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Footnotes:Church, Money, and Covid-19

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Footnotes¹

¹Curated Resources for Ministers



March 20, 2020

Hey Friends,

We're in strange times. Someday we'll look back and remember those months when we applauded people who refused to hug, shake hands, show up to work, and go to church. Surely we'll get back to normal, but it will be a new normal for sure.

I wonder where the church is in all of this. The word church (*ekklesia*) means assembly. How can we be the assembly when experts recommend not assembling? These developments pose significant questions for the future of church around the world. I'm currently working through Reggie McNeal's *The Present Future*. He says that for too long some American churches have been clubs that received dues and held meetings. When I read that a few months ago I wasn't sure. I am now, especially as the *ekklesia* tries to figure out how to be church without being able to assemble.

And about those dues. As this health scare wrecks the economy, church leaders are left asking how the bills are going to get paid. This question leads to larger questions about church budgets and how church members handle their own money. Churches are complicated financial systems, usually run on a volunteer/informal basis. This particular crisis might be calling us to something better. I'll spend some time in this issue talking about church budgets in uncertain times. Also:

- The Story of Angela Ruiz Robles and Digital Reading
- Preaching Online
- A Book Recommendation
- A Few More Footnotes



Footnotes Roundtable: Jason Thompson

Jason Thompson is the Executive Minister for the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ in Nashville.

BT: COVID-19 will affect church finances with decreased giving, as well as hitting the wallets of the members who have lost work. Where else do you see the hit coming?

JT: Missional organizations and missionaries are going to be impacted. Many of our parachurch organizations do not have large amounts of capital.

BT: It would seem churches with online giving options are better positioned for this.

JT: Absolutely. The number of check writers decreases each year. Use this opportunity to move your donor base to online giving. Do it now.

BT: What advice would you give church leaders as they prepare for budget emergencies?

JT: Build a three month reserve. Freeze all unnecessary spending. Even if your congregation has a three month reserve, go ahead and put safeguards immediately in place. Plan for the rest of 2020. Don't be afraid to ask members who are gifted financially to be part of the solution. Make budget adjustments. Do your best not to cut missions.

BT: Many churches have debt. How can church leaders work with that debt when a crisis like this one hits?

JT: Negotiate the debt with your local bank. During this season make minimum payments. When we move past this season, get your church out of debt. I've consulted with numerous churches across the country who have replaced debt with funds for mission and ministry.

BT: People are anxious and might be in their own financial crisis, yet, churches anticipate members to come through on certain commitments.

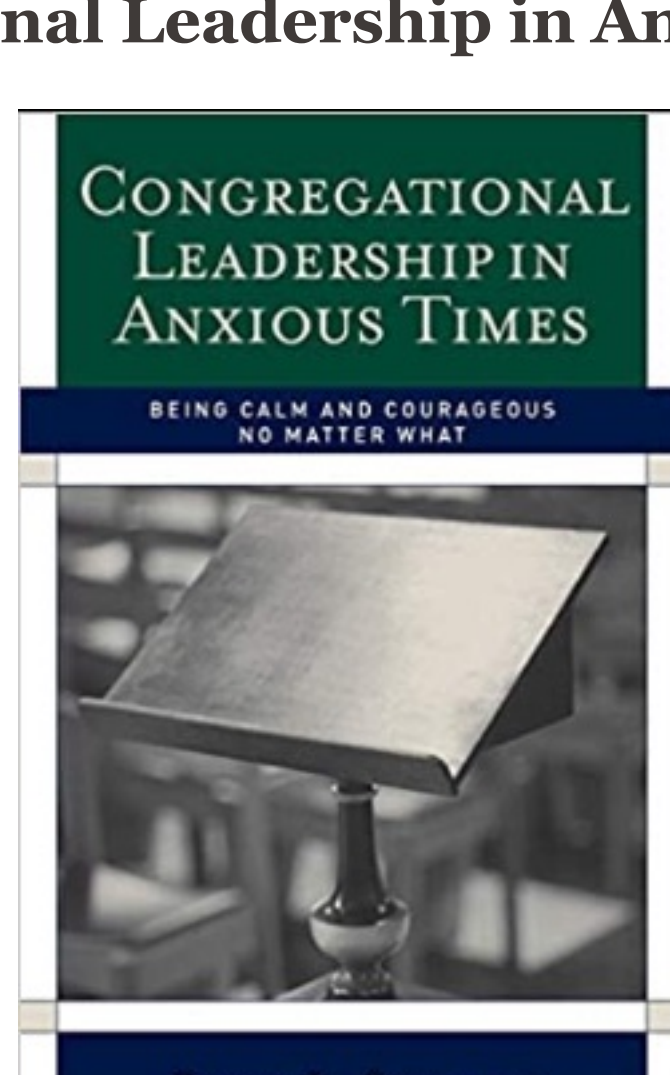
JT: Sensitivity is a must. We need to inquire about the needs of our members at the same time we are reminding them about our commitments to missions and ministry.

BT: Are there any silver linings in this for church leaders as it concerns budgets, or is all of the news bad?

JT: Most likely, this season provides churches an opportunity to prioritize its objectives. Also, we do not need to miss the opportunity to call our people back to following Jesus. Sharing our possessions is more important than golfing or going to the movies. Let's open our eyes and see the positive potential for a culture consumed by materialism and the faulty assumption what we are in charge.



Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times



Angela Ruiz Robles A Pioneer in Digital Reading

As school administrators and teachers move students to digital forms of learning during this pandemic, we need to recognize the work of [Angela Ruiz Robles](#), who was on top of this over 80 years ago.

When she watched kids haul backpacks full of print books to school, she envisioned a backpack with just one "book." Her *Mechanical Encyclopedia* was an electric book that read plastic cartridges loaded with varieties of content. Pretty brilliant. And way ahead of her time. She anticipated Kindle, and in many ways the Nintendo Game Boy.

I'm curious what digital innovations will come out of our current global health scare. Will Zoom meetings become the new normal? How will this influence universities? Did hanging out with the kids for a few weeks make parents more likely to home school (or more open to teachers making six-figure salaries?). Digital books and tablets are surely a larger part of the future than they were just two weeks ago. When we pull out that tablet we can remember one woman's vision for a device that would squeeze all human knowledge into something small enough to carry in a messenger bag.



Tips for Preaching Online w/ Jim Martin



I talk with HST Vice President Jim Martin about preaching online.

A Few More Footnotes

1. [How Churches of Christ responded](#) to the 1918 "Spanish Flu."
2. [Churches after Coronavirus](#) from Thom Rainer.
3. Next time you preach from the Sermon on the Mount about "don't worry about... what you will wear" remember [these people who haven't bought clothes in a decade](#).
4. "Spend a lot of time on a few key words or thoughts." [Carey Nieuwhof on better preaching](#).
5. " If I understood a conversation I overheard in the hall correctly, you can time yourself with an online timer application called "TikTok." [Your Hastily Prepared Online College Course](#).



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FOOTNOTES helps church leaders discover the resources that will improve and sustain their ministries. It will regularly feature interviews, book recommendations, site reviews, and editorials. It is a project of Bob Turner. You can direct any questions or feedback to rjturner@harding.edu. Complaints can be sent to his Juno account.

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