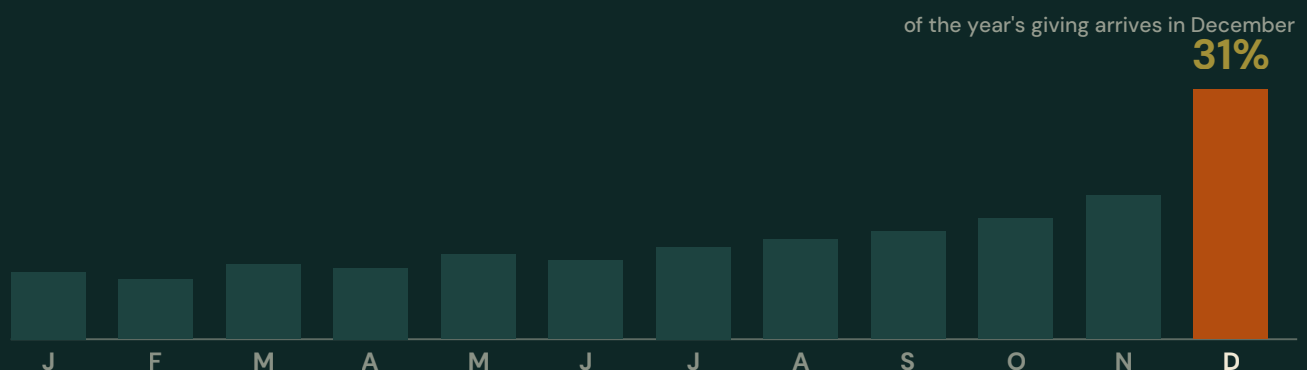


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The Year-End Giving Playbook

How to plan a year-end giving campaign that funds the mission — from October planning to the biggest three giving days of the year.

Josh Roberie



Introduction

The Black Friday of Ministry

Are you a Black Friday shopper? Some people love the doorbusters — up before dawn, coffee in hand, chasing the deals. Others would rather sleep in, eat leftovers, and shop from the couch. Either way, the day earned its name for a reason: the Friday after Thanksgiving is the day that historically moved retailers' ledgers from red ink to black. And it hasn't stayed one day — it stretched into Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, and Giving Tuesday, because businesses and nonprofits alike have learned the same lesson: *people are most willing to open their wallets at the end of the year.*

What does that mean for you as a pastor?

It means the last quarter of the year is your ministry's Black Friday. Nearly a third of all charitable giving happens in December. Some organizations report the single biggest giving day of their entire year is December 31. Year-end giving is not a gimmick — it is a real, measurable season of generosity, and it can fund real ministry: the outreach you've dreamed about, the missionaries you want to support, the building project, the benevolence fund.

You should never build a budget that survives only on a December miracle. But you also shouldn't ignore the season when your people are most ready to give. Stewarding year-end generosity well is not pressure — it's leadership.

People avoid pressure — but they respond to vision and transparency with generosity.

This playbook compiles everything I've learned helping churches run year-end giving campaigns into one plan you can actually run: how year-end givers think, the seven strategies of a high-impact campaign, how to give some of it away to missions without busting your budget, and how to close the books ready for the new year. At the end you'll find an October-to-January campaign calendar and word-for-word swipe copy for every announcement and email the plan needs.

Let's finish strong.

1

Know the Season

How Year-End Givers Think

Before you plan a campaign, you need to understand the people you're inviting into generosity. Year-end givers behave in patterns — and each pattern points to a move your church should make.

31% of giving happens in December. Nearly a third of the year's generosity arrives in one month — the same month many families feel the most financial stress. The givers with the most capacity want their giving to touch something tangible.

That tension is the key insight of the whole season: December givers — especially entrepreneurs and high-capacity givers — want to give to a *specific need that makes a visible difference*, not to a line item called “general fund.” Think of Jesus feeding the five thousand: He connected a real need (a hungry crowd) with a real giver (a boy with five loaves and two fish), and multiplication happened. Give your donors a cause with a face on it, and you give their generosity somewhere to land.

12% of giving happens in the last three days of the year. Some people wait to maximize interest; most simply do what all of us do — wait until the deadline. Either way: your campaign is not over when your giving day is over. Keep the door open, and keep communicating, through December 31.

54% of nonprofits start planning their year-end appeal in October. The organizations that receive year-end generosity are the ones that prepared for it. Your creative team needs time to develop a theme; your communications team needs weeks to get the message out. October is not early — October is on time.

27% of church members attend in a given week. Even committed members attend irregularly now. Announce your giving day once and most of your church will simply never hear it. Repetition isn't nagging — it's the only way the message reaches everyone who would have gladly participated.

60% of people prefer to give digitally. If giving at your church isn't easy, fast, and mobile-friendly — including text-to-give for your Christmas and New Year's Eve guests — you will miss givers who genuinely wanted to invest. Test your own giving experience on your phone this week.

Do this now: pull up your church's giving page on your phone and time how long it takes to make a first-time gift. If it's more than two minutes, fixing that is the highest-return move in this entire book.

2

Strategy One

Plan Ahead

When I was a kid, we built ramps for our toy cars. One thing became apparent fast: if you wanted the car to fly high, you needed a long roadway to build momentum. The longer the ramp, the higher the flight.

Year-end giving works exactly the same way. The more runway you give your campaign, the higher it goes. A generous December is built in October.

Before you ask your people to plan ahead, you and your team have to do the same. Get the right people in a room — senior leadership, creative, communications, finance — and walk through four questions:

- **What happened last year?** Review last December's giving: totals, timing, how people gave, what you communicated and when.
- **What's the goal?** Set a number and, more importantly, a purpose. What ministry will this fund?
- **What's the theme?** Give your creative team time to develop the name, imagery, and story of the campaign.
- **What's the timeline?** Work backward from your giving day to schedule every announcement, email, story, and social post.

Helping people plan ahead is also the single easiest way to increase giving *without putting pressure on anyone*. When people have weeks to pray and decide, generosity becomes a considered act of worship instead of an on-the-spot reaction.

Calendar anchor: hold this planning meeting in the first two weeks of October. The full month-by-month calendar is in the appendix.

3

Strategy Two

Pick a Giving Day

A campaign without a date is a wish. Selecting one specific day of sacrificial giving builds a longer ramp for vision — and gives your donors a clear target to hit. When you pick a day to unite as a church in generosity, people can pray and decide *in advance* what God is asking them to give.

Name It Something That Carries Vision

A key element of the giving day is the theme. Don't call it "Year-End Offering." Give the day a name that communicates importance and impact — something with vision and legacy in it. The name should answer, in two or three words, *why this matters*. Your theme becomes the thread that runs through every announcement, email, graphic, and story for the next eight weeks.

Give the Day a Destination

Remember the first secret of year-end givers: they want to fund a difference they can see. Attach your giving day to specific causes — a local outreach, a missions partner, a next-step project — and report back afterward on exactly what happened because your church gave.

Where to put it: most churches land their giving day on one of the last two Sundays of the year, close enough to December's generosity window, with room left for the last-three-days push afterward.

4

Strategies Three & Five

Communicate Until They've Heard It

Most nonprofits make only one to three donor “touches” for their entire year-end campaign — and then wonder why the response was thin. You will have to communicate, re-communicate, and communicate again. That's not because your people don't care; it's because they're not all in the room.

Only about a quarter of your church is present on any given Sunday. Announce your giving day once, and the majority of your congregation — including committed members who would gladly participate — simply never hears it. The message has to repeat, and it has to travel through more than one channel.

The Weekly Drumbeat

The primary channel is your Sunday service: a short, vision-filled announcement each week that a day of giving is coming and you want people to begin preparing now. Vary the wording; keep the theme.

Every Avenue You Have

- **Stage announcements** — weekly, starting four to five weeks out.
- **Print pieces** — handouts or a worship-guide insert with the theme and date.
- **Social media** — multiple posts that vary slightly in message; same theme, different angles.
- **Your message** — mention generosity as an application in sermons leading up to the day.
- **Segmented email** — different notes for members, regular givers, and newcomers.
- **A mailed letter** — to those who have given in the past. Physical mail still carries weight.

Rule of thumb: by the time your team is tired of saying it, most of your church is hearing it for the first or second time.

5

Strategy Four

Tell Stories of Lives Changed

Numbers inform; stories move. During your campaign, the most persuasive thing you can put in front of your church is not a thermometer graphic — it's a person whose life was changed because your church was generous.

Where to Find the Stories

- **The ministries this campaign will fund.** Capture short videos and photos from the outreach, missions partner, or project your giving day supports. Show the need and the hope, not just the ask.
- **People your church has ministered to.** If part of the giving supports your church's own ministry, use a testimony — someone who met Jesus, got free, got helped — because someone gave.
- **Last year's campaign.** The strongest case for this year's giving day is what happened after the last one. Close the loop publicly: "Because you gave last December, here's what happened."

Start telling these stories *before* the giving day, not just on it. A story a week — on the screen, on social, in email — keeps the campaign about people rather than money.

Keep it short: a 90-second video or a three-sentence testimony read from stage beats a ten-minute presentation. You're lighting a fire, not giving a report.

6

Strategy Six

Pitch the Vision and Make the Ask

The big day arrives. Now it's time to make the ask — and how you make it matters.

Vision First, Then Need

Before you ask, share the vision, not just the need. People don't fund deficits; they fund destinations. Let your church know where you're going — what will exist in your city, in people's lives, in the nations — because of what's given today. Paint the after-picture.

Then Make It Easy

After the vision is clear, remove every ounce of friction from the response:

- Put the giving link, text keyword, and QR code on screen while you make the ask — and leave them up.
- Walk through how to give in one sentence: “Text, tap, or drop it in the box on your way out.”
- Make sure your giving page is branded, fast, and mobile-first — the experience should feel like your church, not a third-party form.
- Have a way for people to give toward the specific cause, not just the general fund.

Share the vision, make the ask, and make the response effortless. Generosity flows where clarity and ease meet.

Don't apologize. An apologetic ask communicates that giving is a burden. A confident, joyful ask communicates that giving is a privilege — because it is.

7

Strategy Seven

The Last Three Days & the Follow-Up

Your campaign is not over when the giving day ends. Two groups still need you: the people who gave, and the people who haven't yet.

Pursue Givers with Appreciation

Within days, communicate the results and celebrate: an email with the totals and what they will accomplish, and wins shared from stage on the following Sundays. Gratitude isn't just polite — it's the first communication of *next* year's campaign.

Don't Sleep on December 29–31

Remember: 12% of the year's giving arrives in the final three days, and for some organizations December 31 is the biggest giving day of the year. Last-minute givers are real — some are maximizing their planning, most are simply human. Engage them:

- **Share the results of your giving day** — and remind people it's not too late to be part of it.
- **Send a last-week email** to your financially invested members letting them know gifts received through December 31 count in this calendar year — useful for their tax records and your books.
- **Make a simple final-Sunday announcement** with the cutoff date. No pressure; just clarity.

Year-end guests: Christmas Eve and New Year's services are full of people who aren't in your database. Text-to-give on screen at those services is the easiest on-ramp they'll ever get.

8

Give Some of It Away

Missions Without Busting the Budget

Here's a fear that quietly shapes many year-end campaigns: *if we point generosity at missions, will there be enough left for the church?* Sustainability matters — but so does the Great Commission. The good news: giving to missions doesn't ruin church budgets. In practice, it strengthens them. Three myths keep churches from finding that out.

Myth #1: “Giving to missions tells people we don't need their offerings”

The opposite is true. When you devote a portion of your offerings to missions, you communicate that your church is *worth investing in*. You cannot be faithful to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19–20) without being committed to the nations — and giving away part of your budget shows your people, more than anything else you do, that their church can be trusted with money. Trust raises generosity; it doesn't compete with it.

Myth #2: “Talking about giving pressures people and discourages generosity”

People avoid pressure — but they respond to vision and transparency. Communicate regularly about your budget, report what percentage of giving goes to missions, and teach on generosity *before* there's a need, as part of your normal preaching calendar. A church that talks about money with clarity and joy produces peaceful households and cheerful givers.

Myth #3: “A missions option on the giving form is enough”

A checkbox is not a vision. Missions giving grows when you plan for it the same way you plan the rest of the campaign: name it in your giving-day theme, communicate weeks in advance, and afterward celebrate exactly what those donations did — photos, updates, or an interview with the partner your church supported, shared before the offering on a Sunday.

Model the generosity you want to see. A church that gives is a church people give to.

9

Close the Books

Finish This Year, Fund Next Year

The services are done and the parties are over — but the year isn't closed yet. A few unglamorous moves in the last week of December set up your whole next year.

1. Serve Your Last-Minute Givers Well

Confirm the giving cutoff is communicated (email plus a final-Sunday announcement), make sure online giving stays open through midnight December 31, and get statements and thank-yous out promptly in January.

2. Examine Your Financial Systems

While the season is fresh, audit the machinery: Was giving easy on a phone? Did text-to-give work for guests? Could you pull the reports you needed? Is your giving page branded like your church? Whatever creaked under December's load is your January to-do list — switch or fix it in the quiet months, not in November.

3. Set Financial Goals for the New Year

Pray about what your church should accomplish next year, then let the budget tell the truth about it:

- Is there something new that needs to be funded — and what gets reduced to make room?
- Where did actual spending drift from the budget you set last January, and why?
- Where can you be more efficient so more resources reach actual ministry?

Review it with your team, write it down, and revisit it quarterly. Next December's finish starts with this January's plan.

And book the meeting: put next year's October campaign-planning meeting on the calendar now, while you remember what you wish you'd done sooner.

Put It into Practice

The October-to-January Campaign Calendar

October — Build the Ramp

- ☐ Hold the planning meeting: review last year, set the goal and the cause, pick the giving day (one of the last two Sundays of December).
- ☐ Choose the campaign theme — a name with vision and legacy in it.
- ☐ Brief the creative team: graphics, announcement video, print piece.
- ☐ Test the giving experience on a phone; fix anything slower than two minutes. Set up text-to-give.

November — Tell the Story

- ☐ Capture stories: video/photos from the ministries the campaign funds; testimony from last year's giving.
- ☐ Draft every communication: announcements, three emails, social posts, mailed letter.
- ☐ Begin the weekly stage drumbeat 4–5 weeks before the giving day.
- ☐ Mail the letter to past givers.

December — Make the Ask

- ☐ Weekly announcements + a story each week (screen, social, email).
- ☐ Giving day: pitch the vision, make the ask, leave the link/keyword/QR on screen.
- ☐ Within 3 days: results-and-gratitude email; celebrate wins from stage the next Sunday.
- ☐ Last week: send the “counts this calendar year” email; final-Sunday cutoff announcement; text-to-give on screen at Christmas Eve and New Year's services; giving open through Dec 31.

January — Close the Loop

- ☐ Send giving statements and thank-yous promptly.
- ☐ Report the final totals and what they funded — from stage and by email.
- ☐ Audit the financial systems that creaked; schedule fixes or switches now.

☐ Set the new year's financial goals with your team — and calendar next October's planning meeting.

Go Deeper

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