



Surviving the Summer Giving Slump

(What to do NOW to prepare)

Pastorpete.org

Every church I know of experiences the dreaded summer slump. As a leader you can mark your calendar and know that as soon as graduation is over many families will hit the road, head to the beach, or spend lots of weekends at the lake until school kicks off again in August. Churches take different approaches when it comes to the summer slump. Some accept it, some fight it, and others just deal with it.

Those that have decided to just accept the slump decide to go into maintenance mode in the summer. The Pastor takes a month of vacation, or decides now would be a great time to let the youth minister preach for a few weeks. Some dig through their old sermon files and preach messages they prepared decades ago to save some time in study, and preparation. Bible studies cease, evening activities crawl to a standstill, and with the exception of VBS, camp, and other activities for those under the age of 18 church for the most part stops for a few months.

Others fight the slump. They beg their members to attend regularly. Some even entice the congregation with clever prizes, gifts, and drawings. Still others offer children who attend a certain number of Sunday's a FREE trip to the water park, or pizza party. Churches that fight the slump take the attitude of "if you miss church you miss out, so don't miss!"

Finally, there are churches that just deal with the summer slump. In my experience, the majority of congregations fall into this category. Dealing with it means that you don't stop ministry, but

you don't guilt your people about attendance and giving either. You probably will not launch a new program in the summer, but you don't necessarily stop the regular programs either. For the most part Sunday's in the Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter all look the same at these churches. So what can we do to prepare for and better deal with the slump of summer?

Much of dealing with the summer slump actually has nothing to do with summer at all and requires churches to be proactive throughout the spring to prepare for the summer slump. Here are a few things we have done to get ready for summer at Cowboy Fellowship and minimize the impact of the summer months.

1. Get the word out early in the year. We start promoting summer camps, VBS, and other summer outreach and ministries early in the spring. Generally around February we are already signing people up for these regularly scheduled activities. This means people are more likely to plan their vacations around church rather than plan church around their vacations.
2. Get the sign up sheets out early in the year. Equally important is getting volunteers signed up early in the year as well for any event that requires large numbers of volunteers. For example to pull off VBS at our church we need a large number of adults. We don't wait until June 10th to put the sign up sheets out for the July VBS. Instead we are promoting and signing up kids and adults in March and April. If you wait until June many of your adults will already be missing Sundays and might not even know you need volunteers. Sign them up early and then remind them as the date draws near.
3. Plan a Powerful Sermon Series and let everyone know about it. We try to let our people know what they can expect from the pulpit throughout the year, but we are even more proactive about this as summer approaches. Promote your sermon series online, with post cards, and from the pulpit as much as possible. People are more likely to attend if they know what you will be talking about and if it relates to their family in some way. One of the worst things we can do is slack off during the summer when it comes to preaching.
4. Cast vision and expectations during the summer. Remind people about the impact your church is having on the community and how important they are to the work of the Gospel.
5. Take mission trips during the summer. This is a great deal of work and takes months and months of planning but sending a team out from your church during the summer reminds everyone that the work of the Gospel never ends.
6. Avoid the temptation to harp about the lack of tithes during the summer. When attendance drops so does giving—it's just how it works. When you get on your soap box about the poor giving, people tune you out during the summer. The problem is not that the people you are complaining to are giving less, it's that the people who are not sitting in front of you are not giving at all.
7. Avoid fundraisers in the summer. Car washes, bake sales, candy drives, and the like are used by many churches to help pay for trips and camp particularly for youth. The problem is they take lots of man power and resources to pull off. Man power is in short

supply during the summer. So, if Mom has to help work the car wash she is less likely to commit to other essential ministries. We have a no fundraiser policy at our church, we don't ever do them. Instead, we promote faithful giving through the tithe, and nothing more. However, if your church does fundraising to offset the cost of events, do them some other time of the year-- not during the summer.

8. Plan and promote fun family events during the summer. Things like family night at the local pool with free food and drinks are great during the summer. Our church plans a family night at the ball park each year, as well as many other fun family friendly events. These happen weekly and promote fellowship and keep us all connected through the craziness of summer. Not everyone will come to every event, but nearly everyone will come to at least one event during the summer. The key again is early planning and preparation.
9. Set the example with your own church attendance during the summer. I highly encourage ministers to take a break and go on vacation with their families during the summer months. When you go on vacation make sure you take a Sunday off. The church will be fine without you for one Sunday! However, when you are on vacation make it a point to attend another church on Sunday. When you come back, let the church know what you learned, experienced, and felt as you worshiped with other believers, wherever you happened to be. This should help remind people that church is important and something we should seek out even when we are away from our own congregations. I am always encouraged and blessed when I experience God with other churches as well. If you skip church while on vacation, don't get upset when others skip church during their summer vacation as well.
10. Make your services available for those that missed worship this weekend. In today's world, pod-casting and websites should allow nearly every church the ability to store their worship services on the web. At our church, the Internet audience doubles each summer as people tune into the pod-cast or get caught up on the sermon series after they return from vacation. This helps people stay connected and engaged even when they are not physically present.

There is no magic prayer to make the summer slump go away. It is a fact of life in the church. You can accept it, fight it, or deal with it as best you can. Personally, I have found that lots of prayer, promotion, and planning in the spring are the best ways to deal with the slump that I know is coming.