

PLANNED OFFERING PROGRAM

(An appeal for increased offerings through the Sunday Offertory Collection)

The Planned Offering Program is conducted over a three-week period and includes a homily presentation by the pastor and lay witness presentations by individual parishioners. Following these homily presentations, a personalized, segmented mailing is sent to all parish households. This program can be adapted each year for use as part of a parish's *annual stewardship appeal*; that time when we make a return to God with increase (to the parish) of a proportionate share of our treasure (financial resources). The following is a comprehensive description of the program:

WEEKEND #1 PASTOR INTRODUCTION

The program is introduced on the first weekend with a homily presentation by the pastor at all Masses. The pastor's presentation is general and emphasizes themes of stewardship such as gratitude, sharing and accountability. This is an opportunity for the pastor to call parishioners to a greater awareness of the need for their participation in all areas of parish life, including the financial support of the parish. The homily becomes specific when the pastor explains the financial state of the parish. In this context, the relationship between the weekly Offertory collection and the operating budget of the parish is detailed.

The following week all registered parishioners receive a personalized letter from the pastor, restating the themes of his homily, with a special request for new, renewed and/or increased financial support (the gift of one's treasure) through the Sunday offertory collection. The mailing can be segmented if you wish into various parishioner groups (regular and non-regular contributors, school families and parents of children enrolled in religious education classes, for example). The segmented letters have a specific request for participation and support depending on the targeted audience and may indicate a parishioner's record of giving through the offertory collection for a certain period of time.

WEEKEND #2- LAY WITNESS TALKS

On the second weekend parishioners give a *witness talk* about their involvement in the parish and how they have come to a greater understanding of stewardship and the importance of giving back to God through the gift of their time, talent and treasure. Speakers might be identifiable parish leaders, school families and/or a long-time member of the parish—a parishioner who lives his/her faith commitment and can motivate others to become involved in parish life. Lay witnesses understand the concepts of gratitude, sharing, accountability and making a return with increase to God. (*Stewardship: An Overview*).

Lay witnesses might explain how the parish meets the varied needs of its members through its varied ministries and programs (liturgy, the sacraments, school and religious education for kids and adults, etc.), and then explain how these services are supported through weekly donations received through the Sunday offertory collection.

During the second week, parishioners receive another letter from the pastor that reiterates those ideas expressed at all the Masses the previous weekend. This letter can include a copy of the witness talk, or a special guide for parishioners to use to determine regular ongoing offertory support. A commitment card and return envelope is enclosed in this mailing. As part of the letter, the pastor asks that parishioners make a faith commitment of their financial support to the parish by completing the commitment card and returning it to the rectory in the envelope provided.

WEEKEND #3 COMMITMENT WEEKEND

On the third weekend, the celebrant recaps many of the themes of the previous two weekends and thanks those who have already returned their commitment card to the rectory, making an outward commitment of their support to the parish. Time is then made available after the homily for those others who have not already done so to complete their commitment card and place it in the collection basket if they wish.

PROGRAM FOLLOW-UP

A month or so following the stewardship of treasure campaign has been initiated, the pastor sends a personalized thank you letter to those parishioners who completed and returned a commitment card. A mailing can also be developed for those individuals who did not return a commitment card. The pastor may ask again for the gift of their financial support and include information about the program's success. All commitment cards should be recorded and filed for follow-up later in the year.