

ECO GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

*How the Pandemic has Changed our Plans,
but not our Priorities in Mission*

Brainstrom Session Summary: Challenges and Creative Adjustments during COVID-19

These notes are summarized from the break-out group conversations during the Global Engagement Zoom meeting on May 28, 2020. Many thanks to the pastors and mission leaders who contributed to this list of challenges and creative adjustments to mission engagement our churches are facing during the global COVID-19 Pandemic.

Challenges:

Technology:

- Two dimensional world of Zoom, missing the in-person connection.
- Understanding and becoming well-versed with Zoom and the new technology – big steps and changes.
- Language issues with Zoom.
- Increased need for communicating through technology.
- Overwhelming number of meetings on Zoom.
- Email reading is down because people are inundated with emails.
- Virtual world makes it hard to keep momentum up.
- Teaching the later generations how to get connected to social media/live streaming services.
- How do we keep an online presence as we begin to open back up? Do we need to?
- Given how much we've had to shift to online, what is the best way to protect engagement in security sensitive parts of the world (places where we can't put what is happening on the internet)?

Budget:

- Late approval of this year's budgets.
- Where will the money come from?
- How do we manage the budget during panic?
- Is there enough money for the church to function, let alone support ministry partners?
 - What is the best way to prioritize and focus mission giving now in the face of such massive needs.
- PPP loans in anticipation of need.

Church Mission Engagement:

- Trips and visits have been cancelled.
- How do we continue to support and meet the needs of global and local partners/ministries?
 - What are new ways we can do this? (varies based on lock-down status)
 - What projects would be helpful?
- Learning how to stay connected so global communities don't feel abandoned.
- Having to create new ministry models and helping missionaries navigate significant changes to their ministry models.
- Involving and motivating missions teams with ideas and new initiatives.
- Realizing the hard impact on mission partners who rely on short term mission trips that are cancelled.
- Missionaries are not able to come and share with congregations.
- How do we keep mission updates in the worship services?
 - Non-worship meetings are mostly cancelled leaving worship services as the main avenue to get information to the congregation. This does not give a lot of time for missions to be addressed.
- Some missionaries are doing more than expected during this time, while others are being called back by their sending agencies.
- Local mission work has increased but global awareness has not as much.
- Lack of knowledge on how to serve the local community during this time.

Planning:

- Hard to plan for the long term when it is all uncertain.
 - How long will this last?
- Setting priorities among so many needs/opportunities.
- Addressing food shortages and logistics challenges for getting food and medicines.
- Coordination is difficult with social distancing and new protocols.
- What is going to be the new normal after all of this ends?
- How do we navigate the reopening process wisely and effectively?
 - Surveys in some congregations have shown many won't be returning to Sunday morning in-person worship soon.

Creative Adjustments:

Technology:

- Zoom calls with partners, to be face-to-face.
- "Service" or "Action" page on the website.
 - Provides bite size opportunities for those who are overwhelmed/lost.
 - Local opportunities to donate, bag rice & beans for the food pantry, etc.
 - Our "doers" want something to do, so created this/working to keep it fresh.
- Holding virtual lunch and coffee breaks to educate church members.
- Increased communication with partners via zoom has helped with understanding and relationships.
- Zoom, Email, Social Media has been helpful with communicating and planning.
- Webinars.

Budget:

- Consider giving a stimulus check to help funding those in need globally.
- Pivot to monthly payments rather than quarterly, then if money runs out they are up to date.
- Setting up COVID emergency funds to address both local funding needs, as well as targeted global mission's needs.
- Began a capital campaign.

Church Mission Engagement:

- Considering development of new partnerships.
- Rekindling partnerships.
- Virtual Mission Trip
 - Make a local recipe ahead of time to create a virtual shared meal
 - Start with intro to poverty
 - Video of the area
 - Q&A and discussion live streamed
 - Prayer time
- Global mission week and local mission week focused on church wide weekly prayer rooms.
 - Invited mission partners to join.
- Prayer meetings.
 - Partner video is featured in the worship service once per month, then have prayer meetings on Monday evenings for that month's featured partner.
 - Partner has also joined, and participation is higher since it can be done from home rather than traveling to church for the prayer meeting.
- Partners are being recorded reading the week's scripture.
- Sharing pictures and thank you notes in church email from partners.
- Incorporating missional video series with Sunday school classes.
- Sharing Zoom conversations with partners in online worship services.
- Sponsoring meals for healthcare workers in local hospitals.
- Sunday links to personal Moments for Mission.
- Strengthening relationships with existing partners to get resources to where they are needed.

If you would like to connect with the community of mission leaders in ECO Churches, please contact Jen Haddox, ECO's Director of Global Engagement at jen@eco-pres.org.