

Community and Connection

Rev. Jimmy Rushton

I'm a lead pastor at a multisite church in Canada that's made up of a bunch of little churches that are trying to communicate and live out the teachings of Jesus in our neighborhoods. Historically, we gather on Sundays and in "home churches" throughout the week.

And like most of us, we haven't been able to do much of that for the past 18 months.

And like most of us, we've been faced with the tension of staying connected while staying home.

And as most of us have experienced, it hasn't always been . . . fun.

Here are four things I've learned over this season that have helped my thinking in how to foster and encourage community:

1. HOW ARE YOU, THOUGH?

A few months ago, I sat down with one of my key leaders to talk about regathering in our context, and the first thing she asked was, "How are you?" I answered quickly with an arsenal of visionary ideas. She gently put a hand up. "No, that's work/church stuff. My question was, how are *you*?"

I wasn't prepared with a response. My adrenaline-pumped planning had usurped my soul care, and I realized that I probably won't care well for my community if I haven't cared well for myself.

So, question 1: "How are *you*? No, really?" Do you have rhythms of self-care and soul care? Are you regularly unplugging from the wall of "doing" and plugging into the wall of "being"? Jesus had regular rhythms of withdrawing from social and ministry life to attend to his own inner life with the Father. Is that your pattern too? Holistic health is a critical care factor. So as you think about fostering community and connection in your context, the most important question to start with is, How are you? No, really, how are *you*?

2. THE NEW NORMAL IS NOT JUST THE OLD NORMAL WITH NEW CLOTHES ON.

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, we can be lured into thinking, "Let's just wait this out, do the best we can, and then we'll get back to normal." However, the new normal won't just be the old normal with new clothes on. What we did before can't be the only thing we do in the future.

Consider a few key ideas that you're excited to innovate and strategize for your new normal with the spiritually curious (those who identify as spiritual but not religious) in mind. Keep the ministry programs and connection points that have continued to work. And consider, What are the things you would love to try but have been too nervous to implement? Maybe this is the season to flex some proactive ministry muscles.

3. LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!

In Anabaptist circles, we embody and espouse the community hermeneutic: that the spirit of God speaks through many voices together instead of a singular voice in isolation.

Who are your trusted, key, core, competent, and connected leaders who will cheer you on but also call you on your misses? Are you spending regular time with them to listen and learn? Multiple voices leaning into the future is always more fruitful than one



JackF / iStock / Getty Images Plus

planning alone. Gather your team and listen; lean into your leaders, hear their experiences, and learn what they're excited about, and don't be afraid of contrarian voices—there are always places and spaces to learn from!

4. EXPERIMENT, EXPERIMENT, EXPERIMENT!

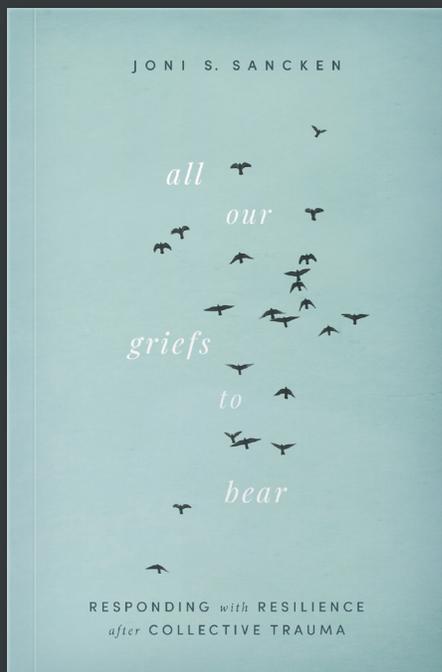
Author Tod Bolsinger has reflected that this is not the time for the church to be building new predictive systems, as the future is still very much unknown, but instead we should be building a bunch of little ministry prototypes and turning them loose. The ones that fail, fail. We should pay attention to the ones that don't and invest in those ideas and prototypes in shorter increments.

Think in two- to three-month increments and plan accordingly. Instead of "back to normal," think in terms of this being a ministry season of experimentation. What ideas have been back-cataloged for you? Is this the time to bring them out front? Maybe this is your season of trying for the medium-term future. Create a culture, a team, and a season of "try" to see what you learn!

I know and have experienced the difficulty and frustration with trying to plan, predict, and strategize for this season and the season to come. Despite our present circumstances, I hope you're encouraged to look inward and care for yourself, to not be content with how things have always been, to lean into what could be, to experiment and listen with your trusted colleagues, and most importantly to know that Jesus is with you and loves you.



Jimmy Rushton is the lead pastor and one of the teaching pastors at The Meeting House, a multisite church in Ontario, Canada. He is married to Heidi and they have two daughters—Kaitlyn and Ella (and two dogs, Rolo and Cocoa!). He is a reluctant coffee snob, is an avid golfer, loves music, and is a bit of a Bible nerd.



Move your
church
toward
POST-
PANDEMIC
resilience



HERALD PRESS

HeraldPress.com • 1-800-245-7894