

***It’s a Minefield Out There!***

**Church Pandemic Response**

A few days ago, CMBA sent out inquiries to a group of churches of all sizes and locations to see how they are responding to the current spike in COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations as schools open and the seasonal programming begins.

It is obvious responding now is more difficult than responding 18 months ago when the pandemic forced everyone to engage in major shifts. It was simpler then. Many people were afraid. We were moving into the unknown. There was more unity around radical action.

Now it is not so clear. Many people are pandemic weary. Competing voices in our congregations ring in our ears. Our own resolve to move forward is strong, yet we must admit how much of our response is personal, spiritual, scientific, compassionate, or political. These perspectives are not all compatible. Opinions are widely varied as to what actions need to take place.

Some people are convinced they know the right things to do and are angry that everyone else does not agree with them. This is regardless of what perspective people have on the pandemic.

The open-ended question we asked was – “Are you talking in your congregations about taking any actions about the current spike in COVID infections? 1. Are you having THE TALK but not choosing to take any ACTIONS right now? 2. Are you having THE TALK and taking some ACTIONS? If so, what ACTIONS?

Here is a summary of what we heard:

1. Most everyone is talking. Not many are taking significant actions either because they see no need or because they are simply watching the situation.
2. Of those taking actions, most are minor.
3. People are encouraged to take personal responsibility to be safe, careful, and considerate of others.
4. Churches are encouraging masks but hardly anyone is requiring masks.
5. Some are continuing to sanitize before/after worship and other room use, but there is not the same level of commitment to sanitizing.
6. Attendance is shifting back to more people watching online and fewer people physically present for worship and small groups.
7. There is the monitoring of infections, notification of people exposed, some quarantining, but no significant contact tracing.
8. Social distancing – with marked off pews – is still happening.
9. Some are encouraging people who have not, to get vaccinated. None said they are requiring vaccination for participation in certain events.
10. Some have never returned to live worship, so they are certainly not doing so now.
11. Some churches are delaying the start of seasonal programming.
12. One church is pre-recording all its music in case it must make a last minute decision on a given week to go totally virtual again.
13. As many meetings and gatherings as possible are now held by videoconference.
14. People in churches who get infected – even if vaccinated – and go to the hospital, are staying longer.
15. People in churches who need surgeries and other procedures are having these delayed by hospitals.
16. Medical personnel and first responders are still under enormous stress and need ministry.

Part of the talk among a few is that if things get worse, they may take stronger actions, but they know this time there will be a backlash from their congregation. There is no one right action that will please everyone. Thus, some churches are hesitant to take more actions, and a very few churches are saying it is foolish to take any actions.

Overall there is an acknowledgement that many people have lost the principle of taking actions that affirm the common good of everyone. The hope is that more people would go beyond even the common good and focus on the higher good found only in a spiritual Higher Ground approach.