

RALLY

A FINANCIAL TRAINING PLAN FOR THE POST PANDEMIC CHURCH

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RESOURCING | GENEROSITY CULTURE

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Back when my knees could handle it, I completed a few marathons. It was a time of great joy and accomplishment as these were done with five other guys with whom I trained and shared a lot of time. I miss those days. My knees don't.

What I learned from long-distance running was the idea that you cannot be ready overnight for the enormous strain of 26.2 miles on one's body. I knew that intellectually but learned it in real-time – when the many months leading up to a marathon meant disciplining my body in every possible way to overcome the unexpected obstacles that are inevitable on race day. When we needed our bodies to perform under stress, we could count on them.

Another lesson I have learned by hanging out with church leaders is that you cannot mount a last-minute training and expect great generosity from the congregation. It would be like waiting for the last day before the marathon to train.

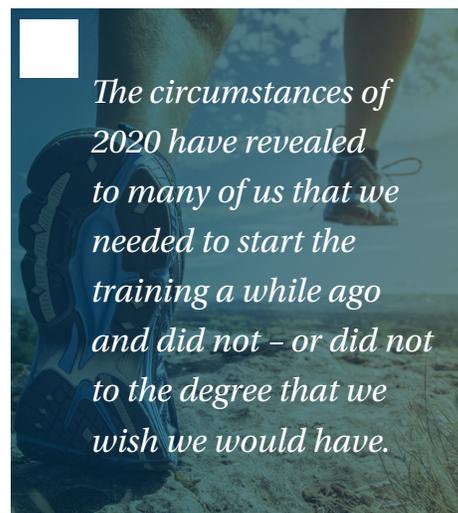
Developing generous disciples is definitely a long run idea – a marathon of sorts. Over time and with encouragement, people will grow as we point the way. And generous churches are ready for any challenge. It reminds me of a guy I sat next to on an airplane one day that told me, "I want to be in the kind of physical shape that if someone asked me to run a half marathon tomorrow, I could do it." Wow.

The circumstances of 2020 have revealed to many of us that we needed to start the training a while ago and did not – or did not to the degree that we wish we would have. Overnight, we expected our church "bodies" to be ready for a race that is throwing unexpected challenges our way – financially and in many other categories. We were not as ready as we would have hoped.

So, is there hope for churches who are facing a big financial challenge? Yes - there is definitely some encouraging news. First, church members continue to be supportive and gracious – people seem to be sensitive to the fact that everyone, including their church, is in an uncertain situation. For churches with industries deeply hurt by job loss, there is only so much people can do. But many congregations have stepped up in amazing ways.

Still, there is a difference between an immediate boost of support by church members in the first 60 to 90 days of the pandemic and a long run plan for generosity development in our congregations.

The following is a two-part approach. The first section highlights what actions to consider for a short-term boost of financial fuel for the church facing the challenges of early 2020. The second is a more long-term strategic look at the features of a church creating an environment of cultivating generosity through discipleship. The second section is more about sustained generosity – a marathon mentality will last beyond the pandemic timeframe and into the "new normal" and beyond.



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PART ONE: BOOST FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN THE SHORT RUN

Churches that have seen their financial support as relatively stable during this time have exhibited a few characteristic actions that encourage support in the immediate future. Consider these concepts and the suggestions that follow for how to turn them into action right now for your church.

Model Trust in God's Provision

The congregation needs to look into the eyes of church leaders and see the peace of God. Leaders should be authentic in their own fear and uncertainty about the future, but also reassuring in their ultimate trust in God to do whatever He wishes in and through the church – even if it will undergo change. This is time to reach out first to offer hope and care, not to reach out with palms open for a contribution. God will take care of us as we take care of those in need.

Celebrate the Church's Mission

God is still at work. And many of our churches are seeing beautiful ways that members have come together in support of each other and the community. As people are feeling the inevitable instability of the time, it is reassuring for them to know that the church is on mission – beyond simply staying afloat or paying the bills, the church is activated to help. Explain this and celebrate it.

Develop a Digital Giving Strategy

A rough statistic being circulated pre-COVID was that though 75% of churches in America had a digital giving platform of some kind, only 25% of church donations were made this way. This means that overnight churches were faced with the challenge of not just having the capability, but training and encouraging people to use it. Take the time to explain to reticent members how it is safe and helpful to use online bill pay, credit or debit cards, electronic funds transfer, text to give and whatever channels you have – open up all the valves. And adjust or re-work your church's giving website if the usability of it is lackluster. Now is the time.

NOTE: Churches should also consider a "return envelope" strategy, particularly if there are a lot of older members who would use the self-addressed envelope to mail a check back to the church. Frankly, many older people understand and use digital banking and other technologies so don't presume they need the old-fashioned way. But sending out envelopes to the church members is fairly inexpensive for a surprisingly great return.

Listen to the Faithful for the Pulse

Connecting with the most faithful givers in the church is a very effective way to get the pulse of what is happening in the congregation in terms of economic and income shifts. Some of the giving households at the top of the list are accustomed to direct and open conversations about money and will welcome a discussion. It is important for church leaders to connect with these households and express care for their family and curiosity about how this year has impacted their situation. Then ask





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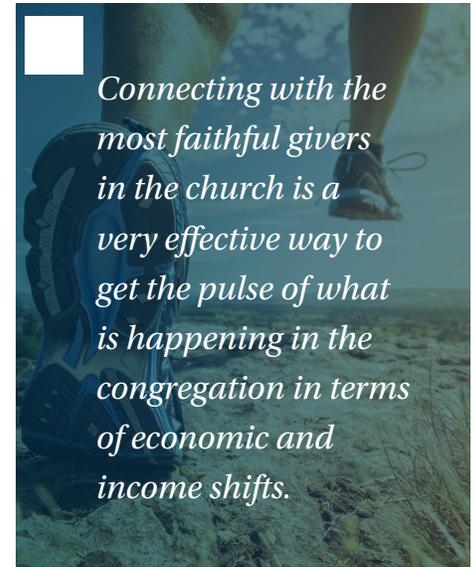
them for advice or ideas on what the church may need to consider going forward. This is a sure-fire way for mutual encouragement. When the pastors we coach decide to reach out, they are always glad they did.

Explain Contingency Plans and Expense Reduction

This is the opportunity for the church to model proactivity. Healthy leaders will explain how the church has reduced expenses right away and is considering other “waves” of reduction that can be executed when and if necessary. Honesty is still the best policy. When church leaders explain the possible future scenarios that face the congregation with integrity and truth, it reduces the tendency for people to “invent their own narrative” about how the church is doing or what may be next. When trust in leadership builds, giving tends to increase.

Be Proactive in Your Courage to Ask

Do not be afraid to be direct in your request to individuals and the congregation in the wake of the stay at home phase. As a pastor, you will do it graciously. But do it courageously. People do not have to give. But they do need to know that it is needed and part of a healthy Jesus follower’s way of living. Not everyone has lost their job or lost income. Be empathetic with the possible nervousness people may have, but be calm and clear about reminding people about their opportunity to make an impact. We have already seen evidence that those with steady income will step up in recognition of their fellow church members who are without.



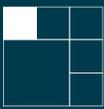


PART ONE: BOOST FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN THE SHORT RUN

What can pastors and church leaders do right away to utilize these best-practice concepts?

- 1. Conduct a teaching series on the generous life.** The good news is you can use both the teachings of Jesus and the example of so many acts of generosity during the pandemic – there were so many! The teaching can be one part celebration, one part inspiration, and one part challenge. Ask small groups and Sunday School classes to process what they have learned so far in 2020 that should become the new normal in living the abundant life Jesus promoted.
- 2. Do more “State of the Church” updates** than you normally would. In uncertain times, we want to minimize the guessing that people must do about the church, its solvency, its plans for the near future, and the long term. Often, church leaders will do this once per year. The way our lives have been destabilized in 2020 demands this kind of conversation with the congregation more often. Plus, for many churches, there is very good news about how God has used them during the time of crisis to serve each other and the community. Develop a way to regularly explain:
 - **How you are staying on mission**
 - **Ways you are adjusting our strategy**
 - **The financial status and your actions**
 - **What you are learning that is fruitful**
 - **Elements of the future about which you are excited**
- 3. Create a re-entry team to help design the new normal** even if this team only needs to meet a handful of times to explore the concepts in this article, ask members of the congregation to help navigate the uncharted waters of the future. Have them discuss ways to re-engage the congregation with the mission and get people back in connection with each other. Utilize the team to help gather feedback from the congregation – including formal and informal surveying of people to find out needs, concerns, and learning from the first half of 2020 that may impact the future of the congregation. This can be an exciting time for the church!

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PART TWO: TRAIN GENEROUS DISCIPLES FOR THE LONG RUN

Auxano Resourcing is a team of professionals who specialize in coaching churches to develop systems to grow generous disciples. Now we are back to talking about training for the marathon.

From here forward, consider putting practices into place in your church that will produce a church body with generosity muscles that are trained for the long run.

Auxano has worked with churches all over the country to help them create pathways for people to practice and learn how to be giving in many different ways. Each church crafts its way of communicating these pathways to growth through their own context, theology and style – and the results are breathtaking.

Not only do church leaders see increases in financial fuel for the mission (many churches see increases of 20% or more), but see members of the congregation grabbing a hold of that mission with new levels of intensity. Not surprisingly, Jesus was right – your heart follows your money and vice versa.

Many leaders are already having conversations and attending webinars about being ready for the “new normal” phase over the second half of 2020. We will likely have a 2.0, 3.0, and other iterations of whatever is new and normal. And most of us are simply trying to discern as best we can – no one really knows how things will look.

But there are certain things that can be very helpful to fueling a church’s mission regardless of what the new normal looks like: **Good Information, Good Analysis, Good Platforms,** and **Good Reporting.** These are best-practice tools for any church at any time.

We have made some friends over the years of being in ministry – experts in other categories that partner to lead our churches well. These are the organizations led by men and women who help congregations in the development of generosity and better ways to accomplish their mission as they make disciples and serve their communities.

We are dreaming and imagining with churches about a new and robust way to lead in times that require agility and savvy spiritual leadership. These are new concepts for many churches, but partners with helpful systems that are available to churches immediately. We picked them because of their value – their fees are not back-breaking for churches of any size. So we think it is helpful to introduce them to as many leaders as we can.

We are encouraging churches that are committed to the long-term development of generous disciples to imagine having:

- Ready access to up-to-date information about the congregation and community – preferences, demographics, postures, and attitudes about faith and spirituality.
- Easy-to-use tools to analyze the financial giving behavior and potential of your current congregation in order to develop the best discipleship approach.
- A professional, secure, seamless, easy-to-use digital giving platform that can help people stay consistent with their commitments to generous living.
- A group of church communication experts advise on and prepare regular reporting that celebrates missional impact instead of simply handing out giving and attendance facts.





PART TWO: TRAIN GENEROUS DISCIPLES FOR THE LONG RUN

GOOD INFORMATION

ACTION STEP: Do fresh research on your community

We hear about big data and have a level of skepticism about how the information is being used. That's fair. Not every kind of new technology should be embraced wholesale. But a group of Christian tech experts has come up with a cost-effective way for churches to get fresh and up-to-date information about the people inside and outside the church. In this manner, leaders are not flying blind as they navigate the uncharted waters of the future.

Kingdom Analytics helps churches collect critical data to provide reconnaissance for strategic decision-making like:

- 1. Complete demographic, geographic, and psychographic analysis of your church congregation and community**
- 2. Ethnicity, age, income, and education analysis of your congregation compared to your community**
- 3. What the community is looking for in a church**
- 4. Generational analysis and trends**
- 5. Program and ministry preferences of your congregation and community**

Specific data on a church can be culled from the church database (not names or private information). Add to that the aggregated data that comes from sources available from the US Census and other market research groups, Kingdom Analytics can provide enormous help to the new paths we may have to forge in the future.

Go Ahead Action Step: Discuss the implications of the data research with your leadership or a small task force. Ask: What new information did the data reveal? What old assumptions did the data challenge? What are 2-3 implications on cultivating a church of generous disciples?



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GOOD ANALYSIS

ACTION STEP: Disciple people with the help of analysis

The territory ahead of us is unlike the journey most of us prepared for when we entered the ministry. And yet, there are tools available to us on that journey that were also not available until recent years. One of the groups that have done a respectful and thoughtful job of dealing with the giving data that resides in every church's management software is MortarStone.

Without ever compromising data security or feeling too "creepy," this group of Christian men and women are committed to doing everything they can to help the church understand and properly utilize data gathered from the giving patterns of their congregation.

MortarStone creates easy-to-understand dashboards of real-time information that helps church leaders, including information about:

- **New givers, lapsed givers, and consistent financial leaders**
- **Year-over-year comparisons, growth opportunities, and retention analysis**
- **Capital campaign tracking, multi-campus reporting, and demographic breakdowns**

With snapshots of real-time data about giving practices of the congregation, discipleship strategies can be developed to address underdeveloped givers as well as the most mature and faithful contributors. They even have a robust methodology for helping churches cultivate non-cash and asset gifts from church members now (and not just in their estate plans).

The friendship with the **Auxano Resourcing** team allows these two groups to weave seamless support and coaching around church leadership teams. First, they safely and securely analyze data (MortarStone) and then use that analysis to develop discipleship pathways and systems for increased generosity in each congregation (Auxano).

Go Ahead Action Step: Discuss the benefits of better data with your leadership or a small task force. Ask: How can knowing more about the practices and patterns of giving in our church help us to disciple people at a greater level? What are 2-3 benefits to developing better pathways and systems for generosity?



PART TWO: TRAIN GENEROUS DISCIPLES FOR THE LONG RUN

GOOD PLATFORMS

ACTION STEP: Clear digital giving obstacles

As mentioned before, just because a church has a website or a digital giving platform does not mean that it is effective. Many churches, understandably, do not have website design experts nor can they afford them. And many or most churches have a way to give electronically but have not been proactive in explaining and promoting it as a “legitimate” way to give tithes and offerings.

2020 gave us an immediate audit of our systems of engaging people in the virtual and digital world. Some of us passed the test fairly well. But many have had the weaknesses of their platforms exposed. The overnight digital renaissance of the church has shined a light on the gaps in our approach.

The good news is there are groups like [LifeWay Generosity](#) who have developed both platforms for digital giving and also the tools to help church leaders deploy them most effectively. And, for church leaders who are dizzied by the many options for a digital giving platform, LifeWay’s stands out because of its extremely low cost, easy to use, and high-value system. They were not the first to arrive on the scene of giving platforms, but they have grown exponentially, signing up thousands of churches for their platform in just a week or two following the stay at home orders of 2020.

Through their platform churches can receive funds via:

- **Text to give**
- **Church app**
- **Non cash methods**
- **Crowd funding**
- **Events**

Users have access to generosity and stewardship coaching from the LifeWay Generosity staff (e.g., videos, blogs, etc.) as well as experts from other organizations around the country who regularly appear as guests.

Again, it is not about whether or not a church has a digital giving platform, it is whether church leaders have cleared the obstacles to use that platform so that it becomes normalized in the life of the church.

Go Ahead Action Step: Conduct an audit on your current digital giving platform, and discuss the benefits and challenges with your leadership or a small task force. Ask: What are 2-3 ways to increase the effectiveness and congregational usage of our digital giving platform?



PART TWO: TRAIN GENEROUS DISCIPLES FOR THE LONG RUN

GOOD REPORTING ACTION STEP: Celebrate your impact

One of the questions we get asked constantly as generosity and stewardship coaches is, “What should I report to the congregation, if anything, about the giving numbers?”

This always leads us into a much longer conversation about what should be reported and in what manner. Churches have traditionally reported only giving and attendance because that is what most churches measure. But with an increased desire on the part of many in our congregations (particularly the next generation and younger members) for more reporting on impact than just numbers, new ways of reporting have sprung up.

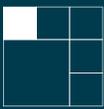
The Impact Report Company (TIRC) was established in 2019 to allow churches to have a partner to consult on and create infographic-style one-page reports on a regular basis to encourage and inspire the members of their church.

This group will urge churches to aim to do these colorful and custom reports once per quarter. They also coach leaders by having them dip their toes into the Impact Reporting world by not tackling too many measurements at once. The early phase of reporting allows for a soft entry. It includes the categories that are most likely to be already counted like attendance, giving, groups, leadership and mission with the idea that down the road churches can get as creative as they want or need to be.

The benefit of these “Impact Reports” is based on a few important assertions:

- 1. What you measure grows**
- 2. What you celebrate gets repeated**
- 3. Nonprofits are doing this very effectively so the church looks comparatively “not effective” even though this is often not true**
- 4. Measuring outputs (like community impact and life-change) is the wave of the future. Reporting on other data (e.g., attendance, giving, etc. in addition to inputs) is good but not the ultimate barometer of effectiveness**
- 5. Reporting “impact” is the best motivator for financial support from the congregation and more engagement with the mission**

Go Ahead Action Step: Circle back to your leadership or a small task force and evaluate your financial/generosity reporting over the last year. Ask: What did we do well? Where could we have been more clear, celebratory, or courageous in how we talked about money? What are 2-3 good examples of church financial reports that can influence our next update? Calendar your next financial report to the congregation.



PART TWO: TRAIN GENEROUS DISCIPLES FOR THE LONG RUN

REACH OUT FOR ASSISTANCE

Auxano is a specialized team of multi-decade ministry professionals who care about the church and church leaders. The events of this crazy year have provided the team with another opportunity to serve and learn alongside the many churches who are creatively and courageously walking into a fuzzy future.

With all of the question marks and decisions that pastors and leaders are facing these days, we recommend that they reach out for assistance. The perception that church consultants “charge high fees” or “cannot serve smaller churches” is just not true about the thousands of churches that Auxano has served in the last 18 years. From church plants of under 100 people to mega-multi-site churches of thousands, we count it an honor to serve many as the frontline ministry professionals to which we owe a great debt of gratitude.

For more information about coaching, assistance, or for an introduction to the partners mentioned above please email: resourcing@auxano.com.

If you would like to contact the author and Director of Auxano Resourcing, Greg Gibbs, please email: greg@auxano.com.