Adapting to COVID Changes

Tips for navigating ministry changes brought on by COVID.

Ministry has changed in light of COVID. Your church's weekly schedule likely underwent some modifications, and virtual gatherings became more popular. The change was abrupt and complex to navigate, but you made it work—and now it's time to start considering what it looks like to transition back to more active ministry participation. The following pages provide key considerations to help make that transition a success.

Ministry Scheduler Pro

Changes in Leadership

Your church leadership may have changed over the course of the pandemic. Perhaps a particular ministry wasn't needed over the course of the last year, or maybe some leaders are not yet ready to return to serving. Many people have been reevaluating their lives and priorities, so the transition into a more active ministry is a perfect opportunity to re-engage your leaders (and new volunteers!). It's also an opportune time to assess the way you've been doing things and decide what practices you want to keep and which you want to change moving forward.

Questions to ask yourself

How can I re-engage my existing leaders?

Where are the gaps in my current leadership?

How can I train new leaders?

When should I communicate changes to volunteers?

Re-engage existing leaders

It's important to re-engage your existing leaders—these are your veteran volunteers. They have the experience to guide newer volunteers through learning the ins and outs of your ministry. Consider personalized outreach to these leaders, inviting them back to their ministries with a phone call or thoughtful email. You can send out personalized messages to custom segments of your volunteer database. Or, set up a virtual gathering for all your existing volunteer leaders to come together as a community and plan for the ministry changes ahead.

Identify gaps in current leadership

Once you've re-engaged your existing leaders, try to identify gaps in your current ministry leadership. Brainstorm as a team. Maybe you're missing some Bible study group leaders, or perhaps your lead lector is no longer involved. Or, maybe you want to start a new role, like a long-term virtual service coordinator. Ask yourself: what returning ministries do I need leaders for? Which newly adapted roles do we want to adopt long-term?

Train new leaders

After you've identified gaps in your leadership, it's the perfect time to identify and train new leaders. Recognize your existing volunteers' potential and encourage them to become leaders! Ask your existing leadership to train these new leaders—it'll keep your old hands engaged while training up the new volunteers to take on leadership roles in your ministry.

Communicate changes to volunteers

This time of transition might feel turbulent to your volunteers. It's important to keep your volunteers informed. Update everyone's contact information. Communicate openly and regularly with them about changes in ministry leadership, and opportunities for them to step up as leaders themselves. If you frame the changes in a positive, growth-oriented way, you'll keep morale and excitement up among your volunteers. Remember to share updates with your broader church community, letting everyone know who to go to, and for what aspect of ministry. By keeping expectations clear, you'll minimize confusion.

Changes in Protocol

From traffic flow and sanitation needs, to communion and greeting recommendations, a lot has changed. Guide volunteers and attendees through changes in your church's protocol by setting clear expectations from the beginning.

Familiarize yourself with your local guidelines

Familiarize yourself with the rules and guidelines for your area with regards to in-person gatherings. These recommendations are likely to change as time progresses, so it's important to review them regularly. Develop protocols for your services and other gatherings, and work with your ministry leaders to modify your services accordingly. This might mean extra sanitation stations, or a different seating configuration. Engage your ministry leaders in developing services and gatherings that are compliant with your local rules and regulations. Try to have fun with the challenge: how can we solve this puzzle to deliver great services and gatherings for our church community?

Questions to ask yourself

What are our local guidelines for in-person gatherings?

How do changes in protocol affect our space and our budget?

What expectations do we need to make clear for our community and our volunteers?

Assess how changes will affect your space and budget

You'll likely encounter some changes related to your space—limited capacity services, new sanitation protocols and accommodating people attending virtually. You might need signage to direct foot traffic and provide seating information. Team up with your ministry leaders to build out a plan for your space.

Involve your budget team in this exercise—some of the protocol adjustments will come with an expense, such as the need to purchase extra hand sanitizer stations or the cost of disinfectant spray to wipe down pews between services. To minimize expenses, encourage community members to donate their time and talents wherever possible.

Have clear expectations for your community and volunteers

Most importantly, you need to set clear expectations for your volunteers and church community. Communicate protocol changes to your volunteers early and often. Provide regular announcements at services, in your church newsletter, in your service slides, and via email to keep your community apprised of changes to services and other gatherings. Make it clear who your church community should go to if they have any questions. Keep the tone enthusiastic! Returning safely to a more active ministry is an exciting prospect, and you want to communicate that energy to your community.

Changes in Scheduling

You probably revamped your schedule as a result of COVID. That likely included an accelerated transition to virtual gatherings. Your schedule will likely evolve for a while longer, as you transition to more in-person services and decide how integrated you want virtual gatherings to be to your ministry moving forward. Here are some things to keep in mind with regards to your schedule.

Questions to ask yourself

Is our schedule accommodating of last minute and unexpected changes?

What are our new volunteer needs?

Should we retrain volunteers?

What changes do we need to communicate to our volunteers?

Be agile

Be flexible in your planning. As we mentioned in the previous section, there will be changes to occupancy rules and sanitation protocols. This will affect your community attendance as well as the number of volunteers you need at a given service. Expect things to change, and be prepared to adapt your schedule, gatherings, and plans accordingly.

Identify your new volunteer needs

Changes in scheduling mean changes in volunteer needs. As you transition to more active in-person ministry, it'll be time to "call back" volunteers who may not have been active over the last year. Poll your volunteers to get a sense of what they feel your community's needs are, then brainstorm together about how you'll cover any gaps in your volunteer needs until your numbers increase.

Work with your ministry leaders to develop a list of the roles you'll need to fill. Re-engage inactive volunteers and try to help church members get more active in ministry. Make sure you have a system to efficiently update volunteer roles as they change.

If service times and volunteer needs are changing frequently, you may want to change your scheduling method. Consider allowing volunteers to sign up online or manually scheduling your volunteers until you get back to a more consistent schedule.

Retrain volunteers

Consider retraining volunteers. It's been a while since certain roles were engaged, so your volunteers may need a refresher on their roles or new roles they may want to fill. There will also likely be new responsibilities across the board related to the changes in protocols and sanitation due to COVID.

Communicate changes to volunteers

Communication with your volunteers will be key to a smooth transition back. Plan for how volunteers will sign up or indicate they are returning to serve in a ministry. Encourage key ministry leaders to touch base with their volunteers on a personal basis. Call those who haven't read or responded to emails! And have a backup plan for what to do if volunteers suddenly become unavailable, such as planning for a couple extra volunteers per service. By conducting outreach to make your team feel valued and thoroughly planning for potential obstacles, you'll be well positioned to have a smooth and successful transition back into a more active ministry.
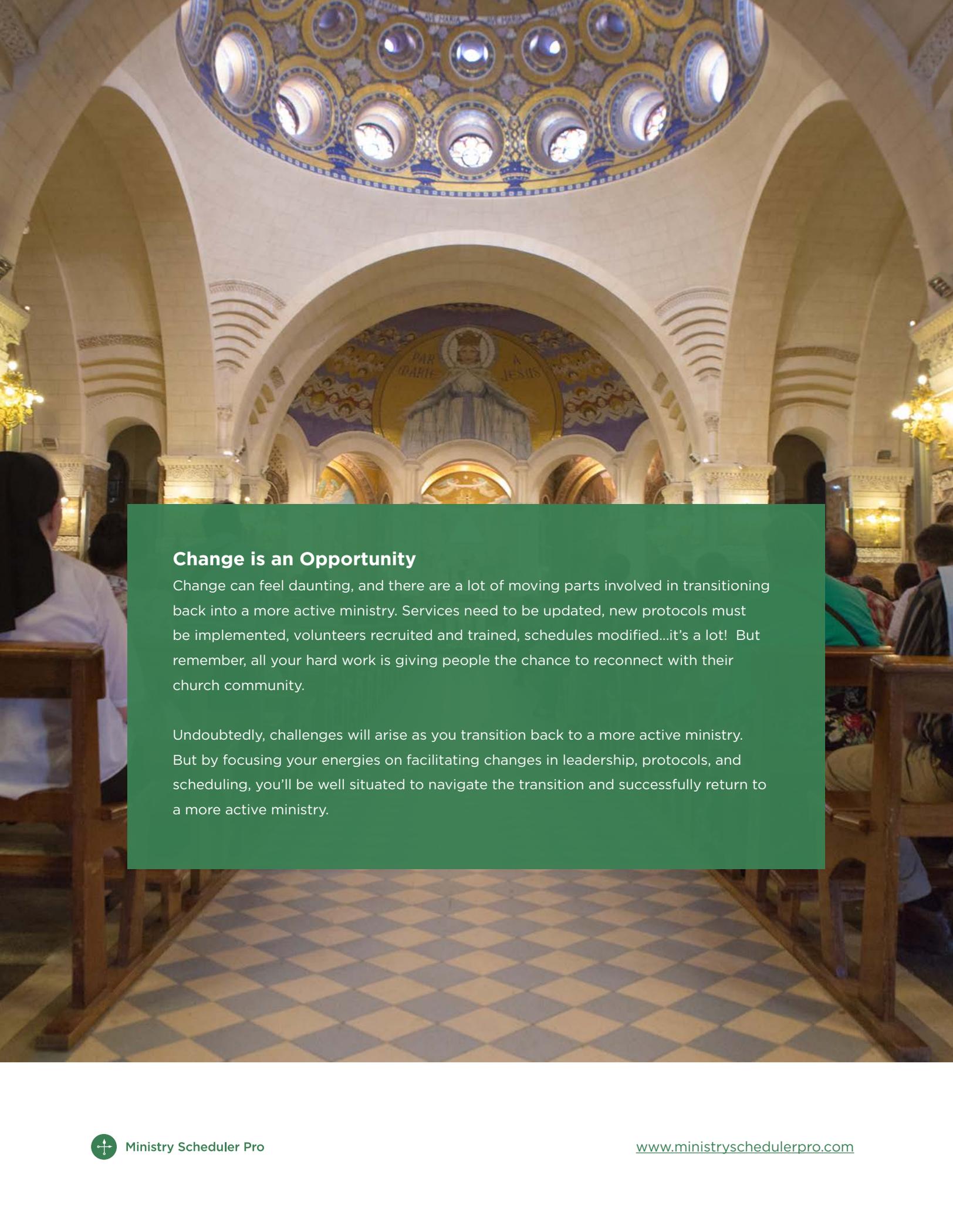
Change is an Opportunity

Change can feel daunting, and there are a lot of moving parts involved in transitioning back into a more active ministry. Services need to be updated, new protocols must be implemented, volunteers recruited and trained, schedules modified…it's a lot! But remember, all your hard work is giving people the chance to reconnect with their church community.

Undoubtedly, challenges will arise as you transition back to a more active ministry. But by focusing your energies on facilitating changes in leadership, protocols, and scheduling, you'll be well situated to navigate the transition and successfully return to a more active ministry.