

Simple Strategies for Successful

Year-End Giving





Since 1992, Faithlife Corporation (formerly Logos Bible Software) has grown from a couple of programmers in a basement into the largest developer of Bible study software and a worldwide leader in multilingual electronic publishing. We partner with more than 500 publishers to make more than 120,000 Bible study resources available to customers around the world.

Innovation is key to Faithlife's growth. In the last few years, we've expanded from our flagship software product, Logos Bible Software, to a variety of tools to complement your faith and Bible study experience. In June of 2011, we launched Faithlife Ebooks, a Christian ebook store and ereader app. In 2012, we released Faithlife Proclaim Church Presentation Software along with the Faithlife Study Bible and faithlife.com, a social network that allows Christians from all over the world to connect and share ideas online.

Most recently, we've launched an entire suite of church administrative tools including Faithlife Sites, Faithlife Sermons, Faithlife TV, Faithlife Giving, and more! And we're still just getting started.

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This guide also contains several short pieces of content that originally ran in *Ministry Team* magazine, a Faithlife publication. These articles were not written by Jess Holland but by other contributors, and they have been marked with an asterisk and note. We've combined them with this guide to build a more robust offering of year-end content.

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Table of Contents

About Faithlife | 2

About the Author | 2

Simple Strategies for Successful Year-End Giving | 5

Communicate and Ask | 8

Follow-Up Plan | 10

Retrospective | 11

Additional Resources | 12

10 Ways to Inspire Generosity on Giving Tuesday | 12

When It’s All Over, Don’t Forget to Say “Thank You”
to Your Givers | 14

Connect with Givers through End-of-Year Giving Statements
(Example Included) | 15

Simple Strategies for Successful Year-End Giving

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

A strategic end-of-year giving plan can accelerate the growth and forward movement of your church or ministry.

People have a spirit of generosity, particularly around the holiday season. And many people are going to give to their church in December no matter what—especially those who get annual bonuses or people who prefer to give a large gift a few times each year.

But with a little planning ahead, you can build a year-end giving plan that fits your ministry and helps you reach your ministry and financial goals.

Why your year-end giving plan matters

The end of a calendar (or fiscal) year gives you an opportunity to share about how giving plays a weighty role in each person’s spiritual journey and the overall mission of your church.

Showing church members how their generosity has impacted people or ministries is particularly powerful, especially at this time of year, when people are already thinking about money. Being transparent about where giving goes demonstrates that your church (and God) can be trusted with their tithes and offerings.

Your year-end giving plan doesn’t matter just because people are thinking about money. It’s also because what happens in December impacts your bottom line year-round. Consider these charitable giving stats:

- Nearly a third of all giving happens in December alone.
- Over 10% of all giving comes in the last three days of the year (December 29–31).
- The biggest single day for giving is December 31, even though #GivingTuesday and other focused giving days are on the rise.¹

The good news is that you don't need a full campaign to have a successful year-end. In this guide, I'll walk you through some simple steps you can take—some that you can even start today—to help your church make this December count.

Define your year-end goals

Clearly defining your church's ministry and financial goals for the remainder of the year makes it simpler to decide what to share with your church and when.

Even so, not all goals are created equal. The SMART method helps you define your goals and give them direction and focus. We define SMART goals as:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Ambitious/attainable
- Relevant
- Time-based

Obviously, your year-end goals have a clear end date. But there's more to setting goals than just beating last year's giving. Take some time to pray about a good financial goal for your church. Maybe you'd like to end this year over your budget, or maybe you'd like to raise an extra 5%. Just make sure you share your goals with your congregation (more on that later).

Determine the budget

It's important to set a budget for your year-end giving project—particularly design, print, and mailings.

¹ <https://www.networkforgood.com/nonprofitblog/year-end-giving-data/>

There are plenty of great free design tools if you don't have room in your budget for a designer. We recommend checking out [Canva](#), [Adobe Spark](#), [Pablo by Buffer](#), and [Snappa](#).

Pro tip: Think ahead on print times. Find out what the average turnaround time is for your printer. Most large print pieces, like banners, take at least a week to complete. If you're working with a graphic designer, be sure to factor in the time it will take to create design options and work through edits.

Assign roles

One of the most important decisions you'll make is determining who you want on your year-end giving team. Whether you choose staff or volunteers, clear planning and communication between everyone involved is crucial for success.

I recommend defining and assigning specific roles for things like design, print, social media, email, and administration (mailings and lists). That way there's no ambiguity about who's responsible for what.

Once you've enlisted your team, schedule a kick-off meeting and periodic progress meetings so your team stays on the same page and can troubleshoot problems together.

Pro tip: Keep a running Google doc that lists what everyone is working on (including links to content, design, etc.), due dates, and any other necessary information. Make sure each person updates their tasks so you can use this doc for your progress meetings.

Develop your messaging

Simon Sinek says you must always explain “the why behind the what.” For someone to give, they must understand the why. Instead of informing, you can guide your audience to connect and relate to your goals by having a clear, simple message. When a person understands how their giving plays a vital role in your ministry or organization, they will support you.

It's easy, especially if your church is struggling financially, to be too direct about the impact of year-end giving. But here's my best advice: tell the truth, but don't sound needy or alarmist.

Instead of: "We're depending on your generous donation for our church to keep the doors open."

Try: "It's been a tough year financially for our church, but we're trusting God to provide. Please pray about your giving this December, and make a gift on our website."

Instead of: "If you don't give in the next three days, this vital ministry will not survive."

Try: "By partnering with people like you, we have the opportunity to change the lives of kids in our city. Let's get to work!"

Write your key message (the 1–2 sentence summary), set it aside for a few days, then write it again.

Developing key messaging takes time. It also requires feedback from multiple age groups and demographics. Ask a team of attendees or members to listen to your messaging. After receiving their feedback, rework your content and start communicating it!

Determine how you will collect your gifts

People like to give in multiple ways (online, mobile devices, cash/check), so it's important to provide all options. Consider your audience, and make sure you've got several ways people can easily give through their preferred method.

If your church isn't already using online giving, mobile giving, or text-to-give, you might be missing out on some gifts that people want to send. Start receiving these gifts right away with [Faithlife Giving](#).

Communicate and Ask

There are many ways to share your key message, but if you're not careful, you might be preaching to the choir.

However, you can easily tailor your key message to reach your target audience (probably longtime attendees or church members), and share it where it will make an impact.

Here are some key communication channels you'll want to consider and an example of how you can connect with your audience on each. Further down, you'll see an example of a communication timeline you can use to share about year-end giving opportunities with your church.

Church services: Share about end-of-year giving opportunities in your stage announcements for the last three Sundays in December (excluding Christmas Eve—no one is bringing guests to church so they can hear a giving appeal).

Bulletins: Include information about giving and a way to give in your bulletin each week in December.

Social media: If your audience is on Facebook, share ways to give directly from the platform. Don't go overboard, though. Since social media at its best connects you with potential visitors or new attendees, you won't want to share giving opportunities more than a couple times.

Emails: The average open rate for non-profit emails is around 24%. That means one email won't cut it. Write a series of 3–5 emails to guide the reader to give.

Signs: Use digital signage around your facilities—including staff offices.

Faithlife group: If you have a Faithlife group, share your end-of-year goals and updates.

Continued...

Here’s an example of a communication timeline:

Date	Task	Message
12/1	Include in bulletin and weekly churchwide email	As you’re planning your year-end giving, please consider supporting the work God is doing through our church. All gifts must be received or postmarked by 12/31 to count for this calendar year.
12/3	Churchwide email and social post	Today is #GivingTuesday! Many people take today to review their giving and support causes they care about. Please consider supporting the work God is doing through our church.
12/8	Bulletin, churchwide email	Same as above.
12/10	Mailed letter arriving in mailboxes	Same as above, include notable things that year-end giving will help your church accomplish.
12/15	Announcement, bulletin, churchwide email, social post	Same as above.
12/22	Announcement, bulletin insert, churchwide email	Same as above.
12/29	Announcement, bulletin insert, and email	Reminder: all gifts have to be received or postmarked by 12/31 to be counted in this calendar year.
12/31	Social post	Last chance: give before midnight.

Follow-Up Plan

It’s easy to make sure you’re meeting your goals, but it’s important to remember to celebrate along the way. People want to know you’ve received their gift, appreciate it, and that it’s being used to make a difference.

One easy way to celebrate givers is to schedule a thank-you email that sends after a donation is made. Send “insider info” emails to givers with a special preview of things their giving supports (such as a new building) or information that isn’t available to the public yet.

Most importantly, keep the conversation going. Talking with your church about year-end giving provides a great way to look back at the past year and create excitement about what’s coming in the next.

Year-end statements

Send a letter with your year-end giving statements that highlight special moments, numbers, and memories from the year. Remind the giver that the ministry or organization is even better because of them. Check out the additional resources at the end of this guide to get even more direction on year-end statements.

Retrospective

When January 1 rolls around, the big push is over! Take some time to thank God for what he did in your church last year, and ask him to guide you for this new year’s goals.

But just because the push is over doesn’t mean the work is done. Now’s a good time to evaluate how everything went. What were your big wins? What would you like to do differently next time? It’s important to give feedback while you remember details and strategy. Save your notes and ideas for improvement so you’re one step ahead next year.

With these strategies, you’re ready to maximize your end-of-year giving goals.

Let us help you track your donations and more with Faithlife Giving. With Faithlife Giving, your giving solution is a click away from your church’s online community, where people can access newsletters, calendars, study guides, and more.

You’ll also receive free, personal customer support from our team, plus help to transition your church or organization to Faithlife Giving. And with bank-level security, every donation travels safely from donors to your church.

Additional Resources

10 Ways to Inspire Generosity on Giving Tuesday*

Giving Tuesday will be celebrated across the United States. The day kicks off the giving season, offering a counterbalance to the materialism of Black Friday shopping. Since 2012, the movement has grown to include 10,000+ organizations worldwide. In 2017, Giving Tuesday raised \$274 million, an increase from \$97 million the previous year.

2016  \$97 million

2017  \$274 million

1. Make sure people know you're participating.

Feature Giving Tuesday messaging and logos on your home page or in your weekly bulletin, and include calls to action that prompt people to give online or through their mobile device.

2. Share what you're doing on social media using the hashtag #GivingTuesday.

Broadcast instructions and encouragement on your church's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Faithlife Groups pages. Make the posts highly visual and full of personal stories, and invite people to "please share this post."

3. Organize a community-wide event on Giving Tuesday to unite your congregation and engage them in giving and volunteering.

Create a holiday wish list for people in need and organize your congregation to fulfill the wishes.

4. Collaborate!

Plan an event with another house of worship in your community and learn how people of faith approach giving during the holiday season.

5. Enroll leadership at the highest levels.

Ask your pastor to preach a giving-oriented message on the last Sunday in November. The pastor might make the first donation up front during a worship service or live on social media, or announce it in an email newsletter. Nothing encourages generosity like seeing it in action.

6. Create an incentive for people to participate.

Secure a matching grant that will double the impact of your congregation's Giving Tuesday efforts.

7. Use Giving Tuesday to kick off a longer holiday celebration that involves your community in-service and giving opportunities in December.

8. Share stories of generosity.

Examples of godly giving and generous living are inspirational to people both inside and outside the church. Create a video and share how giving has impacted people's lives.

9. Ask people in your church to take an “unselfie” on Giving Tuesday and share it on social media, along with their plan for unleashing generosity in the year ahead.

The hashtag #unselfie was used 39,700 times for 2017's #givingtuesday. When you share your “unselfie” on social media, remember to tell others how they can give.

10. Set a goal for your church.

Since Giving Tuesday happens outside typical worship times, tell people how they can give online or from their phones.

*This content was originally published in *Ministry Team* magazine's Fall 2018 edition.

When It's All Over, Don't Forget to Say 'Thank You' to Your Givers*

Use donation receipts to express your gratitude and share your vision.

Once Christmas is over, the church staff can exhale and take a break—everyone except the bookkeeper. January is the month for sending donation receipts to people who supported the church financially in 2018.

Nonprofit organizations aren't legally required to give their donors annual receipts. In fact, the Internal Revenue Service says it's up to donors to request a receipt if they want to claim tax deductions for their charitable gifts.

But why pass up an opportunity to increase engagement and build relationships? Your donors faithfully support your ministry all year long. Annual receipts are a great way to show your gratitude and invite people into the church's vision for the year ahead.

As you prepare your year-end statements, here are some helpful tips to keep in mind.

Give donors the right information

An organization that fails to provide a proper donation record is jeopardizing the donor's tax deduction. According to the IRS, a donor who claims a deduction for a monetary donation of \$250 or more must maintain a written acknowledgement from the nonprofit. The IRS says this donation record must contain the following information:

- **Name of the organization.**
- **Amount and date of each monetary contribution, as well as the total amount.**
- **Description (but not value) of any non-monetary contributions.**
- **Statement of whether the organization gave the donor any goods or services in return for the contributions. For most church donations, the record can say that the only benefit to the donor was an intangible religious benefit. However, if other goods or services were provided, the record must include a description of those benefits and a good-faith estimate of their value.**

Connect with Givers through End-of-Year Giving Statements

Example Included

When I was on church staff, I spent a week every January working on giving statements, from updating our mailing list to printing, folding, and stuffing as many envelopes as you can imagine (okay, it was a few hundred).

Giving statements matter for two reasons: they give your donors a record of their contributions, and they give you an opportunity to thank your donors.

This simple step is critical for strengthening the sense of partnership between you and your church members. Here are five rules of a good donor thank-you letter, followed by an example.

1. Include your mission statement in the letter.

A donor thank-you letter is a prime opportunity to reinforce your church's mission. You don't have to quote your mission statement word for word, but take a few sentences to remind your donors about what's important to your church.

2. Explain briefly how donations help accomplish the mission.

Don't list every single ministry your church supports. Save that for an annual churchwide meeting or a special letter. Instead, hit the high points from last year, and reinforce the message that each gift helps your church make a difference in people's lives.

3. Tell a moving story.

Hopefully, you have lots of examples of how God is at work in your congregation. Choose one that's specific and that reflects your church's mission and distinctives. For example, in the letter below, the church's mission statement focuses on making disciples in the community, and the story reflects how one small group is practicing discipleship with a needy neighbor.

4. Cast the vision for what's next for your church.

Only God knows how he'll work through your church in the coming year, but you probably have plans. Share them! Not only does this invite people to help accomplish that vision but it also communicates you are strategic and thoughtful about stewarding God's resources, which inspires confidence in donors to keep giving.

Are you praying for more small group leaders? For a new ministry to reach your community? Or for more people to visit your church? Be as specific as you can about your plans.

5. Include a heartfelt thank you from a pastor.

Lastly and most importantly, remember that the point of this letter is to thank your donors. It's a wonderful opportunity for remembering and honoring their giving, whether that's \$20 or \$20,000. Think of the widow who gave from her poverty, and thank your donors as if they gave their last dollar for the kingdom.

Did you know you can prepare giving statements easily with Faithlife Giving? [Learn how.](#)

Example thank-you letter

Dear John and Jane,

Thank you for your generous contributions toward the mission of Cornerstone Church.

In part through your faithful giving, God used our church to do kingdom work this year—more lives changed by the gospel, more service in our community, and more missions overseas. In fact, here’s 2018 by the numbers:

- **20 baptisms**
- **35 people sent on mission trips to Haiti, Southeast Asia, and Romania**
- **10 people sent to aid disaster relief efforts after Hurricane Michael**
- **100 needy students served in our school supply drive**
- **3 church plants and 5 missionaries supported**

Our ministry here at Cornerstone isn’t about numbers, though—it’s about glorifying God by making disciples in our community and around the world. That happens in our Sunday gatherings, our small groups, our student ministry, and all the other ministries of our church.

But it also happens in your home.

One powerful story of how God worked in 2018 comes from Josh and Courtney Gibbons, members in our church. Josh and Courtney moved across town and soon met their new neighbor. They prayed for her and got to know her, and when her abusive boyfriend left with many of her possessions, Josh and Courtney asked their small group to help this woman get back on her feet. This small group raised \$1,500 to pay two months’ rent, and a couple in the group donated their old car so she could get to work. This young woman is coming regularly to Bible studies and expressing sincere interest in becoming a Christian!

I could tell many more stories just like this one, all about how God is using our church to share the gospel with people in our city, around the country, and to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)).

But for now, let me simply say thank you.

Thank you for inviting friends to church. Thank you for serving in the kids' ministry, the hospitality team, the worship band. Thank you for giving cheerfully and sacrificially to see the gospel spread in our city and around the world.

Let's ask God for more in 2019.

Sincerely,
Pastor Tim Smith

P.S. Your giving statement is enclosed with this letter.
You can also find your 2019 statement (or change your recurring gifts) at [example-church.com/give](#)



Church Tech with a Mission

Learn how Faithlife Giving is helping churches like yours grow.

Explore our website or schedule a demo with our giving experts to learn how Faithlife Giving helps churches grow in the Light of the Bible.

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