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# How to Advance the Kingdom of God without Travelling

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*Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth. —Jeremiah 9:23–24*

COVID-19 is a *kairos* moment (from the Greek word for 'a crucial time', as opposed to chronological time), a turning point for humanity. It has humbled the world, showing that human wisdom cannot solve our problems. Scientists have been baffled, public-health efforts have triggered a massive global economic downturn, and military might cannot bomb the virus into submission.

In many parts of the world, humanism and secularism have tried to do away with God. But COVID-19 has seized our attention, demonstrating that humans cannot exist or live meaningfully without recognizing God.

Evangelicals have responded admirably to the pandemic, applying Ephesians 5:15–16: 'Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.' National evangelical alliances on every continent have acted in selfless, remarkably effective ways. In Caribbean nations, they participated directly in government decisions on how to reopen from lockdown; in Argentina, the government asked evangelicals to manage distribution of a million food packages; in Sierra Leone, national evangelical leaders disseminated health-related messages by radio and personally travelled to villages to demonstrate proper sanitation.

One common theme, from Argentina to Jordan to Uzbekistan, has been that evangelicals are so well respected for their selfless, honest work that many governments call on them for assistance, even in countries where Christians are a small minority.

I have created a series of videos on national alliances' exemplary responses to the pandemic. You can find them at <https://covid19.worldeaa.org/AlliancesInAction>.

Evangelicals have been a source of mercy and comfort to millions, generously providing emergency assistance. We have cooperated in this temporary suspension of normal worship patterns, recognizing that in doing so we are partners in serving our community, not victims of religious persecution.

Sadly, in some cases bad theology has led to gullibility, as a few have fallen

prey to conspiracy theories claiming that COVID-19 is a hoax or a sign of the end times. But other evangelicals have broken free from their silos and collaborated as never before in prayer and ministry.

We all know that churches and theological schools around the world have shifted to online communication and platforms, often reaching far more people than they had been connecting with in person. Global organizations like the World Evangelical Alliance have made a similar shift from travel to electronic connectivity, and the change has not been all bad.

Normally, I am away from my Manila home 75 percent of the time. Since March 16, I have not left my neighborhood. But with the borders closed to travel, we have found that we live in a borderless world.

During the first two years of my tenure as Secretary General, I had to travel to New York every two or three months for meetings. Believing that we could be more efficient if we travelled less, I decentralized our operations into six offices and we began having more of our meetings by Skype. (If you are a latecomer to technology—Skype was the predecessor of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and GoToMeeting.) Our senior leaders now spend more time together online than we used to spend when meeting face to face.

Granted, this change can negatively impact quality of interaction. Attention can fade during Zoom calls; the informal break times during in-person meetings when ideas could percolate in side conversations are harder to arrange; relationships can become more task-oriented and less person-oriented. But COVID-19 has allowed global leaders to discover that we can meet with more people and be present in more areas via the Internet than as frequent flyers.

The suspension of mass gatherings has powerfully impacted the megachurch phenomenon. We still have no idea when thousands of believers will be able to congregate in huge sanctuaries or auditoriums again. But again, this disruption may have spiritual benefit.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the disciples that they would be his witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. Following Pentecost, the uttermost parts were initially forgotten as the megachurch of Jerusalem instantly attracted thousands of believers. But by Acts 8:1, persecution forced the church to scatter—and to take the gospel to communities throughout Judea and Samaria. Although no one wishes for persecution, one could say that 8:1 achieved what 1:8 had not.

According to Acts 2:46, the Jerusalem believers quickly began having both large-group meetings (in the temple courts) and small-group meetings (in homes). During this pandemic, megachurches can still deliver preaching and inspiration to our electronic devices as a substitute for large gatherings, but interpersonal connections, body life and pastoral care happen only in small groups. Maybe we all needed to rediscover that our homes can be churches and that spiritual transformation happens best in intimate, personal settings.

Whether your church is holding in-person meetings again or not, and no matter how evil these days may seem, let us make the most of our time, technology and other resources to communicate the gospel at a time when empty hearts are crying out for it.