

COVID and the Church

9/15/2020 - by: [Charles Ericson](#)

While hiking with my family along the Cadillac Mountain South Ridge Trail in Acadia National Park recently, I received a text on my phone which came from WABI, the local CBS affiliate in Bangor. The text began: “There are now three deaths related to an August 7th wedding...”

Three. Deaths. Related to...a wedding.

You may have heard the story behind this headline on the national news. A wedding held in Millinocket, Maine, was attended by 65 people, most of whom did not wear face masks or maintain social distancing at the wedding or at the reception that followed. The last report I saw stated that 56 people who attended the wedding and reception had contracted the coronavirus, and when secondary and tertiary (third-party) cases are included, over 150 COVID-19 cases have now been traced back to the Millinocket wedding. That number includes 82 people at the York County Jail over 200 miles away from the wedding location, and 21 more at a rehabilitation center in Madison, Maine. Both of these locations have vulnerable populations. Just imagine an inmate about to be paroled, or an ailing nursing home resident, having their future jeopardized due to someone else’s disregard for health precautions.

What can faith communities learn from this tragic incident?

Masks that cover our faces save lives.

Social distancing of six feet or more helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Being covered by the blood of Jesus will not protect you from catching, carrying or spreading the virus.

The pandemic we are immersed in right now is not a hoax or a deep state conspiracy.

We also learn from the Millinocket tragedy that:

Rushing to resume indoor worship in sanctuaries is unwise and potentially deadly (for more on this, please see: [Not One Is Lost](#), May 26, 2020.)

And we are reminded that Jesus never required followers to gather in buildings to worship, only that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20, NRSV). Believers can gather virtually online, via email threads, conference phone calls and other creative methods – and Jesus will be there among them. I can only imagine that where worshipers gather in close proximity with faces uncovered inside the confined space of a sanctuary, Jesus will be with them also – only Jesus will be outside on the lawn frantically

shouting, “Get out! Get out now and go somewhere safe, stopping only to buy a mask and wash your hands!”

What can churches do when faced with anxiety about losing money and parishioners?

Clergy and lay leaders can reframe the worship scenario from the negative “we can’t gather in person yet” to the more positive “we are blessed to remain safe at home with virtual worship”.

Praise and reward your pastoral and support staff, for they are working harder than ever to continue ministering to the needs of the church. Adaptation is difficult and exhausting.

Encourage those with financial means to increase their generosity to make up for the dire circumstances of others who have become unemployed or have mounting medical bills.

Tell the finance committee that the rainy day for which they have been saving the church investments all these years has arrived and it is pouring torrents. Time to withdraw some principal.

Give your pastors additional time off to devote to family, make a retreat, go to the spa or beach, or even take a hike in a national park. These can spark gratitude and renewed energy for ministry.

And while doing all of this, trust the medical experts, scientists and – in the case of faith communities – educated theologians who have no motivation other than to keep us all safe and keep us alive.

Our God speaks: *“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live...”* (Deut. 30:19, NRSV). The choices we make going forward through this pandemic can most assuredly lead to blessings and life, or curses and death. As faith communities, may we always choose wisely...choose with others in mind...and ultimately choose blessings and life.

Author



[Chuck H. Ericson](#)

Chuck Ericson began serving the churches and clergy of the Eastern Region of the historic Connecticut Conference upon the retirement of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Clough. It is familiar territory for Chuck, as he was actively involved in the Tolland ...