

Christian Groups to Help Small Churches at Risk of Closing Due to COVID-19

Several national Christian groups, led by the AND Campaign, today announced an initiative to help small churches throughout the U.S. that are at-risk of closing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The effort, which also includes former NFL player Benjamin Watson, is called the Churches Helping Churches Initiative, and it's targeted to assist congregations in low-income communities in urban areas that have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 economic shutdown.

According to a recent Barna Group survey, thousands of pastors (7%) are unsure or not confident that their church will survive the coronavirus pandemic and nearly a quarter of American churches (22%) have already reduced staff hours, reduced compensation or laid off employees. Another recent Axios-Ipsos poll found that low-income Americans are now far more likely to be at risk of coronavirus infection or job loss.

This Churches Helping Churches Initiative urges larger, more stable churches to assist at-risk churches in their own community. On its website, [churcheshelpingchurches.org](#), the Initiative has provided guidance and best practices for how large churches can pursue this type of outreach.

In addition, to help encourage generosity by stable churches, this Initiative creates a Coronavirus At-Risk Church Relief Fund that provides \$3,000 grants to small churches who are at risk of closing within the next three months due to a steep loss in financial giving. The initial goal of the fund is to raise at least \$500,000 during the month of April from

Christian donors, foundations and large churches. Already, the Initiative has secured the commitment of \$100,000 toward the fund. The grants will be administered by the National Christian Foundation and 100% of the proceeds will go directly to at-risk churches.

“Although the federal government has moved to provide some assistance to Americans and nonprofits, we believe that the church should be the first to help their brothers and sisters in need,” said Justin Giboney, president of AND Campaign. “Many of our churches in low-income, urban areas have been hit hard because of the virus’ spread in densely populated areas and the loss of jobs for hourly workers, who cannot do their work remotely.”

“It’s a very challenging time for our nation, and especially for many of our low-income communities,” said Benjamin Watson, former Super Bowl winning NFL player and Walter Payton Man-of-the-Year Award finalist. “My wife and I are honored to support this initiative to help churches, many of whom are pillars of hope and charity for their community in times of crisis. I want to invite all Christian organizations and followers of Jesus Christ who are able to help to come together and find ways to support these vulnerable churches and their congregations.”

Organizations, churches and individuals who want to give towards the fund and pastors of small at-risk churches can apply at [andcampaign.org](#). Applications for grants will begin to be processed on Monday, April 6.

“Regardless of whatever assistance our society may ultimately provide, the body of Christ should be the first to help at-risk churches,” said Joshua Crossman, board member of Pinetops Foundation, a Christian philanthropy. “Our foundation and many others are eager to play a role in helping encourage churches to partner together for the good of their communities and the glory of God. We are grateful for the AND Campaign’s

leadership in this moment and the many partner organizations who have responded so quickly and powerfully. It's deeply encouraging."

Along with the AND Campaign, the Initiative is supported and organized by a collection of Christian groups and leaders, including the Pinetops Foundation, Movement Day, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Church of God in Christ (COGIC) denomination, Pinkston Group, National Latino Evangelical Coalition, Jude 3 Project and Pulse Movement.