

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR GENEROSITY IN A CRISIS

Before addressing the crisis we are in, let me say how profoundly grateful I am for the decades long legacy of generosity among our parishioners. I have witnessed that generosity for years.

Concerns about the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) are real. Obviously, our primary concern is the holiness, health and safety of our parishioners.

Many of our parishes and parish leaders are seeking guidance on how to proceed during this time of uncertainty. In my 34 years here in the development office, we have had some experience in addressing times of crisis, economic stress, and natural disasters. There are some lessons we have garnered through those experiences.

These lessons focus on the importance of continuous communication and engagement with parishioners, prudent adjustments to short-term stewardship and development plans, and a focused commitment to staying the course of our overall stewardship and development plans. Of course it is necessary to make adjustments as needed, but never abandoning asking for support. Strong leadership, creativity, flexibility, and resilience have helped our parishes persevere through challenging times.

In light of the current and rapidly evolving circumstances, the development office offers the following guiding principles around our efforts for our pastors, staff and volunteer leaders. People follow leaders. I also know that we can't take a horse to water and make him drink but, we can make him thirsty, and that is my job and yours. :

1. Don't make assumptions regarding parishioners' giving ability. Allow them to make their own decisions as to their level of giving. According to Scripture and the teachings of the church, each of our parishioners has a spiritual need to give of their time, their unique abilities and their financial resources. That spiritual need doesn't go away just because we are in a crisis. It may have to be adjusted, but it does not go away. So we need to continue to ask for all three.
2. Despite the economic impact of the crisis, people still support their main causes where they feel the most attachment and the most connected. Hopefully, that place is the church. The main thing is to know the main thing, and keep the main thing the main thing. The main thing is a relationship with God and others.
3. We can't control events, but we can work toward greater control over creative responses to events. That is your job and mine.
4. Believe in abundance as Jesus tells us to do. Work to overcome your parishioners' perception of scarcity.
5. Encourage your parishioners to focus on gratitude because we still have so much to be thankful for. Spend time thanking parishioners.
6. As you always do as pastors, staff and volunteer leaders, point to Jesus for what's important. Encourage your people to focus on the Mass (even if it is on line for now), scripture, prayer, faith, hope, love, family, friends, and those in need. Increase opportunities for people to grow in their relationship with Jesus and service to others.
7. Talk about the impact of your parishioners' giving.
8. Keep in touch with those in need in your parish – the elderly, the sick, etc. Let your parishioners know you value them and care about them. Offer resources that might be helpful to them.

9. Increase communication with parishioners. Keep them fully informed and deeply engaged. Use various communication methods – letters, newsletters, emails, phone calls, web sites, podcasts, virtual briefings, etc. Use multiple methods to communicate. Step up your outreach to your parishioners.

In challenging times, churches that stay the course and engage extensively with their parishioners emerge successfully. These situations offer an opportunity for us to demonstrate our relevance and cement our relationships with them.

This is not the time to pause or delay our various efforts to connect with and engage our parishioners. Again, it is very important to note that in previous downturns, crises, economic stress and natural disasters, those who continued to push forward in their efforts ultimately succeeded, and those who took a step back lost ground.

Thank you for all that you do to strengthen our parishes and our people. The development office hopes these guiding principles, gleaned through many years of experience and periods of uncertainty, are helpful as you carefully navigate your efforts in the coming months.