

What's your church's money story?

Now that your congregation has passed the midpoint of the year, it's a good time to examine your financial health. For many congregations, this is the first full year in a post-pandemic environment. How do the finances look in your organization today?

Money isn't everything when you're trying to do faithful ministry, but knowing where the money is going and where it's coming from is one of the essential responsibilities of leadership. If you haven't done so already, it might be worthwhile to get ahead of the annual budget preparation cycle. Use the slower pace of summer to take a deep dive into the financial narrative of your ministry. What valuable insights can you discover as you get ready to plan for the upcoming year?

When we tell our congregation's story, we often point to a vision statement or a motto, but our finances tell a story, too. Knowing how much money is coming in, and from what sources, informs a leader about who the stakeholders are. It's been said that people vote with their pocketbooks and wallets. Sometimes a decline in giving indicates members' growing concerns about the direction of a ministry. Sometimes a decline in giving reflects anxiety that has nothing to do with the church and everything to do with an uncertain economic outlook.

Closely examining your expenses can reveal areas where the church's commitments need to change. Are you still sending money each month for an initiative that ended three years ago? Are nonoperational ministries still taking up space in the budget? This summer review will also give you an opportunity to reflect on what's missing from the budget. **Budgets are vision-funding plans.** Do you see the vision represented in the budget? If not, this might be a good time to make a change.

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