

What to Do When your Pledges Don't Meet your Expectations

Reflect on possible reasons.

- Did you have key parishioners move, pass away, or go to a different church?
 - Be sure to have a conversation with those going to a different church to understand why.
- How much impact did the current economic and political uncertainty have on your parishioners? The [anxiety index](#) shows that individuals are concerned about a possible recession and don't know what to make of the new tax laws.
- Have you reviewed your annual budget to make sure it is efficient and reflects on the priorities of the parishioners? Did you hold listening sessions before the campaign?
- Have you followed best practices for a successful campaign?
- Do you have a clear mission and vision for the church? If so, is everyone on board with it, and has it been well communicated over the course of the year? Do people feel they have input into the mission, vision, and goals of the congregation?
- Did you do something different this year? (Different is often good, but it can also be too new for some.)
- Was your campaign Spirit-led or are parishioners still giving out of a sense of obligation?

It is OK to ask again—just do it differently and personally.

- Be personal: One-on-one conversations from the clergy, vestry, and stewardship committees are the best. If an individual pledge is down, it is ok to ask, especially from a place of support. Part of knowing parishioners is knowing their financial struggles. If someone didn't pledge, be sure to have a follow-up conversation.
- Find a parishioner who can make a lead additional one-time gift and use it as a matching challenge gift. This helps individuals reconsider where they are and also motivates additional giving.
- Space out your asks and think of targeting your asks for different purposes:
 - Reach out over the Easter Season, highlighting the essential work of the parish. The Easter season is a time of celebration. What are ways individuals can give to celebrate the work of your church?
 - Do a targeted ask for a specific part of the budget. This might be outreach, staffing, programming, or even something as seemingly mundane as boiler repair. Some people prefer to give to support a cause or specific need over an annual budget. Others like the

challenge of making sure a need is fulfilled, helping build enthusiasm around specific asks. Year-end asks are made by almost every nonprofit. Churches don't have to be different. Prepare yourself to do a more specific ask over the Advent and Christmas season.

- Take advantage of Colorado Gives Day and do a special outreach page for the parish or a particular ministry of the parish.
- Think of asking outside the congregation. Are there groups who use your space who might be willing to contribute? Business or community groups who appreciate what you are doing or love your building, dog park, or grounds? Could you take advantage of historical grants or grants for social outreach? The diocese can help with prospect research and foundation asks.

What Else Might We Do Differently?

- Do a series of visioning or listening sessions. Learn how to do one-on-one conversations and asset mapping through our Asset Based Community Development workshops.
- Shorten your actual fall public campaign and work behind the scenes. Have one-on-one or house meetings before the public campaign and increase your follow-up. Long, drawn-out campaigns often produce anxiety and people don't generally give out of fear.
- Thank you, thank you, thank you. Express your gratitude throughout the season through individual thanks and also congregation-wide celebrations.
- Begin to shift to year-around stewardship. Check out the year-around stewardship calendar of the Diocese of West Texas. (<https://www.dwtx.org/departments/stewardship/year-round-stewardship/>)
- Engagement is the main antidote to almost everything, including less participation in stewardship. Good stewardship is engagement. Engage parishioners in decision making, connect them socially within and outside of the church, open up more ways for people to volunteer.
- Think more like a nonprofit. Whether you believe it or not, you are in competition with them for dollars. Consider thinking outside the normal church box. For example, some parishes use the [Benevon Model](#), one of many successful strategies for giving.
- Make it super easy to give. Make your online portal stress-free. Experiment with credit cards through Kiosks and iPads with credit card fobs (available for trial through the Diocese). Try "text to give" during announcements.
- Help people work through their own financial constraints. Talk spiritually and practically about money, how to manage debt, how to plan for the future, about the many ways of giving.