Episcopal Parish Network
Where the Church Gathers

Summary and Transcript
From Easter to Everyday Discipleship: Preparing for the People Who Walk Through Our Doors
Originally presented March 24, 2026

Summary

This webinar focused on using Easter Sunday as a high-impact moment to welcome spiritually curious attendees and guide them into ongoing discipleship and generosity. Speakers emphasized grounding giving in theology, clarifying next steps after Easter, and building measurable pathways that connect community, serving, and financial stewardship.

Key takeaways:

1. **Core Philosophy: Theology Over Transaction**
    - **Lead with God's Character:** Anchor every invitation in God's generosity and spiritual formation rather than budget deficits.
    - **Avoid the "Transactional Trap":** Frame giving as a response to faith to prevent visitors (especially millennials) from feeling like "just a donor."
2. **Strategic Engagement & Discipleship**
    - **The Discipleship Pathway:** Generosity is a byproduct of community. Research shows that those in small groups or service roles give significantly more than "worship-only" attenders.
    - **Community First:** Treat small groups or service teams as the "front door" for busy families and millennials, rather than requiring worship attendance first.

- **Digital Presence:** Recognize that online and on-demand participation is a standard pattern for growth, often reaching a ratio of 6 digital participants for every 10 in person.

3. **Tactical Giving Frameworks**
    - **The Giving Path:** Move donors through a clear progression—from acknowledging first-time gifts with personal thanks to encouraging recurring, impact-driven contributions.
    - **Shift the Language:** Replace the word **"Pledge"** with **"Estimated Giving."** Focus on **percent-of-income** as the primary metric for growth to offer clarity and flexibility.
    - **Purposeful Easter Offerings:** Use Easter to invite visitors into a spiritual practice rather than a fundraising campaign.
4. **Execution for Easter**
    - **The "Single Next Step":** Don't overwhelm visitors with a vague bulletin. Offer one concrete, plain-language invitation (e.g., "Coffee with the Rector").

Transcript

OBJ Elizabeth Boe (EPN Host)

Good afternoon, friends. Welcome on this Tuesday afternoon to what promises to be a really fabulous conversation. My name is Elizabeth Boe, and I am EPN's Director of Program and Strategy. And I'm so glad that you're joining us on this Tuesday before Holy Week, and I'm sure that you will learn a lot. Please, if you have any questions, be sure to put those in the chat.

OBJ Elizabeth Boe (EPN Host)

But I would love to introduce you to our speakers and then turn it over to them so that you'll get on with the really interesting part, which is not listening to me. So in this webinar, Erica Allen, who is a United Methodist pastor appointed by her bishop to serve at Horizon Stewardship, and Joe Park, a former bank CEO, called into full time ministry who now leads Horizons, draw on findings from the Giving USA generational research, and explore how the momentum of Easter Sunday can carry your

congregation into a lasting culture of generosity and discipleship. So you will learn a lot of things. But three key things they will offer you by the end of this are some practical steps to engage those who attend during Easter and invite them into something deeper. You'll connect seasonal generosity to a broader year round culture of giving and create clear pathways for people to grow, serve, and invest in your church's vision and mission.

OBJ Elizabeth Boe (EPN Host)

If that sounds too good to be true, I promise it is not. And Joe and Erica are gonna tell you how to do that. So once again, thank you all for being with us. Please put your questions in the chat. Please also feel free to introduce yourselves and tell us where you're calling in from.

OBJ Elizabeth Boe (EPN Host)

And with no further ado, I will turn it over to Joe.

OBJ Joe Park

Thank you very much for the introduction. When Erica and I finish, we will have a time for questions. So if you want to begin to put those in the chat, we'll be happy to go through those. We're also happy to have individual conversations with you after we finish our work. So let me go ahead without any further ado and begin.

OBJ Joe Park

So if you're wanting to grow generosity in your church, your strongest foundation is gonna be built on your commitment to and systems of discipleship in your church. As people grow closer to God through intentional engagements in the discipleship practices. They grow, the church grows, the culture of generosity flourishes as a symptom of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. Easter Sunday and Christmas are

among the best opportunities you have to invite people on a journey of their lifetime. For most parishes, Easter Sunday is the biggest gathering of the year.

Joe Park

Your sanctuaries are full. New families are walking in, and these are families we may not see again before Advent. Easter isn't just a celebration. It's an open door. As church leaders, we have the responsibility to wisely steward this opportunity.

Joe Park

For over thirty-two years, Horizon has been helping thousands of churches grow disciples and fund ministry. A clear learning from that time is that when people experience authentic community and an invitation to a compelling vision, they respond. They participate. They serve, and they invest financially in support of that vision. Easter will bring new people through your doors.

Joe Park

The question we're gonna discuss here today is not whether they're gonna come, but whether we and you are ready for them. Erica?

Erica Allen

What you all are doing on Easter Sunday morning is one of the most important things that will happen anywhere in this world. You're gonna stand in front of people, some of whom it will be their first time inside a church in years. Maybe they haven't been there since they were a child. There will be people there because someone they loved invited them and they almost said no. And there'll be others who are there carrying some heavy weight.

Erica Allen

They don't quite know why they're there, only that something pulled them through the door. And your church, your parish will be the one that sees them. I'm Erica Allen. I'm a senior ministry strategist with Horizon Stewardship, and I work with churches across the country on generosity and discipleship. Before I did this work, I was doing what many of you are doing.

Erica Allen

I was serving a church as a pastor. I know what it's like to be the one who prepares for Easter Sunday with no idea who might show up or what it might look like, but praying that somehow God would help people connect to the church and continue to transform the world. What I wanna offer to you today are a few practical ways to take what we at Horizon Stewardship know to help cultivate generosity, implement it well on Easter Sunday, and be ready for people who, because of that, keep showing up Sunday after Sunday, day after day, week after week. Because here's what I believe with everything inside of me. If we do this right, if we meet new people with clarity, with community, and with a compelling vision of what it means to follow Jesus, some of them will be sitting in those pews next Easter and the one after that.

Erica Allen

Laura, if you'll go ahead and put it on principle one, one of the first things that we were gonna talk about is the importance of theology before transaction. Easter is unique. No other Sunday brings as many spiritually curious people into the room at one time. Many of them, especially millennials and young families around my age, are searching for meaning, for community, and for something real. And what they carry with them into our sanctuaries is this quiet question.

Erica Allen

Is the church going to ask me for money, and what am I going to do when they do? I was a church planter. I started a new United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida, and so I met with every millennial I could find in that area. And I'd ask them this question over a cup of coffee if they would, go with me. I would say, what stands in the way of your relationship with the church?

Erica Allen

Almost without exception, they named the same thing in their top three. All the church does is ask for money. That perception that we all know too well. Right? Not all of them use the exact same words for it, but every single one of them felt the weight of this.

Erica Allen

Church, I wanna say to you, if you'll go to the next slide, Laura, we church, we do have a problem, and it is not that we talk about money. The problem is not that we talk about money. In fact, most of us may not be talking about it enough even though we know the facts that about two thirds of Americans report they are often or always stressed about money. Two out of three of the people sitting there on Easter Sunday will be stressed about their financial situation. It is a leading cause of marital conflict.

Erica Allen

It's one of the leading reasons that marriages end in divorce. We know that Jesus talked about money, and Jesus talked about our relationship with it more than almost any other subject except the kingdom of God. So what is the church getting wrong here? How do we change this narrative to “not all the church does is ask for money?” What can we begin to do today that allows people to talk nonstop about what the church actually does really well?

Erica Allen

And that's transformation in the hearts of hearts and lives of people. How do we get it to be rolling off of the tongues of people that those people at that church are the most generous people I have ever known? My personal conviction is that we in the church fail to first proclaim the generosity of God's goodness in our lives. That builds the spiritual framework necessary to understand whose money we are talking about and the significance of how or how we steward those resources. Jesus used money as a lens to illustrate spiritual priorities, moral responsibilities for its use, and the dangers of misplaced trust in money and the power and possessions, and just chaos that that can bring to your life.

Erica Allen

Instead of acknowledging and talking about money in that way, too many of us skip straight to the ask, and we miss the theology of what we believe about money, finances, and generosity entirely. We make it transactional when the church makes it transformational. Here is what I know. God is generous. And when we respond to God through generosity, that physical act, that physical act of giving has a profound spiritual purpose.

Erica Allen

It changes the giver. It reshapes a person's heart. It loosens the grip of fear and scarcity. It's one of the most tangible ways a person moves from believing in Jesus to living like Jesus, and that is discipleship. So you might be saying, how do we do this?

Erica Allen

You begin with a question that most churches skip. And this question is what do we actually believe about generosity? What do we actually believe about generosity? Not what the church needs, not what our budget looks like, not what our giving numbers were like last quarter. What do we believe theologically, deeply as a church about why generosity matters?

Erica Allen

Because here's the thing, how we answer that question shapes everything. It shapes how we talk about money. It shapes how your congregation and the people in it feel when you bring it up. And it shapes whether generosity becomes a lasting part of your church's culture or just this awkward conversation that we have every so often. If you'll go to the next slide, I'm gonna show you a framework that we find really helpful.

Erica Allen

If you're if you wanna sit down and work on creating this theology of generosity, I think it's really helpful to sort of follow these three movements. The first movement is that God is generous. Start here when you talk about finances, generosity, money in your church. Start here, the character of God. Don't start with your budget or your needs.

Erica Allen

Start with the character of God. The foundation of everything that I believe about generosity is this. God is by nature a generous God. Everything flows from this, the creation of the world, the gift of life, the sending of Jesus Christ. Generosity isn't just something God does, it's something God is.

Erica Allen

So before we would ever invite anyone to give, we have to ask ourselves, are we rooting this in who God is? The second movement is that generosity is transformational. Here's what happens when people actually respond to God's generosity with generosity of their own. It changes them, not just their bank account, not just the church's budget. It changes them, the person who's giving.

Erica Allen

When someone responds to God through giving, it reshapes the heart. It begins to reorient our priorities. It shifts what a person loves and where we put our trust. This is what we see in scripture, and it's what churches who are doing this well see in the lives of real people that generosity transforms the giver. The third movement is discipleship, growing as followers of Jesus Christ.

Erica Allen

This is the whole point of this. Generosity is one of the most tangible, measurable ways a person moves from believing in Jesus to living like Jesus. When someone takes a step in generosity, a real step, not a guilt driven one, they are growing as a disciple, which means when your church talks about generosity, you're not fundraising. You're doing discipleship. Now I wanna get really practical for a moment because this theological foundation actually changes how you communicate.

Erica Allen

If you'll go to the next slide, I'll show you a contrast of how this is often lived out in the church. There are two kinds of churches when it comes to how they approach generosity. And if we're not really clear about our theology of generosity, we can become a transactional church. The transactional church sees generosity as a funding problem. They ask for money because the roof needs fixing or the budget is short or the building fund is behind.

Erica Allen

They talk about needs, their needs, the ministry needs, the operational gap, and they make a one time ask, usually at a specific moment in the calendar, and then they go quiet about money. Now I wanna be fair here. This isn't bad. Churches have real needs. Budgets are real.

Erica Allen

Joe, the CEO of Horizons and myself look at church budgets almost daily. Right? This is real. But when this is the only language that we give our church to hear something goes wrong, People begin to feel like ATMs. Giving feels like paying a bill.

Erica Allen

And the moment the need disappears, so does this motivation to give. That creates a transactional relationship. The transformational church does something different. They see generosity as a spiritual formation opportunity. Instead of asking for money, they invite spiritual growth.

Erica Allen

The giving moment in worship becomes not just a moment in worship, but a moment in people's lives, in their week, where they are invited into deeper discipleship. It transforms from this moment of offering to this moment of discipleship where they're invited to go deeper. Instead of talking about needs all the time, the transformational church talks about God's generosity. They say, look what God has done. Look what God has given.

Erica Allen

Look what that means for how we live and how we live out the mission of God. And instead of a one time ask, these churches cultivate a lifelong practice. It's because generosity is a habit and it's woven into the culture of the church. Here's the key insight here. Right?

Erica Allen

The transactional church and the transformational church, the ask is almost the same, but the framing is completely different. One says we need your money. The other says God has been so generous, and here's an opportunity to respond to that. One produces transformation. Easter is your best opportunity to begin this conversation.

Erica Allen

Lead with theology. Lead with vision. Lead with the generous character of God and let the invitation to give, to respond to that generosity flow from a foundation of joy and celebration. When we speak about God's money, we must connect it to the spiritual importance of our journey of discipleship. We must connect it to becoming more like Christ.

Erica Allen

When we invite people to give, when we make a clear connection to the impact our giving will have, not only on our own spiritual growth, but also on bringing the transformation of the kingdom of God to those whose lives will be impacted. Be crystal clear. We believe in a generous God, and our stewardship of the financial resources entrusted to us by God is deeply important, not just for those who will be impacted by our generosity, but also for the benefit of the giver. The second thing, if you'll go to the next slide, the second thing I wanna talk about, I'm stealing a quote here from Brene Brown that clarity is kind. In fact, I would say it's the kindest thing that we can offer to the church.

Erica Allen

But before we talk about what to do in terms of clarity, let's talk about a few numbers. If you'll go to the next slide, there are three numbers I sort of want us to talk about right now. The first one is 77%. According to the Giving USA 2024 report, 77% of millennial donors, people my age, are open to making an occasional gift to the church. Let that sink in.

Erica Allen

Three out of four millennials who are giving to some kind of organization were interviewed for this Giving USA report, and three out of four of them are open to giving occasionally to the church. The problem is not that we are resistant to give or be generous. It's not that we are terrified of the economy. The problem is that many churches haven't given a pathway to say yes to generosity. Next number.

Erica Allen

A data researcher who conducted... not next slide. Stay on that slide. A data researcher who conducted a rigorous statistically valid research project at the Resurrection Church in Leawood, Kansas, a United Methodist Church led by pastor Adam Hamilton. It has nine campuses from a few 100 to over 10,000 worshipers per Sunday. The study found that across all campuses, these things are true.

Erica Allen

People who attend church 12 to 24 times per year do not but do not participate in small groups or serve in any hands-on ministry role gave about 1% of their household income to resurrection. So these are normal worship attenders, but they're not really involved in anything else. They give 1%. Research from the Indiana School of Philanthropy suggests that Americans have given about the same 2% or so of their after tax income to churches and charity for about the last forty years. So we can assume the people attending Resurrection Church 12 to 24 times per year, but who do not participate in small groups give around 50% of the annual amount they give to churches or charitable organizations.

Erica Allen

They give about 50% of that through the church. But those members who do actively participate listen to this. People who do actively participate in small groups or in a

hands on ministry give about 3.5% or three and a half times as much of their household income as regular attenders who have yet to take the next step along the discipleship pathway of community and spiritual formation in small groups or to serve actively. This next point is important. Everyone at this church at Resurrection hears the same message about generosity.

Erica Allen

But those who join a small group or start serving give three and a half times more through the church than the average American. The clear teaching on generosity at Resurrection Church is essential for people to make the connection to discipleship. But the evidence is clear that until they take the step into community and spiritual formation or begin to serve, the message of financial generosity has not yet taken hold until they take that next step. The people who walk through your doors on Easter are often unfamiliar with church culture. They don't know the language.

Erica Allen

They don't know the rhythms. They're curious, hopeful, and a little unsure. And if we're not intentional, we'll send them home with nothing more than a bulletin and a handshake when we know that deeper discipleship and growth is what they want. The number one thing that folks in this millennial age group are looking for is community. They wanna be in a setting where people grow most in their faith, and they know that as a small group.

Erica Allen

In 2024, Giving USA data shows that 73% of millennial donors attend religious services a few times a year or more. Oftentimes, this generation is underrepresented in mainline churches. And we think that's because they are looking for places where a message of invitation feels relevant to the struggles they face daily. That invitation to a better way of life, it is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. These folks will bypass a

beautiful building and an historic name to find a gathering offering hope and a clear pathway towards a better way of living.

Erica Allen

So what does that mean for us? If you'll go to the next slide, it means that our next step is urgent and practical. I know this may sound silly, but there are going to be people who are sitting in the pews at the Easter Sunday service and they don't even realize it's normal to come back next Sunday. I'm asking you to help people understand what their next step looks like and what its relevance means in their lives. And then provide a warm invitation that includes making a safe but personal connection such as coffee with a rector or an invitation from a small group leader to connect and learn more.

Erica Allen

Where does all of this start? In my work through Horizons, I've learned that the evidence is crystal clear. It begins with a clearly articulated and measurable discipleship pathway. Make the route so simple that someone who has never entered a church before knows exactly which door to choose next. Help people see that worship, creating community communities, spiritual formation in small groups or Sunday school, serving others, and becoming a generous steward of God's resources are all essential elements in experiencing the rich, joyful, and abundant life that Jesus describes in John ten ten.

Erica Allen

You might be asking, why is this person who's a church generosity specialist talking about a discipleship pathway? And I just wanna let you know it's because you cannot separate generosity and discipleship. They are deeply connected. My experience, along with the thousands of churches that Horizons has served shows that no matter how clearly a church shares its theology of generosity, that seed will struggle to grow until it lands in the fertile ground of purposeful community, spiritual formation, and

serving others. I believe Jesus may have said something about this in a parable about a sower of seeds repeated in three of the four gospels.

Erica Allen

Clarity of discipleship pathway is not administrative. It is a kind, spiritually serious offering of the church. If you'll go to the next, next slide. So I want us to just take a few minutes to look at what happens in a church that sort of is lackluster about a discipleship pathway and those that are intentional. Lackluster discipleship churches assume that people will just figure out what their next step is.

Erica Allen

They have no idea what their next step is. These churches focus on attendance. Who's here? How many people are here? It's very information heavy.

Erica Allen

You can expect to get lots and lots of information, but discipleship feels optional and unclear. A church with intentional discipleship shows people what their next step is and how to take it. It's growth focused. It's more focused on who God wants the person to be and how they can grow to be more like God and more like Christ than anything else. It's transformation focused.

Erica Allen

How are we as a church helping people engage in the transformation of hearts and lives within and beyond this parish? And it's expected and invited that people take their next step of discipleship in a church that is intentional. The third principle that we are going to talk about, if you'll go ahead to the next slide, the third principle that we are going to talk about is building a giving path. It connects the message of the risen

Christ on Easter Sunday to a year round culture of generosity. This starts with building a giving pathway.

Erica Allen

It's a clear progression of measurable steps, each with an invitation and, listen up, each with a church responsibility on the other side. There are two people, engaged. There are two parties engaged in this giving path. If you'll go ahead to the next slide. A giving path is, like I said, a clear intentional progression of invitations, each step moving a person deeper into generosity as a spiritual practice.

Erica Allen

It offers a way in for first time givers. So when someone makes that first gift, it helps invite them to do that. It lowers the barrier, but it celebrates the meaning of taking that first step. It encourages consistency that you can build on, helping you create recurring habits that fund ministry year round, but that also help form a person to have a consistent and healthy relationship with their finances and with their generosity. And it gives a framework for growth.

Erica Allen

So a person can look at the generosity pathway, they can find themselves on it, and they know how to grow to the next, to the next step. If you'll go ahead to the next slide, you can find resources on the giving path. You can find those resources on our website at giving365.com. We have a bunch of resources there. It's a gift that Horizon Stewardship offers to churches.

Erica Allen

It's a library full of things that'll help you write a theology of generosity, it'll help you come up with a disciple pathway, and it will help you with this giving pathway. Here is

a problem. This is what each step requires of the church because this is what most churches treat generosity like. They treat it like a light switch.

Erica Allen

It's either on. Generosity is either on or it's off. You're either a giver or you're not. You give during the annual campaign or you don't. But that's not how spiritual growth works. It's not a light switch.

Erica Allen

Right? It's not how generosity works either. Think about how you'd approach someone new to faith. You wouldn't hand them a theology textbook on day one, but you would invite them to take a next step and then another and then another. Each step building on the last.

Erica Allen

Each one moving them into a deeper life with God. Generosity deserves this same intentionality. And here's what it offers your church practically. Three things. Here's what it requires of your church.

Erica Allen

I'm sorry. First of all, when someone gives something, so when they make that first gift, they should receive a handwritten note, personal acknowledgment, and a celebration of that first gift because it is a yes to it is a response to God's generosity. When folks make it a habit, when their second step is that they sign up for online recurring giving, that we don't want that to become invisible. We want them to experience and hear about a story of impact that the church is making. We want to keep pointing towards a generous God and the way God's transformation is continuing to work.

Erica Allen

Step three, we want to use only percent of income as a unit of measure. So we want to invite people to determine a specific percent of their income that they will invest in God's work through your church as they grow toward 10% or beyond. Let go of all vague language of a little more or a little more here and start talking about increasing their giving as a percentage of income, as a unit of measure, and encourage people to grow in generosity, to move above and beyond that gift of a tithe. And that helps shift the question from how much should I give to what is God asking of me. Steps along the giving pathway must be clear and measurable.

Erica Allen

The percent of household income is a measure that everyone can use even if that income is fixed. Right? Completely remove vague words like more or what you can, etcetera. And also when you use the tithe, which should only be described as 10% of household income, and you may need to define that. Remember, folks aren't always familiar with the language as our church.

Erica Allen

Use the tithe as a point of measurement, not the destination. Because what we don't wanna do is for people to think that God wants to cap their giving at the starting point of generosity. Right? We want them to move beyond that and we want to take that cap off. Explaining that offerings, free will offerings, free will gifts beyond returning God's tithes lifts people's imagination to how we steward the 90% of our income that we are given dominion of.

Erica Allen

You might say in receiving an offering, we return God's tithes and our offerings. When you clarify your understanding of the tithe in your theology of generosity, which you

also might wanna put on your website and communicate clearly what we at this church believe about giving, people understand both the why and the what that is being asked of them as you invite them to take the next step along that pathway of generosity. Moving people toward returning God's tithe is not about the math. It is about the posture. When we return God's tithe, the first 10%, we acknowledge God's ownership and provision and our role as stewards.

Erica Allen

It loosens money's grip on our lives and it opens us to a deeper trust in God's provision. Easter Sunday is a natural moment to invite this. People are already moved and in awe of what God has done through Jesus on that day. Meet them there. Invite those that you lead to take the next step and to grow in their generosity.

Erica Allen

For people who are already regular givers, the invitation is to identify what percentage of their income they are giving and prayerfully consider increasing that amount by one or more percent of their income as they move toward and beyond a tithe. If your church is anything like Resurrection Church, you'll be asking most regular attenders who are not in small groups or serving to double their giving. It might not be helpful to step into the pulpit on Sunday and just say, hey, everyone. Please consider doubling your giving. But within the context of a clearly articulated and biblically supported theology of generosity, you can effectively ask people to prayerfully consider growing their giving by 1% or more of their income, which for most equates to doubling their giving.

Erica Allen

Your theology of generosity, your giving pathway, and your use of only percentage giving as a measure invite sacrificial giving, which I define as giving where something in my life has to change to make it possible. This is where generosity stops being a line item or a guilt trip and it becomes a spiritual practice. The question is no longer

how much should I give, but what is God asking of me? If you've done the work of the first three steps, if people understand that generosity is transformational, if they're connected in community, if they've been giving and growing, this step is not a shock. It's the next step that they have been working toward all along.

Erica Allen

Can you go to the next slide? A church that makes giving just a one time event, we only focus on it a couple times a year or during one season versus a church who operates with a transformational giving path, they look a little different. The one time event church has a one time ask and focus, and you know in October that that is when they're gonna talk about money, and that is it. They focus on an amount that you give and not on the growth of a person. It's often a reaction to a need.

Erica Allen

The church needs this because we need to fill in the budget by December 1 or whatever instead of a response to God. A transformational giving path takes the pressure off of the church and that transactional relationship and instead invites people into prayer. God, what is it that you wanna do through me? And they're responding to God now, not just the need of a budget. The one time event ends with a gift.

Erica Allen

You make your gift, you make your money, and those folks never talk to you again. Right? But a transformational giving pathway invites people to grow deeper and deeper and deeper in their faith, trusting God more and more and more with their possessions, their resources, and their finances. This is yes. If you go to the next slide.

Erica Allen

I want to invite you all to go to giving365.com. At giving365.com, you'll find a library full of resources and you'll also find our brand new, Giving three sixty five agent, which is in beta testing. It is our AI large language library, which means instead of asking how could my church increase generosity, you won't get an answer, “Look under your pillow and maybe the tooth fairy will have brought you money last night.” Instead, it is gonna draw on resources from people at Horizons who've been doing this work for over three decades. It will get very, very theologically rich and deep information for how your church can move to this place.

Erica Allen

So we really wanna invite you to go to that. This is what I want you to walk away with before Joe and I enter a question and answer time, and that is that generosity is not a funding problem. Generosity is not a funding problem. It is a discipleship opportunity. And the churches that treat it that way, the ones that root it in theology, that build a clear path and keep inviting people forward, Those are the churches that don't just raise more money, they develop more people.

Erica Allen

And that's the win. That's what it's all about. The question isn't just how do we get our people to give more. It's how do we become a church where generosity is so clearly rooted in who God is, so clearly woven into our discipleship culture that it becomes the most natural thing in the world for our people to do? That church exists, and you can be a part of building it.

Joe Park

Erica, thank you for sharing that information, that presentation. I'm giving you just a second to catch your breath. There was a question in the chat about membership. There is no fee for that membership. Underneath that giving.ai, you see the next slide.

Joe Park

That's the Giving three sixty five. So you can just scroll up to it. And all those resources we put in there are free resources for the church. They're kind of do it yourself, help you equip your generosity team and leaders. They're just our gift to you because we see ourselves in ministry together.

Joe Park

So I'm gonna ask Erica a few questions to get this started, and then, we will, we'll open it up and answer your questions. So, Erica, as pastors are thinking about this Sunday, what is the most or as I think about Easter Sunday, what's the most important question they need to be asking themselves?

Erica Allen

We talk a lot about Easter being sort of the biggest Sunday of the year. Right? And it is in all the ways. But the question that I really want church leaders to sit with is not just how do we get more people in the seats. It's are we ready for the people who are already coming?

Erica Allen

Because they are coming. I just want this to be crystal clear. Millennials and young families are walking through the doors of churches on Easter Sunday and other Sundays. They are curious and hopeful. The data from the 2024 Giving USA generational report shows that millennial giving to places of worship is up 57% from 2021.

Erica Allen

They are not checked out. They are not too skeptical. They are not too overwhelmed. They are here and they are hungry. The question is, are we ready to meet them?

Joe Park

So when somebody walks into church on Easter Sunday, and they're truly searching for something, they may not be able to articulate that, but they're drawn there for some purpose. What are some of the common mistakes you see in preparing for that moment?

Erica Allen

Yeah. We just hand them a bulletin and a bulletin board and say, here are some events that maybe you could be a part of if you'd like to be, and we call it a day. You're going to have the largest gathering of the year. People who would never describe themselves as church people are going to be there on Easter Sunday, and we have to acknowledge that. They came searching for something.

Erica Allen

How do we provide a clear next step in plain language for them? How can we offer some next step for them that they might actually be seeking? Specific ways that they can safely and comfortably learn more about finding community, about being a part of a small group, about belonging somewhere when they haven't belonged anywhere in a while. How do we give them helpful guidance to navigate their life? And most of all, how do we invite them to that discipleship centered life that transcends the challenges of this world?

Joe Park

So there's gonna be an offering taken in most churches on Easter. In light of what you're telling us about millennials and people who may not be familiar or or may not

be the people that would describe themselves as church people, how do we prepare that offering? How do we prepare people to give that offering and the church to receive it?

Erica Allen

First of all, don't skip the offering. Take an offering on Easter. But think right now about how you're gonna frame it. Because how you frame it matters enormously. Don't just haphazardly stumble through the offering on that Sunday.

Erica Allen

Because if the first thing someone hears or sees about giving at your church is a need, hey, we have this budget gap. If that's printed in your bulletin, think about it before Easter Sunday or this building campaign or whatever. You've just confirmed every suspicion that we quietly walked in the door with. Right? You've told them that the church is transactional.

Erica Allen

But if you frame generosity, you take just a moment to think about that moment of the offering and you frame generosity as a spiritual practice, if you say this is a physical act, this giving is a physical act with a deeply spiritual purpose and here's what it does in you when you give, not just what it does for the church. You've opened a door that's going to stay open just a little longer after Easter Sunday is over. Lead with theology, lead with the generous character of God, and then invite people to respond as they are moved by the Holy Spirit.

Joe Park

One of the things I've heard you say is that generosity is a physical act with a spiritual purpose. How might a church communicate that in a way that lands with skeptics?

Erica Allen

Good. The fancy word for this is donor or giver. I'd rather call it giver centric communication. Instead of focusing on what the church needs, which is church centric communication, You simply tell the truth about what generosity does to and for a person. You explain how giving loosens the grip of fear and scarcity, how it reshapes a heart.

Erica Allen

It's one of the most tangible ways a person moves from believing in Jesus to living like Jesus. It's not a fundraising pitch for the church. Proclaim the truth of the gospel because it's so good and it's so transformative. For the skeptics, there's plenty of research showing that generous people are happier and physically healthier. In an increasingly digital world, right, where most people, people my age, who are gonna put actual physical cash in an offering plate is very low these days.

Erica Allen

Right? We usually give digitally. And in a world that is increasingly increasingly digital, people are longing for purpose more than ever. That digital space can handle a transaction. What it cannot give you is meaning.

Erica Allen

You can as the church, but only if we believe in ourselves and we have the courage to say it out loud.

Joe Park

So what you've been talking about today is a really long trail, meaning they are practices for year round generosity. You're using Easter as an example of an opportunity we have with a lot of people gathered. We've got some responsibility to steward that. That's in two weeks. What is one thing you would encourage a pastor to or a leader in a church to be doing or thinking about at this moment?

Erica Allen

Decide right now what you are going to ask the new people who visit your church on Easter Sunday to do next. Not in a general vague way. I'm the best at coming up with general vague language sometimes. So think about it ahead of time is what I'm asking you to do. Be specific.

Erica Allen

Be very specific about it. Is it a small group? Is it a new member gathering? Is it a coffee with the rector? Is it a follow-up email with a single clear invitation?

Erica Allen

Whatever it is, make sure it is so simple and so compelling that someone who has never been to your church before can say yes without hesitation. The Giving USA data shows that millennials are the most responsive gen generation across almost every channel of communication. Email, text message, snail mail. They like we like snail mail. So we're ready to be reached.

Erica Allen

The question is, are you ready to reach them? Easter Sunday is the moment. That follow-up after Easter, it's your moment. Do not let it pass without a clear invitation.

Joe Park

Final question, and then we're gonna turn to the audience. But you and I follow-up practice we have at Horizons. One of our disciplines is measuring effectiveness, so we rely a lot on research. We do our own research. You and I are actually publishing some research we did on worship and giving and church trends.

Erica Allen

But I'm here I hear

Joe Park

everywhere this message, the church is dying.

Erica Allen

Is do you agree with that? Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope.

Erica Allen

Some churches are dying, but the church of Jesus Christ is very much alive, and the promise of scripture is it will be until the end of time. And there is substantial research supporting this. Our own research, which we'll publish next week, shows that churches in all sizes and all denominational settings are thriving. There are multiple supporting studies, but one of the most compressive ten year studies show that millennial givings to places of worship is up 57% from 2021, and it's growing. People don't give to things that are dying.

Erica Allen

We've learned this in our work. Right, Joe? They now out-give your generation or generation x, so that generation between you and I. We now ou- give

Joe Park

Thank you for calling me generation x.

Erica Allen

You're welcome. You're welcome. They, we now this generation now out gives generation x, and millennials who are givers are the most engaged generation in the church today. If we're giving, we're showing up. We're volunteering.

Erica Allen

We're a part of what it is you're doing. Research also reveals that many mainline and smaller churches are not yet sharing a compelling enough story. We've not developed a clear enough pathway for discipleship engagement or the offerings along that pathway fail to meet the needs of millennials, gen x, and boomers. But these issues are something that we know how solve. Right?

Erica Allen

As I shared, there are thriving churches of all sizes, all theological perspectives. Our challenge in the mainline church is that we don't make our theologies actionable and accessible enough. This is not a theology problem. It's a process failure. We have a good mission statement, but we fail to invest in bringing it to life.

Erica Allen

Far too many of our churches like a clear vision and strategic ministry plan that's both time bound and measurable. People are looking for you to communicate those things to you. We fail to create clear, cohesive discipleship pathways that effectively lead our people into deeper relationship with Christ. We told you how to do this. We'll send you the recording and you can look at it again.

Erica Allen

Right? In the area of generosity, we often fail to clarify our theology of giving and we leave people confused about what we are asking for and why. What they hear is we want more money. But is that truly, that's just not the message we wanna send. When we bring our mission statements to life with a compelling vision of our desired future, of who it is God is calling us to be.

Erica Allen

When we say this is our plan to get there and it's built on a discipleship pathway to help you become a deeper disciple of Jesus, a person who looks more like Jesus every day. When we create a clear understanding of our theology of giving and what it does to people and in the world. And when we reframe our messaging and actions to reflect those beliefs, our churches will flourish. And the people who walk through your doors on Easter Sunday, they'll be right there with you next Sunday.

Joe Park

Thank you, Erica. Mary Collins asked this question. What are some of the things that you have seen churches do and provide that is a clear next step of how to get engaged beyond just the bulletin?

Erica Allen

I think an invitation to a class a lot of times what we say is a new member class. What I might suggest you saying instead, because people don't always know what that new member what does that mean? If you've been here two or three Sundays, after church today, we're gonna have coffee with the rector and we invite you to come and have coffee and a muffin with our rector and talk about and then the rector can give the next step. But their next step is to show up as something beyond worship. And be crystal clear about that and and watch that member language because they don't folks don't always know what that mean what they're actually showing up for.

Joe Park

So I don't yet see any questions in the slide deck excuse me, in the chat. The one thing in the research that I just find amazingly compelling, you covered it. I just wanna draw a circle back around to it, and that's a study at Church of the Resurrection. By the way, that was an agnostic who did that study. So you're following someone who's not fully convinced that certainly of our of our theology.

Joe Park

But everybody at Church of the Resurrection is getting the same generosity message. You know, Adam Hamilton does a really good job, but it isn't until they get in small groups, which they're very intentional about what a small group means, creating community, spiritual formation, sending care. It all happens there. They have systems that if somebody's missed a couple of those, that there are automatic pastoral touches that come out on that or just plain serving in a hands on ministry. They don't mean on the leadership board.

Joe Park

They mean literally doing ministry, but it's it's when they do that that that messaging activates.

Erica Allen

Yeah.

Joe Park

So if this is why our mission at Horizons is to grow disciples and fund ministry because and I love these are Erica's words. Generosity is a symptom of discipleship. And in the mainline church, I'm attending a mainline church. My wife is a pastor in a mainline church. We love the mainline church.

Joe Park

We love the theology that we find here. On the other side, we see a lot of churches that are struggling, lots that are vibrant, and we just cannot find as much as we would love to bring practices that are absolutely going to be frame bending in your church, after doing this for twenty two years, I'm absolutely convinced there's nothing a church can do that will impact giving as much as investing in spiritual formation and getting people to serve. I think you do have to have all these practices in place for that seed to be in the fertile ground, but that fertile ground is in community and small groups. And when we look at churches, we see that this discipleship part is radically underfunded compared to

Erica Allen

Yeah.

Joe Park

Say, the worship part. If you were to show those statistics to people that operate businesses or organizations and lay that against the budget of a church, they would probably say, hey. We're if we really want a return, and a return is someone who is

deeply committed to Christ and a proxy variable of that being engaged in discipleship and serving and giving, this we need to invest more here. And so I just wanna make that point. Somebody did ask the question, are you suggesting we drop the word pledge?

Joe Park

And we do. We don't like the word pledge. Mainly, we're not so much against it as it is ineffective, and it doesn't support the idea of being a percentage giver. When you substitute that for an estimate of giving, then what people are doing is choosing the percent of income Yeah. That they're going to give in advance, and that gives you the opportunity then to come back at the end of that third quarter and say, okay.

Joe Park

You know, this is a great opportunity to look at your actual giving against the percent of income that you chose to give and true that up. And most people will assume the worst. And so when they put that number on there, that does represent what they believe to be a safe percent of their income. And they see that their income is so much more. It gives them an opportunity to reinvest that reinvest in that.

Joe Park

And you're also saying as a church, if something happened and your income went down, it's the same level of faithfulness to give that same percentage on the lower income as it was. It works across the board. So that's why we use estimated giving and try to avoid the word pledge. We do use in a capital campaign the word commitment, but you won't see us intentionally using the word pledge. Eric, you can answer this one.

Joe Park

Rosemary is asking how to engage millennials to come to our church to begin with and invite them to engage when they're so busy in their careers and family responsibilities.

Erica Allen

So when I first came into ministry about fifteen years ago, I remember there was some research that people give you about an hour of their time and oh, a week. And then, you know, they'll grow that as they grow deeper in their faith. But I I like to think about that church of the resurrection number three and a half times. So do you wanna invite people to worship first, or would you rather invite them to a small group? And so what small groups do you have that are operating as a front door and meet that community need that so many of them have, and then let worship be the second step.

Erica Allen

So that discipleship pathway, I think so many times we think you go to worship and then you go to small group and then you do... You know, it's linear. They might come into your church through a small group, and then their next step from a small group might be that they begin attending worship regularly or they start serving in a ministry. So I would say if we know that people involved in a small group give three and a half times that or service opportunity, why wouldn't we invite people to engage that as a front door? And then, worship maybe is the second step.

Joe Park

And that's a clear corollary in the thriving church resources we see. Yep. People will watch, and and and this is more of a challenge within Episcopalian theology. But online worship and in growing thriving churches, are six people watching online or on demand, which is they watch the service when they want to watch, when it's convenient for them to watch the service for every 10 in worship. So six people online for every 10 in worship among churches that are growing.

Joe Park

So that's an important thing to wrestle with as well. But when churches are built on small groups, well, churches that are built on effective small groups grow substantially more than churches that aren't. It's a very, very clear, corollary. It was a question about small groups. So what are examples of small groups?

Joe Park

And that can be, that can be anything. It could be a Sunday school class. Most grow rapidly, growing churches can't afford to build enough rooms. That's the only reason they don't, you know, do it on Sunday. They tend to do it in people's homes.

Joe Park

But any group, even a choir can be a small group if you're creating community, if you're doing spiritual formation. You're teaching there's bible teaching associated with it. There's care associated with it. There's sending associated with it. So those are examples of that.

Joe Park

And there's a question from Daniel about what is our opinion of encouraging time and talent as a source of giving. So I tell you my personal opinion is everything that we talk about for generosity applies to, giving of stewarding other resources. So you can substitute that, and I think it is very appropriate to do it. Here's the problem. Barna Research says that when people hear time, talent, and treasure, if we come across and that's what we're asking for in the offering time, they hear it as substitutionary.

Joe Park

And, biblically, I can't find that that's us that that that that's what we want people to do. So they have to give the thing that is easiest to give, not the thing that is most precious to them. And so we have to be really careful when we do those things. And so our recommendation is not to talk about time and talent during the offering. Talk about them in other settings and other times and other ways because they are critical.

Joe Park

But when we mix the two together, what happens is giving goes down, and people say, oh, well, I'll smorgasbord that. And they lose the opportunity of generosity. And there's a reason Jesus talked about generosity more than any subject except the kingdom of God. Now this is my theology. You all, every person here is gonna have to work out your own theology and support that biblically and and bring your practices in line with that.

Joe Park

And when you do, even if it differs from mine, it is going to have a positive impact. Being fuzzy, being unclear, being vague, not having a plan, those are the things that we know are not working. Now we've hit our time limit. We are happy to answer.

Erica Allen

Can you... can you just repeat that statistic about online to in person worship ratio for growing churches?

Joe Park

I can. This was done by a study that we helped sponsor from the unstuck group. I had over a thousand churches, I think, involved in that. And what they found is that there are six people online or on demand for every 10 people in person. And so there's a

correlation between churches with high online and in person engagement and growing.

Joe Park

And some of that is a substitutionary effect where people are given choices. I'll give you in person an hour or an hour and a half in my small group or serving, and then I'm gonna watch the worship or listen to it as I do something else. And, you know, it is we may not want them to to substitute that, but is it better that they're in a small group and they're experiencing all that and they are paying attention and they're coming to worship and they are following along? Or are we so invested in them being physically present that we're okay with the loss of what happens inside of small groups and serving? So that's part of it.

Joe Park

And, again, I know we're out of time, but Eric and I are happy to have these conversations with you one on one. You know, we all have to work through our own theology and become clear on it. And when we're clear on it and are able our church leaders are clear on it corporately, then good things are gonna happen. So it doesn't have to look the same from church to church, not even looking the same from an Episcopal church to your neighbor Episcopal church, but it needs to be authentic for you and your setting and your context. EPN, thank you very much for letting us...

Erica Allen

Thank you so much.

Joe Park

,,,here. I put in our email addresses, so reach out to us if you've got questions.