

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



5 Tips

***FOR HELPING YOUR CHURCH
BEAT THE SUMMER GIVING SLUMP***

RICH BIRCH



Summer is on the way. For many churches that means some of our dynamics shift and change. People are more likely to be away on vacation. Families are taking their kids to summer camps. We can see a decline in attendance at our churches. On top of the softness in attendance, **many churches see a small decline in their giving over the summer time.** Now is the time to start planning for this annual reality and put into place a few strategies to help your church reverse this trend.

Most churches operate on a thin margin between their normal monthly giving and their expenses. Often times, that margin goes away in the summer months. **This can be a problem for a church because they are attempting to invest to get their ministries ready for a busy fall and just at the moment they are looking for a few extra resources the cash flow just can't sustain those investments.** This doesn't need to be the case! You can put a few practices in place this spring and summer to help your church launch into the fall strong because of healthy giving over the summer months. Here is some practical help for your church to navigate through this season in the life of your church!

Automation beats Determination

Late spring is the perfect time to remind people that they can set up automated giving to your church. Explain to people that if just rely

on determination in our lives they will often fade out. However, if you set things to run on automation, they happen consistently over time. Ask people to join your automated giving program to continue to fuel the ministry of the church.

Don't rely on just a single announcement to get this request through to people, but communicate this message through a few different channels. Make sure to at least communicate it in these 5 ways:

- **Announcement //** Take time out to explain it during a Sunday morning.
- **Walk Away Hand Out //** Give them a card to take with them explaining how to set it up.
- **Immediate Email //** Follow up with a Sunday afternoon email from your team reinforcing the message.
- **Direct Mail //** Time a piece of mail to arrive at your people's homes shortly after the announcement.
- **Later That Week Email //** Email your people again a few days later to remind them and let them know that others have been signing up too!

5 Benefits of Automated Giving for Your Church

- **Smooth Out the Bumps** // As people travel in summertime (or at other times of the year) their giving will continue to flow to the church.
- **Not Prepared** // People are increasingly carrying less cash (let alone checks) with them on Sundays.
- **Larger Average Giving** // Studies have shown that people who give online and through automated methods give larger individual gifts and more over time.
- **Regular Reminder** // By people giving regularly to your church they will receive a consistent reminder of your church and how they are growing in their relationship with Jesus. It's a part of discipling your people!
- **Increased Revenue** // You will see more giving flow to your church.



Consider Hosting a 90 Day Tithe Challenge

A 90-Day Tithe Challenge picks up on [Malachi 3](#), where God seems to indicate that he wants people to challenge him in generosity. Ask people to tithe for 3 months to your church, and if they then believe God hadn't been faithful to them during that time, we would give them back their tithe... no questions asked!

If you haven't heard of this before I could understand if you are suspicious! I would suggest you start by listening in on other churches as they talk about this with their people. Listen to their messages and download their materials. It will help you frame up how you're going to present this challenge to your community. Here are some churches who have done the 90-Day Tithe Challenge:

- **Liquid Church** // I think Tim did a superb job with this.
- **LCBC** // Some great support materials, including updates and resources.
- **Life.Church [Video]** // Hear Craig doing a great job explaining the challenge.

5 Questions to Ask Before Hosting a 90 Day Tithe Challenge

- **Do you want something for people or from people?** // Many churches report an increase in regular giving when they utilize a campaign like this, but if that's your only reason for doing it, people will know. Do you really believe that a generous lifestyle is what people need? Are you modeling that in your own life? Take some time to reflect and pray before deciding on this direction. Make sure you are looking to help people, not just increasing your offering.
- **What's the easiest way to gather interest?** // A well thought-out response card during the service should make it straightforward for people to get more information. This is a massive (and sometimes intimidating) decision for people to make; we don't want them getting tripped up on a clunky response mechanism. (Tip: Ask people to respond if they are looking for more information, rather than asking them to commit to the challenge right in the service.)
- **How are you going to thank the people who get involved?** // It's a big deal that people are giving in this way. For most of the program participants, it will be the most significant giving they have done to a church in their entire lives. You need to reinforce that they are making the right decision. There will be a lot of indications in their lives that this is the wrong decision... including bills, car repairs, and family members! Sending people a copy of a book like [The Money Challenge: 30 Days of Discovering God's Design For You and Your Money](#) might be a great way to reinforce this decision!
- **How will you keep people engaged?** // It's one thing to commit to doing a challenge like this during a service when people feel inspired; it's another thing to stay motivated for the entire 90 days! We sent emails every Thursday to all the people who signed up to participate in

the challenge. Some of the emails were encouragements from Scripture, some solicited stories, others retold those stories to people to keep them encouraged. We finished the challenge with a video from our lead pastor, thanking people for participating and encouraging them to continue.

- **How can you publicly celebrate this breakthrough?** // Churches who have been through this process have seen so many cool stories come out of the people's lives who commit to this challenge. How are you capturing these stories and then sharing them with the wider church? [You can see an example of one of these stories from Liquid Church here.](#) Sharing these stories builds your people's faith to consider taking this massive step in their lives!

Quarterly Giving Update

Reminding people of their giving every quarter is a best practice for churches. These reports should be mailed to each of your donors' homes throughout the year. Churches who have done this regularly have seen direct financial results from these regular updates and their revenue.

The attitude of these updates is gratitude to people for giving to your church. They serve as a helpful reminder to your community about how their giving is making a difference in the life of the church.

If your church has never done quarterly giving updates, then doing one in early July that covers the first six months of the year is a great time to start!



6 Elements of a Quarterly Giving Update Letter

- **Thank You** // Go out of your way to ensure that you are thankful in the overall tone and approach of the letter.
- **Connect to Vision** // Tell a story about the vision of the church in action. Show people how their giving is making a difference in the life of the church!
- **Statement** // Show them how much they have given year to date to your church. If your church has multiple "funds" make sure they show all that data.
- **Be Open to Questions** // Ensure that you let people know who they connect with if they have any questions about the finances at the church. Be open and transparent about this aspect of your ministry, and go out of your way to invite people to ask questions.
- **An Ask** // Make a soft ask around the upcoming financial need of the church. Let people know that their continued giving makes a difference. (Asking people to join your "Automation beats Determination" campaign would be a great ask!)
- **Response Tool** // Include a way for them to give right away. This could include a response envelope or website address that they could go to.
- **P.S.** // Studies have shown that the P.S. on letters like this are among the most read statements. Include a clever "call to action" as your postscript to the letter!

Meet with Donors 1 on 1

There is a segment of the people who give to your church who disproportionately fund your mission. These people have the ability to make money and give it generously to your church. Oftentimes, **these people are not looking for special treatment or attention, but they would value some time with the lead pastor or other members of the leadership of the church.** In my experience, these people aren't looking to get anything from the church but are simply wanting a relationship with the leadership of the church.

This practice will increase your giving over the long haul at your church. It won't necessarily solve the short-term softness in your offering over the summer, but it will help you build relationships with people who will help you over the long term at your church. It's about taking advantage of the changeup in people's schedules to attempt to build some new relationships to help the church long term.

5 Questions Church Leaders Ask When Thinking About Meeting with Donors

- **But what about when Jesus said “But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” in Matthew 6:3-4?**

- Jesus was speaking to the giver in this passage, not to you the leader. There will be people who won’t want to meet with you because of this passage and that’s ok. Ensure discretion with people as you interact and allow them to remain private. You aren’t offering them a special seat in church or to put a plaque with their name on it! You’re just attempting to build a relationship.

- **How do you ask them for a meeting?**

- When you call or email them just say something like: *“You have invested in our ministry deeply and I wanted to take some time to get to know you better.”* I wouldn’t hide the fact that you are meeting with them because of their financial contribution but keep the focus of the invite and conversation on relationship.

- **What do we talk about for our time together?**

- Not money! In fact, my recommendation is you just meet with them like anyone else from the church. You’re attempting to build a relationship and get to know them better. You could lead off the conversation thanking them for their support of the ministry through serving and giving and reassuring them that you aren’t asking them for anything today! (It’s all about relationship!) When you have about 15 minutes left in your time together simply ask *“Do you have any questions about the church that I can answer? Is there anything about our ministry that you are wondering about?”* My experience has been that your openness to answer questions about the life of church is enough to help with supporters.

- **But I don’t know who gives what to the church!**

- That’s a mistake. Someone at your church beyond the financial people

need to know who is giving to the church to help foster generosity. In the same way that if someone at your church was showing a disproportionate spiritual gift of teaching and you’d meet with them, all you are doing is tracking these people with a gift of giving and help encourage generosity.

- **How do I follow up with these people after we meet?**

- Great question! Keep looking for doors that you can open for this person. Are there people in the church you should be connecting them with? Do they have questions that require you to follow up with them? Are there open issues that they pointed out that you should follow up on? I’ve found that writing quick notes to myself immediately after meeting helps remind me what I’m supposed to do next with these people.

Start Working on Your Christmas Campaign!

Now is the time to start planning and working on your Christmas Giving Campaign. It’s critical that you don’t leave this project until late in the fall. Multiple studies show that somewhere between 25%-33% of all charitable giving is made in the month of December. Although we are attempting to teach people to be generous all year long, we know that a large percentage of them give additional gifts in the last few weeks of the year. **Many churches who execute a Christmas Campaign see a bump in giving in excess of 15% in the last month of the year.** Use your summer months to get ready for this important giving opportunity in the life of your church and next summer you’ll be in a different financial place!



3 Resources to Help You Plan Your Christmas Giving Campaign

- **Christmas Campaign Editable.XLS Timeline** // Download this spreadsheet of the various activities you'll need to be involved in this fall to have a successful Christmas Giving Campaign. All you need to do is modify the date field of the last Sunday that you are hosting services, and it will auto-populate a timeline to direct your planning for future years too!
- **8 Phases of Effective Christmas Giving Campaigns** // An overview of the various aspects of a successful Christmas Campaign. This might be a helpful discussion starter with your team over the summer about what you'll be tackling in this area.
- **60 Page Digital Magazine on Generosity** // This digital magazine contains some helpful articles on generosity. Included in it is a discussion of why summertime is the perfect time to start working on your Christmas Campaign!

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