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The Field Guide for Data-Driven Ministry

How to Transform Information into Insights that Help Drive Your Ministry Forward

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Introduction:
Why Is Data Important in Ministry?

There's a reason today's businesses, nonprofits, and pro sports teams are turning to data for better decision-making. **Data enables you to see things you might otherwise miss that can help you make smarter choices.** That's as true for churches as it is for the Houston Rockets.

Data gives churches insight to better meet the needs of congregation members. Using data, church leaders can discover things like what programs members want to see more of, the different ways members prefer to give gifts, and even identify at-risk members before they disengage from the church.

Benefits of being a data-driven ministry include:
- Making smarter decisions (eliminating biases)
- Better meeting the needs of your members
- Creating a community where everyone feels they have a say
- Generating stronger, more personal connections with members

Breaking Through Barriers to Make Your Ministry More Data-Driven

The benefits of data are too valuable to pass up—and more churches are catching on. Yet a couple roadblocks continue to keep churches from unlocking the full potential of data. At TouchPoint, we believe it's time to break through these barriers so that every church can experience the positive impact data can have on ministry.

One of the ministries we are working with that has helped give us an inside glimpse into the difference using data can make is Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. We want to thank the staff at Redeemer for participating in some great webinars with us and for their contributions to this content (their insights can be found throughout this guide). They are a fantastic example of the major breakthroughs a church can make when adopting a data-driven approach!

The word "data" may trigger thoughts that technology is impersonal. In reality, the opposite is true. The idea behind using data is to learn more about your community so you can bring your congregation closer together.

Data is a form of listening. It's a way of hearing from your congregation and staff about who they are, what motivates them, and what doesn't. It's a way to learn more about their experiences and create greater satisfaction.

The heart of being a data-driven church is using information to understand the needs of your congregation. Too often as church leaders we make decisions based on assumptions or our own biases. Data enables you to fill in blind spots and make smarter decisions for the spiritual betterment of your members.

Using data does not mean you need to sacrifice biblical commitments. Rather, data is a tool for directing you to fruitful paths for discipleship and spiritual formation. By listening well to your people, you can design and implement ministry strategies that more closely fit into their lives so they more easily become disciple-makers.

There is an aura of mystery surrounding data that leads many church leaders to believe it requires an abundance of technology and expertise to make it go. **The reality is, using data to make better decisions requires nothing more than an open mind, a willing heart, and a commitment to the process.**

Data is a tool for directing you to fruitful paths for discipleship and spiritual formation.

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The perception of complexity when it comes to working with data is largely the result of disorganization. **When you have a plan in place for keeping your data organized and a strategy for putting it to work, it's less a matter of having the right expertise than it is simply taking the right steps forward.**

That's what this resource is designed to help you accomplish. Through this guide, we will share some practical steps you can take today to put data to work in your church to help deepen engagement with members, enhance discipleship, and make better, more informed decisions for the future of your ministry.

In this paper you will learn:

How to determine what data is really important and actionable

Why you should use data in the midst of work that is fundamentally oriented towards caring and ministering to individuals

How to solicit constructive feedback from church members and use it to make smarter ministry decisions

ACTION STEPS
3 Ways to Make Your Data Immediately More Useful

Get all your data in one place. Your data may be all over the place (event registrations, spreadsheets, volunteer data, etc.) Having it in one place gives you a single central access point to see everything that is happening in your church.

Clean up your data. A lot of data is messy with information in wrong fields, duplicates, etc. Cleaning it up gives you a clearer and more accurate picture of what's really going on.

Organize and build reports that drive sound decision-making. Look for ways to take your data and make sense of it. Ask yourself: *How can I use this information to move people to become deeper, more devoted followers of Christ? What types of buckets can you put people in to see movement in their discipleship or devotion?*

Step 1:
Define Your
"One Thing"

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If you've ever looked at a to-do list of 5, 7 or 10 tasks and felt that sinking feeling of *"how am I ever going to accomplish all this?"*, you know that numbers can be daunting. On the other hand, if that list just has one task—even if it's a big one—it feels more doable simply because it stands alone.

That's the power of one. **When it comes to taking steps toward improving your ministry, harnessing the power of one is an important strategy to keep you and your staff from feeling overwhelmed.** The idea is simple: Rather than focus on accomplishing many things at once, instead focus on one key goal and invest all your collective energy into making it happen.

How to Determine Your Church's One Big Goal

"What's ONE thing you would change about this church and why?"
This is the key question you want to ask because it gets people to focus on one thing—not three or five—but one. It makes them think about their top priority. Asking a specific question like this will get you very specific answers.

Seek feedback

1

Who should you ask this question to? Everyone involved with the church. That includes all staff and congregation members. You want as much data as possible so you can make the most informed decision.

Analyze and overlay results

2

Once you have all your answers to the question above (whether collected through interviews or surveys), take your results and look for the top trends. What are the most common answers? What are the most frequently mentioned concerns?

Decide where to focus

3

Use the data you've collected to determine the most important thing you can do to improve your church and the wellbeing of its members. Then make sure you clearly communicate that goal with all staff and congregation members.

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Examples of things a church might want to improve could include:

- Increasing generosity overall
- Finding people who are falling through the cracks before they fully disengage from the church
- Increasing the number of families that are giving on a monthly basis (recurring giving)
- Focusing on church growth (population)
- Making it easier for guests to become members (guest follow-up and assimilation process)
- Improving the facility appearance and/or function

*NOTE: Once You Ask, Be Prepared to Act

If you're going to ask a one-thing question, it's really important you have a plan of action. Even if your ultimate action isn't focused where someone wanted you to, at least they can see where the ministry is heading (the heart of your church) and that you are taking their feedback into account.

Establish Objectives to Drive Your Goal

Once you have determined your one big goal, figure out the key objectives that will help you achieve that goal. Choose 3-4 objectives directly tied to achieving your overall goal that can be clearly tracked and measured through data.

For example:

If your "one thing" is improving generosity, your objectives might be increasing online giving giving by $10,000 this year or getting 100 more congregation members to make mobile donations.

ACTION STEPS

4 Ways to Create
a User-Driven Church

Listening – Leaders should listen to staff and congregation members in every way possible. Why? Because there's no better way to discover and understand your church's problems than by listening to your members.
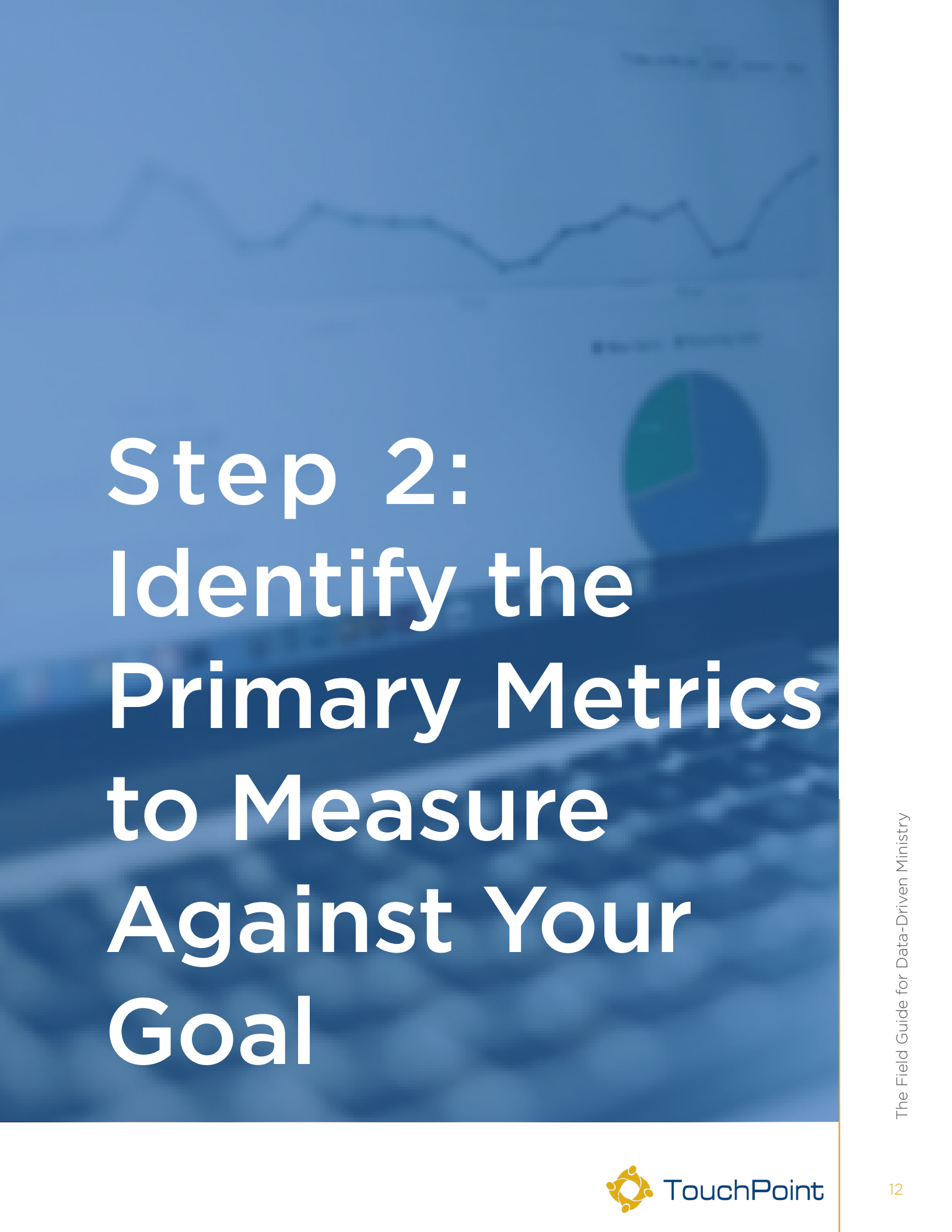
Practicing empathy – People are thankful when you listen and feel their frustration and pain. Empathy isn't just good business practice, it's an outflow of the gospel.

Constantly iterating – You should always be seeking feedback from your members and finding ways to improve. That should be continuous.

Remembering this story isn't ours – Our churches are God's story that he has given us. If we are shepherding people, we have to create a story for others—not for ourselves. **That's what user-driven churches do.**

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# Step 2: Identify the Primary Metrics to Measure Against Your Goal

Beyond pointing you in the direction of your goal, another great use of data is to show you the progress you are making toward reaching that goal. This is incredibly helpful in both keeping you on track to accomplish your one big goal and keeping your team motivated.

Start by establishing baselines that show where you currently are with your efforts and puts that in context to where you need to be. It's like looking at a map that says *"you are here."* You know exactly how much ground you need to cover. Of course, before you can establish your baselines, you need to know what data you should look at.

What Are Some Metrics You Can Use to Measure Your Goal?

When tracking progress toward achieving your goal, what data should you look at? While the answer to that question depends on your goal, there are some common areas and approaches that typically prove valuable. We've broken this down into three critical areas—**time, talent, and treasure.** Here are some examples of key data points you might want to examine in each area:
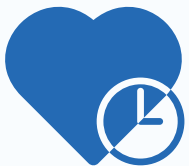
Time

How people are spending their time with your church is an incredibly telling indicator of where their hearts are.

Key data points:
- **Attendance** – When people are showing up, what events are they showing up for? What demographics are showing up in terms of age, gender, economics, etc.?
- **Small groups** – What percentage of the church is attending a life group, Sunday school, Bible class, or other small group?
- **Volunteer frequency/area** – How many people are actually volunteering? What are they volunteering for? How often are they volunteering?
- **Preferred communication channel** – What ways are people communicating and interacting with the church? How do the prefer to connect (phone, email, social, mobile, etc.)? Where do they spend the most time? Does the church bulletin get read?

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Talent

We need to empower the congregation to operate in their gifts and develop their own personal ministries.

Key data points:

- **Spiritual gift assessment** – What spiritual gifts do church members have that you can use to help achieve your goal?
- **Desired spiritual discipline growth area** – What are some areas that congregation members are interested in learning about and growing in more?
- **Vocation/industry** – What are vocations, backgrounds or qualifications members have that can be valuable to your church?
- **Hobbies/skills** – Likewise, what are some hobbies or skills members may have that your church can more fully utilize?

Treasure

Understanding the giving patterns of your church is important both for effective planning and developing the giving heart of your congregation.

Key data points:

- **Monthly vs. intermittent vs. year-end giving** – How do people tend to give in your church? Is it regular, random, or mostly just in December?
- **Special giving for ministries and missions** – Do special giving events inspire people to give on top of what they normally do?
- **Cash vs check vs online/mobile** – How do members typically make their donations? In what form does most of your money come in?
- **Preferred giving method that you don't currently offer** – If they could, how would people like to give to the church?

Use Data from These Areas to Establish Baselines and Discover Opportunities

Based on what is most applicable to your goal, by looking at different data points from these areas you can establish baselines showing where your church currently stands. Use those baselines to measure your progress moving forward.

You can also use this information to identify opportunities for growth toward meeting your goal. For example, if you find from your data that a certain type of event is generating greater attendance, hold more of them. Or if you find providing more online giving opportunities to members could boost overall giving, make an effort to focus more on this area moving forward.

ACTION STEPS
3 Ways to be a More Member-Driven Church

Find out what streaming technology congregation members prefer to use to listen to sermons. There are many options available, including Soundcloud, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, Vimeo, etc. Do your best to meet your members where the majority are. (Hint: the more places you can make it available the better!)

Offer members the option of monthly giving. Recurring gifts that are automatically pulled out of somebody's checking account are a convenient option for congregants, and help make giving more consistent and predictable for your church.

Make note of the vocations of your members in your database. When a disaster happens and the hearts of your congregation are ready to engage, this will help you leverage the talents of your member's specific skill set.

Step 3: Use Mobile Technology to Increase the Quality of Your Data

In case you haven't noticed, mobile devices are everywhere. Phones and tablets are part of our everyday lives. They're how we connect, find information, watch, listen and read. Our smartphones are in our pockets at all times—even in church.

Many ministry leaders see this as a problem. They see mobile—and a lot of today's technology—as a distraction from the things that are truly important. In many ways they're right, but it's not the technology's fault. Mobile devices are not inherently good or evil; rather it's how we choose to use them that makes the difference.

Since mobile devices have become an essential part of our everyday lives, why not work to make them a tool for good? Why not invest in making mobile an extension of the church for your congregation members? It's another way you can minister to people's daily lives and advance their discipleship.

The Changing Face of Church Mobile Applications

In the past, having a mobile app for your church basically meant just having a mobile version of your website. It was a passive way for churches to deliver information to community members. That has changed significantly.

Today's church mobile apps give staff and congregation members access to a wide array of actions and features—and benefit churches greatly when it comes to the collection and upkeep of data. Being present in the mobile space in a way that is different than how churches have done things traditionally is incredibly important.

3 Key Advantages of an Effective Church Mobile App

Here are a trio of ways a quality mobile app can benefit your church:

1

Communicate

Share information about upcoming events, let people know a new sermon has posted, ask for feedback or for members to complete a survey, or give members a place to send a message to a pastor. It's another way for you to speak to members and members to speak to you—even when they're not at church.

2

Respond

Give members a quick and easy way to respond to the spirit moving them in real time. Rather than waiting in line at a table to register for an event you mention at a service, they can do it immediately on the app. Rather than going home and getting on the computer to listen to a sermon, they can do it from anywhere on the app.

3

Give

One of the great things about a strong church mobile app is that it puts giving at people's fingertips. Even if an individual forgot to bring an envelope or cash to a service on Sunday, they can still make a contribution right then and there. Or they can sign up for monthly or recurring giving on the spot.

Examples of actions church members can take using a mobile app:

- Register for events
- Manage their giving
- Manage volunteer commitments
- Update communication preferences
- Listen to sermons
- Take a survey
- Sign up for a community group
- Log a prayer request
- Read a morning/evening devotional

How A Mobile App Can Improve Your Data Hygiene

Beyond the benefits listed above, having a quality mobile app can also benefit your church when it comes to data. This is generally true in two ways:

1

It can help you collect more data

You can connect your app to your database so that anyone who registers for the app is automatically added to the database. You can also use your app as a place to share surveys with members to gain additional feedback (data), and learn more about app users based on how they use the app (actions they take).

2

It can help you keep your data updated

Your app enables members to update critical information that may change, such as their addresses or phone numbers. When they do, that information will also be updated in your database. Keeping data on your members up to date is key to having a useful database.

The more your mobile app becomes integrated into your church, and the more staff and congregation members use it, the more valuable it becomes as a data tool.

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ACTION STEPS

5 Features Your Church Mobile App Should Include

Two-way integration between the app and your church database. Members should be able to update their personal information right from their phones. That keeps your database clean and up-to-date.

Make important announcements. Share updates easily and efficiently from your church's app with real-time push notifications.
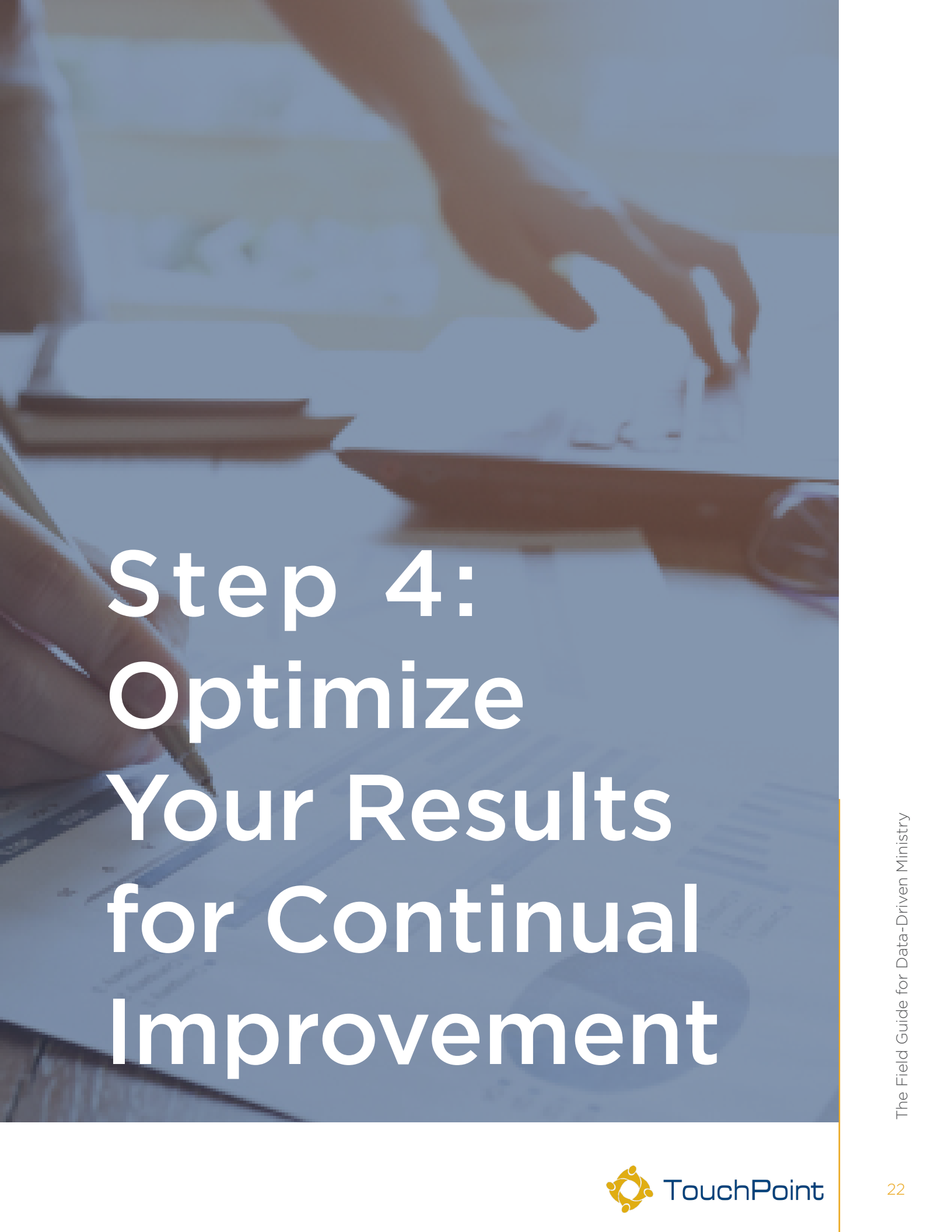
Giving through the app. You may have a church app offering mobile payments, but be sure to check how those payments are being processed and if there is a transaction fee associated with each gift.

Stream content according to your members' preferences. One of the greatest benefits of a church app is streaming customized, engaging content directly to your congregation through the app.

Take attendance. Small group leaders should be able to quickly and easily check members in, add/drop members, and update member photos in the church database right from their mobile device.

Step 4: Optimize Your Results for Continual Improvement

There is a term in the tech world called **"Minimum Viable Product"** or MVP. It's where a new product or website is developed with sufficient features to satisfy early adopters, then the final set of features is developed after considering feedback from the initial users.

What this does is create a sort of feedback loop where you build something, you put it out there, you take your data and learn from it, and you make improvements. This cycle of thinking is a great approach to apply to your ministry.

Even after you reach your goal and achieve your "one thing", the process doesn't end. **You should always look for feedback from your members and find ways to improve. That process should be continuous.**

Being a data-driven church is about more than just collecting and valuing feedback (data), it's about using that information to take action. Data is not the end, it's the means by which you're able to achieve your goal.

5 Ways to Use Feedback to Make Better Ministry Decisions

There are a number of ways you can leverage feedback to make better ministry decisions. Here are some examples:

1

Segment contacts based on their communication preferences

You have to get the right message to the right people at the right time. You also need the right communication channel. May churches still have a number of aging individuals who are active in the congregation, which means having a social-media-only communication approach is probably not a wise decision. It's important that you're segmenting within your church based on communication preferences. Learn how members want you to communicate with them.

2

Use spiritual gifts responses to discover potential volunteers

Getting people involved in volunteer opportunities that match up with their spiritual gifts can have a big impact on their discipleship. One church we worked with had their members do a spiritual gifts assessment and logged that information in their database. That enabled them to search for people with specific gifts and see if they have a heart for something like teaching in addition to the gift.

3

Discover where people are disengaging or falling through the cracks

If someone's attendance or giving start slipping, that is a really good indicator of a heart problem. Maybe it's a problem at home—with their marriage, kids, or a death in the family. Or maybe it's a problem with the church or questions of faith. Either way you want to be there. Discovering those things through the data—having red flags that go up—creates an early warning system so you can act. Your team can chase down those lost sheep before they walk out the door for the last time.

4

Make smarter technology investments

To have a deeper impact on the lives of the people you serve, it's important to offer more than just a one-hour impact each week. To do that, you need to understand demographically the makeup of your church and what technology they're using. Think about what investment will help you expand your reach. Whether it's video streaming technology or a new PA system, do what makes sense for your members.

5

Use data analytics to track giving

Tracking giving trends throughout the year can be helpful for strategizing and planning. For example, you can see if giving is down from this time last year and work to figure out why. Or you can plan a giving series during the time of year when you traditionally have the highest attendance and/or giving. Tracking and monitoring analytics can help you do all those things—and more.

ACTION STEPS
4 Ways to Become a Feedback-Driven Ministry

Conquer fear of negative feedback – Don't be defensive or resistant when it comes to hearing about the bad things. Rather, embrace this feedback. Understanding where people see problems will help you improve.

Cultivate a growth mindset – Don't get stuck in a fixed mindset. Embrace change. Praise your staff and volunteers for trying new things. Focus on making experiences about learning and viewing new challenges as opportunities.

Make sure you have a unified system for collecting, aggregating, and reporting on data – If your data is disorganized and in silos, you won't use it. Having a single source makes it easier to access and actually put your data to work (which is the essential to success!).

Pick "one thing" to work on over the next year and set benchmarks for measuring progress – Don't overwhelm your team by focusing on many different improvement initiatives. Rather collectively set your sights on one specific, measurable goal and put all your muscle behind it.

Conclusion:
Embracing Data as a Kingdom-Building Tool

Hopefully this guide had helped reshape your perception of data and open your mind to the possibilities and opportunities data can offer your church.

Data—rather than being something cold or complex—just means getting to better know the people who are the beating heart of your church. Putting data to work doesn't have be complicated or epic, but it does require a new way of thinking and a commitment to seeing the process through in order to fully reap the rewards.

To recap, here's how your church can start using data today to make smarter ministry decisions:

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Step 1: Define Your "One Thing"

Ask all your staff and congregation members, "What's one thing you would change about this church and why?" Use that information to determine a single measurable goal you will focus on achieving.

Step 2: Identify the Primary Metrics to Measure Against Your Goal

When establishing what data you will use to track progress toward your goal, consider looking at three key areas: time (how many hours, events, activities people participate in), talent (how people contribute their gifts) and treasure (how much people are giving to the church).

Step 3: Use Mobile Technology to Increase the Quality of Your Data

Today's mobile apps are changing the way churches and members interact. Having a quality mobile application will help both improve communications with members, and enable you to more effectively collect and manage data.

Step 4: Optimize Your Results for Continual Improvement

Even after you've reached your goal, you should continue to work to get feedback from your members and improve your services. Being a data-driven church means constantly collecting data and using it to make the church experience better.

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Why Data Is Important to Your Ministry

By taking the steps above, you are putting your church on the path to become more data-driven. What does that mean? Why is it important? It means you are committed to building your ministry around the needs of its people. It's important because your goal is to shepherd people to the Lord, to help build their discipleship.

The positive impact and community building we've seen among churches that have made a commitment to become more data-driven has been nothing short of outstanding. So while you may encounter some challenges along your journey, we urge you to persevere. As a result you will move your members and ministry forward in ways you never thought possible.
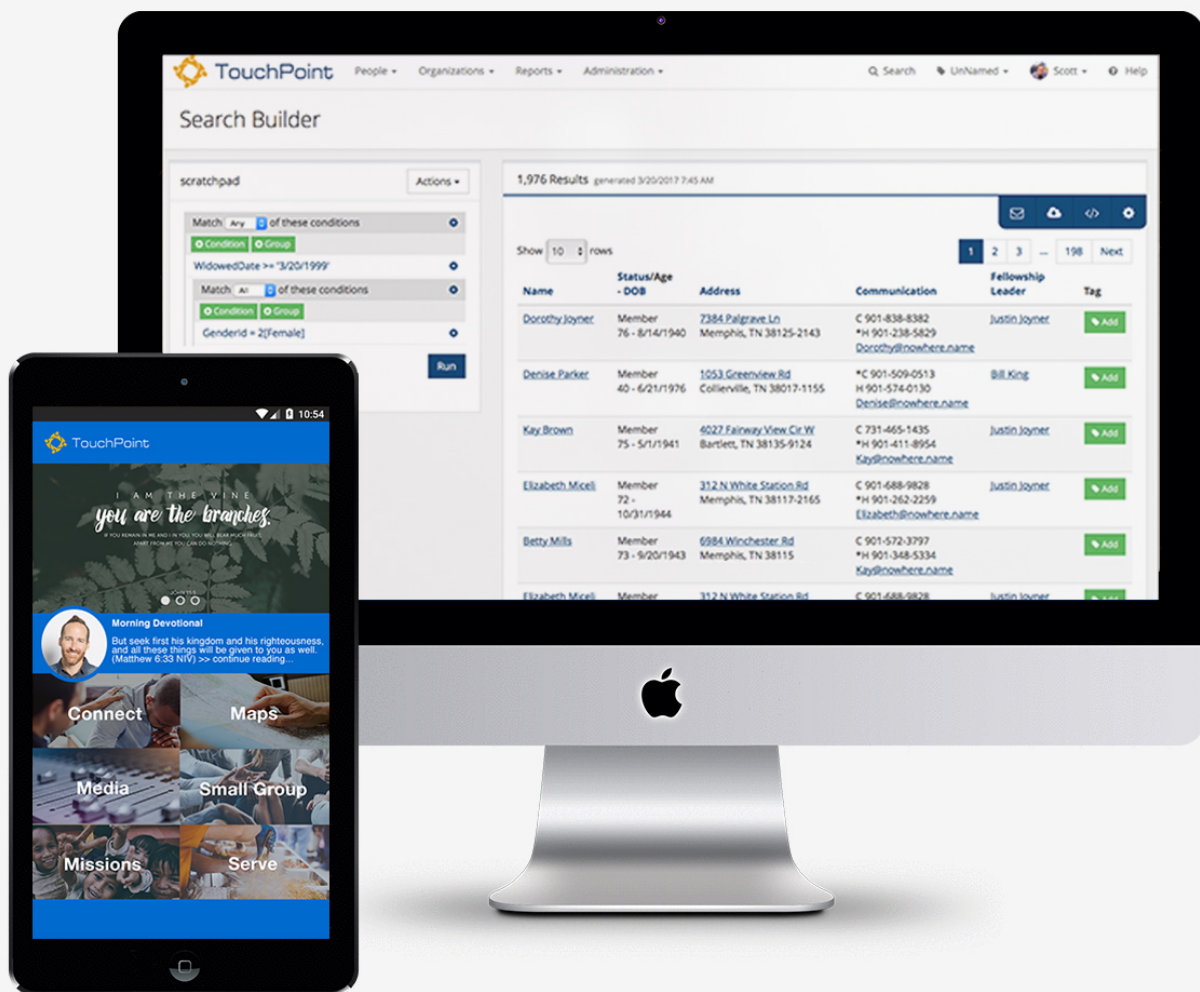
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Experience Church Engagement Software that connects your church more deeply than ever before.

TouchPoint is an affordable, full-featured church management and engagement platform for churches that want to stay connected on any device.

TouchPoint Engages Your Church from One Database You Can Access from Anywhere

- Get a 360-degree view of your members and visitors
- Manage everything from giving to event registrations—all from the same database
- Communicate in personal, relevant, and timely ways with every member
- Access your data on any device, from the office to your favorite coffee shop