

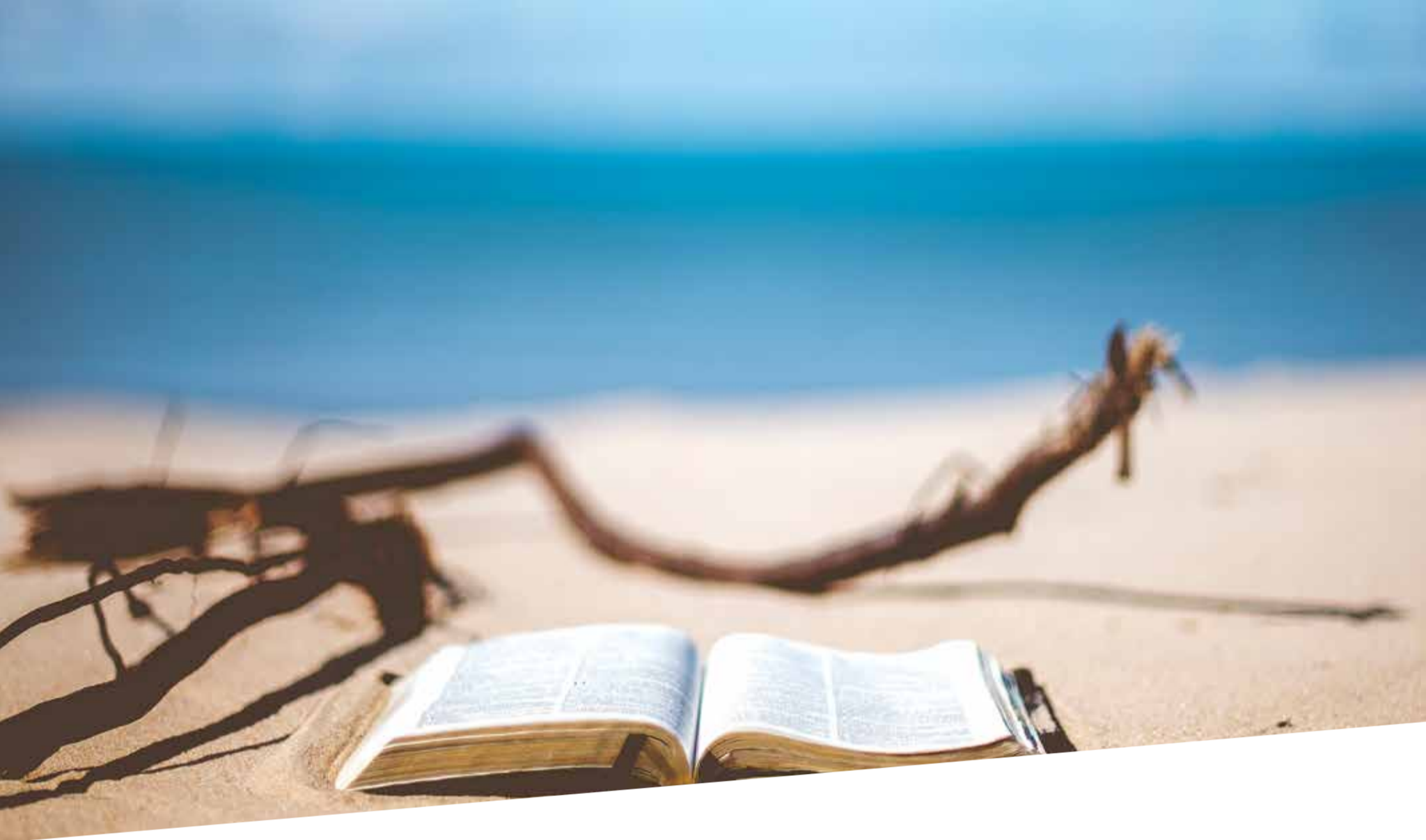
HOW TO BEAT

THE SUMMER GIVING SLUMP

BY HORIZONS STEWARDSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Many churches face a sharp decline in giving over the summer because of vacations and other activities. With an effective plan in place, your church can beat the summer slump and even experience an increase in giving.

Here is an example of a letter sent by a church at the start of the summer. This was their attempt at beating the summer slump in their church.

Dear Church Member,

With the summer months ahead bringing vacations and other activities, the members of the Finance Committee, would like to remind you to keep your pledge current. Throughout the summer, even while you are away, expenses such as heating, air conditioning, personnel costs, and maintenance of our facility continue. When pledges fall behind, it creates a cash flow problem, which makes it difficult for our church to meet its obligations. Thank you in advance for your commitment to ABC Church.

Sincerely,

Your Church Finance Committee

Do you feel motivated? Ready to write that big check? Would you give to this church? Would you be inspired to higher levels of giving so the church can pay for air conditioning and grounds cleanup?



Churches like this one fail to inspire giving especially when the summer giving slump hits. Their intentions are good, but their plan is all wrong. This ebook provides the resources you need to create a simple and effective strategy for avoiding the summer giving slump.

Not only will you have the templates and resources you need, the end of each section includes an action plan to help you get started. With your plan in place, your church will be ready and able to jumpstart summer giving and experience a fully-funding summer.

LET'S GET STARTED!

Before we begin developing your plan, it is important to understand a few basic giving principles.



WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO GIVE?

- 1.** Belief in the organization's vision.
- 2.** High regard for leadership.
- 3.** Fiscal responsibility of the institution.

If leaders are not well regarded or the church has not demonstrated fiscal responsibility, there is little you can do to restore confidence during the summer months. However, there is a considerable amount that can and should be done to unify your church members around a common vision.



THE POWER OF VISION

**People give to your church because they believe in
your vision.**

They believe in what the church is doing and want to support it. However, with the constant noise of everyday life, the vision can get lost in the shuffle. Therefore, you have to be intentional and repetitive in sharing your specific vision for ministry. It is not enough to preach one powerful sermon on vision the Sunday before you launch a program or stewardship initiative. People need to be reminded about where God is leading you and how you plan to get there. Even in a down economy, people will support a vision they believe in.

DISCOVERING YOUR VISION

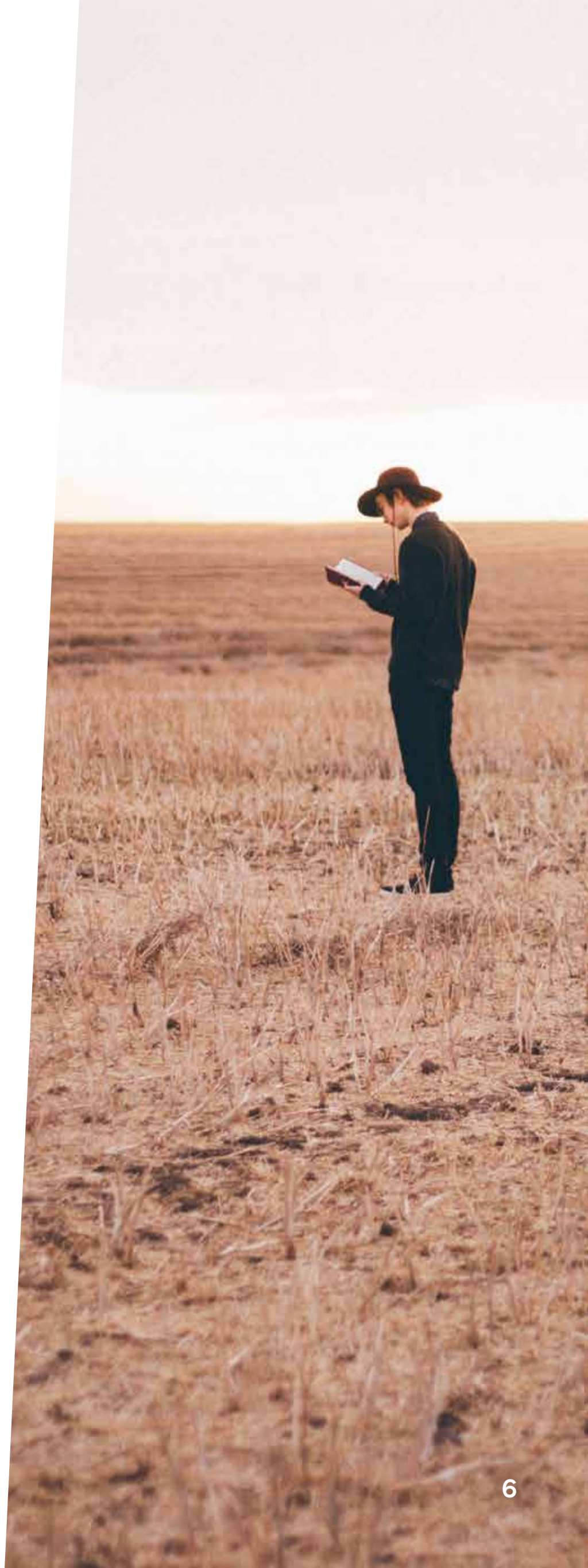


While there has been a lot written on the development of a good vision statement, often we make it so complicated that by the time our vision is cast, everyone is exhausted. Many vision statements have been word-smithed to death and are much too long. A quality vision statement answers two questions:

Who is God calling us to be?

What is God calling us to do?

Both questions take into account your context, the resources you have available to you, and the current environment. Your vision statement should identify the ways in which God is calling you to do God's work in the world and how you will accomplish it. For purposes of your summer giving program, you should identify initiatives occurring during this season rather than a one-year or five-year plan.



The key to sharing your vision can be found in the three C's: *Clear, compelling, and concise.*



The most important aspect of your vision is that people clearly understand what you are trying to accomplish and how you intend to get there. Your vision should also be compelling. Remember that your church members have endless options for making a donation. Like it or not, you are in competition with every other charitable cause.



**Yes, you are the church!
However, it no longer suffices
to say, "We are the church.
Make a donation."**

Many of your church members are receiving clear, compelling, and concise vision statements from other nonprofits. It is imperative that you share your vision similarly. People need to see and hear how you are putting resources to work. If they choose to make a donation, how will it be used? Please don't share a long missive outlining all the details of your vision. Give people the high level information and invite them to ask questions, if desired. A good vision should be brief enough to be memorable and describe (clearly, compellingly, and concisely) what God wants your church to do and how you're going to accomplish it..



MAKE GIVING ABOUT VISION: NOT MEETING YOUR BUDGET

Many churches actually hurt themselves further by using the wrong approach to combat the summer slump.

Instead of focusing on the vision, they make giving about making the budget (example-the church letter in the introduction). Few of your members will be inspired by meeting some arbitrary budget number, no matter how many PowerPoint charts and slides you show them.





To beat the summer slump, giving should be about the vision, not about the budget.

People want to know how you are putting their gifts to good use. Tell them how you are advancing the Kingdom through the ministries of your church. Let people know what you intend to do with the resources you will

receive. People want to know their gift is making a difference, so tell them how your church is impacting lives. Tell stories of who is being impacted and how their lives are being transformed through your ministries. Don't be shy! Your church is the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. That is an inspiring story.

ACTION PLAN:

Develop your summer giving program vision statement



o Following the above guidelines, create three to five statements of why your summer program is so important for your church. What major initiatives are you launching this summer? Who will these ministries impact and how?

o Demonstrate fiscal responsibility by telling your members what you have accomplished and how you've served as the hands and feet of Jesus. Where and to whom have you made a difference? How will you continue to do this?

o The answers to these questions will help you formulate your vision statement. When you begin your summer program, use these statements as talking points to clearly, compellingly, and concisely tell your ministry story.





o Once you have answers to the above questions, flesh out your vision statement in one page or less. Identify what specific new initiatives you have planned, including infrastructure or work to the physical plant. Your building is a tool for ministry. Remind people of the importance of your building in supporting your ministry. For example, you are not fixing potholes and repaving the parking lot. You are demonstrating hospitality by making your facility accessible to all people. You are providing a safe and inviting place for people to grow in their faith. That sounds so much better than paving the parking lot.

o You may want to create a special name or theme for your summer giving program. A memorable theme helps tie together messages about the summer giving program. Use a scripture text that speaks to the ministry you are accomplishing.

o Develop a plan for sharing your vision throughout the summer on all your communication channels. Use your newsletter, bulletin, announcements, pulpit, social media, and email blasts to communicate your messages.



PREPARING FOR SUCCESS: LEADERS LEAD THE WAY!

This plan for addressing the summer slump offers strategies for two giving groups that exist in every church:
committed core and constituents.

The committed core includes ministry leaders, elders, deacons, small group leaders, and financial leaders. In most cases, the committed core make up about 20% of your congregation and contribute as much as 90% of the resources. The committed core is vital to achieving your vision and equally important in combatting the summer slump.



The constituents make up 80%-90% of the congregation and contribute about 10%-20% of the financial resources. Many in this group are learning and growing in their discipleship journey, but have not yet grown in their giving. The constituents give at the lower levels or not at all.

It is important to provide models of generosity to educate constituents on the principles of Christian giving. Therefore, the committed core should be actively engaged first. The committed core can be powerful influencers and should be kept informed at every step in the process.

Before launching your summer giving program, gather your committed core in a Vision Summit designed to increase awareness and build support for your ministry.



VISION SUMMIT

The Vision Summit is designed to engage and inform your committed core about the vision of your church.

People who have the opportunity to provide early feedback tend to provide support. The Vision Summit helps create buy-in from the committed core so they can passionately share their enthusiasm and support with others.

ACTION PLAN:



- Generate a list of the committed core in your church. Your list should include ministry leaders, staff, elders, board members, and other who hold leadership positions in your church. The list should also include those who provide financial leadership to your church. Your final list should represent about 20% of your active members.
- Establish a date, time, and place for your Vision Summit. You will also want to consider the format for your event and whether it will include food and beverages or not. There is no right or wrong here as it is totally dependent on what works best in your church setting. The Vision Summit should be no longer than one hour, so if food is served, buffet style is preferred.

- Send a letter to everyone on your list inviting them to the Vision Summit. Ideally this should be done about two weeks in advance of the Vision Summit. If you are able, a quick phone call or email reminder helps maximize participation.

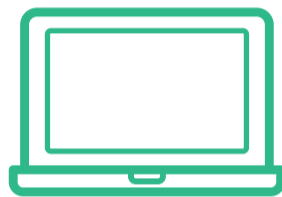




- The format of the event can take many forms but should include the following:
 - o A time of praise and worship.
 - o A ministry update including the impact of your ministries over the past year. Thank the group for being the primary support in making your ministry happen.
 - o Vision casting. This is your opportunity share your vision with those who will determine whether or not you achieve it. Prepare your presentation well and include handouts and/or email the presentation out after the meeting. Share your vision in terms of the impact your ministries will have on the people you serve. Show your enthusiasm and share your personal support.

- o Announce summer program. Share the theme of your summer program and explain what you intend to accomplish. Remember it is not about meeting the budget, but about enabling transformational ministry.
- o Time of commitment. Invite your committed core to pray about their support for the summer program through their influence, prayers, and financial commitment. Ask them to become owners of the vision God has for your church. Invite them to call you with any questions they have.
- **Follow-Up.** Immediately following the Vision Summit, send an email to all those on the invitation list and attach your presentation. Include answers to any questions that may have come up during the event.





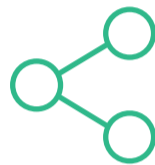
GO DIGITAL OR FACE THE SLUMP

If you are not already set up to do online giving, this summer is the perfect time to get started.

Ok, probably five or more summers ago would have been better. Online giving is not only essential to avoiding the summer giving slump, it is vital to your ongoing ministry support. Church members who are traveling or simply not in worship can maintain their financial support through online giving. Passing the plate is no longer sufficient to growing giving.



Placing a “**Give Now**” button on your website is only the beginning to making online giving easy. You need a long-term plan that includes website optimization and giving tools such as kiosks, text-to-give, QR codes, and others. The summer is a great time to encourage members to set up automatic bank transfers. Still need more convincing? For more on online giving, read [here](#) and [here](#).



USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO INCREASE GIVING

In 2017, it was estimated that 81% of American had a social media profile. Facebook is by far the most popular followed by LinkedIn, Twitter, and several others.

If your church is not on social media you are missing out on a prime opportunity to share your vision with current and prospective members. Often the argument against the church being on social media is that church members won't use it.



Because of the prevalent use of Facebook by people of all ages, it has become an important source for information. Sharing your vision story through photos, videos, and articles will help people understand the impact you are making in the world. Even during the summer, people check in on social media. Use these digital platforms to help share your vision with your members and others.



SNAIL MAIL IS NOT DEAD--YET

Snail mail is not entirely dead and it can be an effective tool for your summer program. USPS letters have become rare in our electronic world making them a treat for those who value more traditional ways.

Consider some of your committed core people. Are they more likely to reply to an email or a personal letter in their mailbox? Studies show that donors born before 1945 chose direct mail as their primary means for making contributions. A substantial percentage of younger donors had also made a recent donation via snail

mail. The key to snail mail effectiveness is sending specifically targeted and personal letters to recipients. Donors should not be treated the same, but rather be segmented based on their giving behaviors. For more information, click [here](#). Also, donors should never receive a letter addressed to "Dear church member."



HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE DIRECT MAIL LETTER

If you are going to go to the trouble to send direct mail, you should be should your letter will have the impact you intended.
Here are some important guidelines.

- **Personalize your letter.** A letter addressed to “church member” does not convey the relationship you have with your donors. The letter should be addressed to “Jim and Jane” because that is what you would call them on a Sunday morning. Mail merge makes this a fairly simple process even if you are sending hundreds of letters. Don’t skimp on this. Letters addressed generically are likely to be thrown away before they are even read.



- **Make your letter brief.** Correspondence should be limited to one page. Think through your message and keep it short and to the point. If people have to wade through several paragraphs before you get to the point, they will likely never get to the important stuff.

- **Keep your focus on ministry not money.** Remember your audience is concerned with ministry and the impact you are having on your community and beyond. If you have made a strong case for why your ministry is worthy of their support, you will not need to reference the summer slump, the budget, or keeping pledges current.




- **Call to action.** Be clear about what you want them to do. You want them to pray about how they can partner with the church to broaden its reach and impact in the world. Tell them what you're doing, who is impacted, and what you plan to do next when funds are available. Then ask them to help you do it.

- **Make it easy.** If you've written a powerful letter but don't provide an easy way for people to respond you will likely lose their support. Before their enthusiasm declines, make sure there are several easy ways for people to respond. Include an envelope (for check writers or those who will bring cash with them to church). Print a QR code on the letter that will direct them to your church's homepage where they can click the **"Give Now"** button

- **Enclosures.** Provide a #9 envelope (**which fits inside a #10 business envelope**) addressed to the church. There is no need to include a stamp. This will be the first part of their gift to the church. Also, include a copy of your vision statement.

- **Proofread.** Have someone check for grammar, typos, and errors in your letter. A letter that is free from errors conveys its importance and the investment of time you have made to create it.



- 
- **Signature.** Ideally the letters should be hand signed by the pastor. If this is not practical, an electronic signature is the next best thing. If coming from someone other than the pastor, the letter should be sent from a person rather than the “finance committee.” Including a phone number and/or email address is a nice touch in case people have questions about what’s in the letter.

Action Plan:

- Make sure you have plenty of letterhead, #10 and #9 envelopes on hand. The #9 envelopes should have the church's address pre-printed on them. If you are using a special theme, consider have special envelopes printed with the logo on them. Alternatively you can have stickers printed with the theme and put them on the envelopes.
- Create your plan for beating the summer slump including the dates for email, direct mail, and other correspondence.



IMPORTANT:

When you create your list for emails and direct mail, be sure to remove your financial leaders from the list. Financial leaders are those who provide substantial funding to the church—usually the top 5-10 donors depending on the size of the church. Financial leaders should be included in your Vision Summit, but should not receive a direct mail request. The pastor should have ongoing personal communication with financial leaders and engage them directly. For more information about financial leaders ministry go [here](#).



APPENDIX A

SAMPLE SUMMER GIVING PROGRAM

This example uses the theme “The Summer of Light” to communicate that in the midst of a world of uncertainty and darkness there is light--Jesus is the light of the world.

We want to lift Him up high so that His light will shine and bring others into the light. Almost every Sunday the summer giving program is mentioned. Remember to use all forms of communication—email, direct mail, newsletters, social media, bulletin, and the pulpit.

Invite lay people to share their testimonies about God’s generosity in their lives. Remember the message is to share the impact of your ministry in the world.



MAY

1ST WEEK IN MAY VISION SUMMIT

A gathering of all ministry and financial leaders. See section on Vision Summit for more information and agenda outline

2ND WEEK IN MAY

Send a direct mail letter (**See samples**) and email announcing the summer giving program.

3RD WEEK IN MAY

Bulletin insert encouraging giving. For samples and more on electronic giving go [here](#) and [here](#).

4TH WEEK IN MAY

Layperson Testimony – Enlist one or more laypeople to share their stories of their transformation through giving to the church.



JUNE

1ST WEEK IN JUNE

Send a direct mail letter and email sharing highlights of your summer giving program vision. Clearly and concisely share information about what ministry you will be supporting and what impact this ministry is making in the world.

2ND WEEK IN JUNE

Include an insert in your bulletin. Focus on another special project or initiative that is a part of your summer giving program

3RD WEEK IN JUNE

Bulletin insert encouraging giving. For samples and more on electronic giving go [here](#) and [here](#).

4TH WEEK IN JUNE

Layperson Testimony – Enlist one or more laypeople to share their stories of their transformation through giving to the church. Remember these testimonies could be recorded for your website and social media. Also, testimonies could be written and included in your correspondence.



JULY

1ST WEEK IN JULY

Bulletin insert encouraging giving. For samples and more on electronic giving go [here](#) and [here](#).

2ND WEEK IN JULY

This should coincide with the mailing of your 2nd quarter giving statements. Be sure to include a note on giving statements about the ministry you were able to accomplish with the gifts given. Remember to tell them what you will be able to accomplish with their additional gifts. Include your vision statement and envelope.

3RD WEEK IN JULY

Include a bulletin insert sharing one or more of the following:

- How many recently signed up for automatic bank withdrawals
- Report on the accomplishment of summer ministries such as vacation Bible camp, mission activities, or youth programs.
- Introduction of new or expanding ministries happening soon

4TH WEEK IN JULY

Layperson Testimony – Enlist one or more laypeople to share their stories of their transformation through giving to the church. Remember these testimonies could be recorded for your website and social media. Also, testimonies could be written and included in your correspondence.



AUGUST

1ST WEEK IN AUGUST

Send a direct mail letter and email sharing highlights of your summer giving program vision. Clearly and concisely share information about what ministry you will be supporting and what impact this ministry is making in the world.

2ND WEEK IN AUGUST

Layperson Testimony – Enlist one or more laypeople to share their stories of their transformation through giving to the church. Remember these testimonies could be recorded for your website and social media. Also, testimonies could be written and included in your correspondence.

3RD WEEK IN AUGUST

Wrap up of summer giving program and send thank you. Express gratitude to those who provided support. Update on ministries accomplished and impact on the community.



**APPENDIX B:
SAMPLE LETTERS
FOR THE THEME,
“THE SUMMER OF LIGHT”**

2nd week in May—Letter announcing summer giving program

This template can be used for direct mail and email



ABC CHURCH

Dear Jim and Jean,

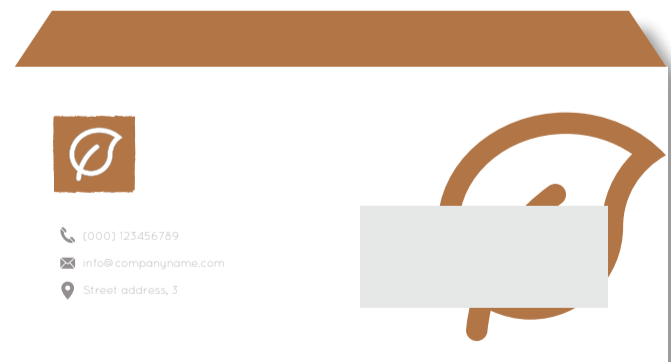
Thank you for your ongoing support of the ministries at ABC Church. With the spiritual and financial support of our congregation, we have been able to [list recent accomplishments and identify a specific example of the impact of your ministry]. We are grateful for God's hand in the work we are doing in our community and around the world.

The theme for our summer program is "The summer of light" calling forth the image of Jesus as the light of the world. Through our ministries, we are bringing light and hope into the world in the name of Jesus. This summer we are focusing our attention in some key areas [list items from your vision statement]. Our growing Vacation Bible Camp continues to attract children from our local community and beyond. Our partnership with XYZ Church has enabled us to bring children from Detroit's inner city to our campus to share with them the light of Jesus. Although some of the families are able to afford the \$45 VBC registration, many of the children will be on scholarship. Registration is still open, but indications are that we will almost double our enrollment from last year. If you would like to provide one or more scholarships for VBC kids, please use the envelope provided or go to our website at www.abcchurch.org.

God's blessings to us are abundant through this ministry and the other initiatives described in the attached document. Please continue to keep our church and especially the VBC kids in your prayers that we will be able to remove any darkness with the light of Jesus this summer.

Sincerely,
Senior Pastor

Encl: Vision Statement and envelope





1st week of June

This template can be used for direct mail and email

Dear Jim and Jean,

It is difficult to comprehend that this year is almost halfway over. However, as I reflect back, I am in awe of what our community of faith at ABC Church has been able to accomplish. [List some milestone accomplishments here].

Even as we celebrate all that God has done through our church, we realize there is so much left to be done. As you know, the Summer of Light program includes several ministries that are having an impact in our community. If you were in worship last Sunday you were able to hear from Josh and Susan about the profound impact of the annual Nicaragua mission trip. As youth leaders, Josh and Susan spoke about the transformation they have witnessed in the dozens of youth who have participated in this mission trip over the past six years. It was moving to hear the stories of how the young people matured in their faith and grew in their confidence while in Nicaragua. As the group prepares for their seventh year, we are blessed with a group of sixteen young people who will return to us different from when they left. It is programs such as this that enable us to bring the light of Jesus into the world.

During this summer of light, I ask you to consider how you are called to support the work and ministry of ABC Church. Your support, whether it is a gift of service, money, or prayers, makes Jesus' light shine brighter through our church.

With gratitude,
Senior Pastor

Enclosures: envelope and vision statement



0123 Zip, ABC City, USA 



(000) 123456789
info@companyname.com
Street address, 3





2nd week in July—Insert for quarterly statement

Dear Jim and Jean,

Thank you for your faithful contributions to the ministries of ABC Church. It is because of the generosity of our members that we are able to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Our theme, the Summer of Light, demonstrates the importance of continuing our calling to share Jesus with the world.

One of our Summer of Light initiatives is to bring local musicians to “make a joyful noise.” Last Sunday, the Violin Quartet, drew a huge crowd of visitors who heard the message of Jesus through our worship services. The exceptional music we have experienced this summer is made possible through donations to our church.

I give thanks to God for your ongoing support of our ministries.

Sincerely,
Senior Pastor

www.abcchurch.org

0123 Zip, ABC City, USA 



 (000) 123456789

 info@companyname.com

 Street address, 3



1st week in August

This template can be used for direct mail and email

Dear Jim and Jean,

More than ever before, I am honored and humbled to be a part of this faith community. The commitment and enthusiasm expressed here is sight to behold. Just last week a situation emerged that could have been (but wasn't) a disaster. Let me explain.

As you are likely aware, one of the goals of our Summer of Light program was to create a stronger connection with our neighbors. ABC Church is blessed to be located in a residential community but, because of our location, may be one of its best kept secrets. Last week was our community open house. Letters were sent to every home within five miles of our church inviting them to stop by to join us for a picnic lunch. The event organizers did a magnificent job preparing the hot dogs for grilling and many of you provided scrumptious salads and desserts. Having never done this event before, we guesstimated the attendance at 100 people. God had something else in mind! About an hour into the event, it was clear we had underestimated our attendance and would soon be out of food. Without hesitation several members jumped into cars and returned with ample supplies to feed the crowd. It was a real-life story of loaves and fishes—ok, maybe buns and hot dogs.

The open house is a prime example of who we are as a faith community. Rather than throw up their hands, our congregation uses their hands to make God's ministry happen. As a result, we introduced our community to the work God has called us to do in His name. Our community is shining brighter because of the Jesus-light shown by this congregation.

Thank you for continuing to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this community and around the world. Thanks be to God.



0123 Zip, ABC City, USA 

+00 1234 56 789 

info@company.com 

www.company.com 

3rd week in August

Thank you letter after summer giving program is completed

Dear Jim and Jean,

The Apostle Paul opens his letter to the church at Philippi by saying, “I thank my God every time I remember you.” I know how Paul felt as every time I think of our faith community, I thank God for you and that God allows me the privilege of being your pastor.

This past summer was another reminder of how blessed I am to serve the Lord here. Gifts to the Summer of Light program provided \$XX,XXX additional support to boost our summer ministries and shine the light of Jesus.

None of this would be possible without God’s blessings and the faithfulness of our church family.

Here is the rest of Paul’s opening thanksgiving and prayer to the Philippians,

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

May this prayer of Paul be as true for our church as it was for the church at Philippi. I look forward to seeing you this Sunday.

Sincerely,
Senior Pastor

0123 Zip, ABC City, USA 

+00 1234 56 789 

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Adapted from the 2017 Fully Funded Summer by The Charis Group