

THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP LETTER

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LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

We asked a group of Wesleyan leaders from across Africa the following question. What follows are their responses.

Question: What do leaders need to remember when leading the church in times of crisis?

Responses:

Rev. Doctor Galela

*Regional
Superintendent,
Wesleyan Church of
Southern Africa*



Crises happen at a time least expected and negatively distracts our plans in place. When it happens we need an effective and immediate response to prevent catastrophes which might affect those we lead negatively. We are need to act beyond ourselves in ways that will protect those we lead, our communities and the nation at large.

The following are to be remembered when leading the church in times of crisis: Leaders need to fully understand and grasp the nature of crisis. Continually seek information in order to gain knowledge that will enable you to determine steps necessary to avoid a negative impact on people at large. Leaders need to seek information from reliable accredited sources to minimize fake and incomplete news.

1. The authorities will impose regulations that will help to manage the crisis at hand. Regulations are meant to protect individuals, families, communities and the nation to prevent dangerous

catastrophes. Leaders need to identify how the restrictions affect the church. The church is part of the community within the nation and is expected to adhere to all regulations which don't violate biblical teaching principles.

2. Leaders are required to respect and honor the government and authorities who are serving the nation. Leaders are to bring clarity on imposed restrictions and derive a means to help those whom they are leading to adhere without failure.
3. Leaders need to find ways to communicate encouragement by bringing hope and praying for heavenly assistance. The people we lead respond differently in crises; some are gripped with fear and become uncertain about the future. They need assurance of God's presence and protection. Continual updates, encouragement and prayers will bring hope and strengthen those we lead to fully trust in God. We need to be a voice of hope and encouragement.
4. Leaders need to have a relief mechanism in place to help those who might be in great distress. Relief can be in the form of counseling, material goods, food and shelter.

**Rev. Thabsile
Thwala**

*National
Superintendent,
Wesleyan Church of
eSwatini*



Church leaders are appointed by God and are entrusted to care for many souls, not only limited to those that belong to their congregations. One thing to note is that this world imposes crises (intense difficult times) to its inhabitants including the church. However, there are things that each leader needs to remain cognizant of. These include but not limited to the following:

1. The call and the assignment of God: Every leader must make sure that he/she lives to pursue the initial call that he/she received from God. Paul says, 'So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven' (Acts 26:19). So, crisis or no crisis, stick to the vision received from God.
2. Believe and be obedient to the Word of God: We learn this from the ministry of Jesus Christ. He faced a number of crises while on earth, but what sustained Him is that He was obedient to the Father at all times. He did all that He saw His Father (God) doing and the said all that He heard from the father (John 5:19, 12:49). So, leaders need to see and hear from God, and then fully obey.
3. Pray and remain righteous: We know that it is the prayer of a righteous man that avails much and performs tremendous exploits (James 5:16b).
4. Feed and shepherd the sheep (John 21:16-17): During crises that separate and scatter the church, like COVID 19, it is very important to consider other alternatives for feeding and shepherding the church. This includes using different media and home visits where possible.
5. Get a good understanding of the nature of the crisis at hand: Proverbs 4:7b says "In all your getting, get understanding." There are a lot of things said about different crises out there, to an extent of false prophecy, myths etc. So, if the leader has good understanding of the crisis, he/she can use the Word and his understanding to refute anything false.
6. "Let your heart not be troubled but believe in God" (John 14:1): John 16:33: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." In the midst of all crises God's purpose will prevail. So, remain calm, do not panic. Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
7. Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Comfort all the afflicted and pray for them (Luke 10: 34-35: "He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'")
8. Believe God and pray for a miracle: Luke 1:37 "There is nothing impossible with God".
9. Protect churches and societies from false prophets: Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." If a leader is not understanding the times, a crisis period could open a wide door for false teachings.

10. Do not allow for xenophobic stereotypes to creep in and instigate hatred and discrimination.
11. Based on the knowledge that has been given on a particular situation, the leader must be decisive. Very often church leaders are the last ones to agree with what is being said - or even the last one to make a decision that will help the members. Leaders as entrusted by God with the flock should encourage the church to be part of the solution and adhere to rules and regulations.

Rev. Andrew Bondo

District Superintendent, Wesleyan Church of Nigeria



Things a leader should remember in crisis:

- A leader should remember to count his blessings in order to strengthen himself. Those who have gone through past crises like wars and Ebola should recall how the Lord took them through.
- Recollect how Jesus handled crises. He identified with sisters of Lazarus so emotionally that He wept. He met physical needs of the 5000 hungry male listeners by feeding them. This can be done through prayers on WhatsApp, Messenger, visitation etc. Meet physical needs when necessary.
- Most importantly, leaders should remember to tell followers to learn from present crisis and prepare followers for future ones. Just as this one came

unexpectedly; others may come suddenly. One of the best things any leader should remember do for his followers is to empower them to learn to do without him by pointing them always to Christ because He is our only present help in trouble not our leaders.

Rev. Gloria Azikiwe

Ministry Facilitator, Wesleyan Church of Kenya



It is the onset of a new decade, the year 2020 that is ushered in with pomp and celebrations as people across the world celebrate the close of a decade and the opening of a new decade. Before the end of January news circulates of a flu-like virus break out in China, Coronavirus (COVID-19). Well like the previous breakouts like Spanish Flu, SARS, Bird flu, and Ebola many people in other parts of the world not affected just carried on with life. It seems that with COVID-19, this would be the situation, where parts of the world not affected would continue as normal, churches would continue to meet as usual and life would continue until it started spreading and soon became a global pandemic in a few months redefining every aspect of life including the church.

As the world grapples with containing the coronavirus with governments shutting down or controlling structures of how people interact, the church in many places has not been spared. Pastors have found themselves caught flatfooted and at loss on what to do - especially in African countries that have experienced these lockdowns. Suddenly many pastors had to figure out what to do and how to shepherd their flock

when churches were also being affected by these lockdowns.

The Church in her history has had to wade through different seasons of crises beginning with the early church when crisis arose of Hellenistic Jews complained that their Hebraic counterparts were discriminating against widows who were Hellenistic Jews in the distribution of food. The twelve apostles came up with a solution to restructure the leadership and allow others who were selected according to the guidelines given to do the food distribution and when this was done, the complaining stopped (Acts 6: 1-7). The next crises were widespread persecution that necessitated the church leaders and members of the church to flee or go underground (Acts 8:1-4). Those that fled took the message of the gospel and spread it wherever they went birthing new communities of faith in different parts, thus as a result of the persecution the church spread. As the church spread into the gentile territory, problems arose of doctrinal interpretations of whether these gentiles should convert to Judaist practices of adherence to the laws of Moses or not. This situation that was threatening to rip the church apart, brought about the sitting of the first council in Jerusalem to debate these matters and look at a way forward that resolved the issue and maintained the unity of the church. (Acts 15: 1-35). These few examples from the scriptures and many more that have happened in the history of the church show that God has continued to equip the church to rise to the challenge of crisis throughout her history, therefore even what is currently happening on the global scale calls for the church to get back to the drawing board and re-evaluate and come up with strategies that will propel her forward.

What then do leaders need to remember when leading the church in times of crisis? Below are some six suggestions that church leaders can engage during times of crisis:

1. Prayer and Intercession

It sounds simplistic and cliché, but prayer is the mother of all strategies. We are living in strange times and whatever is happening on the global platform is new territory both for the world and for the church. But leaders need to remember that God is sovereign, in control and has not been caught flatfooted like everyone else as we all scramble for solutions. James 1: 5 (NIV) is clear in its invitation, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."*** Church leaders all around the world, should not attempt to presume that they have answers to respond to a crisis in a contextually relevant way if those strategies are not birthed from a place of prayer.

The early church discovered this and when persecution first broke out on the Apostles, the Apostles rallied the church to pray (Acts 4:23-24). After Peter and John were threatened by the Sanhedrin not to preach in Jesus' name, the church was shaken and responded together by praying and in Acts 4:31, the result of this time of prayer was the Holy Spirit filling and empowering the believers with boldness to continue spreading the gospel.

It has been very encouraging to see leaders who have rallied believers to prayer because in such strange seasons only God can fill us with His Spirit and empower us with wisdom and boldness to respond effectively to various situations of crisis that the church finds herself facing.

2. Leadership Exchange & Consultations

Church leaders need to have the humility to listen to one another and talk to one another across the denominational divide. A crisis is an opportunity for dialogue and unity and a breaking down of barriers to achieving the common goals of ensuring the health of the body of Christ and to the continued spread of the message of the gospel. Whereas we will not agree on every doctrinal point and may have some serious points of argument, we cannot afford to come to the table of crisis holding up our divisive placards of differences, otherwise we as the church will not achieve progress in the midst of division. We are the body of Christ, the church, those called to belong to Jesus Christ and have put their faith in Christ as Lord of their lives and head of the church which is His body. No other instance, than in a crisis does the church need to unite led by her shepherds across denominational lines to engage from a common front, speaking with one voice, united in action to engage the crisis situations that strange times bring. It is for the benefit of both the church and the world when the church unites in love and becomes salt and light in such trying times.

3. Flexible Methods

Leaders need to be open, flexible and intentional at adapting methods of ministry in times of crisis. If there is a time that has called for openness, flexibility and change it is during this season of COVID-19. Suddenly leaders of churches in many places where lockdowns have been put into place have scrambled to quickly find different ways of ministering to their members as they adhere to government restrictions. But of interest is those who have held on to sticking to business as usual. Stories abound of pastors who showed up on Sunday mornings after lockdowns were

instituted to find that they were the only ones in attendance that Sunday morning or maybe with one or two other families in congregations that were fairly sizeable. This situation has forced leaders of churches to rethink, re-evaluate, consult and come up with different strategies of reaching their members for ministry and reaching the lost.

4. Re-defining Gathering.

From the look of biblical prophecies and the correlation of events happening at a global scale, the church needs to be realistic and acknowledge that we are living in strange times and strange will be the norm. This is not being pessimistic or presenting a gloom-doom gospel and neither is the author of this article claiming to have special insight into the last days in reference to biblical prophecies. But if we as the church are true to the scriptures and the truth they represent, then we are in for strange as the norm. Therefore, it may call for the church to redefine conventional methods of gathering. For instance, in this COVID-19 season, there are churches that have opened their doors by increasing the number of services, restricting numbers of those who gather per service, spacing out the seats or the people to ensure there is social distancing when people gather for worship, have offered hand sanitisers and some even masks to those that have gathered to comply with safety restrictions.

In countries where persecution of Christians is the norm, the gathering of believers became made up of small groups, secretive, underground and spread out in various locations to avoid detection. As the church continues to exist in these strange times, there is a need for openness, flexibility, and intentionality of redefining and adapting

its methods of gathering to ensure that believers continue to fellowship and encourage one another.

5. Use of Technology and Social Media

Churches are increasingly making creative use of technological and social media platforms for continued discipleship and outreach. Well, we cannot over emphasize this but it's here with us! Technological advancement and Social media are here with us! These have totally redefined communication even in the rural and remote places of the world. We as the leaders of the church and more so in times of crisis cannot ignore how technology has redefined the social landscape globally.

Unfortunately on many fronts, the church is usually slow to catch up on using these avenues of access to smartphones, internet, and social media as means to both disciple and increase our outreach influence as we spread the message of the gospel and disciple believers. COVID-19 has brought this reality to the face of many church leaders more than anything else in our times. Suddenly even the media-shy pastors who didn't give much thought to social media, have belatedly appeared on Facebook, Instagram and others have opened church WhatsApp groups in order to spiritually nourish members of their

church and reach a wider social media audience.

6. Social Interventions

Church Leaders need to rally and engage members of their churches to reach their communities through social intervention strategies. We cannot solely rely on governments, governance structures, private sector or NGOs to respond and intervene during a crisis. The church has a mandate and responsibility to be salt and light in the community by loving others. This is best demonstrated when the church reaches out to the community around her in times of crisis to give hope, share the love of God in practical ways and make a difference with whatever resource the church can marshal whether in terms of human resource, financial or material intervention during a crisis. To sit back and be laid back as church leaders and not lead and rally the church to respond to our communities where they hurt most almost feels sinful and unjust on the part of the church and her leadership.

In Conclusion, as Bill Hybels correctly said, "The Church is the Hope of the World." Therefore, the church has a mandate and a responsibility to engage crisis times with wisdom, grace, love and compassion in order to be effective in making a difference and thriving during such strange seasons.

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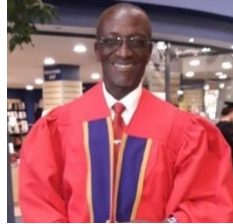
# WHAT WESLEYANS BELIEVE

**Question: How do we understand the global Covid-19 pandemic from a Biblical perspective?**

**Response:**

**Dr. James P. Toga**

*Pastor, Gardnersville  
Wesleyan Church,  
Monrovia, Liberia*



## **1.0 Probable Biblical Prediction**

The Synoptic Gospels mention several national and international events that will precede His return. Various English Bibles refer to them as “Signs of the End Time” or “Signs of the End of the Age”. They include, national and international wars, revolutions, massive earthquakes, famines, persecution of Christians, pestilences (NLT: epidemics, Matthew 24:1-35; Mark 13:1-31; Luke 21:5-28). We know that all these have increased in this century. The present COVID-19 and its devastating, universal effect would suggest that Jesus included it in His predictions.

## **2.0 Present Perception**

Many people, irrespective of their nationality, race and religion, perceive the COVID-19 as “Man-made” and intended to reduce the global population (I am hearing this in my country, Liberia). Other people, including Christians, perceive it as “divine judgment” and an imminent “end of the world”.

## **3.0 Possible Profits**

I think that Christians, particularly, can gather some “profits” from the presence of COVID-19:

1. Growth in personal Bible study and prayer
2. Growth in family fellowship and devotions
3. Probable development of “Home Cells”
4. Deepening of personal faith in God
5. Reverting to the “Home Church” of the New Testament

The fifth point is significant. Christian families who love Jesus Christ, but who cannot assemble in their places of worship, may worship in their homes just as some early disciples did (cf. Rom. 15:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2).

## **3.0 Positive Plea**

The Gospel of Matthew (2:12-14) informs us that “an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in dream” and commanded him to “Get up...take the child [Jesus] and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child and kill him. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod...” (NIV).

This passage presents God as ironical. On the one hand, He was capable of killing King Herod, or blinding his soldiers so that they might find the baby Jesus. Yet on the other hand He chose to send His Son into exile for safety. The question now is would God get angry with Christians who decide to stay

away from congregating for a while until COVID-19 passes?

I think that Covid-19 is more dangerous and more deadly than King Herod. I think too that we would be sinning the sin of “Presumption” if we ignore the reality of this

virus and disobey the pieces of advice from our health experts and the “lockdowns” of our governments. I plead therefore that Christians everywhere obey the advice of our health workers and our governments to keep safe.



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