

Beyond *the* Offering

Energizing Congregational Giving



Alexander-Haas
TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

First Things *First*



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from the Carolina office of
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Refocus Brings Clarity

"2020 will be a year of clarity and vision!" said one nonprofit leader with which I was working last year. Of course, she was making a play on the image of 20/20 vision as we worked together on her organization's strategic plan.

Now, five months into what was to have been "a year of clarity and vision" and faced with the continuing uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems nothing could be farther from the truth! What was to have been a time envisioning a clear road ahead, has now been one of trying to navigate a very blurry trail. What we believe to be a certain path forward on one day, gives way to a need to change direction just two days later!

For most, when having to quickly shift from the normal community sabbath worship experiences to virtual and broadcast experiences, they noted increased participation. Even giving levels appeared to be on the rise during the initial weeks following the required "stay-at-home" orders.

Now, at least through a handful of conversations I've had with some current and former clients, we are hearing that attendance/ participation and even giving may be on a decline. Yet, each congregation or group is different, however, and we're not sure which trends are here to stay.

One church leader with whom I spoke, highlighted three areas believed to be important in enhancing participation as well as giving:

- Executing a specific approach to ensure that each member receives care and compassion;
- Addressing specific mission and outreach efforts of those most impacted by COVID-19 while also supporting those on the so-called front lines of providing services to those in need; and
- Ramping up communications via multiple channels to help individual members retain a sense of community.

These are merely three areas for one church. But I'd love to hear about yours. In order to help correct our vision for the weeks and months ahead, **we need your input. Your insight on what is happening in your house of worship will be invaluable to us. We hope you will take just one minute of your time to participate in a very short survey.** We will share the results in the next issue and on our social media.

Question 1

Compared to our normal attendance numbers, over the past 8 weeks, and based on our best guesstimate on tracking "attendance" or participation online, we have experienced the following during our main worship time:

[Answer here](#)

Surveys Release Varying Data

How is Your Church's Giving?

A recent poll of pastors report a decrease in giving has risen from 62% to 79% in the period from early to late March. The same poll showed that while many pastors reported an increase in virtual attendance, over half reported that giving was down (25% slightly, 37% significantly). The end of March, just over one in three pastors (35%) stated that giving rates "stayed about the same," and only two percent noted some level of increase.

When asked about their primary strategy to encourage financial generosity to their church:

- Nearly two in five pastors (38%) note a plan to "direct people to our existing online giving."
- One in five (19%) say they would "highlight options for check and cash donations."
- Fifteen percent say they would "implement online giving for the first time."

Other responses include:

- Speaking more often about generosity during the service (3%).
- Modeling generosity as a church community (3%).
- Highlighting an existing text-to-give process (2%).
- Implementing text-to-give for the first time (1%).
- Fourteen percent of pastors say they "did not specifically strategize about generosity this week."

While another general donor survey shows

Majority of Donors Plan to Keep Giving Until Economy Recovers

With the COVID-19 pandemic creating uncertainty for both the economy and the nonprofit sector, 20 percent of U.S. donors said they plan to stop giving to charity until the economy has recovered.

Based on a survey of 630 donors conducted between April 17 and 21, Donor Confidence Strong in Face of COVID-19 found that:

- 28% of respondents said they plan to keep giving regardless of the impacts of the public health crisis while
- 53 percent said they would continue to give but give "more carefully."
- Respondents who attend church weekly are more likely to give compared with those who never attend (40% vs. 16%), and
- boomer and older respondents are more likely to give compared with millennial and younger donors (33% vs. 26%).

In terms of their overall giving in 2020,

- 25% of respondents said they would give less than they did in 2019, while
- 52% planned to give the same and
- 17% said they would give more. Respondents planning to give more include large majorities of regular churchgoers (75 percent), self-identified conservatives (74 percent), and boomers (78 percent).

Among those who say they will give more in 2020, 33% cited COVID-19 as the main reason. According to the report, respondents plan to give slightly more to places of worship as well as to health and medical nonprofits in the United States, and slightly less to educational institutions, faith-based charities (excluding places of worship), and arts and cultural organizations. *PND, 5-14*

And what about worship

How the Pandemic Has Changed Worship Will Things Ever Be the Same?

A survey by the Pew Research Center in April found more than 90% of regular churchgoers in the US say their churches had closed their doors to combat the spread of the coronavirus, with the vast majority saying that worship services had moved entirely online. Social hours and church suppers are a thing of the past, at least for now.

However, the changes are not all negative. Many pastors have intensified efforts to stay in touch with members of their congregations and maintain their church communities.

"This crisis has actually caused us to do a better job of picking up the phone and checking on our members," says Randal Lyle, senior pastor at Meadowridge Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX. "It's made me refocus on connecting individually with people. So there are some connections that are probably stronger now than they were before."

The shift to online communication on platforms such as Zoom has also introduced some new efficiencies.

"I don't have to drive an hour to sit down and read the Bible with someone," she says. "I can do it all from home. There's no running to meetings. There's no strain on my kids. There's no strain on my husband. I'm not always rushing somewhere," says Chair Anderson, a devoted member of North River Church of Christ in Marietta, Ga.

In some cases, however, the coronavirus shutdowns have weakened church connections. The Pew survey and a survey by the Public Religion Research Institute found that one-third or more of those who had previously attended church regularly were not bothering to watch online services. For those whose church affiliation was already tenuous, the disconnect may be permanent. *NPR, 5-20*

We Want You to *Know*....

Transforming Institutions

For more than 30 years, Alexander Haas has been a fixture in the nonprofit community. We are honored to have worked with both large and small faith-based organizations, helping sew the seeds of compassion, hope and charity.

[See a list of our faith-based client partners...](#)

Our Transformational Services

Raising the funds to meet the mission and ministry needs of churches is becoming increasingly challenging. At Alexander Haas, we understand the challenges that congregations face in raising the funds to support their mission. More importantly, we understand how to overcome those challenges. We offer a variety of stewardship services for the unique needs of faith-based organizations.

[What can we help you with?](#)



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