



Practice: Most Generous Cities in America



A few years ago I remember reading a report about the most generous cities in America. It caught my interest because my home city of Birmingham, AL was ranked #3. Recently, I did some research to see how, not only my city, but others were doing. Much to my amazement I discovered multiple data points on the most generous cities in America. I was really astounded by the interest in the topic and the data that was being gathered. Not only that, but the affirmation of the church and the direction it can provide its leaders is pretty impressive.

Below you will find a summary of just a few of the research projects I located. I will provide an overview, link to the study, and some comments of application for church leaders. Finally, you will discover a few discussion starters for your next staff or leadership meeting to help you move your city up the list. Here we go.

Engage People

Overview: This study was done by The Barna Group and measured the percentage of people engaged in giving any amount to a church or non-profit organization. The top three cities are El Paso, TX/Las Cruces, NM, Lexington, Ky, and Memphis, TN. A couple of interesting findings are that the amount of wealth in a particular city did not necessarily make it more generous. It is important to note that other studies also determined that the more wealthy an individual is doesn't necessarily equate with a high level of generosity. Another finding is that in many cities a high percentage of generosity was directly related to higher levels of giving to churches.

Application: Generosity in the church is an issue of faith and discipleship and not wealth. Most churches do not possess either discipleship confidence or a strategy. Both are really easy to come by. However, church leaders tend to view the topic of money in fundraising terms at best.

Leadership Discussion Starter: Take a look at the article and see where/if your city ranks. Make a list of ten ideas your team should consider deploying via your church to help move your city one rank higher or insure you at least get on the list in the future.

Study Link: <https://www.barna.com/research/50-most-generous-cities-in-america/>

Create Culture

Overview: This study was conducted by Travelocity and was really fun. It studied hundreds of thousands of social media posts from across the country. Web posts with hashtags like #charity, #donate, and #volunteer to discover which cities talked about these and other topics like it the most. It is simply a study of words and language which reflects priorities of a culture. The top three cities are Casper, WY, Conway, AR, and Albuquerque, NM.

Application: Never underestimate the power of words. The language of money and giving is ridiculously important to your church. Many churches are silent on the topic which creates a very weak culture. Others are too aggressive when they lean towards talking about money in terms of budget and need. Most churches simply lack a clear and compelling language related to generosity. Money is

a powerful influence in our lives and communities. It can dramatically change a situation in a moments notice.

Leadership Discussion Starter: Preview your church's social media posts for the past year. How many times did you share about money, giving, or generosity? Would you characterize your money language as silent or aggressive, positive or negative? What could you start doing this week to create a positive language related to money and giving at your church?

Study Link: <https://www.travelocity.com/inspire/25-giving-cities-u-s/>

Visionary Cause

Overview: This study was conducted by GoFundMe and is very encouraging related to how powerful a clear cause creates action. It measured two data points. First, how many GoFundMe giving campaigns were launched and how many total dollars were raised. The top three most generous cities are New York, NY, Chicago, IL, and Houston, TX.

Application: In one year GoFundMe saw the number of people helped triple! Their mission moving forward is to "convince more and more people that they can change their world. It's reminding ordinary people that they have the ability to do something extraordinary by looking around themselves and helping someone in need." GoFundMe empowers normal people to make a difference. It easily creates a clear vision with access to impact. Churches can struggle with a clear vision and an easy access to impact.

Leadership Discussion Starter: Review your church's vision language. Is it something that any believer, on any level of spiritual development can accomplish? Is it clearly understandable or does it employ confusing language? Does it easily translate into practice? Can it be measured? What keeps your people from living the immediate response of a GoFundMe lifestyle where they see a need and feel empowered to go meet it?

Study Link: <https://pages.gofundme.com/giving-report-2016/>

Healthy System

Overview: This study was conducted by Charity Navigator and was the most complex of all. It studied the 30 metro markets that account for 62% of more than 7,983 charities evaluated by Charity Navigator. These charities generate 76% of total revenue and expenses. They analyzed the differences in financial, accountability and transparency practices. Statistics reviewed included program expenses, administrative expenses, donor privacy policies, contributions, revenue, and assets just to name a few. The three top cities are Houston, TX, St. Louis, MO, and Tampa/St. Petersburg, FL.

Application: How a church handles money is critical. Non-profits come under tremendous criticism for their practices and use of money. Every church lives under the microscope of previous public financial failings of non-profits. Clear policies, checks and balances, and tight accountability are a

must. The care with which we treat both the donations and donors should be impeccable. Every church should be able to hold their head high and talk about nearly any financial topic (i.e. excluding items like personal salaries) on a Sunday morning from the stage. This type of financial health just creates a stronger culture of trustworthy generosity. Donors are looking for this from your church.

Leadership Discussion Starter: Make a list of the ways your church builds confidence in your donor base. Think about communication related to expenses, financial health, accountability, success, and donor appreciation. Give yourself a grade A-F. Where could you improve? What is totally missing?

Study Link: <https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=studies.metro.main>