



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

Congregational stewardship steps to consider in a COVID-19 world

In a recent North American Mission Endeavor (NAME) webinar, held to consider how congregations and districts might become more intentionally engaged in the mission of God during the current COVID-19 pandemic, we took note of the new opportunities the current crisis is providing us all to evangelize and disciple our neighbors and communities. But because mission does require money, the discussion naturally turned to the topic of Christian stewardship and giving. Fortunately for us all, Larry Ulrich, Senior Generosity Strategist at Generis, was in the electronic audience and ready to offer us all some help. (You can find even more helpful Generis resources at <https://sites.google.com/generis.com/covid19/home>)

Larry notes that many sacramental churches are rapidly moving forward with digital presences, as they explore multiple options to continue to provide Word and Sacrament ministry appropriate to their respective contexts, in response to governmental decrees and recommendations. He states that, “unlike a single weekend of missed services due to a winter snowstorm, we are probably going to experience several weeks (or months) of having to forego on-campus worship. Based on that, what should we be doing to shore up giving in this season?”

In the hopes that his recommendations might be of help to our Minnesota South District pastors and congregations, here’s what Larry has to say and share . . .

What to do now

1. **Prepare and send a letter** and/or email to address the issue. We have drafted a letter you can revise for your use. To keep the length of this coaching guide from getting too long, just email me and I will forward it to you immediately.
2. **Over communicate.** Consider adding additional emails and videos to your weekly communication rhythms. The more people know the better. We fear the unknown. Provide regular updates, share an encouraging word, and offer scripture appropriate to the day, link people to online devotional resources.
3. **Share stories** of how you are helping individuals, families, and your community through this time. Say *“Thank you for giving. This story was made possible through your generosity”*. In the last few days I’ve seen a couple of great examples:
 - A church has transformed their multi-purpose building into a community food pantry. Volunteers are staffing the facility, people are dropping off supplies at the curb, and needs are fulfilled as others drive to the church for assistance.
 - Locally a church has started a shopping ministry for the elderly and those with compromised immunity. Those needing assistance reach out to the church via phone or email, provide the shopping list, and volunteers do the shopping for them, delivering to the recipient’s door.

4. **Remind** everyone that expanding ministry during this time is possible only through continued generous giving.
5. **Record** a short video showing how to setup and use your online giving platform. Send that video out multiple times over the next couple of weeks. You could do it this way:
 - Make a gift online.
 - Take a screenshot of the screen showing your gift confirmation, blocking out the actual gift amount.
 - Use the screenshot as an image in your email/blog post with this text:
 1. “I just completed an online gift to First Church. Let me encourage you to do the same, as we remain faithful to worship in this way while we are meeting virtually these next few weeks.”
 2. If you are unsure how to setup and use online giving, I’ve recorded a short video showing how easy it is. Click this link...
6. **Pre-record offering moments** with giving options mentioned above & have that play a few times during the week at key moments via communication channels. I have a series of suggestions for planning effective offertories in these unusual, digital times. Again, please email or text me to get these documents.
7. **Prepare** your quarterly contribution summary and send it out earlier (or the first time for some churches) than normal, along with self-addressed giving envelopes, so that those who prefer to give by check can respond sooner than later. Let them know envelopes are included to ‘help you worship our Lord’ by making giving more readily accessible.
8. **Recognize new online givers.** You are likely to have guests worshipping with you online. Many will choose to give electronically. While they may not be new to giving, this marks their first time giving digitally. **PAY ATTENTION TO THIS DETAIL.**

Create a response that affirms their giving and encourages them to automate their giving this way. We accelerate what we celebrate. This will also likely stick beyond this season for higher e-giving participation.

Have a contingency plan

It is always wise to have a contingency budget in place. Today it is vital. Take the time to prepare a budget assuming a 10, 20, even 30% drop in revenue. What are the essentials that must be funded? What are those things that we can reduce if needed? Preparing one or more contingency budgets now doesn’t mean you’re going to have to implement drastic cuts. But if things do get worse before they get better, you will already have your contingency plans in place. Better to do this now before any pressure mounts, rather than waiting and having to try and write that budget in the midst of more turbulent times.

The Generis team continues to develop resources to help you navigate these next few weeks. If you desire access to this portal and other resources, please let me know and I will connect you with these resources.

Some Closing Thoughts from Larry

- Some churches are establishing locked drop boxes on campus for drop off of offerings and prayer request, as they get out to do essential tasks
- Still others are mailing self-addressed stamped envelopes to faithful, weekly check or cash givers, particularly to those who are 'tech adverse'.
- Be sure to track and acknowledge, with a personal note, any new givers in this ministry season, as well as work with your financial secretary to identify any 'out of pattern' generosity to celebrate and affirm with a personal note.
- While the offertory is frequently taken later in worship in a liturgical setting, the emerging digital worship reality may suggest moving it earlier in the service, when participation is likely to be highest.
- Online hosts can also be asked to add a note in comments at the end of the service: "In case you missed it, if you need prayer or support, please email XX and if you would like to give, you can go to [at this point, provide a live link to your digital giving page]."

We pray you found some helpful and useful suggestions in the above excerpts from Larry's blog. If you'd like to know more, you can email him at larry.ulrich@generis.com

Blessings on your intentional engagement in God's mission!



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