



## Principles for Effective Responses – Planning your Pledge Program

### 1. Organize and Form the Stewardship Ministry Team

The Stewardship Ministry Team should include the Rector/Vicar/Pastor along with a leadership team of four to eleven people (depending on the size of the congregation.) Leadership positions often include:

- general chairperson
- chairperson for year-round education
- chairperson for the annual pledge program
- clerk to maintain minutes of the meetings and assist with communications

Meetings of the Stewardship Ministry Team should always begin with a Bible Study to assure a focus on understanding why we do what we do (growing the Reign of God rather than simply acquiring more money for the congregation treasury.)

Meet regularly and be sure to maintain a rolling 12-month (or even 18-month) calendar of future activities to insure adequate planning for upcoming events.

### 2. Design/Select the Most Appropriate Program(s)

Remember to keep the main thing, the main thing: bringing people into a closer relationship with God through increased commitment to support God's work in the world through the ministry of their church.

Identify the current conditions in the life of the congregation (consider emotional/spiritual conditions, sense of vision/mission, leadership, energy, recent successes and failures) and design a program/theme that will respond to the current needs of the stewardship journey of the parish.

Consider what's been done in the past 2 - 3 years: don't repeat last year's program.  
*If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten.*

Consider other major programs that will be happening in the life of the congregation and how they might be integrated into the overall program (anniversary celebrations, capital campaign, dedication of new expanded facilities, start-up of new ministry program, etc.)

Identify the ideal time/season of year for your annual campaign. When will there be the greatest sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing annual life of the parish, and when will there be the fewest distractions in the culture? Identify the optimum time of year for the pledge drive based on these considerations.

Be sensitive to the feelings and hopes of all members, considering these hopes and feelings when making decisions the members will be asked to support. This will generate high trust, good morale and mutual support.

Remember that people want to give in order to further God's work, supporting the ministries of the congregation and beyond, rather than simply to give in order to support a budget. Make all your reasons for giving relate to the mission

Ask/Invite everyone to pledge. Every member is entitled to the opportunity to respond to their adoption into God's family. Pastoral interpretation is necessary to identify the level of attention/contact each member will receive. Some may only receive a single letter with an invitation to pledge.

Determine how best to tell the story: personal witnesses (written and/or spoken); a formal printed Vision for Mission; video; any combination of methods.

### **3. Solicit Vestry or Bishop's Committee Support**

Present the program plan to the leadership for approval, and identify the level of involvement that will be expected from each member in order to support the program. Request vestry approval of the program budget. Remember: leaders can fake being interested, but they can't fake being present. Some congregations expect their Vestry members to make their pledges in advance of asking for pledges from the remainder of the congregation in order to be able to report on the response of the leadership in terms of % increase in pledges for next year.

### **4. Involve Clergy in Pastoral Conversations**

If yours is a congregation that has a history of the clergy not knowing the details of your pledge campaign, it's time to rethink that policy. There are two reasons for this, chiefly.

1. Often members communicate through their pledging / giving. This could be about dissatisfaction with the direction things are going, or frustration with clergy that has gone unvoiced. It could also be an indication that something is wrong in a household – a loss of income, a health issue, a change of some other type. If a member in good standing suddenly stops pledging or reduces their pledge significantly, then it could be an indication that something is wrong. The clergy should know, so they can follow up.
2. The clergy may know about a household situation, and a reason that a particular person or family should be handled more delicately in this year's pledge campaign. Giving your a chance to look at the list and to make notes or to take a household off the list and assign it to themselves will be an appropriate pastoral response.

The bottom line here is that *we should trust that our clergy are good at setting and maintaining boundaries*. They see beyond the gift potential of a family and should be made aware of pledge conditions and have the opportunity to inform the campaign.

## 5. Educate

Year-round education efforts and focused teaching during the annual stewardship emphasis period are both essential. Education events for the annual pledge drive should include some sort of gathering(s) of representatives of at least 25% of the households of the congregation.

Training sessions should provide those who attend with an opportunity to hear the witness of one or more voices from the congregation and/or outside speakers. Also, the training experience should include reflection on these questions:

1. What is it that God is inviting us to do, as revealed in scripture?
2. Just where am I in responding to this invitation?
3. What is it that God is promising me (i.e., eternal life)?
4. How can I be faithful in my response?

## 6. Send Inviting Messages

Witness statements should focus not on what folks *should do*, but rather on what the person making the witness has to share in regard to

1. What they believe
2. What they do in response to what they believe
3. What difference it makes in their life
4. A message expressing "I invite you to join me..."

## 7. Response System

Design an appropriate response system for distributing pledge cards, for returning pledge cards, and for tabulating and reporting results. Sample delivery systems include:

- mailing with a letter
- mailing with a letter and a brochure explaining a current vision for the mission or ministry of the parish
- distribution at a parish-wide festive meal event, with follow-up mailing to those who don't respond at the event
- distribution at multiple small gatherings such as cottage meetings.

Responses are often made by mail, placement in the offering plate, and/or returning in a ceremonial way in the context of a worship service.

## 8. Acknowledgement

Write personal thank you notes to those who pledge. Handwritten notes are best, and notes from the Rector/Vicar/Pastor are preferable. Include acknowledgment of the amount of the pledge and invite response if the amount doesn't agree with what the person(s) thought they

pledged. Include appreciation for the various ways in which the recipient makes a difference in the life of the parish.

### **9. Follow Up on Those Who Do Not Pledge**

It is essential to follow through on a timely basis with mail, telephone or a personal visit after the formal Pledge Sunday/Ingathering Sunday/Commitment Sunday. Normally, two weeks beyond Pledge Sunday is a sufficient grace period before beginning the wrap-up effort.

For persons without a history of giving to the church for the past three years, there is probably little need to continue to contact them beyond a single letter which invites their response and participation in providing for the ministry of the parish. For those who have a history of regular giving, you may want to first follow-up by sending a letter with another pledge card and then, if necessary, making a personal contact, i.e., telephone call or visit. Remember: a personal contact does not take place unless one person directly talks to another person; messages left on answering machines do not count as a personal contact.

### **10. Celebrate and Reward Workers**

Those who worked on the pledge program should receive appropriate personal thank you notes, recognition during a regular worship service, and a special festive party event.

### **11. Evaluate**

Assess what you did as thoroughly and conscientiously as possible in a non-accusatory manner. Include your insights and observations. Maintain a written record for the benefit of future generations of leadership and the future Stewardship Ministry Team.