in rural areas, do not have this choice of online communication.

Whatever the situation, our Sundays are never going to be the same. The Church is going to have to do church differently, pastor Russell suggests.

If we go back in history to when the church was birthed we would find similar constraints put upon “The Way” as it was first referred to, and yet the impact on the whole Roman Empire was incredible.

To be a Christian in the early days meant to change to a radical new lifestyle, even at the cost of one’s life. The underground house church in China may be for us a current example of what the Acts church was like.

Ed Silvano, founder of Harvest Evangelism, has urged believers to change the spiritual climate as Jesus showed us in Luke 10:1-9.

In effect, we are called during the current lock-down to turn our homes into an Ekklesia. Ekklesia is the word which has been translated church in the English Bible. It describes a gathering of believers. According to Matthew 18:15-19, when as few as two Christians gather in Jesus’ name, He manifests Himself and grants them power to bind wickedness and to release grace and forgiveness. This is THE key to push back the evil unleashed in our communities and on the world today.

In Acts 19 we see the Church operating as the Ekklesia outside of the religious buildings with such power and favour in the eyes of the unbelievers that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord...and God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19:10-11).

I firmly believe that this current crisis is an opportunity for us, the Ekklesia, to operate in new arenas for God to perform extraordinary miracles, for deliverance from fear and depression, for financial provision and, most important yet, for accelerated salvations so that large numbers of people will be saved through the manifestation of the children of God.

But, do we not need the church buildings to fulfil the injunction that we should never cease to meet together (Hebrews 10:25)?

I am sure that this is a question I might get, so let me answer it here. There is little to stop us meeting in small groups, observing all the protocols about wearing masks and social distancing, whether that is in a coffee shop, a park or even at work.

Fourteen years ago I embarked on a crusade to convince individual Christians that they had been born, or reborn to fulfil God's purpose and that might not be in so called "fulltime" Christian activity, such as a pastor/minister, or missionary in far off lands, but simply to regard their places of work or every day activity as their mission field.

In this case the major purpose of the pastor/minister would be to equip them to be successful in that mission field.

What a wonderful opportunity to seek out fellow believers in your workplace to advance the Kingdom of God, operating "in power and favour in the eyes of the unbelievers".

Let me draw to a close by posing a series of What ifs?

What if, to ensure adherence to the scripture regarding "meeting together", we saw our work colleagues in this light?

What if our pastors and ministers seized this opportunity to equip us for the work we are doing at our place of work?

What if we used that teaching to share with our colleagues at work and hence multiplied the number who are equipped by the Word by 20 to 25 times a week?

What if existing and future church buildings become "multipurpose" to serve the needs of their communities, e.g. soup kitchen, pre-school and after school supervision, evening classes, exam venues, places for parents to meet, clinics, food warehouses, and gardens to supply feeding schemes for the poor and destitute in our communities.

This is the hour for the Church to decide to do church differently. Scriptures show in innumerable instances how much God cares for the poor, the orphans, the widows, the stranger, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and even prisoners. We are thus reassured that:

"You will always win when you care about what God cares about... There is work to be done and people to be reached, and nothing can take that purpose away from you." (Julia Jeffres-Sadler, *Pray Big Things*).

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