

5/52: How Any Church Can Sponsor a Church Plant

By

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Any church can afford to support a church plant. Most churches can afford to be the sole sponsor of a church plant if they will engage their member's hearts into church planting and use a strategy that is proven to work. Of course, there will be members who will see sponsorship as an impossible venture because "the church is barely meeting budget, and there is the debt to pay off, plus we already give so much." However, a pastor-leader who is a true visionary with a heart for planting churches can have a major success through a stewardship emphasis called 5/52.

5/52: A Basic Explanation

5/52 is a stewardship campaign, over and above the tithe, in which the congregation simply is asked to give \$5 a week for 52 weeks. It has a huge success rate because the pastor is only asking a family to give \$5 per week. Now in almost any American home, \$5 is not something that will cause the family to suffer. Because the pastor is asking for so little, the membership is quick to embrace the new stewardship effort.

What is important for the pastor to realize is that 5/52 pays off in huge dividends. First, it's a great way to raise money. Five dollars a week over 52 weeks turns out to be a gift of \$260. This is an amount many people wouldn't ordinarily give to church planting except through this type of installment plan.

A second benefit of 5/52 is the high level of participation. In the last church where I used to this emphasis to raise money to sponsor a new work, we experienced over 70 percent participation from the church family. To put this into context, this was a church of 300 members with 70 percent making a commitment; we had over 200 commitment cards. The reason was both husband and wife would turn in separate cards. Students would pledge because the level was within their grasp. This level of participation is typical of a 5/52 emphasis done correctly.

5/52 works because of the power of weekly giving. If just 200 people make the \$5 commitment per week for one year, the amount raised is \$52,000. But that is just for one year. The beauty of 5/52 is that it is an annual commitment, with those funds coming in each year as long as the new work needs funds or as long as the congregation has a passion for new church starts.

5/52: Just the beginning.

While the power of weekly giving from just 200 people is truly amazing, what is even more amazing is what can be raised leading up to and including commitment Sunday. 5/52 works best as a total stewardship program through which people are taught to give over and above the tithe for the purpose of planting new works. It is a time of vision-casting by the pastor that can lead to greater gifts in enlisting the people to sacrifice for the material needs of the new church and preparing the people's hearts for a cash offering on the day they make the commitment to 5/52.

With a proper vision-cast about the new work and how it will be funded — through a weekly sacrifice everyone can afford — the pastor needs to let the people know what the costs will be for the new work. Planting a church today can quickly run into several hundred thousand dollars in just a few years by the time rent, salary, promotion, evangelistic activities, and church needs are factored in. One thing the pastor can do as a lead-up to 5/52 is allow the congregation to know what the new work will have to buy and the approximate costs so that God may touch someone to give that amount of money. That way, it won't have to come out of 5/52 funds.

One example is a good sound system. It would be a mistake to say the new work needs a sound system, because if you do some well-intentioned brother will bring the latest system from Radio Shack. Instead, list the items and their cost such as a Sure 24 channel mixing board model # 4567321QA which we can purchase for \$1,437.24. (To my knowledge there is no such thing as a Sure 24 channel mixing board.) By being specific, you get what you need instead of what someone wants to throw away.

On other smaller items, 5/52 can be the launch for creative activities such as a ladies' baby shower. I know of one church sponsor that used the baby shower idea to get the church's nursery materials purchased according to exacting specifications, along with other items needed for worship. This also gave the ladies of the church a fun way of embracing and expecting what God would do.

For a successful emphasis, consider these ideas.

First, give at least six weeks from the time you announce the stewardship emphasis until commitment Sunday. Allow people to prepare. On the day you announce the campaign, meet with your church leaders in the afternoon and thoroughly go over the emphasis. Seek out questions and readily give answers. This is called "working the grass tops." As leaders, these are the people the rest of the members of your church will follow. Their opinions count more than you know. When I meet with the grass tops, I meet with anyone in any position of service. Grass tops include Bible study leaders, committee team members, and every other person who serves. As a matter of fact, I open the meeting up so wide that I say, "If you consider yourself to be a leader, then you are invited."

If the pastor will share his heart, his vision, and the power of giving small amounts weekly by a large number of people, the people will join him. At the leadership meeting I prepare a handout that includes a place for people to submit questions they may be afraid to ask and a place for them to commit to pray, commit to promote, or commit to give to the campaign. I have them check all the boxes that apply. That way the next Sunday I can say, “Seventy people have committed to give already and we are still five weeks away.”

The next idea is to send out three letters. Research has been done that shows that three is the magic number before the law of diminishing return comes into play. In the first letter, I set the stage and make the case for the new work. In the second letter, I ask them to make the commitment in their heart and to attend one of the special events as well as prepare a cash offering. The third is the most time-sensitive letter; it needs to hit the week before the offering with an envelope and commitment card. The letter needs to remind people of the cause and prepare them to visualize success.

Keep the emphasis simple by keeping the theme of 5/52. A \$10-a-week donation may throw people off at first. Five dollars is non-intimidating, and that is one reason it is well-received. Seven dollars may account for inflation, but all of a sudden the numbers become more confusing; we are society with a number system based on fives and tens. However, on the commitment card, have a place for \$5 a week, \$7 a week, \$10 a week, \$15 dollars a week, and other. People aren't limited to giving \$5; it is just a theme for the stewardship emphasis. Be sure to clarify this at your leadership meeting. Also, use the term “stewardship emphasis” over “financial campaign” and you'll be much better received.

On the day of the offering, it is always a good idea to ask for cash along with the 5/52 commitment. It is a good idea to have a testimony from someone whose life will be impacted by the new work, along with someone who has been behind the giving aspect of the promotion since inception. Finally, it is always good to have a “come forward, drop your gift in the box” kind of collection. In the church of 300 mentioned earlier, 5/52 actually raised over \$100,000 with the pre-gifts, cash offerings of that Sunday, and the annual commitment. The reason is because you can spend cash much easier than you can a commitment.

5/52 doesn't end there. As soon as the finance team can deliver the addresses, I send out a thank-you note to everyone who gave. Stay blind to what they gave, but thank them for giving. It may be that you send three letters to the same home, but one of those may be to a student who is just discovering giving; saying thanks will keep the commitment alive.

Finally, develop a newsletter, for members only, as to the progress of the work. Give the task to the staff of the new work as their way of saying thank you in an ongoing way for

the sacrifice of the people. Remind the staff that each year their support comes up for election. The election is not through the budget process, but through what people will give to 5/52 next year.

For smaller churches only.

The majority of Southern Baptist churches run 100 or less each Sunday. So you may be wondering how 5/52 can help your church be involved in church planting. There are plenty of ways if you will be creative.

First, you can partner with two or three churches your size and together win a great victory for the kingdom. This will take an exceptional partnership between the pastors and the people, but it can be done.

Second, you can raise the money each year and put it in a fund to help one church get started. Three years of savings could amount to a large amount of money, which may be enough for a church in a less-populated region where rent is cheaper and the planter may be bivocational. (The high-cost church planting is usually in the newest suburbs where rent, even at a school, can run over one \$1,000 a week.)

Third, you can send the money raised through 5/52 to your state and designate it for church planting. It may be that there is a plant on the other side of the state that needs your partnership and sacrifice and without 5/52, they wouldn't receive the money.

Why churches should use 5/52

There isn't anything magical or mystical about 5/52. As a matter of fact, it has its roots in the sports world, where a coach of a major football team told the alumni he could produce a better team if they would each give so many dollars a week for 50 weeks. From there, I saw it successfully used to fund a mega-church's media ministry. Then, as the need for dollars for church planters rose, I began to wonder whether it could be used to plant churches, and God has blessed us.

The beauty of 5/52 is that each week, the membership makes a decision to support church planting. It puts church planting where it belongs, back in the heart of the people of our great convention. And who can't cut back just \$5 a week to change their community or their world?

Suggest to people that they drink water one night when they go out to eat at their favorite restaurant, buy the smaller container of popcorn at the movies, or go down one name brand in tennis shoes. That way they will always have the \$5 that is necessary, and state conventions won't have to turn down requests for a needed church plant due to budget constraints.

Five dollars a week can't do much on its own, but when combined with a mighty number of passionate people, it can change the world.

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