

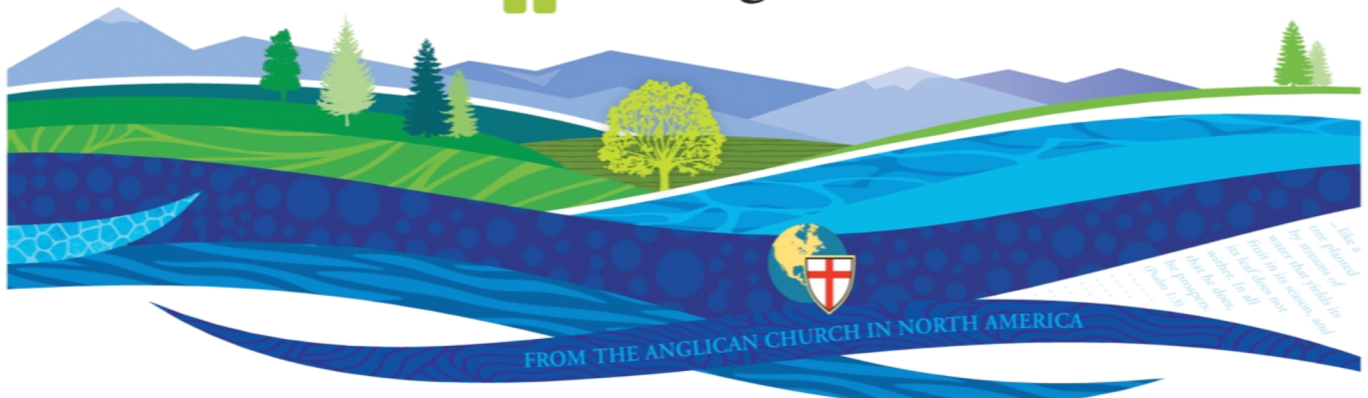
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# *Stewardship in an Age of Coronavirus*

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Revised April 15, 2020

By the Rev. David Roseberry



## What Just Happened?

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My role as curator and guide for ***The Evergreen Project*** compels me to write a few thoughts and ideas for the benefit of all of our leaders in the Anglican Church in North America. Whether or not these ideas and suggestions, and the thinking behind them, make their way beyond our newly formed denomination, I cannot tell. But my perceived audience for this paper are the Rectors, Vestries, and leaders of congregations in the ACNA<sup>1</sup>.

This Age of Coronavirus involves a complex combination of illness, economic trauma, disruption, and social distancing. That is what we know about so far, but we do not know the full impact of this present pandemic or how long this age of coronavirus will last. What we do know is that it is a major global event that will leave an indelible mark. In the midst of this fluid situation, our churches and ministries will be radically impacted. It doesn't make sense to make one "plan of action," given how quickly things are changing. Plus, this is a very local issue. Some local areas have declared states of emergencies, while others are largely unaffected for now.

But one thing is clear: ***every ministry, every congregation, and every leader should be prayerfully thinking about Stewardship in this Age of Coronavirus.*** Yes, it will be locally determined by the impact of the virus and the size and age of the congregation. This is why diocesan and congregational leaders need to think ***now*** about what changes they can make to their ministries, budgets, focus, and strategic plans. It is obvious, if only from a stewardship and budget point of view, that we cannot do nothing.

To hunker down cannot mean to go into hiding!

In fact, our energy and efforts should focus what our congregations can do to LEAD our people through these very unsettling days. With this in mind, I want to present several ideas to kick-start proactive steps for us all.

Additionally, I admit that I have the luxury of standing aside from the direct leadership and management of a congregation. This 'perch' gives me a lot of altitude and perspective that may be helpful. But it also might make the suggestions and thoughts in this paper seem unattainable or not worth the trouble. I cannot be the judge of that. I only write now to offer up some of my best thinking on a critically important question: How can our church grow stronger and more viable in the time to come?

**The Evergreen Project** began precisely to help churches grow in the kind of difficult days we now face together. It is the hope of Archbishop Foley Beach and founders of this movement to help churches become "ever-green", that is, green at all times. When a church understands generosity and the waters of grace and power that God has given us, the church will not need to worry in the times of drought or hardship. Its leaves will always be green. If it remains connected to this water source, leaders don't need to worry.

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<sup>1</sup> This letter and resource should be considered the fourth of four newsletters that have been sent to every ordained leader in the Anglican Church in North America. I had intended to send a hard copy of this paper to all those who have "The Generosity Box". Candidly, I believe that everything is changing so rapidly that a hard copy is pointless. It will remain electronic for the foreseeable future.

But it is not magic. It just doesn't 'happen' without leadership efforts. Rectors and Vestries will need to engage the topic of stewardship and generosity with creativity and confidence in this age of coronavirus. We need to use our imaginations to re-imagine our approach in these days and in the days to come.

### *A Gathering Church*

The very origin of the word for church, 'ekklesia,' means to be 'called out'. It came to mean ones who were gathered; an assembly. But in any case, it is hard to think about a church that is not centered around coming together as one body. This has been the mode of meeting for centuries. The Book of Hebrews specifically admonishes Christians to NOT give up meeting together. (Hebrews 10:25) As I have made the case in my new book "The Rector and the Vestry", the Great Commission from Christ was not given to individuals; it was given to an assembled group who were engaged in worship. (Matthew 28:16-19)

Yet, in these days, for the good of the greater society and to protect people from the ravages of the coronavirus, most churches are suspending their services. While they are not meeting together in-person, church leaders are finding creative ways to continue meeting together virtually. Worship and prayer have gone online. Video conferencing, messaging, and streaming services are our best friends!

*"We all have an opportunity to press into what it means to be 'absent in body, but present in spirit.' It's no one's first choice, but it's not nothing. And it may make us more appreciative than we have previously needed to be of the glory of simple physical presence." – Sam Allberry*

On the positive side, we are facing this scourge with amazing, inexpensive and accessible technology. We have incredible tools for communication and the dissemination of information and encouragement. Had this terrible pandemic fallen upon us even 20 years ago, how would we communicate? So, thank the Lord for that!

But this is an extreme hardship on the life of the church. Of course, not meeting together will also put an enormous strain on our financial resources. Many of us already give creatively through digital options, but not 'passing the plate' and not having the rhythm of weekly in-person worship will greatly impact the income of every church. Recent strong measures from governors and guidelines from the White House have effectively shut down worship in any kind of gathered way. How can a congregation thrive without congregating as we have all been accustomed to doing? How can our churches grow stronger and more viable in the time to come?

### *The Good that Could Come*

These are tough days for the church. They are very difficult days for every member of each congregation. The church has a fourfold burden to bear. 1) Many members of our churches will be furloughed or laid off permanently. This makes for a serious pastoral case load. 2) We cannot meet together in-person. We are forced to rely on technology to stream the message to each household. Many of our clergy have told me that technology is not their first language. 3) This virus is a spiritual challenge for many people. How would our God allow for such a thing? What does it mean that people all over the world are suffering and dying? 4) The pastor and family have their own burdens to bear and issues to face. Pastors cannot be one-way care-giving pastors forever.

We should not worry about the overall health and strength of the church. As I mention in my new book "The Rector and the Vestry" the church is the oldest, self-replicating, self-renewing, ever expanding institution or organization ever. The church has been pronounced dead many times before, but God has always found a way to rebuild and strengthen the Body of Christ.

With this kind of assurance, we can actually begin to imagine how God will use this pandemic to change the church and change each Christian believer in the church. Each of the point below could be expanded and lengthened, but for the purposes of this paper, I will only mention five great things that could emerge from this terrible situation.

1. Churches will shine brighter as the darkness of this time increases. There is true love and God's goodness in your congregation and God can use that goodness and Grace to be a magnet for many unbelievers.
2. The entertainment culture that has crept into the church in the last few decades could be reset to the simple and true faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Givers will be challenged to give even into the face of uncertainty. This is not a bad thing. It is scary. But God has always shown himself supply our 'need' (not necessarily our wants).
4. Pastors will rely more heavily on 'every member ministry'; that is, every member of the church could be called into service and pastoral ministry.
5. A new online congregation could allow churches to spread the message of the Gospel without restrictions.

These are only a few ways that this pandemic could be used by God to strengthen the church. But we have to first get through it! Every church will need to start thinking of new ways of being the church. Every leader will be tasked and taxed with discovering ways to care for the people in the church. It will not be easy and some churches will contract. Perhaps many will.

Let's look first at what really needs to change at the core of each congregation in order to thrive and develop strength during these days.

## An Underground Church

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In order to think clearly about this, I have had to imagine what it must be like to live in an area where gatherings on Sunday were illegal. What do churches do in nations where Christianity is illegal and meeting for worship is not possible? I think like this only as a ‘thought exercise’. I am not saying there is any malice behind the current recommended ban on public meetings including worship by our government leaders and health officials. There is not. But if we are to think about the situation we are in, it helps to imagine our ministry as underground church; a church where assemblies are illegal or small. If gathering for public worship was not possible, what kind of church life, ministry life, and leadership life would we have? How would we teach and reach people, provide pastoral care and discipleship training? How would our churches grow? One thing is for sure, we could not gather for worship in large numbers. We may not be able to gather at all!

Most churches are set up on a gathering model. Members and visitors attend the church on a regular basis. The church has a physical presence and a front door. When people come, there are (usually) clergy and staff to care for them, welcome them, and assist them. While they are there, they give. Potentially consumeristic, but still pretty par for the course. This is what we might call a “Pull” model ministry. It is focused on getting people to come to a singular place and take part in a service or program.

### *Missional Means Pushing Ministry*

But what if we thought of ministry in a “Push” model? The church’s effort would be more focused on pushing ministry out to the members of the church and the community. What if we tried to take the ministry and message of the Gospel and push it out to the members and community so that it lands on their kitchen table.

Simply put, what if the church tried to ‘push’ ministry out rather than ‘pull’ people in? Instead of people and ministers coming to the church, what if we reversed the flow? The congregation as ‘the gathered people’ is on hold. We need to see what it means to be ‘pushed’ out into the mission field.

We have to think differently about ministry. We have to think more ‘missionally.’ In fact, this is what ‘being missional’ is all about. It is about pushing ministry into the community around us. It means that we stop trying to pull people into church space; we push to their space, as it were.

The Church has been an amazingly consistent voice over the centuries. Even today our Anglican Church in North America has a mission statement that reads, “To Reach North America with the Transforming Love of Jesus Christ.” But the problem with mission statements is that they are useless unless they are embodied by members of the church. Well, here is our change. The Age of Coronavirus has given very pastor and every church unprecedented opportunity to speak directly into the lives of every single person in our community.

I know that these “Push Ministry Ideas” aren’t specific to stewardship, but that’s part of the point. Stewardship and generosity are connected to vital ministry. Generosity is always reciprocal. It is not just fund-raising...it is outreach.

## *Financial Fallout*

If churches are not meeting together, giving will go down. Add to this the facts about massive financial shockwaves that we are all aware of. And, to be blunt, most churches rely on Lent and Easter to give their budgets a boost before summertime.

Please be mindful of the losses that your church is going to sustain. You simply can't wait a few months or be complacent in the midst of this complex situation. If things are not adding up for your church financially, don't keep that a secret. Tell your members what is going on. Encourage them to give. Your church has critically important ministry to do. The efforts of The Evergreen Project to build generosity and stewardship in the congregation are efforts to build stewards. So, talk to your stewards about what is happening.

I have laid out a few ideas about how the church can "push" forward in mission. Let me now offer a few specific ideas about what leaders can do to shore up their giving base and strengthen their financial resources. It is fitting that I mention these things at the end for one specific reason: Funding follows Function.

In other words, a church cannot expect to receive adequate funding so that they will thrive in the Age of Coronavirus if they are not functioning as a church with a critical pro-active mission. If your people are hunkered down in place; if they are wounded, afraid, stressed-out, anxious, or alone, you have to go find them!

Put bluntly, people will fund the church because they see that the functions of their church are an integral part of their future. If they see their church as a vital part of how our communities and neighborhoods are rebuilding and reemerging, then the generosity will likely follow. In plain words, I believe that members and donors need to know and trust that the ministry of *their* church is worth supporting because it is important to them and their community. If they believe that, then they will want to give generously.

So, assuming that the church is moving forward in a "push" mission in ways I have outlined above, how can a church find the resources to continue in strength. Here are seven ideas that might be helpful for Rectors and Vestries as they think about their ministry in the Age of Coronavirus.

Here are some things a church might decide to do in the Age of Coronavirus. Each of these would be a high-level idea that might be useful in your own context. And each of these is an attempt to 'push' ministry out to the people and the community and not to 'pull' them into a building or location:

### *1. Real Help with Families*

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There has been a welcome shift in recent years from children's ministry as babysitting and youth ministry as entertainment to a family ministry approach focused on equipping parents and making disciples. This is the perfect opportunity to lean into that shift since kids (and their parents / guardians) will be at home with only one another for a while. What if the effort that goes into weekly Sunday School (for many churches) was shifted into online equipping for parents and model lesson plans and activities for parents to do with their children? What if our wonderful volunteers took to YouTube to read books and have interactive drawing time? Children need adults other than their parents to invest in their spiritual development, but they really need engaged parents discipling them.

*Action Step: Begin to 'push' messages and ministries toward the people and families in your church right away.*

## 2. Help Each Other Grow

The chart below<sup>2</sup> shows the reason that most people attend church. This is from a recent Pew Research Report. It showed a really shocking set of priorities or reasons why people come to church. The #1 reason why people attend church is that they want to feel close to God! That is wonderful and enlightening...but it actually should be shocking too. Why? Because most of a church's program and budget are often taken up with spending on program, staff, and meeting, rather than on addressing the simple reason for church to begin with.

Now I know that we cannot use polls to direct us; they are instructive, not directive. But it would be a very good thought exercise to determine how your church is addressing this heart-felt need or desire from most people. The next weeks to truly touch your leaders as their pastor. Help them (over the phone) to process this great convulsion in light of God's Word. This is pastoral counseling and it begins with the pastor picking up the phone and 'being there' for members of the church.

**Action step: ask your people to email you or text you if they are laid off or furloughed. Give them each a call on the phone and 'be there' for them. Don't hang up without praying for them.**

## 3. Preach Children's Sermons

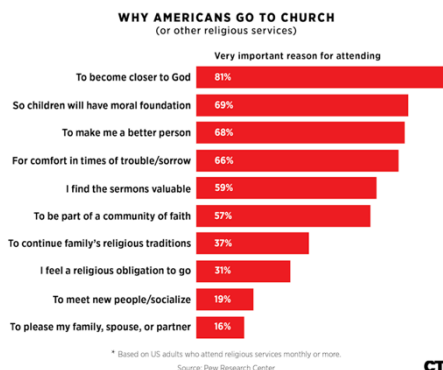
Look at the chart again. The other shocker to me was to discover that parents really want their children to be deeply influenced by the teaching of the church. This is the second most common reason why people go to church. This is good news for every church. Church can partner with the parents to bring their children closer to God.

But after several weeks of viewing many churches' Sunday services online, I have to say that they are totally adult-oriented. They are heady. Text-dominated. Lots of reading. And very, very few efforts to reach the children. Why not? This is something that every church can change THIS Sunday.

**Action step: instead of trying to reach the adults with your sermon and thereby exclude the children, why not preach a children's message and reach both the children and adults.**

## 4. Engage Senior Ministry

If our leaders were to think about how to serve them in an Age of Coronavirus, the ministry would look very different than a 'gathered ministry'. Senior citizens are the highly at-risk group. If they ventured out to do grocery shopping or take a trip to the Pharmacy, they would be putting themselves in a very dangerous situation. Every



<sup>2</sup> From Christianity Today

church has people like this; members who are in the crosshairs of the coronavirus. What would it look like for the church to push the flow of ministry to them?

What if the congregation decided to reach each senior citizen through a younger adult member of their church? Can you imagine the relief that a senior citizen would have in a younger member in the church did their grocery shopping or checked in on them a few times a week? What if we fostered inter-generational friendships and mentoring blossomed due to these new constraints? Just imagine the practical benefit to our older disciples and the mentoring benefit to our younger believers.

*Action Step: Make phone calls to every Senior Citizen in your church and ask them what they need. Match them up with younger members who can serve them.*

### *5. Lead the Church as a Family of Families*

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What does it mean to truly minister to a family that is shut in or locked down in quarantine? How can the presence of a minister be felt and be known by each household? Couldn't the pastor do a selfie-ish video recording a few times a week and email it to the members of the congregation? The pastor could ask that the household view the video around the dining table or wherever they gather for their meal. What if that video included an update about any news from the other members of the flock of Christ? Then the pastor could proceed to offer a table grace thanking God for the blessings of his life and the provision of the bounty of this meal. We talk all the time about the Church being a "family." Is that marketing jargon or do we believe it? How do we draw the church together as a family even when we are physically apart?

*Action Item: Provide videos and Kitchen table liturgies for people to use in the midst of their actual lives.*

### *6. Pastoral Care*

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We want strong "one another" family bonds, but people still need pastoral care. Of course, the pace of modern life often leaves pastors alone most of the day while the members of their flock are at work. But modern technology is amazing. It can close the gap between pastor and members easily. What if the pastor opened up a Zoom video conference and held "Virtual Office Hours" every day in front of the monitor? The weblink to the session would be emailed to every member of the church so that they could, at any time, 'zoom in' to his office and have some one on one time. If there were other people in the 'virtual office' and privacy was needed, private chat lines are available, or a future appointment can be made.

*Action item: open a Zoom account (or similar) choose to set up virtual office hours. Post on Facebook that "the pastor is in".*

### *7. Reach Everyone Every Week*

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Church leaders can launch an organized effort to reach out to every single member of the church body every week. The smaller church pastor will be able to have, for example, one or two volunteers that he/she enlists to reach people by phone or text. The medium to larger church pastor will need to develop a strategy for this outreach. Every staff person can be re-tasked to make phone calls, check in with people, and take prayer requests. Rather than waiting, we can proactively reach out. I strongly encourage every pastor to make the work of pastoral connection and personal contact THE main effort of the congregational leaders. It will require training, monitoring, encouragement, and leadership, but it will be worth it.

*Action Step: Resolve to initiate a connection with every member of your church every week.*



## 8. Varied Communication

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In the midst of new efforts in digital communication and connection, don't underestimate written letters. People will delete emails, some of your e-newsletters will end up in the junk folder, but everyone will open a written letter. A weekly letter from the pastor that is written and mailed using a postage stamp could be a great opportunity to be a bit 'newsier' about what is going on the life of the congregation. It is a proper place to share prayer requests from other members and to uphold the sick and suffering by name. Make sure to think about parishioners who are not tech-savvy. How will you remain connected to them? One rector told me that his congregation is live streaming their service at the normal time while they cannot meet, but he is doing a phone conference call earlier in the morning with many of his older parishioners. Make sure to use old and new methods of communications. I have written on the benefits of 'real mail' in other places, but it deserved to be restated here. There is junk email and there is junk mail. They all are tossed or deleted, eventually. But a letter from the Rector will have a longer shelf life in the congregation. Guaranteed!

*Action Step: Set up your online service platform, test it, tweak it, and then use it. Use the rest of the week to connect to the families in your church.*

## 9. Assume the Highest

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First, assume that every member of your church truly wants your church to succeed. Your members are totally aware that the funds for ministry are going to be reduced. The main engine for the joyous offering and collection of money has been put on hold. Your members 'get' that.

***Resolve: never use guilt or fear to motivate a person to give for the ministry. Start with the assumption that they already want their church to succeed.***

## 10. Faith, Hope, and Love First

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The leadership of the congregation should always communicate that the three most important values of your church are faith, hope, and love. These are the lead stories, as it were, before anything else is mentioned or written about budget shortfalls. Pastors, by nature, care more for people than money. This is how it should be. Make sure that all written communication makes it clear that you love your people.

*Resolve: it is said that Jesus spoke a lot about money and stewardship. Indeed, he did. But he never started the conversation with it.*

## 11. Pressure test all Portals

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Every church needs to have a robust online giving platform. The Anglican Church in North America has an agreement with Kindrid.com to supply these services to each congregation. Set up is easy and the portal is available now. Today, I particularly like the "Text to Give" feature because the number can be easily sent to many people over and over again. It can be inserted everywhere online and printed materials easily.

*Resolve: Make a contribution to your church right now. Go ahead. Do it. Get online and find the button (is there one?). Press it. Follow the prompts. Make the donation. Test everything...then start tweaking.*

## 12. Patronage

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This will be an idea that you either love or hate, but it can be effective. There may be people in your church who have the resources to underwrite the next few months or longer. I would strongly encourage the Rector to find out who in the church might be capable of doing that and setting up a time to make the request.

Remember, the underlying assumption that the people in your church want your church to succeed. Would it be possible for the leader to reach out to one or two or five others with a request to underwrite the budget during these extraordinary times? (I did a webinar on this sort of conversation for last years' program. You can find it at [www.theevergreenproject.org](http://www.theevergreenproject.org).)

It is totally appropriate for the Rector and Vestry to have a frank Zoom call with every member and ask for the personal financial support from each member.

Resolve: Pray about whom the Lord is encouraging you to visit in these difficult times. Confirm that person(s) in subsequent prayer. Then pick up the phone and ask for some time to speak privately.

## 13. Communicate Clearly

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As mentioned above, it is not a good thing to keep your financial challenge quiet. Everyone expects that giving will be down. I would encourage the Rector and Vestry to use their weekly communication to give a weekly update on the giving and whatever shortfall is emerging. As I mention below, a robust communication effort is absolutely essential.

Resolve: Re-task a volunteer or staff person away from 'Pull' ministry and assign them a new role: Chief Communications Officer.

## 14. Zero your Budget

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The budget that you have put together for 2020 has completely changed by events outside of your control. It does not apply any longer. *It cannot be used as a measure to assess giving or allocate expenses.* A new budget for the future will be very simple. Consider something like this to begin with. Back-date it to March 1, 2020.

### Put Income in three categories

- Online and mailed income, plate, pledges, and offerings
- Supportive Income from Patrons
- Current Reserves

### All Expenses in Three Categories

#### Staff

This expense is the cost of anyone on payroll. Some of these people may need to be furloughed; some may need to be let go. In any case, the staff that has been set and trained for the 'pull' ministry can and should be re-trained for the 'push' ministry.

I cannot comment on staff costs and whether people should take pay cuts or short-term leave. I would simply make one point here for all Rectors and Vestries. Staff costs are not overhead. They really aren't. *Staff are the ministry delivery system for the entire church.* Cutting staff is a HUGE setback at every level. It may be necessary, but it should not be the first thing that leaders think about.

#### Bills and Commitments

These are the fixed costs that you have that are paid to vendors, landlords, contracts, monthly subscription costs. This list of bills and commitments should be put in a priority order. Your church can and should guarantee payment to everyone who is owed money, but it will be helpful to place these expenses in priority order. And of course, if payments are going to be late or payments need to be spread out over time, clear communication from the church is essential.

#### Programs

These are the costs for the "Pull" ministry programs that have been, in effect, suspended. In most cases this entry would probably be zeroed out for the time being. However, one of the most important ministries that a church will need to continue will be, by whatever means, a robust communication effort.

Many church vestries will wonder whether to spend the reserves the church has accumulated. I cannot advise, but I cannot imagine a better time to do it.

Resolve: redo your budget with these simple categories. Keep this front and center in your thinking and prayer. Ask the Lord for 'next step' insights.

## Easter Letter to Invoke Generosity

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1. What has it been like for you and your family...what have you heard from church members? Be positive.
2. Do not say,
  - a. "I'd like remind you..." They know this.
  - b. "We have bills and obligations to pay..." Everyone does.
  - c. "I hate to ask you..." You should never hate asking Christians to give.
  - d. "If everyone could give just x". This has the opposite effect that is intended.
3. Instead say:
  - a. This is a request that I would rather make in person.
  - b. I need your help...
  - c. Giving in a time of need is the way of the Christian faith.
  - d. We are reaching our members and beyond with the love of God.
  - e. We are seeing a shortfall.

Dear Friends,

I never imagined that we would be having our Holy Week and Easter services online. ***Say what the experience has been like for you. Keep it short and personal.***

Having our worship services online is an important part of the way we remain connected together as a Body of Christ. I am so glad that so many of you have joined us week by week. Our mid-week services have been a blessing too. We will continue this ministry of worship and outreach as we go forward.

I know you love our church as I do and that you'd want to know how we are doing as a congregation. From the perspective of our ministry and outreach, I think we are doing well. But we are seeing some financial needs that I want to share with you.

Personally, I would rather be with you to share this news...but obviously that is not possible. Still, I know that you would want to know.

Our giving has been significantly reduced in the last few weeks. We have had fewer donations than normal. And the amount of each of donation is far less than usual. I am working with our Vestry to reduce our expenses and pull back spending. Very soon we will devise a new budget going forward.

So far, right after Easter, we have a deficit of x.

This is why I need your help. Our church has important pastoral and outreach work to do in the year ahead. I need your help to do it.

Will you give this week? You could give online if you like. You can mail a check to the church. Our text-to-give number is listed below.

***But more importantly, will you not only give this week, but would you give EVERY week even as we meet online?*** This is the way we will work together to keep our congregation strong.

If you were raised in the church, you might remember that members of the church received 'giving envelopes' at regular intervals. Until we are back in church week by week, I am going to send you giving envelopes on a regular basis. It is sure to help all of our member remember to give regularly, but it is also a way that each family can participate.

I know this pandemic is the most massive interruption we could imagine in our lifetime. It has wreaked untold damage to families and countries around the world. As difficult as these days have been, I know that we will get through it. Our God will deliver us from this pestilence; we will survive.

Please know that you are in my prayers daily.

Signed

## Make like a Tree

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The controlling image behind The Evergreen Project is a tree. The Bible uses this common image to show the challenge of standing firm through all seasons – good times and bad times. (See Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17, for example.) A tree that can stand firm through all seasons has strong, deep roots. The roots go down so deep that they are nourished by deep sources of water even in seasons of drought. It is truly amazing to see trees that grow, prosper, and bear fruit in the midst of incredibly difficult, seemingly defeating, circumstances.

I pray that you and your ministry become strong and sturdy trees as the days come. Deep roots are often deepened by seasons of drought, but only if there is a river to draw from. There is! May the Lord bless you in your best ministry in these most uncertain times. We have heard from our Archbishop to continue in prayer. Indeed, we shall. I know you have heard from your own bishop as well. **The Evergreen Project** is here to serve you in ways that no one ever expected would be necessary.

I hope this document can help you and your parish. May you continue in strength to be ever green for the members of your church and the community around.

In Christ,

The Rev. Canon David H. Roseberry