

4 THINGS CROWDFUNDING CAN TEACH THE CHURCH

“The crowd
is more important
than the funding.

- LEVAR BURTON, READING RAINBOW

INTRODUCTION

Crowdfunding has fundamentally **changed how we fundraise**. In being able to mobilize resources from everyday people, and rely on thousands of smaller donors rather than the institutional backing from governments, foundations, or even select donors with big pockets, now anyone can raise thousands of dollars with just the click of a button.

Changes in technology, culture, and newer generational mindsets are **offering the church new possibilities**.

Churches often struggle to adapt to new realities in culture. But who better to learn from about adapting to the times than the innovators that have capitalized on the new realities with big impact?

Crowdfunding offers the church not only a new way of raising funds but a new way of thinking about the experience of church, how to get things done, and **where to focus our limited energies and highly motivated spirits to amplify the good work we are already doing.**

WHAT LESSONS DOES CROWDFUNDING HAVE FOR THE CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY?



FIRST, WHAT'S CROWDFUNDING?

Actually, it's pretty simple:

People like you
have ideas



You share those ideas
with other people,
the "crowd"



The crowd gives money to help your ideas come to life

Crowdfunding leverages social networks to provide a digital platform to get the word out and collect funds. Churches are part of the crowdfunding revolution too with the launch of faith-based crowdfunding sites like FundThisMinistry.org and FAITHIFY.org.

The most successful crowdfunding leverages digital networks to great impact. With our lives becoming more digital and our communities becoming more networked...

What lessons can crowdfunding teach the church about thriving in our new reality?

4 Things Crowdfunding Can Teach The Church:

- 1. DRIVE PEOPLE IN**
- 2. MAKE ENGAGING EASY**
- 3. OPEN THE WINDOWS**
- 4. FIND YOUR NICHE**

DRIVE PEOPLE IN

#1

Lesson #1

DRIVE PEOPLE IN



Few people stumble upon a crowdfunding page. The people who visit are there because **they were invited, maybe even begged, by people they care about.** They come because of a personal connection. The data don't lie.

The same is true for your church. Most of us assume that people will just find our church community all by themselves because they

- **Drive by the church everyday**
- **Looked at your church's website**
- **Read about you in the newspaper**

While those things do happen, it may not surprise you that word of mouth and personal invitation are the most important factors to generate visitors. **First time visitors come because they were invited.**

Members of dynamic and growing congregations invite people to come to their church and healthy churches help their members spread the good word.

Only 2% of all church goers invite someone to church in a given year. Yet according to Dr. Thom Rainer, 82% percent of non-church goers are at least somewhat likely to visit if invited by someone they know.

NEXT STEPS *To Drive People In*

- **Host a 'For Them' Community Event.** A fun neighborhood event, something that non-members would enjoy. This isn't about conversion, its about starting a relationship
- **Preach and testify** about why you can't keep the good news of your congregation hidden away.
- **Convene a focus group** to to explore what brought church members to church that first time.
- **Start an Annual "Bring a Friend to Church Sunday."** Have loads of awesome music, an engaging topic, tasty food, and friendly greeters. All showcasing your best side.

MAKE ENGAGING EASY

#2

Lesson #2

MAKE ENGAGING EASY



Getting people to visit a crowdfunding page can be a challenge. But visiting and donating are two very different things. Crowdfunding gives users easy, clear, and distinct ways to engage.

They can:

- **Get inspired by reading and learning about the project**
- **Unite behind the project and promote it within their social networks**
- **Fund the project and directly contribute to its success**

All in a few easy clicks.

Once they have taken an action, they become part of the crowd. Crowdfunders know that different people will engage in different ways.

Someone with a large social media presence contributes differently, but sometimes equally as important as someone's rich aunt.

Churches may be more complicated but the same principles apply. A newcomer - who might be looking to get to know their new community - has different needs than a longtime member.

Think about this:

What are the different ways people engage with your church?

Maybe it's:

1. **Staying for coffee hour**
2. **Taking an adult education class**
3. **Joining a small group ministry**
4. **Pledging financially to the congregation**
5. **Participating in social justice actions**
6. **Committing to a daily spiritual practice**
7. **Serving on the board**

By identifying the ways people can engage in your church, you can **assess how easy it is for them to know where they can go next** when they are ready to get more involved.

NEXT STEPS *To Make Engaging Easy*

- **Make a Master List!** List all the activities going on at church that someone could get involved with.
- **Who is involved in what?** Make a list, who is involved in what activities. Depending on the size of your church you might want to just do a small sample of the congregation.
- **Conduct an internal audit:** How easy is it for people to know where to go if they want to get more involved?
- **Evaluate Insider Language:** What insider language do you use during worship or on bulletin boards?

OPEN THE WINDOWS

#3

Lesson #3

OPEN THE WINDOWS



Crowdfunding is public. **Very public.** In traditional fundraising the whole process is shrouded in secrecy. Contribution figures, funders, even ideas are pitched in private and never see the light of day.

Crowdfunding is different. It opens the windows and lets the world see and have a say. But that also means if you fail, the world can see that too. Ouch!

But this is actually a good thing...Why?

Sharing innovative ideas is like oxygen. It gives life to more, and better, ideas. Instead of failures being hidden away in feelings of shame, they can be learned from and embraced.

Churches need to take risks and learn how adapt to the 21st century. Rather than being stuck in feelings of guilt if it doesn't work out, sharing learnings publicly from the risks we take raises our collective wisdom.

The only failures are the ones we don't learn from.

Crowdfunding teaches that we need a community behind us if we are to be successful in taking risks. Instead of only a few people in a church deciding where the church needs to go in secret, crowdfunding reminds the church of what it is at its best: **a community that discerns together its future.**

Transparency is a gift for everyone.

NEXT STEPS *To Open the Windows*

- **Call up a innovative church leader.**
Ask them what they learned from their experiment?
- **Have a failure party!** Celebrate the courage you had to try something new and reflect on your learnings.
- **Trying something new?** Blog about it as you try it so people can learn along side you.

FIND YOUR NICHE

#4

Lesson #4

FIND YOUR NICHE



Successful crowdfunders find and embrace a specific niche. A niche is your unique place in an ecosystem. The world is so big we can't engage with all of it, so we find a smaller subset to which we can fruitfully and faithfully commit.

A big learning about crowdfunding is that, most of the time, there is no big generic 'crowd' out there ready to fund your project. **You have to build your own crowd.**

The 'crowd' that shows up to church on Sunday morning is a unique group of people. They could have stayed home or joined a different church, but they didn't. Which means that your church doesn't have to look or act like the church down the street.

Maybe your church already knows its niche. Maybe you are already known as the “church that feeds the addicted” or the “church with the multigenerational choir” or the “church with the outdoor pizza oven on the town green.”

Learning about your ‘crowd’...

- Where their skills are?
- What they love to do together?
- What they feel called to do?

...allows your church to embody its specific purpose in the world. That no other church could fulfill. Which means you can stop trying to do everything and be all things.

Finding and embrace your niche allows you to tend to your crowd in deeper and more tender ways.

NEXT STEPS *To Find Your Niche*

- **Create an Energy Map.** What areas of the church life feel most vibrant? What areas are energy drains? Explore what they are doing differently?
- **Go on a Church Safari!** Visit other churches in your area and see different way of being and assumptions at work.
- **Let It Go!** Have a memorial service for an old practice that no longer serves you. Honor it, and let it go.
- **Do the Sweet Spot!** Check out Rev. Tandi Roger's take on finding your congregation niche in your local context. Or try Rev. Sue Phillips' Sweet Spot to help you discern how to make hard choices in a world full of ideas.

4 THINGS CROWDFUNDING CAN TEACH THE CHURCH

- #1** Drive People In
- #2** Make Engaging Easy
- #3** Open the Windows
- #4** Find Your Niche

OUR STORY

We don't believe for even a second that the best days of the church are behind us. But we know that what is coming will probably look, well, a bit different than what exists now.

The practices that we need to embrace that dawning future - Risk, Experimentation, and Mutual Support- are practices that are inherently embodied in crowdfunding.

We launched FAITHIFY to start to prepare for that future. Where any leader could learn and use our digital platform to connect to supporters and funders, leverage social networks to get the word out about their ideas, and get the support they need to start building a new way.

Since our launch in 2014, FAITHIFY.org has garnered over \$850,000 in pledges to over two hundred projects. With a 76% success rate, we see that churches are ready to embrace and be transformed by the challenge of our time.

The only question we have for you is...

What Will You FAITHIFY?



“

Religious forms may be useful and beautiful. They are so, whenever they speak to the soul, and answer a want thereof. In our present state some forms are perhaps necessary. But they are only the accident of Christianity; not its substance. They are the robe, not the angel, who may take another robe, quite as becoming and useful.

-REV. THEODORE PARKER

FAITHIFY.org

Crowdfunding Unitarian Universalism