

Ideas for Encouraging Engagement and Support in Your Church

The face of ministry has changed. Demographic shifts, new technologies, and changing attendee expectations require new ways of encouraging engagement and stewardship.

In addition to all the usual distractions that can pull people away from church, such as community activities, work, and sporting events, churches are seeing a trend in people attending one church for several Sundays, and then attending another in the area for a few weeks. This seems to be the result of several different factors, including increased variety in worship styles and dynamic pastors, as well as a desire to please multiple members of the family with different preferences and interests. Yet if people aren't attending a church consistently, they aren't fully participating or giving.

The more engaged people are with a church, the more likely they are to provide financial support. We've talked with business administrators and executive pastors to put together the following ideas on how to both engage attendees and encourage their financial participation. Keep in mind that our intent is not to encourage you to turn ministry into a profit center, but rather to help you maximize your ministry. The reality is that a church's finances affect all other aspects of ministry, and attendance growth that does not come with a corresponding increase in financial support can have a serious impact on your overall ministry.

Ideas for Building Attendee Engagement and Support

- *Encourage connections* – Find ways to help attendees connect with one another and feel part of the church family even if they do not attend every week. For example, one church we spoke with started summer community groups that keep people engaged during the months when the church traditionally sees the lowest attendance and giving rates. At another church, 80% of the adult attendees participate in small groups with studies based on the sermon. If people miss church on Sunday, they are still involved in the message and discussion.
- *Reach people online* – Rapid technology changes have led to large shifts in how churches can reach and engage with attendees and potential attendees. Many pastors are now blogging and some even have thousands of Twitter followers. Churches are promoting events, mission work, and sermon topics on Facebook and Twitter and live-tweeting key points, pithy quotes, and Scripture verses during services. Although the results can be hard to measure, social media and online engagement have become an increasingly effective way to reach people where they spend time.
- *Gain a fresh perspective* – It can be hard to view our church through a newcomer's eyes. Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos, California hired several people who do not attend church to evaluate the church experience as a newcomer. An outside perspective can help your church understand what would truly make an inviting, welcoming experience for newcomers.
- *Use a stewardship expert* – Stewardship experts aren't just for capital campaigns. Just as a newcomer can provide an objective view of your church environment, a stewardship expert can provide a fresh and objective perspective on your congregation's giving habits.
- *Be consistent* – Regularly provide examples and stories of how giving supports life-changing ministry. Cottonwood Church has a three-minute giving focus every week, during which individuals provide real-life impact by sharing stories related to the blessings of giving and receiving.
- *Make it real* – Keep attendees informed on where their donations are going. If you're requesting funds for a specific project, use photos, stories, and experiences to illustrate the desired outcome. For example, Horizon Christian Fellowship in Santa Fe, California, holds project-focused coffee hours and tours of projects the church is raising funds for.

- *Include the youth* – Find ways to get children engaged early. Cornerstone Community Church in Westlake Village, California, encourages kids to support a missionary. How can your church set the groundwork for life-long giving?
- *Consider non-cash gifts* – Traditionally, more than 90% of church donations are in cash, yet the majority of most people’s assets are resources other than cash. If your church is selective and uses a carefully considered, well defined [gift acceptance policy](#), there may be options that could benefit your church and provide benefits for the donor. In one example, a church member in Oklahoma donated 3% ownership in his company to his church. This yielded approximately \$600,000 for the church, while the donor received a \$250,000 tax break.
- *Educate attendees on their giving options* – If you have many older attendees, you may benefit from making them aware of various trust and estate options.

While today’s churches face many new challenges in attendance and giving, there are also many new opportunities to engage people and have a positive financial impact on the church. We encourage your leadership team to spend a few hours brainstorming and discussing new ideas. These just may change the way your church operates, connects with members, and reaches prospective new attendees.

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