

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

Parish Offertory Enhancement Program



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Introduction

The Parish Offertory Enhancement Program is designed to accomplish a number of goals for a parishes having difficulty meeting monthly expenses, need to fund new programs, create a reserve fund, or fund capital improvements.

The main features of the Program include:

- A 10 to 12 week program timetable depending on the size of the parish.
- Expectation of a 25 to 30 percent expected increase in weekly offertory income.
- Principles of stewardship to inform parishioners of the parish's financial needs. Families are asked to regularly contribute, through offertory envelopes or electronic funds transfer, an increased offertory gift amount commensurate with their financial ability.
- The use of personal contacts by volunteer advocates to explain the need for enhanced offertory income and encourage parishioners' new offertory commitments.

The successful completion of the Program should produce:

- *A heightened awareness of the parish's financial needs*
- *A greater involvement by parishioners in the spiritual and material life of the parish*
- *A re-evaluation by parishioners of their past and present charitable giving habits*
- *New volunteers and increased interaction between parishioners*
- *A greater number of parishioners contributing to the parish on a regular basis*
- *An immediate increase in the parish's offertory income*

The overarching goal of this program is to provide an opportunity to educate and inform parishioners about the financial needs of their Parish, encourage parishioners to re-evaluate their current level of weekly offertory support, and commit to a new level of weekly giving commensurate with their financial ability. Through the implementation of the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program, a parish should realize an immediate increase in its weekly offertory collection.

Parish Offertory Enhancement Program Preparation and Implementation

During the initial three weeks of organization and planning for the program, the following should be accomplished:

- prepare the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program timetable,
- recruit a representative committee from the Parish Finance Council and the Parish Pastoral Council,
- recruit Lay-Witnesses who will speak about the role of the parish in their lives at two pre-determined weekend masses,
- develop a parish needs statement and generate the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program brochure (brochure optional),
- prepare the Parish Offertory Enhancement Announcement Letter from the pastor to all parish households,
- compile and analyze the giving history of the parishioners and suggest appropriate levels of increase for each.

The Parish Offertory Enhancement Program begins with the mailing of the announcement letter from the pastor to every member of the parish. This letter should outline the decision to initiate the program and include the parish needs statement, which explains the many financial needs that the parish would like to address if it were able to generate more income from the weekly offertory.

The parish needs statement should outline the following financial or other areas of financial need:

- *the parish is unable to pay its bills without dipping into reserves,*
- *the parish is unable to make payments against its parish debt,*
- *continued deferred maintenance costs on its older buildings can lead to higher maintenance costs in the future,*
- *the people who are employed by the parish deserve to be compensated justly and appropriately,*
- *the parish needs to maintain and hopefully continue to expand its ministries and services.*

The pastor should support the parish mailing with an announcement at all of the Masses to inform the parish of the program, to provide more detailed information as to the reasoning behind the program and its objectives, and inform parishioners that they will be hearing and receiving more information about the program in the weeks to come.

Over the course of the next several weeks, pulpit announcements and the bulletin should be used to provide more information to the parish family regarding the need to increase their weekly support. A meeting should be held to orient the lay-witnesses. A lay-witness should speak at each Mass over two specific weekends determined in the timetable.

The lay-witnesses are a critical element to the success of the program. Lay speakers make a major impact on the parish by telling their own personal stories about the role the parish has on their lives. These special presentations allow the greater parish family to pause and reflect upon their church in their own lives, how their lives have been impacted, and the blessings they received as parishioners. Their messages were very well received and resonated well throughout the faith community.

While the education and awareness phase of the program continues, preparations should be made for Commitment Weekend. The parish should prepare a second parish mailing – a personalized letter from the pastor asking every household to consider a specific weekly increase to their offertory. With this letter, the parish should include the program brochure/commitment card and return envelope. All parishioners should be encouraged to commit to increasing their weekly offering to the parish and fill out a commitment card to demonstrate their intent. The Parish Offertory Enhancement Program culminates with Commitment Weekend, whereby all parishioners are invited and encouraged to return their completed commitment cards to the parish at the Masses that weekend.

To ensure that the parish received the largest volume of commitment cards as possible, the parish should recruit a number of volunteers, called “Parish Advocates”, to canvass the parish with phone calls reminding parishioners to return their commitment cards on Commitment Weekend. The parish advocates are asked to make these reminder phone calls to their assigned parishioners the week prior to Commitment Weekend, as well as a follow-up call to any of the parishioners that did not return their cards for the following weekend.

The parish should conduct Commitment Weekend at all of the Masses on the designated weekend. Parishioners who do not return their cards should be encouraged to bring them to mass the following weekend.

The Parish Offertory Enhancement Program does not end with the successful completion of Commitment Weekend; in fact, Commitment Weekend serves as the starting point for a parish-wide change in its approach to weekly giving. The program asks for commitments from parishioners to increase their weekly giving and then to honor their commitments. It is important for the parish to provide updates and reports about the program, the total increase to the parish offertory, and how these funds are being used.

As a by-product of the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program, the parish may now have the ability to track the offertory contributed by its parishioners who use their weekly envelopes. All commitment card responses should be inputted into the parish database system as pledged commitments. From this point forward, the Parish Finance Council can now generate and receive detailed reports of the parish's offertory collection and compare it to the commitment card responses from the parish. The Finance Council can also monitor individual parish giving and prepare budgetary projections accordingly.

Parish Offertory Enhancement Program Timetable

Pre-Program Activity

- Prepare the Program timetable
- Recruit the Program Committee
- Finalize parish needs statement
- Draft Parish Offertory Enhancement Program announcement letter
- Prepare announcement letter mailing to entire parish
- Begin to identify and recruit Lay-Witnesses

Week #1

- Finalize materials – parish needs statement, announcement letter, mailing materials
- Conduct orientation meeting for program leadership committee
- Mail Program announcement letter and parish needs statement
- Pastor to announce program at Mass
- Bulletin insert to accompany announcement
- Begin Lay-Witness recruitment

Week #2

- Finalize all announcements, bulletin inserts, homilies
- Conduct Lay-Witness orientation meeting
- Bulletin insert at all Masses

Week #3

- Finalize giving segmentation and customize increased giving request letters
- Follow-up with Lay Witnesses to provide assistance (where necessary)
- Identify Parish Advocates (1 for every 15-20 active parish families)

Week #4

- Begin Parish Advocate recruitment
- Finalize parish breakout into regional zones for Parish Advocate recruitment
- Conduct first Lay-Witness presentations at all Masses
- Bulletin insert at all Masses

Week #5

- Finalize parishioner request letter mailing
- Conduct Parish Advocate orientation and assignment meeting
- Increased giving request letter is mailed along with Program brochure/Commitment Card, and confidential envelope
- Conduct second Lay-Witness presentations at all Masses
- *(Optional)* Pastor conducts reminder Announcement for Commitment Weekend
- Bulletin insert at all Masses

Week #6

- Parish Advocates conduct Commitment Weekend reminder phone calls (all week)
- Pastor makes Commitment Weekend announcement at all Masses
- ***COMMITMENT WEEKEND***
- Commitment Cards are collected at all Masses
- Bulletin insert at all Masses
- Option to hold Commitment Card collection after Mass as well

Week #7

- Parish Advocates make follow-up calls for Commitment Cards (follow-up visits conducted when necessary)
- Input parishioners commitments and responses into parish database
- Report Commitment Weekend collection results to the parish with bulletin announcement and (optional) pulpit announcement
- Conduct a wrap-up Commitment Card collection at all Masses
- Bulletin announcement at all Masses

Week #8

- Input parishioners commitments and responses into parish database
- Parish Advocates complete follow-up calls and visits (where appropriate)
- Report Parish Offertory Enhancement Program weekly collection results to the parish

- Conduct a “last chance” Commitment Card collection at all Masses

Week #9

- Input parishioners commitments and responses into parish database
- Parish Advocates complete follow-up calls and visits (where appropriate)
- Send follow-up letter to all envelope users / active parishioners who have not responded
- Report Parish Offertory Enhancement Program weekly collection results to the parish
- Bulletin announcement at all Masses

Week #10

- Send thank-you letter to all responding parishioners to acknowledge commitments
- Continue to input parishioner commitments and responses when necessary
- Report Parish Offertory Enhancement Program weekly collection to the parish
- Bulletin insert at all Masses
- Develop and present comprehensive plan maintain offertory increase initiatives

Week #11

- Prepare a final report of Parish Offertory Enhancement Program results to the parish
- Report Parish Offertory Enhancement Program weekly collection to the parish
- Prepare Continuation Plan to maintain offertory increases
- Hold celebration event!

The Parish Offertory Results

During the planning and preparation phase of the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program, data should be collected on the parish's weekly offertory collections for a period of 12 weeks prior to the program, as well as the offertory collections from the same period one year ago. These pre-program results and year-old average collection figures should be used in determining the weekly average increase experienced by the parish at the conclusion of the Program.

The parish's new collection results should be monitored over a 12-week period from Commitment Weekend in order to determine the average post-program collection increase. The following chart can be used for this purpose.

Weekly Offertory Collections Last Year		Weekly Offertory Prior to Commitment Weekend		Weekly Offertory After Commitment Weekend	
Weekly Average:		Weekly Average:		Weekly Average:	

Parish Offertory Enhancement Program Follow-up Recommendations

In order to ensure that the offertory increase is stabilized, it is suggested that the parish refer to the following continuation suggestions outlined below.

It is very important for the parish to acknowledge the participation of those parishioners who made a financial commitment to increase their weekly or monthly offering. A thank-you acknowledgement letter should be sent to every parish household that responded to the Program.

There may be a number of parishioners who do not return their Commitment Cards to the parish. The parish may wish to consider sending the envelope users who did not respond a special separate mailing inviting them to participate.

A report on the Program should be included in the weekly bulletin. Key items to announce are:

- a. Percent of parishioners responding (number of cards returned divided by the number of active parishioners)
- b. The amount of the average agreement received (total dollar amount on all cards, divided by the number of completed cards returned)
- c. The percent increase in Sunday collections for last year and the average of the collection in the weeks prior to Commitment Weekend
- d. It may also be of interest to prepare an “analysis of giving”, comparing former with current patterns of giving by using the actual collection returns

Example:

Giving Range	# of Families Giving Before	# of Families Giving After
\$25 and above		
\$20 per week		
\$15 per week		
\$10 per week		

The parish should continue to promote the opportunity for parishioners to contribute through an Electronic Funds Transfer at a site like ParishPay.com. As more people participate in EFT without any problems or complications, even more parishioners will participate. The parish could continue to promote the use of EFT by including an “EFT advertisement” in the parish bulletin at least once a month.

A follow-up to all parish households who expressed interest in contributing to the parish through EFT, but have not yet registered or returned their authorization form should take place.

A periodic report should be made to every participating parish household on the amount of their up-to-date contributions and a reminder on the amount of their agreement. If any parishioners have missed six or more weekly agreements, a special letter should be sent reminding them of their support.

It may be helpful to send to parishioners a letter just prior to and during vacation time to remind them that parish expenses do not take a vacation and their offertory support is needed every week of the year.

The parish should also provide regular reports to the parish on the income and expenditures of the church. It is only through communication that the parishioners will know what is expected of them and how their money is utilized and needed. Moreover, the parish clearly defined its financial needs as they were outlined in the parish brochure. Parishioners will be interested to see the progress on these projects and how these needs are being addressed.

Communication is the key to a successful parish follow-up. The more parishioners are aware of the Parish's needs and activity, the more they will respond to those needs as participating members of the church. The pulpit, bulletin, and general parish mailings are the best methods in communicating to the Parish and should be used as often as possible.

The parish should make a concerted effort in reminding parishioners of their commitment at least once a year. The Parish may also wish to incorporate an annual Commitment Weekend renewal. This can be done in a two-week period and include Commitment Cards, return envelopes, and, if possible, a case statement. The activities of this two-week period may unfold as follows:

1. The recommitment program will be held every year in September.
2. Commitment Cards return envelopes, and case statement would be prepared for a mailing similar to the program.
3. The first Sunday the parish could utilize a pulpit announcement – referring to the recommitment efforts and the mailing on its way. Stress the needs of the parish and why it is important to re-evaluate offertory giving, and then ask them to make a renewed commitment to the Church and return the Commitment Cards to mass the following week.

4. The Parish Finance Council would ensure that the parish mailing would be received early in the week to provide enough time for parishioners to reflect on their gift. A member of the Finance Council could speak the following Sunday.
5. The last Sunday would be for the return of Commitment Cards. The lay spokesperson would restate the needs of the parish and thank the parishioners for participating.
6. A thank-you letter would then be sent to all of those parishioners who make a commitment.

By following this simple format, the parish should be able to stabilize its offertory collection and keep pace with rising costs.

Appendix

Sample Parish Offertory Enhancement Program - Bulletin Insert Announcement

***“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”
(Peter 4:10)***

Why support our parish financially?

When was the last time you were given a gift? Was it your birthday? Maybe you can remember the many gifts that you have been given for Christmas or the birth of a child, or an anniversary. Maybe someone has given you a gift for no reason at all except to say “I am thinking of you” and “I love you.”

Certainly, when we are given gifts, it is appropriate for us to express our gratitude and appreciation for the gift by thanking the person in our own special way. We give thanks for the thoughtfulness and appreciation for the gesture. We acknowledge the gift-giving as a “nice thing to do” and we are taught as children to always say “Thank-you.”

What good is a gift if is not used in some way? What do we do with the gifts we are given? Do they stay in the box that they came in? Usually, we utilize the gifts we have received. We wear the sweater, we play the games, we read the books, we use the devices, and we take advantage of the gifts and use them the way they were intended. We take care of them. They are special. Gifts bring us joy, happiness, ease and comfort, or touches of beauty that we did not have before.

We know from the Bible that everything we have is a gift from God. We are stewards—a manager of the many gifts God has given to us. God’s desire is that we use the gifts that he has given us for building God’s Kingdom. If we are good stewards, we place our time, our talents and our treasure in God’s service. Our parish is the spirited place that it is because people use their time and their talent to serve the many ministerial needs of the parish. Our sharing of treasure is another practical way we build up the parish and in doing so build up the Kingdom. It goes beyond just “supporting the parish;” it’s about proclaiming the Good News of God’s love to everyone who comes to our parish. We have a two-fold need here: the practical need for financial support in the parish, and the need for people to see the vision and support the building of God’s kingdom through their offerings.

Lord, grant us the ability to honestly re-evaluate our lifestyle that it might reflect a desire to walk closer with you. Help us to wisely use the gifts you have entrusted us. Help us to take responsibility for our parish, to commit to a common welfare, to a deeper faith, and to a more consistent practice of our faith. Help us to know that stewardship is a way of life with you as Creator and us as the servants, accountable to you for our use of the gifts of time, talent and treasure we have received.

In the name and spirit of Jesus, we commit ourselves to be good stewards of the gifts entrusted to us, to share our time, our talents, our material gifts as an outward sign of the treasure we hold in Jesus.

Sample Parish Offertory Enhancement Program Pulpit Announcement

Delivered by Pastor

Today I am announcing at all Masses that we are initiating a very special program to help the ____ parish Address some of our financial needs and challenges. The program, called _____, is an increased giving program. With the insight of parish leaders, we have identified several needs that we must respond to:

- X
- X
- X

Let me assure you that addressing these needs today is essential. We have a great opportunity to strengthen our parish through this program and I am confident that our parishioners will respond generously. Our hope is to increase our weekly collection by at least ____%. Currently our weekly collection is \$ _____. To address the above stated needs, we need to increase our income to \$ _____.

In the coming weeks you will hear much more about _____. It is an effort to educate our parish family about the principles of stewardship, which, stated simply, is giving back a just portion of our gifts to God. Of course, giving back to the mission of the Church comes in many forms, not just financial contributions. While all parishioners will be encouraged to increase regular offertory giving to the parish through this effort, we invite you to examine other aspects of your life and how stewardship can enhance your day-to-day existence. The Parish and Finance Councils and I are excited to get started on this project, and I am confident we will be successful. In the coming days, you will receive a letter from me describing the Program in greater detail. For now, I ask that you pray for our success.

Sample Parish Offertory Enhancement Program Announcement Letter

August 31, 2015

Dear Parishioner,

Visitors sense it; those who are involved in our parish experience it. We are a spirited and special parish! We are blessed. We are growing and vibrant. I want to thank all of you who so generously contribute your time, talents and treasure to God to make _____ Parish a wonderful community of faith. I can speak of the wonderful faith community that is our parish family and welcoming spirit of our parish first hand. I am grateful for your warm wishes and I am truly humbled to serve this parish as your Pastor. I look forward to the many opportunities for us to grow in faith and share our love for God together.

I must call your attention to two concerns that the Parish Finance Council, the Parish Pastoral Council and I have about our parish finances. I am sure that you are aware that our parish has a \$1.2 million debt. While daunting in its amount, the parish debt is something that through time, we will be able to address. What is a more immediate concern is that the parish is operating in a deficit. Last month, the parish Finance Council and I were faced with the reality that the parish's regular monthly income could not cover the parish's monthly operating expenses. As our expenses continue to increase, the income our parish received through weekly offertory contributions has remained constant.

I am writing to you to announce a very special program that we are initiating in the parish. After prayerful consideration and discussion with the Finance Council and Parish Pastoral Council, we have decided to introduce a program in an effort to increase our parish offertory. The intention of this Program is for all of us to internally examine the role that our parish has in our own lives and how we can challenge ourselves to do more to support it. The enclosed statement outlines our parish needs.

The parish is such a vibrant and spirited community because of the gifts that you share so generously: the gift of your time to worship, the gift of your talents to the many ministries and programs we share, and the gift of your generosity and financial support for our parish. Your gifts go beyond just "supporting the parish," they serve to proclaim the Good News of God's love to everyone who comes to our parish. Right now, we have a challenge to face. But I know that the members of _____ can accomplish great things when we are called to action and ensure that _____ can continue to serve the faithful in the future.

While I am not aware if you are capable of increasing your level of giving, I ask and know that you will give this request prayerful consideration. In the upcoming weeks, you will hear more about this program and you will receive a letter from me asking you to consider a specific gift increase and a Commitment Card for you to document your intention. I ask that you return your completed Commitment Card during one of the masses on **Commitment Weekend**, _____. Thank you again for all you have done in the past and continue to do for our parish. Please know that I will continue to keep you, your family and our parish in my prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor

Sample Parish Needs Statement

Since _____, our parish has served the spiritual and temporal needs of a diverse parish family. For nearly__ years clergy, religious, and laity have helped establish a legacy that each parishioner benefits from today. However, nothing remains the same forever. Just like your family home, parish buildings constructed decades ago are in constant need of repairs and upgrades. And just like your family, our parish is constantly growing and changing. Though we have accomplished much over recent years, our shortfall in regular proportionate giving has limited our funding to current ministries and a few capital repairs, such as _____and _____. Stewardship giving is the key to enhancing our financial stability and growth.

As disciples of Jesus, we acknowledge all that we are and have are gifts from God. Each of us must nurture these blessings, not only for ourselves, but also for strengthening his Church and ministries to others. Faced with ever increasing needs for ministry and service, we now begin a new chapter in our stewardship journey as a parish by undertaking an increased offertory initiative.

This initiative will permit our parish to take a major leap forward as we continue to prepare our ministries and buildings for service for future generations. Each parishioner will be asked to consider a sustained increase in regular offertory giving. As St. Peter exhorts each of us in his epistle, “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another...” Please consider how your proportionate sacrificial increase and prudent use of his blessings will permit our parish to tackle the needs below:

- X
- X
- X

Once again like our founding mothers and fathers who looked to the future to provide for us, it is our responsibility not only to provide for our own needs but also the needs of our children and grandchildren who will come after us. In order to meet these challenges we look to each of our parishioners to prayerfully consider a proportionate increase in their regular support of our parish: a share of the generous blessings that God continues to bestow on each of us. As we look to the benefits, which will be returned to many, let us not lose sight that working together we can proclaim God’s message with pride.

Sample Request Letter to Envelope Users

August 31, 2015

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Salutation,

I am sure that you are aware that our parish has embarked upon a stewardship Program in an effort to increase our weekly offertory. In the short time since this program was announced, I have been encouraged by the enthusiastic response made by our parishioners.

The success of this program relies on the willingness of parishioners to re-examine their current level of giving and then make a commitment to a new level of weekly parish support. Giving to the parish is an offering of faith through the spirit of sacrifice. But giving is also a practical matter; it is the only way our parish can maintain our current level of service to the community as well as prepare for our future needs. We have chosen to conduct this Program with one thought in mind: that, above all, our parish exists to serve you and provide for the spiritual welfare of all our parishioners. I urgently ask you're your help and cooperation in this effort.

Please know that I am grateful for all that you do to make our parish a wonderful community of faith. Our parish records indicate that your regular contributions at Mass averages \$_____ per month. While I am not aware of your current financial situation, I ask that you would consider making a commitment to increase your offering to \$____ or more per week, if this is possible. After you have had the time to prayerfully consider this important request, I ask that you would indicate your gift increase by completing the Commitment Card attached to the enclosed brochure and return the card to the parish during any one of the Masses on **Commitment Weekend**, _____.

You may be interested to know that our parish has established an electronic funds transfer system as a vehicle to receive your offertory commitment. If you would like to have your parish support automatically deducted from a bank account or credit card, please indicate your interest on your Commitment Card and we will provide you with the necessary information to process your gift.

It is my hope that this Program will strengthen the relationship you have with your parish and deepen the pride you have for your parish. I pray that you will be challenged by this request and respond with a generous increase in your regular contribution, and I pray that you will see your contribution as a matter of faith – a way to return something to the Lord in gratitude for His goodness. On behalf of the entire parish, I want to thank you for the contributions you continually provide to the parish. I am grateful for all that you do to make the parish a vibrant Christian community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor

Sample Request Letter to Non-Envelope Users

August 31, 2015

Name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Salutation,

I am sure that you are aware that our parish has embarked upon a Parish Offertory Enhancement Program in an effort to increase our weekly offertory. In the short time since this program was announced, I have been encouraged by the enthusiastic response made by our parishioners.

The success of this program relies on the willingness of parishioners to re-examine their current level of giving and then make a commitment to a new level of weekly parish support. Giving to the parish is an offering of faith through the spirit of sacrifice. But giving is also a practical matter; it is the only way our parish can maintain our current level of service to the community as well as prepare for our future needs. We have chosen to conduct this Program with one thought in mind: that, above all, our parish exists to serve you and provide for the spiritual welfare of all our parishioners. I urgently ask for your help and cooperation in this effort.

While I am not aware of your current financial situation, I ask that you would consider making a commitment to increase your weekly offering to our parish. On the enclosed brochure Commitment Card, you will find a gift plan with suggested increases to your regular giving for your review. After you have had the time to prayerfully consider this important request, I ask that you would indicate your gift increase by completing the Commitment Card attached to the enclosed brochure and return the card to the parish during any one of the Masses on **Commitment Weekend**, _____.

You may be interested to know that our parish has established an electronic funds transfer system as a vehicle to receive your offertory commitment. If you would like to have your parish support automatically deducted from a bank account or credit card, please indicate your interest on your Commitment Card and we will provide you with the necessary information to process your gift.

It is my hope that this Program will strengthen the relationship you have with your parish, and deepen the pride you have for your parish. I pray that you will be challenged by this request and respond with a generous increase in your regular contribution, and I pray that you will see your contribution as a matter of faith – a way to return something to the Lord in gratitude for His goodness. I am grateful for all that you do to make the parish a vibrant Christian community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Pastor

Lay-Witness Presentation Outline

Thank you for agreeing to assist the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program. We have prepared this outline as a guide to assist you in preparing your presentation. The lay presentation portion of the Program plays a very meaningful role in the education process of the parish. Parishioners can readily identify with or aspire to the testimony of those who are actively involved in the life of their parish and give so generously of their time to worship and prayer, their talents to service and ministry and also their personal financial commitment to support their parish.

Above all, your personal witness is an opportunity for you to share with the parish what your faith means to you, the daily joys and possible struggles you see in living your faith, and how your active participation as a parishioner has helped to strengthen your faith. We hope that the following outline will be helpful as you prepare to craft your talk.

I. Introduction

Please take a moment to share with the parish who you are and how long you have been a parishioner at the parish.

Share your involvement in Church ministry, activities, community service projects, as well as your family's involvement in these activities. In addition, feel free to describe the feelings, the joy, the rewards you and your family have experienced as a result of your involvement in the parish (i.e., you have made new friends, feel a sense of belonging or ownership, learned new skills, discovered hidden talents, felt closer to God, or other rewards you may have experienced that can be directly attributed to your service to the Lord and to others, etc.).

II. Personal Anecdotes

Try to incorporate one personal anecdote concerning lives you may have touched through your ministry (i.e., a child, the poor, the elderly, the sick, etc.), or how your ministry has touched you.

III. Living a Life of Christian Stewardship

Have you given any thought to the wonderful things you do to support _____ as a direct response to Jesus' call for us to be disciples and to live a life of service to the Lord? God has blessed each one of us in many ways. Please share the ways in which God has blessed you in your life.

You may also wish to take a moment to define living a life of Stewardship – giving of your time, your talent and treasure, in your own words.

To live a life of stewardship is a way for us to “give back to the Lord in gratitude a portion of all that God has given to us.” When you think about it, our blessings are abundant. Your involvement in the life of St. Mary's is a way to “give back” to God – giving of your time, your talents and your resources to God. Take a moment to share with the parish the many ways in which your family participates in the act of “giving back to God,” and how that has impacted your life.

IV. Your Relationship with the Parish

Share with the parish the impact that _____ parish has had (or continues to have) on your life. Please explain, in your own words, what being a parishioner at _____ means to you. As parishioners, what are your expectations of your parish, and how are those expectations being fulfilled? How have you benefited from this relationship?

How has _____ Parish strengthened your faith? What does your faith mean to you and how is your faith realized at _____?

As a faith community, the parish also has expectations of its parishioners. Feel free to share with the parish, in your own words, what you believe those expectations to be (i.e., joining together at Mass in the worship of God, active participation in the ministries of the parish, service to the community, and financial support of the parish within our means). Our parish invites us to share the gifts that God has given us.

V. Conclusion

Conclude your presentation by encouraging fellow parishioners to take the time to reevaluate their commitment to _____. The upcoming weeks will provide everyone with an opportunity to prayerfully consider the ways in which they can “give back” to their parish. Encourage them to seriously consider this commitment of time, talent and treasure to the Church. You may wish to remind them that “when we put God first, when we give generously to God, He will not fail us.” You may wish to close with any personal thoughts you have on how you can reaffirm your commitment to the Church. Invite others to join you in making this commitment.

Questions for Reflection

As you are preparing your talk to the parish, take a moment to reflect on these questions. If you are so inclined, feel free to pose these questions to the parish during your talk for their own personal reflection.

1. Why should we as a parish give back to God some of what He has given us?
2. How can we share our time, talent and treasure with God?
3. What does Jesus ask us to do with the gifts he has given us?
4. How does our contribution of time, talents, and treasure help the Church? Help others?
5. What does “sacrificial giving” mean to me?
6. What benefits do I receive in return from God and others when I share my gifts?
7. How will I use my time, talent and treasure for God and others in the future?
8. What does it mean to be a good steward?
9. What does any one of the following Scripture verses mean to you?
 - a. “The Measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Luke 6:38)
 - b. “Everyone to whom much is given, of him much is required.” (Luke 12:48)
 - c. “This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you.”
(John 15:12)
 - d. “Keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35)
 - e. “Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides.” (Matthew 6:33)
 - f. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40-41)

Other Tips for Preparing your Talks

- Jot down thoughts and personal experiences as they relate to the different points mentioned in the outline and the reflection questions mentioned above. The more personal your presentation, the more effective your message will be received.
- Take your notes and begin to write your talk out word for word.
- Meet with the pastor to ascertain that you are including all the points you want covered.
- Practice the talk aloud in front of a mirror. Deliver it to your spouse, family or good friend and ask for their critique.
- Strive to deliver the talk in a sincere, enthusiastic and friendly manner.

Role of the Parish Advocates

1. Attend the Parish Advocates training and assignment meeting (date) to learn the specifics of following-up with parishioners regarding the timely return of Commitment Cards.
2. Receive an assignment to follow-up with households in your area to ensure Commitment Cards are returned to the parish.
3. Call your assigned parishioners prior to **Commitment Weekend** to remind them to return their commitment cards at Mass. Then, make follow-up calls to your assigned parishioners to ensure the timely return of their Commitment Cards.
4. Speak positively to parishioners regarding the message of the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program and its importance for the parish.
5. Make a personal commitment to increase your weekly offering during the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program commensurate with your financial ability.

Suggested “Friendly Reminder” Message

“Hello, my name is _____, a fellow parishioner at _____. Father _____ has asked me to call you as a friendly reminder that this weekend is Commitment Weekend. You have received a letter from Father along with a Commitment Card. We hope that you would take a moment to fill out your Commitment Card and return it to any of the Masses this weekend. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Parish Office. Thank you for your consideration, and thank you for returning your Commitment Card to Mass this weekend.”

Suggested Follow-Up Call

“Hello, my name is _____, from the parish. Father _____ asked me to contact you to let you know that if you did not have the chance to return your Commitment Card to Mass last weekend, it is not too late. If you have not done so already, fill out your Commitment Card and return it to Mass this weekend. If it is more convenient, please feel free to use the enclosed return envelope and mail your commitment card to the parish. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the parish office. Thank you for your consideration and for returning your Commitment Card to Mass this weekend.”

Frequently Asked Questions:

During your calls to parishioners, you may be asked some specific questions about the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program. We have tried to anticipate some of the questions you might be asked and provide you with the answers. Please know that if a parishioner has a specific question you cannot answer, please refer them to the parish office.

Q. Why do we need to fill out a Commitment Card?

A: The Commitment Card is an opportunity for you to document your intention to increase your weekly support to the parish. From the completed commitment cards, the parish will know how much to expect from the weekly offertory and be able to prepare and budget its finances accordingly. Commitment cards are not binding and can be changed or altered at any time.

Q. Where does our money go?

A. The weekly offertory collection goes to the ongoing operational support of the parish. It allows us to maintain all of the programs and ministries of our parish, and it also goes to paying for electricity, fuel and heating costs to run the church.

Q. The request is too high. I cannot give that much.

A. The request for your consideration that was mentioned in Father _____ letter was provided as a suggestion – not an expectation. No one in the parish is aware of your financial circumstances and the decision to increase your support to the parish and at what level is entirely up to you. Everyone has been asked to prayerfully consider increasing their support. Yet, no one is making that decision for you.

Q. I do not want people to know what I give to the Parish.

A. I agree with you, and I can assure you that no one is going to know what you give to the parish. After filling out your Commitment Card, seal it in the return envelope we have provided for you and return it to Mass this weekend. That way, you can be assured of its *confidentiality*.

Q. Could you tell me more about Electronic Funds Transfer?

A. Electronic Funds Transfer is a great way to make contributions to the parish without writing a check each week. You can have your monthly contribution to the parish automatically deducted from a bank account or from a credit card. If you check the box requesting more information about EFT, and return your Commitment Card to the parish, someone will provide you with all of the information you need to get started. You can call the pastor if you have any other questions.

Q. What do I do with the Commitment Cards?

A. Please fill out your Commitment Card and return it to Mass this weekend. If you will not be attending Mass at _____ this weekend, please feel free to mail your Commitment Card to the parish in the return envelope we provided to you.

Q. What is the average amount that parishioners are giving? How much should I give?

A. I cannot answer that question for you, since sacrifice will vary from family to family. The parish provided you with some suggestions on the back of your Commitment Card that may be helpful in making your decision, but your final decision is a personal one. We hope that you would consider increasing your support to the parish that is within your means.

Q. I do not want to use/ receive envelopes. I would prefer to give cash.

A. I understand, and many parishioners choose to give cash to the parish each week, and you are welcome to do that. However, we ask that you please fill out the Commitment Card, document your intention and return it to the parish. One of the reasons why the weekly offertory varies each week is because the weekly cash receipts fluctuate dramatically. By filling out your Commitment card, the parish can anticipate the contributions each week and prepare and budget accordingly.

You should know that your contributions to the parish are tax deductible, but the parish is only able to provide you with an annual receipt of your contributions if they are received through the envelopes or through Electronic Funds Transfer. Something you may want to consider.

Q. I am no longer a member of the parish. Why did I receive this letter? Or, please remove me from the list.

A. I appreciate you letting me know. We are contacting every registered member of the parish to remind them about the importance of this Program. You received a letter from Father _____ because the parish identifies you as a registered parishioner on its records. I appreciate you letting me know and I would be happy to forward your message to Father _____ and remove you from the parish records.

Q. A question is posed to you and you do not know the answer...

A. That is a great question. Unfortunately, I do not know the answer. I am sure that Father _____ would be happy to assist you with that question. Feel free to call the parish office and speak with him.

Please Note: We want to leave parishioners feeling positive about the parish, even if they choose not to participate. Be sure to thank everyone for their consideration.

Sample Thank-you Letter for Increased Offertory Commitment

August 31, 2015

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME,

Thank you for your kind and generous response to our parish's recent Parish Enhanced Offertory Program. Your commitment of \$000 each *week / month* will make a tremendous difference to our parish and its family. I am pleased to report that the overall success of this Program has exceeded even our most optimistic expectations.

_____ is blessed with the people who form our community and the parish that is our faith family and home. Our financial health and well-being is assured by the generous response of so many people like you.

On behalf of the parish and the many volunteers who assisted us with the success of our Parish Enhanced Offertory Program, thank you for taking the time to think about – and commit to – the financial support of our parish.

May God continue to bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Pastor

P.S. *Parishioners now have the opportunity to have their parish offertory contributions transferred electronically to _____ from a bank account or from a credit card. Please contact the parish office at _____ if you would be interested in honoring your commitment in this way.*

Sample Letter to Parishioners Who Have Missed Four or More Consecutive Weekly Commitments

August 31, 2015

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME,

The members of the Parish Finance Council and I are most appreciative that you responded so generously to our recently conducted Parish Offertory Enhancement Program.

_____ Parish continues to be a growing, vibrant and spirit-filled faith parish: due in large part to the many parishioners who dedicate so generously their time, talents and treasure to God to make _____ a wonderful community of faith. During the Parish Offertory Enhancement Program, we asked everyone to re-examine his/her own financial support to the parish and consider increasing it accordingly. Many of our parishioners generously agreed to increase their offertory giving, just as you did, to help our parish.

However, in a recent review of our records, we have noticed that, for some reason, your offertory contributions have not been in accordance with your committed increase. Perhaps this is merely an oversight. I would be most appreciative if you could resume your offertory contributions as soon as possible. If, for some reason, you are unable to do so, please let me know so we can adjust our records accordingly.

Please know that we would be happy to discuss this matter with you personally, and am able to provide any assistance that I can. May God bless you for your continued generosity and loyalty to our parish.

May God continue to bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Pastor

P.S. *Parishioners now have the opportunity to have their parish offertory contributions transferred electronically to _____ Parish from a bank account or from a credit card. Please contact the parish office at _____ if you would be interested in honoring your commitment in this way.*

Sample Letter to Active Envelope Users Who Have Not Participated in the Program

August 31, 2015

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME,

I am sure that you are aware that our parish embarked upon a Parish Offertory Enhancement Program this past winter in an effort to increase our weekly offertory. Since this program was implemented, we have seen a significant increase in our weekly offertory collection.

The success of this program relies on the willingness of parishioners to re-examine their current level of giving and then make a commitment to a new level of weekly parish support. Giving to the parish is an offering of faith through the spirit of sacrifice. But giving is also a practical matter; it is the only way we can maintain our current level of service to the community as well as prepare for our future needs. We have chosen to conduct this Program with one thought in mind: that, above all, our parish exists to serve you and provide for the spiritual welfare of all our parishioners.

Please know that I am grateful for all that you do to make our parish a wonderful community of faith. Our parish records indicate that although you are a regular contributor to the parish, you did not respond to our Parish Offertory Enhancement Program. While I am not aware of your current financial situation, I ask that you would consider making a commitment to increase your offering to the parish, if this is possible. After you have had the time to prayerfully consider this important request, I ask that you would indicate your gift increase by completing the enclosed Commitment Card and return the card to the parish at your convenience.

You may be interested to know that our parish has established an electronic funds transfer system as a vehicle to receive your offertory commitment. If you would like to have your parish support automatically deducted from a bank account or credit card, please indicate your interest on your Commitment Card and we will provide you with the necessary information to process your gift.

On behalf of the entire parish, I want to thank you for the contributions you continually provide to the parish. I am grateful for all that you do to make _____ a vibrant Christian community.

May God continue to bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Pastor

P.S. *Parishioners now have the opportunity to have their parish offertory contributions transferred electronically to _____ Parish from a bank account or from a credit card. Please contact the parish office at _____ if you would be interested in honoring your commitment in this way.*

Sample Letter to Parishioners Prior to and During Vacation Time

August 31, 2015

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME,

Thank you again for your kind and generous response to our parish's recent Parish Offertory Enhancement Program. Your regular gifts to the parish make a tremendous difference to _____.

Summer is a time for families to take well-deserved time off and relax together. However, our parish expenses do not take time off in the summer! In this regard, I am writing to ask you to remember _____ when you are away on vacation this summer in your offertory giving. You can easily do this by making offertory gifts to the parish for the time you are away before you leave or by signing up for our parish Electronic Funds Transfer Program (EFT). Please contact the parish office at _____ if you would be interested in giving through EFT.

_____ is blessed with the people who form our community and the church that is our faith family and home. Our financial health and well-being is assured by the generous response of so many people like you.

On behalf of the parish and the many volunteers who assisted us with the success of our Parish Offertory Enhancement Program, thank you for taking the time to think about – and commit to- the financial support of our parish.

May God continue to bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Pastor

P.S. *Parishioners now have the opportunity to have their parish offertory contributions transferred electronically to _____ from a bank account or from a credit card. Please contact the parish office at _____ if you would be interested in honoring your commitment in this way.*

Sample Thank you Letter for a One Time Offertory Gift Increase

August 31, 2015

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME,

Thank you for your kind and generous response to our parish's recent Parish Enhanced Offertory Program. Your gift of **\$000.00** in support of this Program will make a tremendous difference to our parish and its family. I am pleased to report that the overall success of this Program has exceeded even our most optimistic expectations.

_____ is blessed with the people who form our community and the church that is our faith family and home. Our financial health and well-being is assured by the generous response of so many people like you.

On behalf of the parish and the many volunteers who assisted us with the success of our Increased Offertory Program, thank you for taking the time to think about – and commit to- the financial support of our parish.

May God continue to bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Pastor

P.S. *Parishioners now have the opportunity to have their parish offertory contributions transferred electronically to _____ Parish from a bank account or from a credit card. Please contact the parish office at _____ if you would be interested in honoring your commitment in this way.*

Sample Bulletin Insert Promoting Electronic Funds Transfer

_____ Catholic Church

_____ Catholic Church is pleased to announce that it now has the ability to receive your offertory contributions through an Electronic Funds Transfer as a simple alternative to using parish envelopes.

Authorized contributions to the parish are automatically deducted from checking or savings accounts on a monthly basis. Contributions are made through direct deposit into the parish's account following donor instructions.

If you would like to receive more information about Electronic Funds Transfer or you would like to enroll in this program, please contact the Parish Office and we would be happy to provide you with an authorization form. Return the form in the collection basket or mail it to church along with a voided check or savings deposit slip and we can begin the process immediately.

Frequently Asked Questions about Electronic Funds Transfer

Q. What is Electronic Funds Transfer?

A. Electronic Funds Transfer is an automatic program that allows you to make contributions without writing checks.

Q. What is the advantage of Electronic Funds Transfer?

A. It saves time and simplifies your life! It helps the church stabilize its budget and save money.

Q. How is my electronic transfer of funds automatically deducted or charged to my account?

A. Once you authorize the transfer, your specified contribution is electronically transferred directly from your checking or savings account to the church's account.

Q. When will my monthly contributions be deducted from my account?

A. Transfers are made on the 15th of every month.

Q. If I do not write checks, how do I keep my checkbook balance straight?

A. Since your contribution is made at a pre-established time, you simply record it in your check register on the appropriate date.

Q. Without a canceled check, how can I prove I made my contribution?

A. Your bank or credit card statement gives you an itemized list of electronic transfers.

Q. Is Electronic Funds Transfer risky?

A. Electronic Funds Transfer is less risky than check contribution. It cannot be lost, stolen or destroyed in the mail. It has an extremely high rate of accuracy.

Q. What if I change banks?

A. Notify the parish and we will give you a new authorization form.

Q. How much does electronic contribution cost?

A. It costs you nothing and saves you time.

Q. How do I sign up for Electronic Funds Transfer?

A. Please notify the Parish or send an email to _____, Parish Finance Council at: _____ . We would be happy to provide you with an authorization form. Return the form to the Parish office along with a voided check or a savings deposit slip and you are all set.

Sample Thank you Letter Monthly EFT Commitment

August 31, 2015

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME,

Thank you for your kind and generous response to our parish's recent Increased Offertory Program. Your monthly commitment of **\$000.00** will make a tremendous difference to our parish and its family. Saint Helen's is blessed with the people who form our community and the church that is our faith family and home. Our financial health and well-being is assured by the generous response of so many people like you.

You indicated on your commitment card your interest to have your parish offertory contribution transferred electronically from your bank account or from a credit card. We are grateful for your willingness to support the parish in this way. In order for you to begin this, please complete the enclosed authorization form and return it to the parish so that we can initiate the process and establish the monthly transfer.

I call your attention to a few important notes. Transfers may only be made monthly. Each transfer will be made on the 5th of each month and can begin as early as _____. Please be sure to document your monthly intent when completing the form or on-line process. Also, once established the monthly electronic transfer will honor your commitment to ***the regular parish offertory only*** and not include any second or special collections. These collections will be taken in church as always.

On behalf of the parish and the many volunteers who assisted us with the success of our Increased Offertory Program, thank you for taking the time to think about – and commit to- the financial support of our parish.

May God continue to bless you and your family!

Sincerely,

Pastor

P.S. While your support for the parish will take place electronically, if you feel the need to “drop something in the basket” as it passes each week, drop in your empty weekly envelope and mark it “EFT.”

_____ **Parish**
Parish Enhanced Offertory Program

COMMITMENT CARD

After reviewing the suggested giving scale and praying about my response, I intend to give:
(Please select one of the following, I understand this is not a legally binding contract)

\$ _____ Current Weekly Gift + \$ _____ Additional Weekly Gift \$ _____ Total Weekly Gift

\$ _____ Current Monthly Gift + \$ _____ Additional Monthly Gift \$ _____ Total Monthly Gift

\$ _____ Current Yearly Gift + \$ _____ Additional Yearly Gift \$ _____ Total Yearly Gift

Name _____

Street _____

City _____, State _____, Zip Code _____

Phone _____

Envelope Number _____ Date _____ E-Mail _____

- Please contact me about electronic giving options that are available
- I have remembered the parish in my will
- I will be praying for the success of the Program.

For those who are giving their gifts electronically please submit this commitment card so that your increased gift is recorded in our system. Please be sure to change the amount of your contribution in the electronic giving application to reflect your increased gift to the parish.

Thank you!

Suggested Annual/Weekly Contribution Based on Income

Annual Income	5% Commitment Annually/Weekly	3% Commitment Annually/Weekly
\$100,000	\$5,000/\$100	\$3,000/\$60
\$75,000	\$3,750/\$75	\$2,250/\$45
\$60,000	\$3,000/\$60	\$1,800/\$36
\$50,000	\$2,500/\$50	\$1,500/\$30
\$40,000	\$2,000/\$40	\$1,200/\$24
\$30,000	\$1,500/\$30	\$900/\$18
\$25,000	\$1,250/\$25	\$750/\$15
\$15,000	\$750/\$15	\$450/\$9

Suggested Weekly Contribution Based on Percentage Increase

Your Current Offertory Contribution	25% Increase	30% Increase	40% Increase
\$5.00	\$6.25	\$6.50	\$7.00
\$10.00	\$12.50	\$13.00	\$14.00
\$15.00	\$18.75	\$19.50	\$21.00
\$20.00	\$25.00	\$26.00	\$28.00
\$25.00	\$31.25	\$32.50	\$35.00
\$30.00	\$37.50	\$39.00	\$42.00
\$35.00	\$43.75	\$45.50	\$49.00
\$40.00	\$50.00	\$52.00	\$56.00
\$50.00	\$62.50	\$65.00	\$70.00
\$75.00	\$93.75	\$97.50	\$105.00