Motivate Your Congregation
5 ways to move them to give, go, or act

By Shannon Litton

One of the greatest challenges church leaders face today is breaking through the noise of their members’ everyday lives and commitments. It can be disheartening and challenging to feel effective if you are not asking the right question, the right way, at the right time.

Luckily, the key to success is not complicated. Check out these top five ways we believe you can effectively encourage giving and participation to advance your mission. Each provides a megaphone for your missions message!

1. Have a clear call to action.
   Too often, we rely solely on transformational stories and inspirational anecdotes to make the ask for us. In doing so, we fall short as our congregation questions, “What exactly do you want me to do with that powerful information?”
   That said, remember conversion is dependent on clarity. If your message is clear, your congregation will understand exactly what you are asking them to do and how to do it, in turn leaving no room for question, doubt, or hesitation.

2. Lower the barrier to entry.
   It doesn’t have to be all or nothing. Show your congregation you understand they are busy and burdened by commitments by allowing them opportunities to be a part of your mission in smaller ways. You can make a more significant impact long term if you engage more of your members on a smaller scale, building on their involvement with bigger asks over time.
   For instance, instead of saying “Come on a mission trip,” perhaps host an informational meeting or reception. Rather than ask for a large gift, encourage members to give whatever they can that week, even if that means their time in service to the church. Start small to build big.

3. Consistently reinforce your message.
   In this digital age, we interpret thousands of messages throughout our busy day. To avoid information overload, we furiously process through what is heard, and what goes in one ear goes out the other.
You could have an extremely strong campaign and people just miss it. Do not assume if no one responds, no one is interested. Rather be consistent and clear in your communication and ask again. You may feel like you’re being a broken record. But at the point you’re tired of saying the same message, people are just starting to hear and understand it. So don’t be afraid to ask, ask, and ask again.

Build advocates.
There are many people who love what you do but may not think about sharing their part in your story unless asked and equipped to do so. When others return from a day of serving or a trip overseas, create easy ways for them to be your voice to support your mission.

So long as you make it accessible for your supporters to advocate for you, you’ll be surprised how happy and open they are to introducing your ministry and mission to their friends.

Focus on the “why” and not the “how.”
We live in the details of the how—“how we serve,” “how much it costs,” “how long it will take,” etc. But people make heart decisions based on the “why” not the “how.” Be sure to explain the fundamental purpose to your call to action and others will be more inclined to work through the details to make it happen.

Once you have mastered all of these tips and tricks, the real key to success is shedding the fear of the ask. If you have all of the resources and messaging in place to make a clear, consistent call to action, don’t stand in your own way by forgetting to turn up the volume and get your message heard. If you never ask for big dreams to come true, they never will.

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Some Church Website Examples

Visit these church websites as your missions team considers how to make your site a valuable missions tool. My criteria for picking these examples: (1) Easy to find missions pages; (2) Content up to date; (3) Clean design that is easy to navigate within the missions section; (4) Motivational content; (5) Clear next-step options. Not all are strong in all areas.

- All Shores Wesleyan: allshores.org/ministries/outreach/.
  Very easy to navigate with limited but focused copy. Their Places, People, Projects, Friends sections define useful categories. Informative blog.

- Centre Street Church: cschurch.ca/global/.
  Clear organization. Response buttons challenge readers to take an action step. The “Global Ministry Hub” is interesting.

- Sugar Creek Baptist Church: sugarCreek.net/onmission.
  The intro video presents a sweeping missions overview. Check out their written and video missions theology and strategy summaries.

- Jubilee Fellowship Church: missions.JFC.org
  Attractive layout with clear navigation. Easy connection to key resources.

- Cherry Hills Community Church: chcc.org/mission/
  Offers a user-friendly volunteer section with direct links to ask a question, apply, or donate.

- Valley Community Baptist Church: valleywebs.org/ministries/outreach
  Note their easy process to sign up as a missionary prayer partner.
1. Use your people resources.
   Do you have people in your church with communications training (marketing, PR, journalism, video, social media, sales, etc.)? Recruit them to help you analyze the way you share your missions calls to action with your congregation. Or consider whether someone in your church would underwrite the cost of hiring professional assistance such as 5by5 to help you tell your story well.

2. Get a clearer picture.
   Conduct some informal surveys to determine how well your people understand exactly how you are challenging them to respond. Consider recruiting one person in each decade to ask five friends three questions. Compile responses and evaluate how well you are communicating to various generations in your church.

3. Remember to repeat.
   Have you repeated your message often enough and in different ways? Remember that a significant percentage of attendees of your church are absent on any given week. And new people joining the congregation need to understand the big picture. Different media reach different audiences. List at least 8-10 communication vehicles you can use to get across your message. Design a schedule to keep your messages fresh.

4. Keep the starting point simple.
   What are five very easy ways people in your church can begin to get involved in missions? Are there opportunities for all ages and life phases? Don’t let your people assume missions is for the young (to go) or the wealthy (to give). For example, are there entry-level service opportunities that fit children, single parents, retirees? How do you celebrate financial gifts of all sizes?

5. Are you thinking big enough?
   Initiate prayer and discussion with your leadership team about whether you are “dreaming big” and “turning up the volume” on your message. Brainstorm creative ways to challenge your congregation to do more for missions than you’ve ever before attempted.
Churches need to present their calls to action in a different context than your agency does. Have you stepped into their shoes to consider how to help them to communicate the missions challenge in their unique context? Can you offer examples of powerful church calls to action for missions? Advent Conspiracy launched by Imago Dei in Portland, OR, is one successful example. You can read about it in our July ’11 Postings.

Are your missionaries “dreaming big” and communicating their vision and mission in powerful ways? How can you help them develop written and visual pieces that powerfully “turn up the volume” of their message using narrative and clear calls to action?

The very popular Samaritan’s Purse shoebox project illustrates the power of entry-level projects for churches. How can your agency and your missionaries design more low-threshold opportunities for giving? Should your church mobilizers sit down with your agency’s development team to brainstorm?

How can you help individual donors to become effective advocates in their church? Keep in mind that the majority of churches already feel swamped by “asks” for money but are often more open to creative engagement opportunities.

Read our related Worth Considering... blog entitled, “When There’s No Platform Time.”