

## Guide: Pastor Talking Points for Autumn – Winter 2020

### Principles to Keep in Mind

2020 has been an extraordinary year, and it is bound to continue to be so as the United States looks ahead to a presidential election and a likely increase in COVID-19 cases once winter arrives. Use this document as a guide to help you present a hopeful, consistent stewardship message between September 2020 and January 2021.

- **You cannot over-communicate:** As pastor, you know the most about what’s going on at the parish. Most parishioners only know what’s going on because of what they heard from your last communication, and they have likely forgotten half of it. What feels like over-communicating to you will feel just right for most parishioners. (Keep in mind that only 10-20% of your parishioners read any communication piece thoroughly!)
- **Your call to action must be clear:** Now is *not* the time for an indirect approach. What do you need parishioners to do so that together you can continue to advance your parish’s mission? Can you distill that call to action into one sentence?
- **You are telling a story – and your parishioners are the heroes:** Every bulletin insert, letter, email, Flocknote message, and pulpit announcement must drive this home. Make your parishioners the protagonists of this chapter of the parish’s history, and they will grow into the role.
- **The 80/20 rule:** Despite your best efforts, only about 20% of parishioners will respond – and that’s okay! Avoid lowest-common-denominator appeals, such as “If every household gave just \$100...” That depresses participation among the people you need the most.
- **The Body has been scattered:** Most pastors were shocked by the low turnout at their first “welcome back” Masses this summer. This does not mean your parishioners have left, but you do need to operate in different ways to reach each member. Utilize all tools available to you – announcements at Mass, video, mass-messaging systems, calling trees, and good old snail mail – to reach everyone.
- **Everyone reaches their lowest at a different point:** You may feel like the crisis has passed personally or organizationally, but there are parishioners who have been doing great until this week, when they shut off their computer, stopped answering mail, and took a break for a while. In light of this, no message should be delivered just once.

### Step 1: Determine Your Goal

With the help of your business manager, development director, and/or finance council, determine the following:

- **Where were you at this time last year?** How much had you gathered in offertory compared to what you had budgeted? Were you happy with the result? Did you have a year-end strategy? How did that go?
- **Where are you right now?** How much have you gathered in offertory compared to your budget? How are your participation levels? Are there any unforeseen expenses or savings that you've recognized since the pandemic reached our shores?
- **In dollars and cents, what is your goal?** How much would you like to raise between now and December 31, 2020?
- **What happens if you succeed?** If you make that goal, what does 2021 look like for your parish?
- **What happens if you fail?** If you do not make that goal, what does 2021 look like for your parish?

### Step 2: Plan

With the help of your staff and parish council, determine the following:

- **What do the parishioners know?** In short, think about Joe and Josephine Average Catholic at your parish. If you imagine they have *only seen half* of your communications since February 2020, and *remember only half* of what they took in, what do they know about the parish's financial situation?
- **What are the parish's top three challenges right now?** These could be operational, financial, ministerial, or spiritual.
- **What are the parish's top three strengths right now?** Likewise, these could be operational, financial, ministerial, or spiritual.
- **How can you leverage your strengths to meet these challenges?** Your answer to this question will become your strategy and the heart of your talking points.
- **If Joe and Josephine Average Catholic want to help, what's next?** These should be distillations of the strengths and challenges question above – utterly practical.

### Step 3: Create Talking Points

- Parish at this time last year: <INSERT AMOUNT>, or <INSERT AMOUNT>% of budget.
- Parish right now: <INSERT AMOUNT>, or <INSERT AMOUNT>% of budget.
- Parish goal: Raise <INSERT AMOUNT> by December 31, 2020.
- Top three challenges:
  - <DESCRIBE HERE>
  - <DESCRIBE HERE>
  - <DESCRIBE HERE>
- Top three strengths:
  - <DESCRIBE HERE>
  - <DESCRIBE HERE>
  - <DESCRIBE HERE>
- How we will succeed:
  - With God's help and generous stewardship, we will <DESCRIBE STRENGTHS> to <OVERCOME CHALLENGES>.
  - People can help by <INSERT OPTIONS>.

### Talking Points Example

- Parish at this time last year: \$800,000 or 80% of budget.
- Parish right now: \$600,000 or 60% of budget.
- Parish goal: Raise \$450,000 by December 31, 2020.
  - \$400,000 to reach budget
  - \$50,000 to be able to distribute in emergency aid to parishioners and people in the neighborhood
- Top three challenges:
  - Participation: While we are 20% behind budget, we are 35% behind in terms of number of households participating in offertory this year.
  - Exhaustion: Staff have been running livestreams, doing digital ministry, and deep cleaning the church for months and they don't have much energy left.
  - Contacting people: Our database wasn't in great shape before the pandemic, and we are having a difficult time reaching everyone.
- Top three strengths:
  - Prayer: Our Adoration program is still going, and people are still signing up for hours.

- Imagination: We have a lot of young, professional families at our parish with great ideas.
- Stewardship: Historically, we have been a generous parish.
- How we will succeed:
  - With God's help and generous stewardship, we will, through prayer, imagination, and our long-standing commitment to stewardship, reach our year-end goal, increase our participation, be better at communicating, and return to a sense of normalcy and equilibrium.
  - People can help by:
    - Move their giving online: This not only helps the parish plan, but it also provides steady funding to all our ministries.
    - Join the census team: We are gathering a team of parishioners to call each household in our database to gather new contact information. This is labor-intensive but can be done from home.
    - Consider a one-time sacrificial gift in light of our matching challenge: Five parishioners have pledged a \$25,000 matching gift to help the parish meet its needs. Every dollar given will be matched.