

6 Keys for Understanding the New Normal

August 5, 2022

- 1. What we might have called ‘Small’ in the past is normal.** According to the Faith Communities Survey, the median onsite attendance at a congregation was 65. In the Virginia Synod, 91 congregations reported that in 2020 they have 101 or fewer active participants in the life of their congregation. (This is consistent with the numbers from previous year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in Virginia most congregations have been seeing about 50% of their pre-pandemic in-person worship attendance.
- 2. Digital Ministry is here to stay.** The pandemic changed our relationship to the digital world. Online worship allowed congregations to reach a group of people who couldn’t or wouldn’t come into a building. Zoom changed the way we conduct meetings and opened the door to connect with friends and members who physically live elsewhere. While every congregation’s context is different, most people will now expect some level of digital ministry. At a bare minimum, nearly everyone who attends your church will have looked at your website and/or Facebook page before they attend.
- 3. Focus on the people who stayed, not the people who left.** In many congregations, there is a tremendous amount of grief over the people who actively left or who simply have not returned. The grief is understandable, but as Carey Nieuwhof points out in his article “Why They’re Not Coming Back,” it is more helpful to focus on who is currently a part of the ministry than on who is no longer a part of the ministry. Building relationships and focusing on nurturing discipleship is far more productive than dwelling on what was lost.
- 4. Volunteering has changed.** People’s habits changed dramatically during the pandemic and it appears that there are now fewer volunteers to support the ministry of nearly every congregation. Moving forward, congregations will need to evaluate and prioritize needs, change their approach to recruiting volunteers, and in general re-imagine volunteerism. Congregations will also need to consider the shift in volunteering from an emphasis on the needs of the institution to get a job done to an emphasis on the needs of the individual to put their faith and gifts into action.
- 5. Community, Compassion and Hope are far more powerful motivators than Challenge, Commitment, and Reasonability.** We live in a time of movements, not institutions. We live in a time where people, especially younger people, place a high value on authentic relationships. We live in a time when what a church says and what a church does must align. We live in a time when loneliness is rampant, when “me” is more important than “we,” and when hope seems fleeting. The good news about Jesus can speak powerfully to today’s world, if we can share it in a way that can be heard.
- 6. Partnerships will be key to accomplishing the mission to which God is calling you.** Collaboration between churches, organizations, and individuals with missional alignment can significantly increase the likelihood of accomplishing a congregation’s mission and goals. Diverse voices open the door to better ideas. Inviting others to walk with you in a mission you identified or accompanying others in the mission they identified add people, creativity, and financial resources to a project.