

Covid-19...opportunity for change!

I write this article on Day 26 of the Lockdown. It is amazing how we now realise how valuable the simple things are in life, and the priority we now place on them.

No doubt, life will not be the same after lockdown. Anybody who continues with life and business as usual, and has not been challenged to change their priorities and values after lockdown, must be totally blinded by self-indulgence.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, this could also be true of some churches and their leaders.

Make no mistake, most parts of the world, yes WORLD, would not be able to survive this crisis if not for the selfless sacrifice and labour of Christians and churches and their various mercy ministries, community projects and initiatives e.g. house-church and feeding structures.

However, there are some churches and their leaders who are struggling to respond effectively to the crisis at hand. I will try to name a few of the factors and suggest some solutions:

Disconnected Leaders

Sometimes we leaders are so consumed with only our flock or denomination or group that we almost lose touch with what is happening at grassroots level.

To take it a bit further, sometimes we are only involved or committed if we are in control or if it benefits our local church.

We almost never form part of city-wide projects or initiatives and therefore almost become irrelevant in times like these.

Denominationalism is another great divider that we have to overcome by looking at building relationships with the churches and their leaders who are right next to us regardless of their affiliation.

My encouragement to these leaders is to make contact with a leader who is connected at grassroots and city level and to ask them how they can be of assistance or how to get involved.

In this week, I read an interesting verse in 1 Samuel 17:15 that said that David would periodically leave King Saul's palace to go and feed his father's sheep.

No house-church structure

Recently, there has been a very worrying trend in certain churches where house-church structures and even corporate prayer meetings have ceased to exist.

The emphasis has mostly been on corporate Sunday services.

Effective churches in society can never be built around Sundays and buildings only, but in homes - here the church in China stands out as a shining example.

Every single evil in our communities can be traced back to a breakdown in the home.

A church that focuses on the restoration of the home and family is hitting the proverbial bull's eye! It is absolutely clear in the Bible that the early church grew in homes, met needs in homes and that more than 50% of Jesus' ministry was in homes.

It is vital that the church returns to growing and maintaining strong house-church structures that will "love their neighbours" and "eat at each other's homes (*while sharing*) their food with glad and humble hearts." (Acts 2:46).

I have a saying, "Homes won't come to church unless the church goes to homes first!"

Lack of action

James 2:17 reminds us that "Faith without works is dead."

We now need a faith that works!

Too many believers have faith but are not sure how to apply it properly to their lives and to those around them.

The over-emphasis on spirituality without practical implementation has also been exposed by this virus.

The book of James is a powerful lesson on practical religion and teaches us that true spirituality translates into blessing and caring for those around us, especially those in need.

As leaders, we have to teach our people not only the what, but also the how!

Financial dependence

The economy is crumbling and with it the income of churches is dwindling.

As leaders, we are greatly challenged as to whether we will depend on offerings or on the Lord God Almighty.

We are also challenged as to how we will meet the needs of our local congregations and the surrounding community.

We need to remember that God is not controlled by the economy, unemployment or the exchange rate, etc.

If He could provide for the Israelites in the desert, He can provide for us now in this time.

Just last week a member of our church told me how he had lost his job a few months ago, but had continued believing in and trusting God. He has received two job offers during the lockdown.

As leaders, we also need to encourage the people that we lead to be generous and to share of their money, food and possessions with those in need.

This always starts with a leader who exemplifies generosity in a crisis.

Just a small warning: Generosity or good deeds that are displayed on social media for vain reasons do not count. We cannot look for mileage from people's misery.

In conclusion, there are clear Biblical injunctions for us to be salt and light in this time.

This verse in Matthew 5:14 clearly illustrates that we have the power to influence the "earth" and the "world" positively.

May our communities and societies be even stronger and united in love and care as a result of strong selfless individuals and leaders.

Russell Viljoen : Pastor of Ebenezer North Community Church in Jacksonville Port Elizabeth.