



# FAITH & PHILANTHROPY

*— in a time of crisis —*

**It's not what you were expecting. Now what?** The capital campaign. Your weekly offerings. A fundraising gala. The spring appeal. Your recognition event. A large gift about to close. A pandemic pushed the pause button on your best laid plans, and your momentum for ministry tumbled with the stock market.

If it didn't feel like Lent before, it does now. Is this a taste of the disappointment that Jesus' disciples felt? They passionately believed that the Messiah would rescue them from Roman oppression. Instead Jesus was crucified, and all their hopes were buried with Him in a tomb. Jesus' death wasn't in their plans.

With an economy in freefall and your best laid fundraising plans for 2020 teetering on irrelevance, what's next?

Right now, your leadership and ministry is more important than it's ever been. No matter your mission, your ability to walk alongside God's people during these days is essential. I know the stress of adapting in times of major setbacks. In my 37 years of working at the intersection of faith and philanthropy, I've weathered three major recessions and too many organizational crises to count. Those experiences have given me perspective and sharpened my tools for surviving - even thriving - during the really hard times.

## There are three philanthropic truths we need to understand at the cusp of this next setback.

### truth 1

Faith-based philanthropy suffers the least during times of uncertainty.

### truth 2

The relationships you cement with your stakeholders will retain momentum.

### truth 3

Organizations that stay the course are most likely to emerge successfully.

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## GIVING TO RELIGION DURING RECESSION

In the past two weeks, every one of the clients I'm currently serving has been in touch with me to ask, "Brenda, what should we expect will happen to our charitable gift income if we're going into another recession?" I rely on data, but I'm also an optimist, so I respond "Prepare for it to go down...maybe."

Here's what's happened to Total Giving and Giving to Religion during the 3 most recent recessions according to Giving USA.

| 1990                       | 2001-2002                  | 2008-2009                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Total Giving<br>↓ 5%       | Total Giving<br>↓ 3%       | Total Giving<br>↓ 13%      |
| Giving to Religion<br>↓ 1% | Giving to Religion<br>↑ 3% | Giving to Religion<br>↓ 1% |

If history repeats itself, the data should bring some solace to faith-based nonprofits facing crises in the global economy. Charitable giving for churches and other ministries stays relatively flat during recession, and may even increase because:

- giving is a weekly or monthly habit for many people of faith. Even if the economy is hit hard, many people will not change their giving behaviors dramatically. (Lilly Family School of Philanthropy)
- people who are more religious not only give more to religious causes, but they also give to secular causes at higher rates, though their faith community and other religious causes are likely to be among their highest philanthropic priorities (Pew Research)
- faith-based organizations and other nonprofits that address the increased needs brought about by economic distress may actually see increases in charitable support (Stanford University)

On the other hand, losses in the stock market and other investments will absolutely impact your ability to raise large gifts in the near term. Many individuals, corporations and foundations will suffer losses that will impact their charitable activity. Again, history tells us this will be only a temporary setback.

# Though faith-based organizations may suffer the least, what do you need to focus on now to retain momentum?

## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are the heartbeat of Christian philanthropy. Jesus' "Love your neighbor" command is the *philia* root of the word. But these strange days of physical distancing will take a toll on our relationships with our stakeholders and the charitable gifts that often accompany them. When surveyed about their decision to stop supporting an organization, the majority of past donors consistently replied "I no longer felt connected." We can't afford to disconnect at times like this. Instead, we need to invest in these two strategies that will strengthen our relationships with our donors during this time of prolonged distancing.

### Strategy 1: Increase Communications

Put your ministry in the position of extended family, and plan to 'write home' frequently. Your members and friends care deeply about your ministry, and want to know how you're affected by the current situation. They will be happy to receive your messages of encouragement and stories of faith.

You should have an external communications plan, with key messages that inform all of your content development, including:

- expressions of care, concern and empathy for the recipient
- a connection between the current situation and your ministry's mission
- current information about how your ministry is being impacted, including financial impact
- your commitment to staying the course and moving forward
- invitation to the various ways that people can be helpful during this time
- messages and stories of faith, hope, and inspiration
- information about how they can contact you or stay connected

### Strategy 2: Reach Out Personally

Some of your stakeholders – those you would typically want to see face-to-face - need to hear from you personally and periodically throughout the crisis. Here's a simple process for these relationship-critical conversations:

#### #1: Make a list of those who need a personal contact

- current governing board members
- friends serving on front lines of crisis
- the 10% of your donors who likely provide 90% of your income
- key volunteers, especially those who are particularly isolated now
- donors who have told you that you're a beneficiary of their estate plans

#### #2: Outline the typical conversation and key messages

- Connect with them personally. "How have you been impacted?"
- Relate the situation to your ministry. "Here's our focus for the near term."
- Share your plans to stay the course. "Once we're past this we'll focus on..."
- Make an appropriate request of them. "Some have asked how they can help..."

#### #3: Have the conversations and follow up appropriately

- Plan to initiate 3+ calls each day
- Be honest and factual about how this is impacting your organization
- Offer hope and encouragement
- Share your thanks, pray together
- Keep notes on any key learnings
- Follow up with any next steps
- Plan & schedule the next touch-point

# Though relationships that are cemented now will retain donations and momentum, how should you adjust your fundraising plan for success?

## STAY THE COURSE

During times of crisis, organizations that take a step back lose ground. Those who stay the course emerge successfully. Plan to:

- Stay focused on your long-term plans and goals, while making prudent short-term adjustments to fundraising activities.
- Convert all your events and meetings to digital formats. Don't cancel anything you can creatively manage online.
- Add special appeals directly related to a crisis response.
- Implement technologies that advance your fundraising and communications efforts.
- Leverage the creativity, technology knowledge, flexibility, and personal commitment of your entire staff team.
- Invite volunteers and stakeholders to step up to help in important and meaningful ways.
- Remain unapologetic about your ministry, while still being sensitive to the impact of this crisis on your donors.

### **“It’s true! The Lord has risen!” Luke 24:34**

Jesus convinced his disciples that the promise of the prophets had been fulfilled as he walked alongside them on the road to Emmaus. As we walk together down the road of bad news and disappointments that may lie ahead, I pray that the good news of an empty tomb will be your joy and the living Lord will be your strength!



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