

JANUARY TOOL

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"Moving the kingdom forward in refreshing ways."

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Focus On Engagement in January

For twenty years, certain giving trends have remained steady. If you are not familiar with the resource "Giving USA" it is a go-to publication for philanthropic research. Every year they release a state of giving report that comprehensively gathers data and trends from across multiple resources, producing best-in-class information for nonprofits and congregations. I will be sharing several of these trends over the next few months, focusing upon those that have been tried and true for twenty years.

Here are a few summary statements that can be directly applied to local congregations:

1. We are experiencing some of the best giving years in the history of our country. Since 2008, there has been a steady climb in charitable donations which includes churches and nonprofits. As a matter of fact, the past few years have been the highest dollar amounts ever contributed to nonprofit causes in our country.
2. Local congregations of worship continue to receive the highest dollar amount of these record giving years--almost twice as much as the second place sector, which is human services.
3. Only 7% of donations are given by corporations, which means the vast majority of dollars donated come from individuals.
4. Individuals with religious affiliations give far more dollars to charitable causes than those with no religious affiliation. **(Which makes discipleship important.)**
5. The more engaged an individual is with the local church or nonprofit, the more dramatic the increase of the amount of times they give annually, the total dollars they give over a lifetime, and the overall energy they provide in advocating for the organization. **(Which makes engagement important.)**

Obviously, this is all good news for the local church. In January of each year giving tends to be down while attendance is up. Then the reverse often occurs in December with attendance lower, but giving exponentially higher. **So how do you grow generosity in the first quarter of the year?**

Based upon the above trends, which have been historically true for decades, here are some applications for you:

1. **Engagement is a priority.** The more people you move into deeper levels of involvement, the better. Focus on your community marketing, guest experience, next steps, and an assimilation process that ensures a powerful first visit, which magnetizes towards a second visit.
2. **Launch small groups and entry-level service opportunities strong.** People who were active guests in the previous year should be ready to take their next step.
3. **Clearly and repeatedly share specific actions resulting from church vision.** The difference you are collectively making in the lives of people in your community and around the world--with a clear path of how to get more involved--is critical.
 - a. Communicate the easy entry points for next steps beyond a second visit. This could be an event for kids, women, or men. Oftentimes small groups, volunteerism, or membership may be too big of a leap for a new attendee.
 - b. Be person-centric. Often, churches lead with what is important to the organization like completing a Guest Registration Card, becoming a Member, or volunteering in the Nursery. **People move faster and further when the opportunities light their fire.**
 - c. As you conclude the first quarter of the year, make inviting easy for your attendees as Easter is right around the corner. This will keep the cycle of growth moving forward.

So what are the #1 and #2 Indicators of Personal Generosity? They are Engagement and Discipleship. The more engaged a person is in living passionately for the vision, the better for the church. Of course, the cause of the church is the Kingdom! It is so important to name your steps in helping a person move from your city to congregational involvement. This is vital in January when attendance can be high, made up of people with all levels of devotion, from new guests to attenders dreaming of being more regular to faithful members desiring to take a deeper step. There are many steps and even more micro-steps of engagement; let's help all move forward because the kingdom is at stake.

Here is a fun assignment for your team to consider. Imagine a potential guest decides Saturday night around 8pm to visit your church the next morning. First, describe this potential guest their stage of life, size of family, background, and possible reason for their visit. What is their state of mind and feeling? What are their needs and what problem are they desiring to solve in their life? After all, they have many options of what to do with their time, yet they have chosen to visit your church. For many churches, these guests may have previously viewed an online service or perused your social media feed. Try to establish the heart position and mindset of a guest, then imagine what their experience is like from their living room couch to a seat in your worship center.

Suppose they open Google on their phone's web browser and begin a search for your church. Once they find your website or social media they begin to click around learning about your location, times, where to park, what to do with their kids, how to navigate the morning, and what to expect. Then, journey with them on their day on this imaginary visit. What does it feel like each step of the way? Are they getting what they need? Are they presented with a helpful and appropriate next step that meets their needs? Be disciplined as you do this exercise. Hint: if the goal is to get them to complete a Guest Registration Card, you might have bypassed their most important need. **Did they encounter God in a powerfully magnetic way at their point of need?**

I will be addressing the **#2 Indicator of Discipleship** next month. However, with attendance high in January and everyone having elevated hopes for the best year of their life, let's focus on helping people navigate their first few steps with your church and Jesus.

I hope this content stirs your mind and starts a conversation with your team. Do not hesitate to text, call, or email me. I would love to be a part of your journey of growing generous disciples.