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4 Tips for an Epic Church

# Giving Campaign





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Most recently, we've launched an entire suite of church administrative tools including Faithlife Sites, Faithlife Sermons, Faithlife TV, Faithlife Giving, and more! And we're still just getting started.

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## Introduction

Running a giving campaign is a big job. I should know.

As my church's director of administration and communication, I helped lead the team that planned and executed our first giving campaign. We had some big goals to correct some shortfalls in the past and to prepare us for growth.

After consulting with church campaign experts, I ran the communication and finance elements and helped manage our volunteer teams. Thanks to the Lord and our members, we reached our campaign goals—and even saw significant financial and attendance growth in the process.

Along the way, I learned a lot about giving campaigns, and I'll share what I learned with you in this guide. Whether you're considering a giving campaign, you're already in the middle of one, or you're looking for ideas to encourage church generosity, here are the four big lessons I learned about church giving campaigns.

## LESSON 1



# Make It Simple

No matter how grand and well-executed your vision, your giving campaign must be simple to succeed.

That's because you need your congregation to be excited about a shared goal, and to do that, you need a simple message they can grasp quickly.

Think back to the fundraisers you did in high school. How many grimy cars did you wash? How many batches of brownies did you bake? On paper, raising money for church camp doesn't look like fun. Yet anyone watching you and your friends scrub tires probably thought you were having the time of your life. What put the "fun" back in "fundraising"? Easy: you were part of a group that united for a single, common cause. That sense of togetherness made raising money exciting.

That kind of single-minded eagerness is what sparks momentum in a church's giving campaign. So, where do you begin?

I suggest that you start building excitement by making your campaign goals as simple as you can. A simple goal doesn't have to be a small goal. If you have an ambitious goal, go for it! But try to avoid overly complex messaging. As Jon Acuff says, "If you ever have to do a complicated, multi-step explanation to say why what you're doing is valuable, it probably isn't." <sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Jon Acuff, *Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done*, Penguin Publishing Group, Kindle Edition, p. 78.

Here's why that's important:

1. **People won't give to something they don't understand.** If your givers are confused about why you're asking them to give or what they're giving to, giving probably won't be a priority. But when people know how their money makes the church mission a reality, they feel like they're a part of your campaign. They're motivated by how each gift empowers your church to do more kingdom work. And that's one mark of a cheerful giver.
2. **It's hard to build momentum if it takes too long to explain.** Ever sat through a lecture that drones on forever? Even Eutychus fell asleep when Paul preached too long (Acts 20:7–12). It's the same principle here. The last thing you want is for your givers' eyes to gloss over when you're still explaining the first point. You can talk about your giving campaign in a way that's simple, memorable, and easy to say again and again (because you and your campaign team will be saying it for years).
3. **Your giving campaign message has to be portable.** Those words are going to show up everywhere—websites, postcards, giving envelopes, videos, and so on. So make your giving campaign message simple enough that the main point fits anywhere.

This kind of simplicity makes it easy for people to support the cause—and feel great about doing it.

While your campaign is bigger than a high school fundraiser, you can make your giving campaign simple by taking a little time to find one message that explains the vision behind all your fundraising goals.

I recommend starting with this insight from Luke Sullivan, a well-known advertising writer: “Write down the truest thing you can say about your [church].”<sup>2</sup> But as you answer that question, don't think about what the campaign will do for your church—paying for a new bus is too narrow of a goal. Rather, think about how the campaign will affect the way your church ministers to the community.

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<sup>2</sup> Sullivan, Luke, and Edward Boches. *Hey, Whipple, Squeeze This: A Guide to Creating Great Ads*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016, p. 48.

For example, my church ran the [Advance Initiative](#), a three-year campaign that sought to “advance the gospel in our community, throughout the world, and in the next generation.” Those were tied to specific goals:

- Pay down our mortgage so we could refinance and put more money into local ministry (advance the gospel *in our community*)
- Increase our missions budget from 5% to 10% (advance the gospel *throughout the world*)
- Make room for more children’s ministry space in our building (advance the gospel *in the next generation*)

Our campaign name, Advance Initiative, helped people catch the vision for what we aimed to accomplish: advance the gospel. And our three main goals made it clear how we would accomplish it. We also used our Advance logo often to help people remember the campaign purpose.

So how can you make your giving campaign message simple?

First, if you have more than one goal, write them on one short list. Try to find common ground between your goals so you can organize them into high-level categories (such as building renovation and listing each project you hope to complete). What’s the main thing you’re praying that all these goals will accomplish?

Next, use action words to describe your campaign’s impact. Is your aim to send a short-term missions team in a new bus, reach new people in your area by building a new facility, or mobilize college students for ministry? Powerful verbs give your initiative a sense of momentum.

Finally, build a campaign name around those goals. It can either be the same name (like “Reach”) or something inspired by your goals, like “Advance.” Naming your campaign helps your congregation understand the main point and feel like they’re part of something significant.

By thinking through the ways your goals will impact your ministry and your community, it’s easier to tap into a simple message your members will remember.





## LESSON 2

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# Make It Visible

There's a reason New Year's resolutions like "pray more" tend to fail. "More" is vague—when will you feel like you've reached your resolution? And when you're talking about a church giving campaign, "more" means practically nothing to your donors.

That's why it's important to make your goals as visible as you can. There are three main steps to help you along the way:

1. Set measurable goals
2. Choose tangible projects
3. Show your progress

As we dig more into each of those steps, think about how you can make each of them fit your church's specific context.

## Set Measurable Goals

If your goal is simply to "give more to missions," your donors probably won't be motivated to give because they won't know what "more" means. But it's different to say, "We're giving \$20,000 to missions—\$10,000 to a local homeless shelter and \$10,000 to build a church in India." That's a specific goal with a specific result—one your givers can see.

## Choose Tangible Projects

Making your goals measurable is only one part of the equation, though. You'll see more excitement and generosity when you make your goals tangible. Being able to see, hear, and experience the effect of your giving inspires more giving. Watching a building renovation in progress or hearing how a missionary cared for 12 orphans is exciting, and givers can't help but think, "My gift helped make that happen."

So, how can you pick a tangible goal? Here are a few examples of some tangible and intangible goals:

<b>Intangible</b>	<b>Tangible</b>
Paying off your church's mortgage	Buying or renovating your building
Generic missions giving	Building a new church in Thailand
Saving for an emergency fund	Hiring a new pastor or staffer
Regular church maintenance	Buying a sound system

Those intangible goals are important things, but they may not be right for a giving campaign.

But if you're set on raising money toward one of these intangible goals, here's my best suggestion for how to do it: tie a visible goal and an intangible goal together.

Notice how we structured our goals for the Advance Initiative above. A huge part of our campaign—and actually our first priority—was to reduce the debt on our building. And while we shared often with our members about why we needed to pay down our mortgage (we actually talked about it in each membership class), that by itself wasn't motivating enough to givers

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to carry a whole campaign. That’s why we added the renovation part. We knew we needed to renovate pretty badly, but we weren’t willing to go into more debt. Tying the debt reduction to the renovation made both possible, when neither goal would have been possible on its own.

Similarly, what visible goals can you link with your intangible goals? Try to make them relate as best you can, so your campaign message can be simple and powerful.

## Show Your Progress

Another tip for making your campaign visible is using photos and visuals. If you’re doing a project around your building, you can hang a foam-core sign in front of the construction that says something like, “This project is funded by [Your Campaign Name]” with your campaign graphics.

Or to make your progress visible in another way, take a look at [LakePointe Church’s giving page](#). There’s a ticker that shows the number of baptisms, mission trips, and families assisted in 2018—all thanks to the generosity of their members. Those stats are great for a giving page, but they’re even better on slides for Sunday mornings or your church business meetings.

Videos are unbeatable for showing progress—and you can pull it off whether you have a whole video crew or one person with a smartphone. You can post a video building tour to show what’s new or have a live interview with a missionary during your service. Then, you can post these videos to your church website so people can easily find them and be encouraged.

When you make your goals visible, people will draw the connection between their giving and the progress they’re seeing—and they’ll be more excited to keep giving.

## LESSON 3



# Make It Actionable

When we started our giving campaign, people asked me all the time if we needed help getting the building ready for renovations. Our contractors were doing all the hard work, but we made extra opportunities for our people to serve. From moving furniture to storage units to redirecting our Sunday morning foot traffic, people wanted to get their hands dirty to make Advance happen.

That's because givers aren't just walking wallets. When people believe in a goal, they're eager to sacrifice their time, talent, and treasure to make it a reality.

While money is important, narrowing generosity to money cuts off a lot of opportunities. You're calling people in your church to leverage their lives to expand God's kingdom, not just their wallets. By creating opportunities for people to use their time and talent to accomplish your campaign goals, you can help teach your members about what it means to go all in for the gospel.

Furthermore, some of your church's strongest advocates may already be giving as much as they can. By finding other ways to include these people, you can model what it means to trust God with your finances. And many times, you'll find that they'll be more eager to give when money's less tight.



So here's the big question: How do you make a giving campaign actionable?

Some of these ideas may be perfect ways for people in your context to take action:

- **Involve groups in your church.** You can run a special kids' offering or have your student ministry do a parents' night out fundraiser. Or encourage your small groups to have garage sales—or better yet, have a churchwide garage sale.
- **Create service and missions opportunities that relate to your goals.** Raising money for a church building in Thailand? Send a mission trip to help the church move into its new building. Or if you're building a playground or renovating, schedule a church workday to clear the area and prepare it for construction.
- **Build a campaign team.** You've got lots of skilled people in your church, and this is a place where you can use their expertise. Think about all the things you'll need to make your campaign a success, and recruit people to organize each one. You'll want project managers, budget specialists, professional fundraisers, event planners, writers, designers, videographers, and so on. If you don't have the right person for a role, you can always hire someone, though it's a good idea to recruit professional-level people in your church to help.

One church's giving campaign shows an entirely different way to ask your members to act. The Village Church in Dallas, TX, is running [Multiply](#), an initiative to make each of its campuses into individual, self-sustaining churches. As a part of this campaign, the church is asking its people to pray, give, and go, which may mean some people take a big missional step: leaving the main campus to go to one of the new, autonomous churches.

The example from The Village Church may seem daunting if your goals are smaller (most goals are!), but think of it this way: a generous church isn't just a church that gives a lot of money. It's also characterized by people who are generous with their time, their talents, and their preferences.

A great way to build that kind of generous culture is by sharing service and mission opportunities to your church's online communication hub. That way, people can see what's coming up and plan their budgets and schedules to help make the church's vision a reality.

## LESSON 4

# Make It Reachable

I'm notoriously bad at annual Bible reading plans. It's not that I don't want to read the Bible more regularly—of course I do—but a yearlong goal is awfully daunting for me. Jon Acuff's words in *Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done ring True*: "If you dream too big at the start, you curse your finish."<sup>3</sup>

That's vital to keep in your mind as you consider your church's campaign goals. It's easy to set a lofty goal and consider it a win if you get anywhere close. But missing a goal you care a lot about is demoralizing.

On the flip side, if you've ever experienced what it's like to reach a goal, you know how motivating it is. All of a sudden, you've got momentum and excitement, and a goal that seemed too big before is now within reach.

Every church is different, and your leadership is in the best position to choose smart goals. But generally these two rules will help move you in the right direction:

1. **Choose the right amount.** In just a few simple steps, you can arrive at a well-researched decision about how much to raise.
  - a. **Start by finding out how much it costs to reach your goals.**  
For example, if you're building a playground, get 3–5 estimates on the playground you want, including permits and installation. Add everything up, and add buffer for any expenses.
  - b. **Next, look at your church's giving and attendance history.**  
What have your giving trends been like in the past five years? What percentage of growth do you typically see year-over-year, both in income and attendance? What percentage of your members give regularly, and what's the average gift?

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<sup>3</sup> Acuff, 22.

- c. **Finally, review your budgeted income for the year.** Is it accurate to the total amount you actually expect to receive?
- d. **Set your budgeted income as your goal for now.** It's a lofty goal that's still reachable. Does that amount fit your campaign objectives? You can go as high as 2.5x your annual income, but that should be your max. If this is your first giving campaign, set a goal you really think is within reach instead of going too big too soon. If this campaign goes well, you can set a higher one in a few years, and your people will remember the excitement of reaching your first goal.
- e. **A final note:** Make sure you budget for the administrative expenses you'll incur during the campaign. That includes things like printing giving envelopes and newsletters, video production, event costs, and so on.

2. **Choose the right length of time.** There are lots of variables on how long is too long, but here's a few things to consider about your timing.

- a. **How itinerant is your area?** Are people moving in and out all the time? If so, probably go for a shorter goal.
- b. **How big is your financial goal?** The bigger the goal, the longer your campaign should run. If your campaign is about half your annual budget, you can set your campaign length for a year or two. Our best advice: don't go over three years. People will lose interest, and you'll see giving toward your campaign start to drop.



**A good rule of thumb is that a church can typically raise anywhere from 1 to 2.5x its annual budget over a three-year period.**<sup>4</sup>

Once you've set your financial goals and your timeline, it's time for the ask. We won't get too far into that part, but you can find lots of great sermon outlines and resources about giving and generosity on Faithlife Sermons.

I'll pass along these final tips, though:

**Don't ask everyone to give the same amount.** You'll limit yourself and your congregation when you say something like, "If 100 people in our congregation pledged \$2,000 a year, we'd be right at our goals." People who want to give more will feel they don't need to, and people who can't give that much feel guilty. And the last thing you want to do with your giving campaign is make your givers feel guilty into making a pledge. Instead of doing the math, simply explain your campaign's financial goal and ask people to give as they feel led by God.

Ask people to pray before asking them to pledge. Our church asked people to pray about their campaign pledge for the week before our commitment day because we wanted each person to settle on their gift with the Lord and with their spouse or family. Many people actually had closer to two months to prepare, thanks to our informational events that preceded Commitment Sunday.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://capitalcampaignservices.com/church-campaigns/church-capital-campaign-goal-setting>

**Boldly ask people to give over their regular giving.** We've all heard people ask questions without really asking them, saying things like, "I'm just wondering if . . ." Those kinds of questions tell people you have reservations about what you're asking. So [be compassionate and confident in your ask](#): "We believe this is what the Lord is calling our church to do. Will you pray about how you can commit financially to make [this goal] happen?" Phrasing it as a question prepares your congregation to answer with a yes.

**Thank your givers regularly and thoughtfully.** Go out of your way to thank everyone who gives toward the campaign. I recommend giving generic thanks from the stage (without names, of course), sending personal thank-you notes, and mailing or emailing regular giving statements with a letter from your pastor. That way, each giver knows how your church truly appreciates his or her generosity.

## ■ **Putting It All Together**

Whether your goals seem large or small, your ministry matters to your congregation, your community, and the world. By making your campaign message simple, choosing tangible projects, giving people ways to take action, and setting reachable goals, you'll be in a great position to help your givers see the importance and value of your campaign.

We hope these tips help your next giving campaign! Let us know how your campaign goes in the [Faithlife Giving group](#) on Faithlife.

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