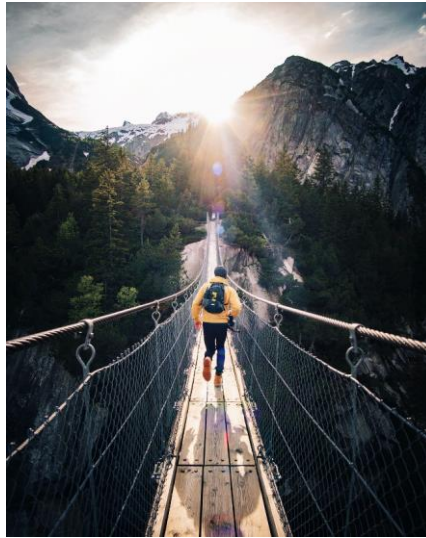


LIVING IN TENSION

Sympathy for the Executive Pastor in 2020

Learning New Moves

The dissonant themes of 2020 have pushed the Church and State to be much closer dance partners, and there has been plenty of stepping on each other's toes. "Who'd have seen this coming?" I remarked ironically during a phone conversation with Mark Lunsford, the new Executive Director at Orchard Hill Church; a Gospel centered, outward facing, community church in greater Pittsburgh. We got acquainted recently when our firm was involved with him joining Orchard Hill as their new XP. Mark commented, "The more we try to get things back to normal, in light of the Covid-19 constraints, the more frustrated people get." Both of us mused at how many completely un-anticipatable factors had emerged to form the *new normal* of church logistics in 2020. Dynamics that were not even in our consciousness six months prior. Mark never imagined his first couple months on the job would involve responding to community lockdowns, social distancing, regulations against singing in worship, and other unprecedented restrictions that are now part of local church ministry operations.



Realigning Expectations

The typical job description for an Executive Pastor requires a leader with qualities that are solution oriented and strong on implementation. They are the go-to staffer responsible for day to day operations including supervision of all church staff and coordination of all ministry programs. It is the position that reports to the Senior Pastor to implement strategies that support the lead's vision for a local church, allowing for greater focus on the role as spiritual guide for the congregation. In the best of times the XP lives in a healthy tension between organizing to foster spiritual development, an organic process; and managing the organization's functional structures, a corporate process. It's a big job for a

highly talented individual with both business and pastoral giftings. So what happens when this job has to be done during a global pandemic aggravated further by a season of heightened racial tensions and civil unrest?

Tensions Held In Tension

What if we were to look at 2020 like a sandwich, with Covid-19 on one side, and Black Lives Matter on the other, with Christ's prayer for his disciples and the future Church in between? Have we savored sacrificial love, acts of kindness, suffering with, and a revolutionary Shalom - peace with God, our fellow humans, and with the planet? It's a lot to digest. Living it out requires the redemptive power found in the message of the Gospel. Sean Johnson is an executive staffer at Reality L.A., a church in Hollywood with a vision for the renewal of their city through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sean proposed, "this is a season where pursuing relationships takes precedence over the pursuit of being right." He went on to say, "I've been a bit surprised at who, that is, members of our congregation who have reacted so strongly out of fear, or self-righteousness. The pandemic really shook a lot of people. Then you see others who faced their own hurts and brokenness, embracing their need for a Savior. I think we'll look back on all this as a sweet time for the Church. I believe there is a redemptive arc to this story."

Counter Culture

So, let's remember to lift up our executive pastors and other church leaders as they serve our diverse communities of faith, working in the tension between the temporal and the spiritual. The Church has a profound opportunity to demonstrate a powerful witness to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, through unity, generosity, and transformational reliance on the

love and goodness of God. Brent McCracken, author of *Hipster Christianity*, challenges us to be countercultural in his recent article titled [Church, Don't Let The Coronavirus Divide You](#). It's a great rallying cry for a movement.

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