

TEN STEPS FOR LOCAL CHURCHES TO TAKE IN AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

Dr. Don Nations, DNA Coaching, 2008

An economic downturn changes the ministry landscape. There is a need for certain kinds of programming and a greater openness to it. The local church needs to take steps to assist both its congregation and its community deal with the impact of the changing economy. Have no doubt, a decline in the economy will impact the vast majority of churches. This is the time to invest in certain ministries and exercise good stewardship. The following are ten steps to consider taking when the economy takes a turn for the worse.

1. Offer courses in basic budgeting and household finance. A considerable number of people live paycheck-to-paycheck. Many carry thousands of dollars in credit card debt. It is common for people to live beyond their means. And most families do not have and stick to a budget. A program such as “Good Sense” or “Financial Peace University” could be especially appealing to people who are anxious about the economy and their personal financial situation.
2. Host and promote a workshop on financing college and trade school. Education is one of the keys to improving one’s financial situation. A difficult economy can make financing higher education a huge challenge. At the very time that people need access to the education (first time in college, upgrading skills, transitioning to a new vocation, etc.), their finances may make it more difficult to attain. There are, however, many ways to finance continuing education – many of which most people are unaware. Work with your local high school, community college, vocational/technical institute, university, etc. to create the event.
3. Sponsor a workshop on writing a good resume. It is very common in the business world for candidates to be eliminated from consideration simply due to a poorly written resume or an incomplete application. A few hours with a knowledgeable person may be the difference between employment and unemployment. Work with your local chamber of commerce, business department of a community college or university, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), etc. to develop the event.
4. Increase the number of no-cost and low-cost outreach events. There are many ways to reach people in the community without spending a lot of money. Servant Evangelism, distributing flyers door-to-door, calling and asking for prayer requests, prayer walks and inviting people to church can be accomplished with little or no financial investment. The church is called to reach new people and needs to reach new people. It is possible to do this even if finances appear limited due to a difficult economy.
5. Look for savings from energy conservation. It may be possible to save a significant amount of money by taking some simple steps to conserve energy. Consider the following: insulate water heaters and all exposed pipes, turn off unneeded lights, change the thermostat by a degree or two, install ceiling fans and use them, check the seals on doors and windows, keep fireplaces and furnaces clean, replace incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent bulbs or LEDs, shift to a four day work week (which allows for reduced heating and cooling of the building), properly inflate the tires on church vehicles.

6. Improve the effectiveness of annual events. For example, many churches invest a lot of time, energy, people and money to host a Vacation Bible School. For all of that investment, however, it is rare that a new family joins the church and becomes regularly involved in worship. This is the time to tweak VBS to more effectively connect with the families of the children involved in the program – spend intentional time with them, provide great hospitality, follow-up with the families on a monthly basis, etc.
7. Have a representative participate in the Chamber of Commerce. This allows the church to participate in creating a more positive business climate in the community. It also allows the church to remain in the information loop, connect with companies that may be hiring and connect with people in the business community. The representative may or may not be the pastor.
8. Review the investments of the church. Are your long-term accounts in long-term investments? Talk to your Holston Conference Foundation (865-690-8124) for resources that could be of assistance.
9. Improve those things about the church which do not cost money. While this may not be a great time to conduct a capital fund campaign, this may be the perfect time to focus on improving many of the systems of the church – hospitality, welcoming, follow-up phone calls to guests, an improved design for the newsletter, the cleanliness of the facility, trimming trees and hedges, etc.
10. Sponsor community-wide job fairs, employment services, relevant workshops, interview skills classes, etc. Publicize these throughout the community.

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