

Challenging Your Church to a Christmas Miracle Offering

The strategy...

The strategy behind a **Christmas Miracle Offering** is simple. Challenge your church family to truly make the upcoming Christmas all about Jesus. You will ask your attenders...

- to spend only one-half on presents of what they would normally spend at Christmas and to give the other half to the Christmas Miracle Offering.
- to ask family members and friends who normally give the attender gifts to instead give the gift amount to the Christmas Miracle Offering in the attender's honor.

The benefits...

- Your church can achieve new and powerful levels of outreach this Christmas—without impacting the church's budget or regular tithes and offerings.
- The Miracle Offering offsets the focus on materialism that is normally the hallmark of the Christmas season, encourages simplicity in spending, and refocuses Christmas and Christ's followers on honoring Jesus. We become producers of God's blessings and not consumers of "stuff."
- You will invigorate people's excitement about the type of sacrificial giving that truly empowers the Church to serve as the body of Christ. Generally in December each year, we communicate repeatedly with our attenders regarding the "year-end" need, or the amount of money we will need during December to complete our budget and place us in a position of financial health for the new year. In 2004, we did not mention the year-end need at all, but instead focused our energy and that of our attenders on the miracle that Jesus wanted to do through us. The Christmas Miracle Offering exceeded our expectation, AND the year-end need was met in full.

The steps...

Step 1 - identify the need through the eyes of Jesus...

In summer 2004, Ginghamburg's Senior Pastor Mike Slaughter was fascinated by a story in *Newsweek* regarding the horror in Darfur, Sudan. That fascination was soon followed by a conviction that God had a call on Ginghamburg to do what we could as a church to reach out to the Sudan—a country and a people in crisis who have received little international attention. Since violence had prevented the planting of crops that growing season and with 350,000 children, men and women in the Sudan at risk of starvation by year-end of 2004, that call was soon clarified to mean feeding the hungry of Sudan. We also realized that simply providing food to Darfur was a short-term solution—important, but not the ongoing answer to a long-term crisis. The project ultimately identified, with the help of our strategic partner, to meet the ongoing need was a sustainable agricultural project that included the purchase of seeds, training on farming techniques for the Sudanese families included in the project, and an emphasis on seed conservation for future crop seasons.

Questions:

- Where is God calling your church to be the hands and feet of Jesus?
- What is the short-term solution? What is the ongoing response?

Step 2 - choose a strategic partner

Depending on the call God places upon your church, you may not have the expertise to implement the right solution without also identifying the right strategic partner(s). That partner ideally should:

- Demonstrate a proven track-record in the type of service or outreach to be provided
- Be able and willing to give complete and accurate accountability for all funds or materials you entrust to the partner or agency for deployment
- Ensure that all or most of the resources given will go directly to support the mission—not to administrative costs
- Add credibility to the project in the eyes of your leadership boards and church attenders

For the Sudan project, Ginghamburg is partnering with the **United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)**, the not-for-profit humanitarian agency of The United Methodist Church. By partnering with UMCOR, Ginghamburg can be sure that one hundred percent of our gifts will go to the Sudan project, since UMCOR's administrative costs are supported through local church apportionments and other sources. UMCOR has the experience, accountability and reach we needed to assure our church family that the project was doable and had integrity. In addition, UMCOR was able to respond very quickly with the Ginghamburg offering they received in full in January of 2005 by opening its office in the Sudan in March and planting the crops one month later.

For more information on UMCOR, visit www.umcor.org.

United Methodist Committee on Relief
General Board of Global Ministries
Room 330, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115
Phone: 212-870-3816; FAX: 212-870-3624; Email: umcor@gbgm-umc.org.

Step 3 - Engage your congregation in the challenge...

- **First, cast the vision** with your board and leadership team painting the picture of the need, the call, and the plan. Remind leaders that this offering does not come out of the church's budget or tithes.
- **Second, introduce the need and the challenge** to your congregation before Thanksgiving. Make available to them gift cards that they can use over the Thanksgiving holiday to give or encourage gift-giving from others in their honor to the offering.
- **Third**, throughout the Advent season, continue to **hold the need in front of the church family** through the worship messages, bulletin inserts, a letter from the pastor or lay leaders, stories, testimonials and more. You may also choose to make available offering envelopes for specific use with the Miracle Offering. We kept baskets with

offering envelopes available at all Worship Area exit doors throughout Advent as an ongoing visual reminder.

The table below reflects the communication schedule Ginghamsburg used in 2004 to communicate and emphasize both the need and the challenge. (Examples of many of the communication materials are available at www.ginghamsburg.org/sudan.)

Date	Activity
November 6 / 7	Place small announcement in bulletin of upcoming Sudan offering reinforcing the vision Mike has already cast from the stage.
November 13 / 14	Keep small blurb (similar to last weekend) in the bulletin about the Sudan offering
November 20 / 21	Distribute informational gift cards that attenders can share with gift-giving family members and friends over Thanksgiving to inform about Sudan gift-giving. Also, include full information as insert in the bulletin that explains all program details.
November 22	Mail "all church" letter from Mike promoting / explaining the Sudan Miracle Offering and include an offering envelope in the mailing; post offering information on the web site.
November 27 / 28	Distribute Sudan offering envelopes in worship; redistribute bulletin insert about the program; have Sudan bracelets available for sale at the lobby counter with all proceeds benefiting the offering; promote overall Sudan project during worship.
December 4 / 5	Re-distribute Sudan offering envelopes in worship to reach those who missed the previous weekend.
December 11 / 12	Do video story / stage push about the Sudan offering.
December 18 / 19	Collect miracle offering at each worship celebration; indicate that offerings can also be dropped at the church office at any point in time through the end of the year.
December 24 (Christmas Eve)	Mike S. will mention from stage and ushers will use baskets to collect the exit offering for each of the seven worship celebrations
Early 2005	Announce / celebrate the results

Step 4 – Collect the offering...

Make it easy for your attenders to bring their offering. We collected our 2004 offering on the final weekend of Advent as well as Christmas Eve. Contributions could also be brought or mailed to our Main Campus office at any time up through the end of the year.

Step 5 – After the offering...

- After all offering contributions have been received, announce and celebrate the immediate results.

- Re-communicate clearly with your congregation how the funds are being deployed and when the church family can expect to experience, see or learn the upcoming fruits of the outreach or project you've selected.
- Surround your project with prayer. As our crops grew throughout the summer and our team prepared for the potentially dangerous trip to Darfur, we challenged our congregation to pray unceasingly for the project and the trip. Prayer Bible bookmarks with specific Sudan prayer needs were distributed, cell groups received special instructions for praying through the Sudan initiative, new prayer groups were formed that met daily at the church campus for prayer about the Sudan, and a 24-hour prayer vigil was held on campus starting the day the Ginghamburg team left for Africa.
- Bring back the story! People want to know how God has multiplied their gifts to God's glory. In our case, we sent a team to Sudan in August 2005 to bring back video footage of our crops and the transformation in the lives of real people. That type of journey may not be possible for your church. In that case, perhaps your strategic partner can bring back the pictures and the stories for you and help you to show God's work to those who gave sacrificially.
- Identify your next call, and do it again. Every Christmas is about Christ-mas! It's not about us!