

Five New Challenges for the “Post-Post” Pandemic Church

by Thom S. Rainer

We have written and presented numerous insights and information about the effects of the pandemic on churches. I even wrote a small book called *The Post Quarantine Church*.

The essence of our information was straightforward: negative church trends were accelerated and exacerbated in the pandemic and for the several months after churches regathered in-person. In simple terms, declining churches typically experienced greater decline, and the relatively few growing churches experienced more modest declines.

We are now entering a new era beyond the post-pandemic phase. We are in a “post post” pandemic era. It is significantly different than the months after churches regathered in-person. Most church leaders and members, however, have not adjusted to the rapid pace of changes accelerated by the pandemic and its aftermath. This reality can best be explained by five new challenges confronting churches today.

1. We assume we’ve reached a new normal. The pace of change accelerated by the pandemic was so significant that we’ve hardly had time to catch our collective breath. But more cultural and technological change is on the way. We simply cannot assume that our approaches to ministry today are adequate for the tsunami of cultural change yet to come. The biblical mandates for our churches are unchangeable, but the methods we use must be prescient and wise.

2. We continue to overly focus on the church as an organization at the expense of our mission. In many churches, we've had to make major financial, facility, and calendar adjustments in the post-pandemic era. In those churches, though, the focus on organizational issues has consumed our time. We often forget we have a mission to accomplish and a community to reach.

3. We see modest evangelistic fruit as significant. One of the key indicators of our lack of missional focus is a small evangelistic harvest. Though we celebrate every person who becomes a follower of Christ, we can't be content with anemic results. A church of 100 in attendance, for example, cannot be content with just five or six conversions a year. A church of 200 can't be content with just ten to fifteen conversions a year. We have lowered the bar. We do not believe God can still reach many more through our churches.

4. We don't grasp the depth of the mental and emotional challenges of pastors. We have addressed this issue many times, and it is not going away. I grieve but, sadly, I am not surprised when I hear of another suicide by a pastor. In my forty years of ministry, I have never seen this depth of pain in so many pastors.

5. We understand culture even less. I get it. The pace of change can best be described as a blur. Just a few years ago I would have never predicted our culture would be as unbiblical and, in many cases, anti-Christian as it is today. But this new culture is our mission field, and we must be ready to reach and minister to those in this culture. They still need Jesus. We still need to be bearers of the good news.

The challenges can seem insurmountable. The pace of change can seem unbearable. But we serve a God who is with us always. We can indeed do all things through Christ who strengthens us. I have full confidence that God will give us and our churches everything we need to reach this new mission field that is our own community.