

*How to Plan
and Conduct a*

CHRISTMAS OFFERING

*(And Why You Should
Get Started ASAP)*

By Nelson Searcy

Lead Pastor, The Journey Church, New York City

Founder, www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com

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MEET DR. NELSON SEARCY



Nelson is the Founding and Lead Pastor of The Journey Church, with locations across New York City and in Boca Raton, FL. By God’s grace, Nelson identified and developed the **Eight Systems of a Healthy Church®** that he has used to coach over 5,000 churches in the US and around the world to adapt those eight systems to their unique ministry fields, resulting in great health and growth. He regularly coaches pastors online and in-person through the **Church Leader Insights** and the **Renegade Pastors Network** ministries that he founded. He also leads several annual pastor in-person conferences and online training events. In ministry for more than 35 years, Nelson and his church routinely appear on lists such as “The 50 Most Influential Churches” and “The 25 Most Innovative Leaders.” He is the author of over 100 church growth resources and 20+ books, including *The Renegade Pastor: Abandoning Average in Your Life and Ministry*, *The Difference Maker* and *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church*. Nelson is the recipient of the prestigious Donald A. McGavran Award for Outstanding Leadership in Great Commission Research. He is a longtime student of church history, especially mastering the areas of evangelism and church growth. Nelson divides his time between NYC and South Florida. He battled Stage 4 cancer and has been cancer-free since 2018, praise God! He has an amazing wife, Kelley, and a teenage son, Alexander, who continues to grow in so many ways.

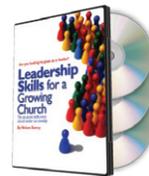
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INTRODUCTION

As the old carol says about Christmas, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” But when does that “time of the year” actually begin? Have you noticed the way retailers have started putting out Christmas displays as early as September? Every year, the push toward Christmas seems to come earlier and earlier. Before the fall leaves hit the ground, we see Christmas trees revealed in all their glory through shop windows. By October, children are making their Christmas lists and lots of people have already started hanging lights and buying gifts. Even though Christmas is still more than two months away, they’ve started preparing. Have you?

Let me be clear. I’m not interested in whether you’ve bought your Christmas cards or started humming *Silent Night*. The real question is whether you’ve started preparing for your Christmas offering. Have you decided to do one, set the kick-off date, and settled on your causes? Now, I know what you may be thinking: You aren’t comfortable asking people to give to an offering around Christmas time. After all, everything is so hectic; people are traveling; wallets are already stretched too thin in an effort to make this “the most wonderful time of the year” for the kids. Christmas is just not the best time of year to ask people to give more to the church, right?

The real question is whether you’ve started preparing for your Christmas offering.

What if you are wrong? What if Christmas is the perfect time to ask people to give over and above their regular giving? I have found that by planning in the fall for an end-of-the-year Christmas offering, you can create an opportunity for incredible blessing. You can give your people a reason and a way to break out of the materialism that Christmas tends to bring. You can accelerate their spiritual growth. And you can be used by God to touch areas of your community and the world that He wants you to be able to influence without money acting as a limitation. The key is to take a cue from those list-writing children and light-stringing retailers and start preparing for Christmas right now...in October or as soon as possible.



What is a **CHRISTMAS OFFERING?**

A Christmas offering is, by definition, a special offering given during a set period of time around Christmas that encourages people to give over and above their regular tithes and offerings. Ever wonder why the Salvation Army chooses the Christmas season as the time to stand outside, ring their bells, and ask people to drop money into the little red bucket? Because they understand that people want to give at Christmas. The season brings with it a feeling of good cheer and generosity. Even though your people may be spending a lot of money on travel and presents, they are still going to give money to some kind of cause. By providing a Christmas offering, you are

A Christmas offering encourages people to give over and above their regular tithes and offerings.

giving them the opportunity to make that gift to the local church, where they will be able to see its fruits in the months and years to come.

Still, I don't want you to think of the Christmas offering only as a fundraising opportunity. It goes much deeper. As we all know, the issue of giving is irrevocably linked to spiritual growth. Couple that with the fact that Christmas is a time when many people let their spiritual growth slide. They are visiting family across the country and missing church; their schedule is thrown off, so they neglect their daily devotional; they easily get caught up in the season's consumerism mentality and fall into the trap of spending money

they don't have to buy things they don't need, in the name of good cheer. But by establishing and promoting a Christmas offering, you can continually redirect their thinking back to what's going on in the local church, while giving them the opportunity to look beyond themselves and give sacrificially to God's work. People grow when they give sacrificially.

Some of you may be thinking, "Yes, but if I push my people to give more at Christmas, won't it hurt my regular end of year tithes and offerings?" Not at all. In working with churches across the country and with hundreds of pastors who have gone through my Coaching Networks, I've found that the Christmas offering doesn't negatively affect regular tithes or end-of-the-year giving. Why? Because the money that will go to your Christmas offering will come out of a different "pocket" than your congregation's regular giving. Often, it's money that they already want to donate to something, somewhere, anyway. You are simply re-directing that gift toward God's work, and doing so in a way that will stretch and grow every single giver.



How Much CAN WE RAISE?

So how much money can you expect to raise through a Christmas offering? In general, with little planning or effort, you could raise two to three times your regular weekly offering. You would be able to raise this amount simply by announcing the offering and providing a special envelope, which we will discuss further in a minute. On the other hand, if you are willing to put some time and energy into creating a plan now for your Christmas offering, you will be able to raise four to six times your weekly offering, or even more.

A Christmas offering is not like last-minute Christmas shopping. You may be able to get away with hitting the mall on Christmas Eve to cross the

You can't wait until halfway through December to decide to pull this off.

final few names off your list, but that kind of last-minute thinking won't work if you hope to garner the full amount possible through your offering. Pre-planning is key. You can't wait until halfway through December to decide you want to pull this

off. Ideally, you should use the month of October to ramp things up and then kick off the offering the Sunday before Thanksgiving, with the intention of running it through the end of the year or a couple of weeks into January. In order to prepare fully for the blessing God wants to bring you, decide immediately to start pinpointing the causes you want your Christmas offering money to go toward and putting your plan of action in place.

Defining the Claus – err, Cause: **WHAT WILL THE OFFERING BE USED FOR?**

Before you understand the “what” of putting together your Christmas offering, you need to have a firm grasp on the “why.” Then, you have to be able to convey that “why” clearly to your congregation. People give to vision. Why, specifically, are you interested in doing this offering? Why are you raising the money? What’s your cause? One of the best causes to support with a Christmas offering is missions. You will be able to raise a lot of money for missions during this time of year. But that shouldn’t be your only cause. Instead of focusing solely on one area, choose several causes that will resonate with the different types of people in your church. Maybe you need to raise money for your Children’s Ministry, or perhaps you want to do a special outreach for the needy in your community.

Different causes pull on different heartstrings in different ways. I suggest that you choose three to five causes to focus on. Make them heart issues. Causes and needs that ignite passion in people are the only thing that will rise above the noise and bustle of Christmas. This isn’t the time to raise money for new pews or the plexiglass pulpit you’ve had your eye on, but it is a great time to bring in

Possible causes:

- *Missions*
- *Evangelism*
- *Benevolence Fund*
- *Children’s Ministry*
- *New Location*
- *New Staff Member*
- *Next Year’s Budget*

money to help support a new church plant or revamp your programming for the elderly. Choose one, primary cause and then two, three or four smaller causes. Let your people know that 50% of the offering will go to the one main cause, and the other 50% will be divided among the other causes. Also tell them that if things go really well – if you exceed your goal – that you will use some of the extra money to begin offsetting next year’s budget. There’s always more to do.

Pull out a couple of important, stand-alone items from next year’s budget and make them causes for your Christmas offering.

Speaking of next year’s budget, that’s a great place to find your causes. Pull out a couple of important, stand-alone items and make them the causes for your Christmas offering. You will be able to raise the money for them before the end of the year and take them out of the budget for next year, thereby freeing up your regular giving for additional ministry and opportunities God wants to bring your way. For example, say you are planning on giving \$4,000 to the start of a new church in an underdeveloped area next year. You can pull that \$4,000 line item out of your budget, make it one of the causes in your Christmas offering, go ahead and cover the cost of it and then use that \$4,000 that you had already budgeted to support local evangelism or do whatever else God puts on your heart. As you pull items out of your budget and raise money for them through the one-time gift of the Christmas offering, you will be giving next year’s plans room to expand.

Over the River and Through the Woods: **FIVE STEPS TO A STRONG CHRISTMAS OFFERING**

Now that you understand the importance of doing a Christmas offering and how to pinpoint your causes, you need to start walking the path toward setting up the most effective offering possible. What kind of plan should you put in place and how? Here are the five most important steps to leading a successful Christmas offering:

Step 1: Decide when to kick off your Christmas offering.

As I mentioned, the Sunday before Thanksgiving is the ideal kick-off day, but you can adjust that to fit your needs. If Thanksgiving falls particularly late, or if your crowd is usually down that Sunday, you may want to kick the offering off a week earlier. The key is to know your kick-off date well in advance so you can begin building toward it. (If you are reading this in late November or even early December, don't fret. You can still conduct a Christmas offering in December, but you may need to adjust your goal to that of one or two times your weekly offering.)

Know your kick-off date well in advance so you can begin building toward it.

Step 2: Set a goal for your Christmas offering.

People love to reach for goals. As mentioned earlier, the amount of your goal will depend on your weekly giving and your ramp up time for the offering.

In general, its best to set a Christmas offering goal that is a little lower than you think you can hit, but not so low that people will dismiss it. If this is your first Christmas offering, choose a goal that will stretch your people but one that will also most likely be accomplished. Celebrating this year’s Christmas offering goal will set you up for a bigger goal next year.

Step 3: Promote your Christmas offering.

Now you are ready to start motivating people to participate in the offering. On the Sunday before you kick off the offering, work it into your sermon if at all possible. For example, if you are preaching about helping people in need because that is going to be one of your causes (there’s a tip), you can say something along the lines of, “Next week, we will be kicking off our special Christmas offering. One of the things that this offering is going to allow us to do is to partner with a local homeless shelter to provide meals for the needy throughout the month of January.” Choose one of your heart-catching causes, work its importance into the sermon, and then use the opportunity to announce the offering and how it can help with exactly what you are discussing.

Choose one of your heart-catching causes and work its importance into the sermon.

While you are talking about the offering in this way, take the opportunity to fill everyone in on the details. Tell people about the other causes and mention how long they’ll have to give. Be clear and authentic. Create a sense of urgency and challenge people to bring their first and best gift to the kick-

off the next week. In my experience, you may have as much as 50% of the offering come in on the first Sunday, if you build it up well the week before. Over the next four or five weeks, continue to mention the offering every Sunday. You don't need to work it into your sermon again but, during your announcement time, remind people that the offering is still in full swing and revisit the causes. You can create a second sense of urgency in mid-to-late December by saying things like, "Let's hit this goal before the year ends!" Do all you can to make your message clear and the giving convenient.

PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE!

Use this promotion timeline to ignite your Christmas offering:

TEN DAYS BEFORE KICK-OFF:

Send out an offering information packet (see below).

ONE WEEK BEFORE KICK-OFF:

Work the offering into your sermon. Highlight the causes. Encourage people to bring their best gift on the first day.

KICK-OFF WEEKEND:

Announce the kick-off with enthusiasm! Highlight the causes.

EVERY WEEKEND IN DECEMBER:

Continue to mention the offering briefly. Highlight the causes. Toward the end of the month, create a fresh sense of urgency.

FIRST SUNDAY IN JANUARY:

Announce a two-to-four-week offering extension.

LATE JANUARY/EARLY FEBRUARY:

Announce the total amount of money raised. Celebrate! Send thank-you letter.

ONGOING THROUGHOUT YEAR:

Update your people on how their money is being used.

Step 4: Provide a Christmas Offering envelope.

As part of your planning, you should create a giving envelope specifically for the Christmas offering. Better yet, include the Christmas offering as part of your regular offering envelope by printing special envelopes for the month of December that include a box for tithes and offerings and the Christmas offering amount (see examples on the following pages). On kick-off day, point your congregation's attention to the special envelope that you will have placed in their bulletin. You can even put bullet points about the offering's causes on the back of the envelope to underscore exactly what they are giving to. Remind everyone that their offering is over and above what they usually give, is tax-deductible and that 100% of it will go to the causes you've been discussing. You might also encourage online giving to the Christmas offering or even in-kind gifts like stocks and bonds. A stock broker in your church should be able to set up in-kind gifts in a way that would be tax-advantageous for your people.

You might encourage online giving or even in-kind gifts like stocks and bonds.

In the name of clarity, I also suggest that you send a letter, or a small information packet, to your regular attenders and members a week to ten days before you kick off the offering (if you are really pressed for time you can send an email to your congregation, but overall, a letter/mailed packet will work best). Use this opportunity to explain the heart of the offering and its causes in detail. Go ahead and send them the special envelope and encourage them to bring their best gift on the first day. Then, on your kick-off day, have

that same letter or information packet available to anyone in the church who would like to pick one up. When people have complete clarity over what you are asking of them and why, they are much more willing to trust God and give sacrificially.

Here's a recent example of a Christmas Offering envelope from The Journey Church:





My Gift

"You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully,"
— 2 Corinthians 9:7

FOUR OPTIONS FOR GIVING @ THE JOURNEY:

- Place this envelope in the bucket when the offering is given.
- Drop it in the mail during the week.
- Give online anytime @ www.JourneyMetro.com.
- Learn how to automate your giving by checking the box below.

The Journey Church discourages the irresponsible use of credit cards. We offer the opportunity to donate by credit card as a convenience to those who manage their finances in a God-honoring way. All offerings are tax-deductible; however, in accordance with IRS regulations, designated offerings may be put to alternate use.



Now through January 31, 2010 • Goal: \$315,000

Support Global / U.S. missions and start new churches
Share God's love to our city through Servant Evangelism
Support local organizations that assist the poor and needy
Fund the 2010 Benevolence and Counseling ministry
Enhance the Journey Kidz experience on Sunday

Write the amount on the line marked **Showing We Care**.

\$ _____ Tithe & Offering First name _____ Last name _____

\$ _____ **Showing We Care** Address _____
(Please use billing address if giving by debit or credit card)

\$ _____ Other City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

\$ _____ **Total** Email _____

Phone number _____

Send me information on how to automate my giving Please check if new information

Method of Payment: Check (Make checks payable to The Journey Church) Cash Visa MasterCard American Express

Debit or Credit card number _____ Expiration date _____

Name on card _____ ZIP of billing address _____

Amount to charge \$ _____ Signature _____

/// PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE ///

Actual size of the envelope is 9" wide by 4" tall (folded). For a downloadable version, click on the "Stewardship" tab at www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/blog.

Step 5: Model the sacrificial giving you hope to see from your people.

As you talk about the offering from stage, make sure you tell your people that you are planning to give. You don't need to disclose how much, but put yourself in the position of being able to give an authentic testimony of your own sacrifice. Tell them that you and your wife have been praying over how

You, as the Pastor, have to be fully engaged in what you are proposing.

much to give, and how God continues to stretch you beyond what you think you can do. Tell them that your children (if they are old enough) are doing chores and special projects this fall to raise their own money to give to the offering. And make

sure all of that it true. You, as the Pastor, have to be fully engaged in what you are proposing. There is nothing more powerful than an authentic leader who says, "I've given. You give too." On the same note, talk with your key staff and leaders about giving. Make sure they are on board with helping to lead the charge.

Giving to the Christmas offering really stretches you as a leader. Every year, I think that I am not going to be able to give as much as the year before. You understand how it is, I'm sure. The end of the year is tough for pastors. Each and every Christmas season, God gives me a number that He wants me to put in the offering and, without fail, it is always a bigger number than I was thinking. But, also without fail, He always provides. Each year, I am able to make the offering that He leads me to make and, inevitably, I grow in the process.

Auld Lang Syne: EXTENDING THE CHRISTMAS OFFERING INTO THE NEW YEAR

Sometimes the ball drops before you've hit your Christmas offering goal. Often, this happens because people want to give but, for one reason or another, can't give until after the first of the year. In fact, on several different years, I have had members or regular attenders approach me with that very news. They want to know if they will still be able to give to the causes of the Christmas offering in the New Year. If you have even one or two people mention to you that they'd like to wait and give in January, don't hesitate to extend the Christmas offering. I often make an announcement on the first Sunday of the year that we are going to be keeping the offering open for another couple of weeks, or even for the rest of the month, and continue putting the special envelopes in the bulletins. We've had as much as 25% to 30% of the final number come in during those first two weeks of January.

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By the first of February, you want to be able to announce that the Christmas offering was a success. Celebrate the fact that you were able to meet or exceed your giving goal. If you didn't quite hit the goal you were shooting for, celebrate the gifts that did come in and emphasize again what great things you'll be able to do with those offerings. As the ensuing year progresses, make sure you give

your people periodic updates on what's going on with the causes of the offering. If you used some of the money to help support a new church in the next state, and in June you hear that the church has just baptized new believers, make that announcement. Keep your people in the loop. You'll make them feel good about what they gave, which will make them likely to give even more sacrificially next year. If you exceeded your goal and that surplus allowed you to do something unexpected, even better. That is exactly what happened at The Journey through one particularly exciting Christmas offering...

Several years ago we had a Christmas offering goal of \$150,000 and an intention of splitting that money three ways: one third was going toward missions, one third toward the Journey Kidz programming and facilities and one third toward a benevolence fund. At the time, we were running an average of 800 to 900 people per week. God really blessed us; the offering topped out at about \$180,000 by mid-January. Even though we were only planning to give one third of the offering to missions, the extra money allowed us to support a new church plant that had approached us earlier in the year. Now that church has been up and running for quite a while and has baptized numerous people. If we had not committed in October to planning and carrying out a Christmas offering that year, we never would have been able to say yes to the opportunity to be part of God's work in that place. God was faithful to provide for all the causes He led us to set forth and then to bless us over and above so that we could be a blessing in turn.

If we didn't commit to the Christmas offering, we'd never be able to be a part of God's work.

CELEBRATE THE GIFTS YOU RECEIVE

Whether you hit the goal you set for your Christmas offering or not, you should never overlook the opportunity to celebrate your church's unified heart of generosity. As your attenders give over and above their normal tithes and offerings, acknowledge their efforts by:

KEEPING THEM INFORMED: *About halfway through your Christmas offering, report and celebrate how much money has come in so far. Thank your people for their generosity and encourage them to continue giving.*

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE: *Even if you don't raise as much money for your causes as you would like, focus your attention on the significance of what you do raise. Always encourage your people by celebrating how much has been given toward the offering's causes. Don't try to motivate them through guilt or through announcements that the offering isn't on track to hit the goal.*

SENDING A THANK-YOU LETTER: *I don't normally send a thank you after we receive each gift, but I do make it a point to send a thank-you letter to everyone at the end of the Christmas Offering or once we hit our goal. One of my best-received ideas has been to send a Christmas in February thank-you card that looks like a Christmas card but is mailed in February. The card is a sincere thank you and celebration of reaching our goal.*

PROVIDING ONGOING UPDATES: *As I mentioned above, update your people on how their money is being put to work throughout the year. Each time you do, make it another celebration of their generosity. Then, they will see the importance of giving even more the next year.*

As the leaves start floating toward the ground and pumpkins start transitioning into Jack-o-Lanterns, you have an incredible opportunity to set yourself up to receive God's abundance before the year's end. With a little attention and planning, you can be the conduit God uses to bring financial support into His kingdom and to draw the givers in your church into a deeper relationship with Himself. Don't let these days slip by. Don't buy into the unfounded fear of not wanting to mention money during the Christmas season. This Christmas offering is neither for you nor about you. It is simply a chance to cooperate with God in accomplishing His purposes. If you choose to seek His will and plan now to carry out a Christmas offering, I can assure you that Christmas will indeed be the most wonderful time of the year...for your church, for your givers, and for all who are blessed by the giving.

Don't buy into the unfounded fear of not wanting to mention money during the Christmas season.



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**continued on next page*

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Blue Ash Community Church
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Fellowship Christian Church
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Keith Merritt
Weaver CMC
Weaver, AL

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St. John Lutheran Church
Boerne, Texas
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In this Pastor-Led Coaching Network, You'll Learn from an Experienced Coach with a 20-Year Track Record

Meet Nelson Searcy...a Fellow Pastor Who is in the Trenches Every Day While Coaching Churches of All Sizes and Denominations.



Hi, I'm Nelson, and I'm passionate about helping churches like yours grow and reach more people for Christ! I'm also a pastor, leading a growing church in two of the most challenging places to reach the lost.

If your church isn't growing the way you know it could, you're not alone. Most pastors aren't short on passion — they're short on systems. **That's where this new coaching network can have a big impact.** I've helped pastors on the brink of closure turn things around and become a healthy, thriving church!

For over 4,000 churches, I've helped apply Biblical and proven Classic Church Growth principles to today's challenges through the **Eight Systems of a Healthy Church®**. These systems are practical, easy-to-implement and proven to work in real churches — just like yours.

My Personal Commitment to You:

If you will simply give this a "try," I will do everything I can, every month of this coaching network, to help you grow a healthy church and lead as a healthy pastor.

Let's proceed together to grow your church and achieve your maximum potential...as part of my **NEW Senior Pastor Coaching Network!**

Nelson Searcy
Lead Pastor, The Journey Church
Founder, www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com

Why Pastors Love Systems Coaching

Position Your Ministry for Success Using the Eight Systems



"When I planted our church, and when I joined the network, we were around 125. Today I'm averaging over 500 – 600 on a weekly basis; we have over 700 members. The Senior Pastor Coaching network **positions your ministry for success**, especially with the eight systems. Connecting with this training at the senior pastor level **will change you and your ministry's life forever.**"

Vincent Collins

Agape Worship Center International
Columbia, SC

After training in Senior Pastor Coaching, you'll be ready to:

- **Raise** small-group participation, online & in-person
- **Assimilate** first-time guests into active followers
- **Mobilize** volunteers for mission and growth
- **Ignite** evangelism and stewardship culture
- **Build** a leadership team that sustains long-term health
- And much more!

As You Prepare to Join this New Network, Please Consider That:

- **ONE** new tither will pay for this network.
- The average increase in attendance is **25%**.
- The average increase in giving is **20%** of your overall budget.
- Nelson will be there **step-by-step** to help you implement.
- Unlike other coaching networks, you get **EVERYTHING** you need to work the systems.

Get Essential Tools to GROW Like Never Before!

Get These Incredible Bonuses When You Join Senior Pastor Coaching Today!

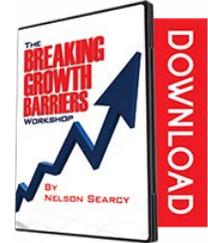
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ONLY 20 SPOTS AVAILABLE!

IMMEDIATE BONUS

Receive this comprehensive resource from Nelson as soon as you enroll.

The Breaking Growth Barriers Workshop — Downloadable Audio Resource (\$599.95 value) by Nelson Searcy.

6-hour workshop: Nelson Searcy leads you to identify and break the nine most common growth barriers that all churches face (and keep on facing), regardless of size.



MONTHLY BONUSES

FREE Complete Sermon Series Each Month. (\$2,759.40 Annual Value)



Bonus Monthly Newsletter. (\$719.75 Annual Value)



FREE Training Websites to Help You Lead Seminars for Your Church. You'll have access to free resources to train your church. **(Over \$495.85 Value)**



VIP Book Partnerships with Nelson. Get priority access to partner with Nelson as a co-author on best-selling book titles for your church! **(Over \$259.00 Value)**



SEMI-ANNUAL BONUSES

\$250 Celebratory Gift for You and Your Spouse. After you've completed 6 sessions of Senior Pastor Coaching, we'll reward you with a \$250 cash gift! Treat yourself and celebrate your accomplishments! **(\$250 Value)**

Plus...every 6 months after that you will receive another gift that you can use personally or as a donation to your church!



ANNUAL BONUSES — FREE EVENT PASSES!

FREE Pass to Annual Renegade Pastors Conference (\$599.00 Value)

FREE Pass to Annual Church Growth and Systems Boot Camp (\$599.00 Value)

FREE Attendance at Any Regional Training Events plus free passes for your guests (up to \$296.00 Value)

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OVER \$20,691.85 TOTAL ANNUAL VALUE!

Join Now and Also Receive The Breaking Growth Barriers Workshop for FREE (\$599.95 value) Immediately After Sign-Up and **Save Over 86%** on Your Membership!

Take Action Now – New Network Starts on Tuesday, September 23. Only 11 Spots Available!

Learn more and sign up here:

www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Growth

561.921.8488

www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com