

Monday, November 30, 2020
One Priority Briefing for Congregational Leaders from George Bullard
A Family of Congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina

One Priority

Starting and Strengthening Congregations to Serve as Vital and Vibrant Missional Communities.

Respite During a Pandemic – Part One

In a few weeks we will complete the ninth month of our active response to the pandemic. As infection numbers continue to soar, hospitalizations increase significantly, and the death count climbs to multiples higher than predicted just a few months ago, as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we find ourselves running a race to keep up with what is happening, and at times feel like we cannot slow down or stop.

Many of us are leading and managing hybrid congregations now. We are part live, part online and, unfortunately, often both are happening at the same time. This is another thing they did not teach us – as they did not know to teach us – how to do in seminary.

With a future hope of multiple vaccines that may combat and control the pandemic, we are tempted to slow down or even stop the race we are running. But just like a relay race where a runner must keep up their fast pace until the next runner has gotten up to speed and can take the baton from the runner before them without slowing down, we feel we cannot afford to slow down.

Yet, what happens if the second runner is not there and the first runner must continue running at the fastest pace they can? Eventually, the first runner will become exhausted and collapse to the ground. As a minister, is it possible that this has happened, is happening, or may happen to you before this pandemic is over?

If so, you need a respite. It is doubtful anyone is going to plan a respite for you, so you have to be self-aware and plan a respite for yourself. You cannot blame anyone else. Out of our ministerial commitment, you have likely been running fast and hard without having anyone to whom to pass the baton.

You need some relief, a breather, some downtime, or a recess. Without it, the short-term and long-term effectiveness of your ministry will be damaged – temporarily or permanently. In spite of the vaccines coming we may still anticipate it will be the end of next summer before the new normal pattern will provide acceptable predictability for our patterns of ministry. The new pattern will – we hope – be emerging by the Ides of March which is one year following the public phase of the pandemic. But it will still take several months for the pattern to smooth out.

The bad news is that may mean we are only a little over halfway through the impact of the pandemic. After your turn to receive a vaccine, you will be substantially immune from the virus but not released from the impact of the pandemic.

What is your plan for self-care? How will you get the respite you need and deserve for all the emotional, physical, and spiritual efforts you have put into ministering in the midst of a pandemic?

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