

Stewardship During a Pandemic

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A short video related to the article is available with the original article and on

- Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/402727368>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PresbyFDN/videos/534821500767285/>
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/Pres_Foundation/status/1245740066124767238

COVID-19 is changing the way the world interacts and the church is not immune to those changes. Amid social distancing and shelter in place orders, many churches have either canceled worship or moved to a virtual form of worship. Pastors and sessions are looking for creative ways to be the church in a quickly changing landscape.

Robert Hay, Jr.



Churches are using all sorts of technology to stream worship services, share daily prayers, and convene corporately to glorify God, even if it is all online. And many churches are finding ways to support and care for the most vulnerable church members by organizing grocery and pharmacy trips so that the homebound do not have to go out and risk being exposed. I think it is in times like these that the church shows its real strength as a community of faith, that loves neighbors, and glorifies God.

But what about financial stewardship during this time? We have seen stories of the famous athletes offering to pay the hourly wages of sports venues that are being impacted by sports cancellations. And we have heard of the big companies that say they are going to continue to pay employees despite losing revenue.

But what about churches? Many churches operate on a very thin margin and have little to no reserves. Most churches are still heavily dependent on gifts that are made in an offering plate when people are physically in church. According to the National Study of Congregations' Economic Practices, 78% of gifts are given during a worship service. Churches living on thin margins are not going to be able to operate if they lose 78% of their revenue during this crisis. So, what can churches do to maintain giving revenue when people are not in church?

BE THE CHURCH: One of the most important things a church can do to sustain stewardship is to continue to serve the Lord and to love its neighbors. Pastors and sessions are correct in focusing on worship and taking care of people. This initial response is absolutely the right response. So, keep being the best church you can be during this trying time.

COMMUNICATE AND TELL YOUR STORY: Use all the tools available to you (email, texting, social media, phone calls, etc.) and make sure your flock knows you are still there and what you are doing. Organize your deacons to just call and check on people. Share on social media daily prayer

practices. Seek out and ask church members if they need help. Don't count on them to reach out to you. People feel isolated and disconnected during this time so there is no such thing as too much communication right now.

MODEL JUSTICE IN EMPLOYMENT: Churches are just like every other small business. Churches have preschool teachers, janitors, hourly employees, and other staff who aren't working now because of the crisis. Churches should do their best to continue paying all staff and honoring contracts with small businesses. Churches should be modeling this practice and making sure that everyone that counts on the church is taken care of.



ONLINE GIVING: If you aren't offering online giving, you need to start offering it immediately. This is the best way to allow people to give during this time. Even if people are using online bill pay, or mailing checks to the church, that still requires someone to come to the church, count the checks, go to the bank, and make a deposit. Online giving will be direct deposited into the church's account and doesn't require anyone to go to the church or to the bank. If you need help with this, the Presbyterian Foundation has the lowest cost option [available](#).

SETUP A COVID-19 ASSISTANCE FUND: Many in your church and your community are going to be financially impacted by this crisis. Setup a special fund and authorize your pastor or session to use this fund to provide assistance to those in need. Encourage people to give to the church as they normally do and to give to the COVID-19 Assistance Fund, in addition to their normal giving. Recognize that many in your church will need help BUT also recognize that others will still have the capacity give.

ASK: We often don't do a very good job of asking for money in the church but during this crisis, it is important to ask. Don't assume that church members will realize the financial impacts to the church on their own. They need to know that for the church to make it through this crisis and for the church to continue to support people during this crisis that it will require people to continue to give. Ask during your virtual worship services for people to give and direct them to the online giving option. Send a weekly email asking people to give with the online giving option as a link.

KEEP BEING THE CHURCH: Again, the most important thing a church can do right now is to glorify God and love its neighbors. Keep doing this, be in communication with your flock, offer online giving, and ask people to give and people will respond!

Presbyterian Foundation Ministry Relations Officers are available to assist you and your congregation. Find your Ministry Relations Officer at presbyterianfoundation.org/mro. While we aren't visiting congregations at this time, we can visit by phone, videochat or email to discuss your church's situation and how we can help.