Maintaining Church Giving during COVID-19

Travis Moody of The Life Church of Memphis offers six ways for churches to flourish in this unexpected season by creating a new normal when it comes to the way they think about giving in order to support members and ministries of the congregation. Even when all services are online, it is possible to keep people engaged relationally and rally around a compelling vision that creates opportunities for generosity.

Nationwide, 40 percent of people have less than $400 saved, and 58 percent have less than $1,000 saved. In Memphis, the percentages are probably higher. In a crisis like the COVID-19 epidemic, financial stresses on households raise questions for the faith communities where they worship.

1 | Focus on keeping people engaged.  
Connect relationally with every church member by phone. Recruit a group of leaders to make sure everyone gets a call. Check in to see how people are, how they’re finding the online service, and how you can pray for them. Continue to be the church.

2 | Communicate a compelling vision.  
Don’t talk about the church’s lack or need. Rather, communicate ways members can gather around a few significant initiatives in the community, and consider adding a relief fund for coronavirus. Some in the church who are not struggling economically because of COVID-19 may be looking for ways to help those who are.

3 | Minimize non-essential spending for a season.  
Even if you have a surplus for your own needs, be mindful of opportunities to help others negatively affected during the virus.

4 | Gather giving data on your church.  
What percent of givers already give online? What percent give within each giving band ($1–1999, $200–999, $1,000–4,999, $5,000–9,000 and over $10,000) or and what percent of total giving does each band give? This helps you develop your strategy to cultivate a culture of generosity.

5 | Create effective offering moments even during online services  
This doesn’t have to take more than a couple minutes or two, and please don’t make it a moment of pressuring people into giving. It’s about connecting givers to the vision of changing lives with their gifts and offering the opportunity for generosity with a reminder of online giving. Remember to make it an act of worship.

6 | Provide appreciation and follow-up for giving.  
For first time gifts, special large gifts outside a regular giving pattern, or faithful giving over time, send handwritten thank-you notes from someone on the pastoral staff. Most people are shocked because churches don’t send notes of appreciation, but this recognition of generosity spurs the gift of generosity further.

Some churches may be making the shift to online services and giving for the first time because of the COVID-19 virus, but this is an opportunity to make this your new normal. Aim to reach 75–80 percent of giving online, and you’ll avoid summer and holiday drop-offs. Leaders can visibly encourage online giving by saying this is how they do it, and churches can arrange to have someone sit on the phone and assist people enrolling for online giving for the first time.

These principles are based on Pastor Travis Moody’s book, Focus on the Giver, Not the Gift: Ten Strategies for Building a Generous Church Culture, and were included in the webinar “Best Practices for Maintaining Church Giving during COVID-19.” It is available for viewing on our website, www.churchhealth.org/fce/