



# Beyond *the* Offering

Energizing Congregational Giving



Alexander Haas  
TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

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from the Carolina office of  
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## Readdressing Your Mission So People Will Come Back

Over the last couple of years, we've gotten pretty good at consuming content online.

Our congregations have adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many have built vibrant live-streamed or recorded worship and education opportunities. This online presence has addressed the need of maintaining a connection to their congregants. But truly being a part of a faith community is different and gathering in person is important. After all, the faith experience of believers - no matter the religious background or denomination - focuses on community.

While efforts to create an online presence have been successful in many instances, we've all regretted being unable to gather in person due to COVID-19 health protocols. With the lifting of many protocols and the increase in vaccination rates allowing us to gather in groups again, the challenge now becomes rebuilding the community.

The good news: people are beginning to return to our houses of faith *slowly*. The less-than-good-news: people are beginning to return to our houses of faith *slowly*.

Most of the congregations for which I provide counsel are looking sabbath by sabbath to see how quickly members will return to in-person worship. In Christian congregations, in person attendance at the celebration of Easter in mid-April will be an important measure of peoples' willingness to return. Or will many people remain online participants?

Scott Thumma, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford International University, has posed the question as "How do you move from just watching to actually being involved, actually engaging with people, actually getting committed enough to give money and to do service and volunteer and things?" Thumma continued, "And I think that's going to be a challenge for clergy." ([See this interesting article focusing on a number of faiths from the Religion News Service](#))

Indeed, many of us have gotten used to simply not attending in person. We've enjoyed sipping our coffee and "participating" in worship at our leisure online at a time of the day or week convenient to us. Most leaders I speak with suggest that encouraging people to come back to the physical church service will be an uphill climb.

Carey Nieuwhof, a best-selling leadership author and podcaster, has said something to the effect that congregations that focus on their “model” more than their “mission” will struggle. This mission is at the core of engaging members, attracting new members, and sparking their generosity to support your congregation financially.

So, the question becomes: as we emerge from the effects of the pandemic, how do you clearly state your congregation’s mission in a compelling way?

As a starting point for answering this, I appreciate three questions that the Rev. Daniel Ross-Jones, MPA, Associate Conference Minister, Northern California Nevada Conference UCC, posed recently to clergy and other faith leaders:

1. Why do you feel your church is important other than that you feel a sense of history or connection with your fellow church members?
2. Why would someone come to your church and get involved other than some physical aspect of your building or location?
3. What do you need to let go of to shout your answers from 1 & 2 from the rooftops?

Our anxieties over how to encourage members to gather in person once again, how to maintain the right “balance” of a hybrid online-in person experience, and how to ensure that we continue growing the financial support for our houses of faith are very real.

As Ross-Jones concludes, “When we invite others to join us in our [congregations] - no matter whether we’re inviting our existing members and friends to give of their financial resources or seeking to invite new people into our faith community to experience the kind of joyful purpose we feel - we first must be confident in and celebrate precisely who we are. Our past, our present, and our future.”

Yes, we’ve gotten pretty good about consuming online content. So, how do we emphasize our mission so that people WANT to come back?

### We Are Here to Help!

Would you like to have a video conversation with one of our church consultants?

Alexander Haas is dedicated to helping churches/congregations build strong fundraising programs to meet both immediate and long-term objectives for mission and ministry.

Simply send us some basic information [using this link](#) and we will reach out to get the ball rolling.

Our Team

## Most Churches Provide Hybrid Worship Amid COVID | Giving Varies

The first in-depth look on the state of churches in the wake of the ongoing COVID pandemic finds that eight in 10 U.S. churches now provide hybrid services, offering options for congregants to worship either in person or online, with 67% of clergy saying 2020 was the hardest year of their ministry.

A vast majority of churches — 88% — suspended in-person worship for some period. Most of those churches — 93% — have now resumed gathering in person. Despite the switch, more than half of the churches (54%) reported

that at the pandemic's height they completely halted fellowship events, such as church suppers and picnics.

More than 30% of congregations saw growth in requests for food assistance, counseling and spiritual guidance and a quarter received more requests for financial help.

The study also found widely varying giving patterns. While four in 10 churches saw an increase in giving, another three in 10 reported a decline in donations from members.

The study, titled "Navigating the Pandemic: A First Look at Congregational Responses," is the first of a new five-year project led by the institute at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace (formerly known as Hartford Seminary). [More information here.](#)



### When 2 Wordles Collide A Nonprofit Wins

Six years ago, Steven Cravotta was an 18-year-old who developed an app, a game called Wordle!, uploaded it and waited. He originally thought the project was a bust; its average daily download rate was in the single digits. Then last December he checked the app's stats and noticed it had 500,000 downloads in a span of five days. He realized a slew of people looking for the viral, web-only game "Wordle," created by Josh Wardle, were mistakenly downloading his app instead.

Cravotta's Wordle! has since become the No. 1 game in the App Store in eight countries (8 million downloads and counting), and the now 24-year-old is cashing in on that success for a good cause. With Wardle's blessing, Cravotta will donate \$50,000 to Boost! West Oakland. Boost! provides free tutoring and mentorship for children in Oakland, CA — the city where Wardle, used to be based. As both games centered on word puzzles, Cravotta felt the money should go to a literacy-focused nonprofit. Wardle agreed.

[Do yourself a favor read the whole story.](#)  
[Washington Post, 2-22](#)



### Giving, Value of Avg Gift Up in '21

Both overall giving and the average gift amount increased in 2021, with giving increasing by 9% on a year-over-year basis and 19% over the last three years. The Blackbaud report also found that the overall average gift amount increased 10% from 2020, with an average donation amount of \$813. Online giving also grew 9% in 2021, showing a three-year increase of 42%; and 28% of online contributions were made from a mobile device. All giving subsectors showed growth in 2021, with giving to environmental organizations growing the most, at 19.3%. *PND, 2018*

### DAF Data for 2021

**Fidelity Charitable** donor-advised funds awarded \$10.3 billion in grants in 2021, a 41% increase over pre-pandemic giving in 2019 — 2.2 million grants were awarded to 187,000 charities, with 2021 grant dollars increasing 13% year-over-year. The report also revealed that COVID-19 effects influenced grant activity, including continued support for direct medical and economic aid. *PND, 2-15*

The **National Philanthropic Trust** awarded more than \$5.15 billion through donor-advised funds — a 15% year-over-year increase and an increase of 212% compared with pre-pandemic giving in 2019. In 2021, the trust awarded a total of 95,717 grants, with all eight charitable subsectors seeing an increase in grant volume. *PND, 3-1*

Our Facebook

Our LinkedIn

## We Know Faith-Based Organizations

For more than 35 years, Alexander Haas has been a fixture in the nonprofit community. We are honored to have worked with both large and small faith-based organizations, helping sow the seeds of compassion, hope and charity. Take a look at our list of religious congregation clients, past and present.

[Our Clients](#)

## A Fresh Approach to Fundraising

Raising the funds to meet the mission and ministry needs of churches is becoming increasingly challenging. At Alexander Haas, we understand the challenges that congregations face in raising the funds to support their mission. More importantly, we understand how to overcome those challenges. We offer a variety of stewardship services for the unique needs of faith-based organizations.

[Our Services](#)



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