

# How Canceling Services Actually Increased Church Giving

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by [Dustin Cooper](#) | October 23, 2018

It is a source of angst for many pastors: a forecast of inclement weather scheduled to hit on a Saturday night or Sunday morning. Whether heavy snow, ice, hurricanes, major storms or brutal cold temperatures, pastors have to make the decision of whether to cancel church services entirely or hold worship for the faithful few who will brave the elements regardless of the forecast. The angst is not just about what canceling services will do to the annual attendance figures or preaching a sermon (that took 15 hours to prepare) to a much smaller crowd. Rather, the angst typically centers on church giving, or the lack thereof.

## How will church giving be impacted when services are canceled?

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When weather negatively impacts attendance, the church may face a financial crunch without that week's regular offering. The impact on the budget may be felt for months as the church tries to "catch up." And if bad weather hits on more than one weekend, the effect is multiplied.

Pastor Aaron had not canceled worship services for over twenty years. There was no snow deep enough or temperature too low to keep him away from church on Sundays. As lead pastor at St. Paul's UMC in Joplin, Missouri, a multi-campus church with 1,000 average Sunday attendance, he was willing to preach to 10 people if they were willing to come out. But last winter he faced a forecast that even he could not overcome. Inches of ice falling from Saturday evening into Sunday afternoon were predicted. A mandatory order was issued for people to stay off the roads. Church was canceled. Like many pastors who faced the same wintry weather, Pastor Aaron was concerned about the impact of canceling services on church giving.

On a day when the doors of the church were iced over, imagine his joy when he learned the offering was \$4,000 **higher** than the same Sunday a year before when good weather prevailed, and worship services actually happened!

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### What made this possible?

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It all started a year earlier when the church went through Horizons' "Stewardship Discovery" program. We reviewed data, met with staff and ministry leaders, and had conversations with financial supporters. Through the Stewardship Discovery process, the church gained valuable insights into their unique culture and how it impacted church giving. The recommendations were accepted, and the church engaged a Horizons coach to assist with implementation.

### The church leadership initiated the following Horizons recommendations:

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- In the church bulletin, remove the weekly offering "received-to-date" data. The amount "received-to-date" provided an inaccurate and incomplete depiction of annual church giving.
- Communicate more effectively through enhanced giving statements, regular mailings, emails, and meetings. This strategy provided a more comprehensive view of overall church giving.
- Share life-change stories in worship of how money given to the annual budget was used to impact people's lives. Giving to the church was being used to deepen ministries and grow disciples not just pay the bills.
- Encourage electronic church giving through the website and text-to-give. Provide instructions and testimonies in worship from people contributing electronically.
- Write thank-you notes to those who gave, whether financially or by teaching/leading a Sunday School class or small group, volunteering in a ministry, or helping at a church work-day.

These strategies cultivated a deeper understanding of church giving as a

spiritual discipline.

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When Pastor Aaron sent an email announcing church services were canceled, he reminded and encouraged members to make their offerings electronically. Because the church had developed effective electronic giving practices, people knew how to respond. Not only did the ice eventually melt, so did the stress about needing to 'catch up' or cut expenses.

Most importantly, the mission of the church continued without disruption.

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It may be another twenty years before Pastor Aaron is forced to cancel worship again. But if inclement weather should strike, he won't need to be anxious about church giving. Now, about that well-prepared sermon...that's another story.

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