

DECEMBER 2020

*Those who hope in the Lord will renew  
their strength. (Isaiah 40:31)*

# WISDOM

from ICSC strategic partners



This month's contributions come from  
the following ICSC Strategic Partners:



Each month ICSC sends you practical information, whitepapers, and tips, as well as other insightful information from our Strategic Partners to assist you with your responsibility as stewards of the Church. We are very grateful to our Strategic Partners for their partnership and commitment to ICSC, and their professional wisdom is a wonderful gift to ICSC members. In this edition ICSC brings you:

- **Philanthropy Without Fear**, *Setting stewardship facts straight during the COVID-19 pandemic* compliments of GP Catholic Services.
- **Donor Engagement + Community Engagement = Total Engagement**, *A Better Way to Give and Connect: Simply, Quickly, and from the Heart* provided by Pushpay.
- **Top 3 Reasons You Need a Digital Engagement Strategy** compliments of Blackbaud.
- **Recovery is Just Beginning** presented by OSV.

For additional information and resources from our strategic partners visit the ICSC website at [www.catholicstewardship.com](http://www.catholicstewardship.com)

# Philanthropy Without Fear

## setting stewardship facts straight during the COVID-19 pandemic

**One need only scan headlines or turn on the television to be inundated with news that only seems to breed, rather than quell, uncertainty.**

It comes as little surprise that we at GP Catholic Services have received questions regarding feared negative impacts on stewardship. The unknowns are many, and fear is an understandable response to the unknown.

Whatever the cause of concern, stewardship and fundraising professionals must have answers for their leadership when asked how to stave off the loss of giving in the current climate. Lessons learned in the past can help us articulate a plan for the future. Our advice: stay the course. And we have the data and experience to support it.

### **First, note past experiences of stewardship during market fluctuations.**

Historically, while significant downturns do impact charitable giving to some extent, the losses in philanthropic dollars are never as dramatic as the market downturns that drive them. For instance, the 2008 recession resulted in a decrease in giving of 7%, but that is considerably less than the 38% decrease the S&P experienced that same year.

There are three pertinent data points illustrating why giving fluctuations are less dramatic than market fluctuations:

- 1** Giving as a percent of disposable income rarely varied by more than 0.1–0.2% annually in the past 30 years.
- 2** Total giving as a percent of GDP has rarely varied by more than 0.2% per year over the past 20 years.
- 3** From 2005-2010, a period that included the most volatile years of the Great Recession, the net change in philanthropic dollars proved ultimately to be a decrease of less than half a percent.

### **Second, stewardship is driven by factors outside of policy or financial performance.**

Looking back to 2017 and the concerns about how changes to tax policy might impact philanthropic giving, just 7% of high net worth donors planned to decrease their giving based on new tax laws. Stewardship is driven by other very significant and intangible factors, including your community's desire to have an impact even when it stretches them financially.

According to the 2018 US Trust® Study of High Net Worth Philanthropy, the top three drivers of philanthropic giving across sectors were personal values, interest in the issue area, and firsthand or secondhand experience benefiting from the organization in question.

None of that changes, even in times of uncertainty.

What's more, there is a powerful argument to be made that for your community, the value they place on making a difference may in fact be heightened by a perception of need in response to crisis.

**Third, past experiences support that while giving does not go down during times of vulnerability, asking for gifts does. And that might be the culprit, not the market.**

So, should you consider forgoing that planned campaign or departing significantly from an existing appeal timeline? Should you hold off on the planned solicitation of an important prospect because your perception is that she or he is heavily invested and will therefore eschew giving in response to volatility? The short answer is no.

Doing any of these things will, at the very least, lead to a departure from an existing plan and delay giving – possibly not forever, but certainly for now.

If you alter course, your community may put off giving or not give at all. Worst of all, they may never even be asked by you. And rest assured, they *are* being asked by other worthy causes.

Instead of departing from your plan in the face of uncertainty, the better answer is to double down. Intensify your focus. Dig into your research. Unflinchingly engage your community. Explain to them why their commitments are more important now than ever.

As the Church, our clients, and each of us alongside them ride out this particular storm – not the first, and certainly not the last – remember that if you have a well-thought-out and achievable plan in place, your transformational moment is still within your reach. A win of this caliber far outweighs the relatively small risk you accept in going for it.



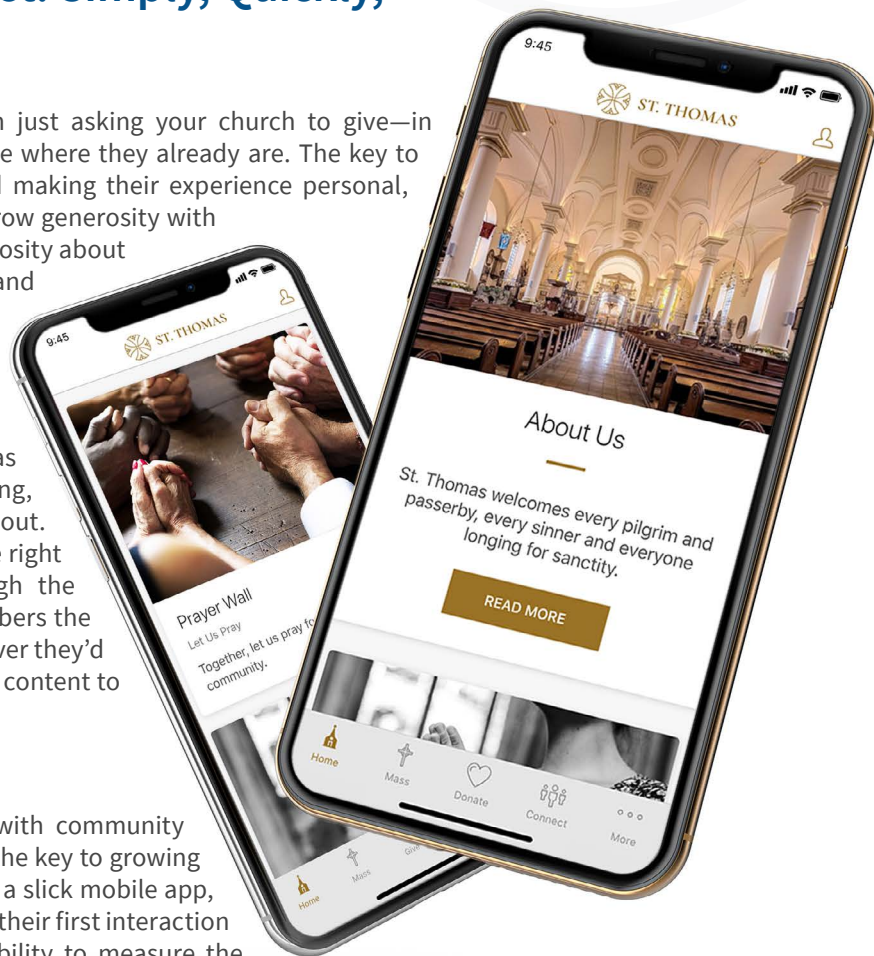
# Donor Engagement + Community Engagement = Total Engagement

## A Better Way to Give and Connect: Simply, Quickly, and from the Heart

**DONOR ENGAGEMENT:** Generosity is about more than just asking your church to give—in order to maximize generosity, you have to engage people where they already are. The key to engaging your donors? Removing barriers to giving and making their experience personal, transparent, and accessible. Increase engagement and grow generosity with a simple, streamlined giving experience that makes generosity about the moment, not the process. Make organizing finances and communicating with givers simple with the full financial suite.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Mobile technology has fundamentally changed the way people are communicating, shopping, and interacting with the causes they care about. But more than just “having an app for that,” you need the right mobile experience to nurture your community through the engagement process. Deepen connection by giving members the ability to participate on their terms, whenever and wherever they’d like. Make communication more personal by customizing content to each member’s needs and interests.

**TOTAL ENGAGEMENT:** Combining donor engagement with community engagement increases connection to your church and is the key to growing generosity. More than just having a simple way to give or a slick mobile app, total engagement works to nurture your community from their first interaction with your church to total engagement. And with the ability to measure the increase in giving and participation you’ll see this year, ChurchStaq is the total engagement system you need to reach your community where they already are.



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# Top 3 Reasons You Need a Digital Engagement Strategy

By Amanda Kepshire

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that digital communication is key to reaching people both effectively and efficiently. While older methods of communication are still valuable, we have seen the importance and value of strategic digital engagement and the impact it has on fundraising efforts.

## 1. Build on current communications

For decades, parishes and dioceses relied primarily on direct mail and in-pew communications in order to get Church news out, share stories, or make requests. It's not time to ditch these older methods of communication altogether, but it is time to expound on what you have in order to further your reach and encourage wider-spread engagement. Adding an intentional and well thought out digital component to your communication strategy is only going to help you achieve your goals quicker, while reaching a broader audience. While your elderly generation is happy to drop their offertory envelope in the basket or read the newsletter delivered to their mailbox, Millennials and Gen Z are looking for something quicker and easier.

## 2. Fine-tune your marketing by utilizing your data

We've already established that the Catholic Church has a tendency to keep communication methods traditional, even as the digital world continues to expand. While there is something to be said about the importance of these seasoned methods of distribution, it's harder to fine-tune them in a way that makes them work smarter for you. You can get so much more out of your database once you know how to use it to your advantage. With an online marketing strategy and the right tools, you can connect with longstanding and prospective supporters in a tangible, personalized way. Automated campaigns stimulate engagement and action through targeted welcome messages and personalized appeals. As you gain more information about your donors, you can expand how you steward them and tailor even more specific messaging. Don't let your data just sit on the sidelines!

## 3. A beeline to online giving

While you utilize strategic marketing campaigns, take advantage of smart online and mobile donations forms that dynamically tailor your ask and provide flexible options – like recurring, matching, and tribute gifts – to optimize conversion and maximize giving. While you have their attention on a digital platform, make it easy for them to take the next step to give. Online communications pave the way for your supporters, or potential supporters, to take action right away as opposed to placing an envelope on the counter for later or relying on an errand to pick up stamps.

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### About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, companies, education institutions, healthcare organizations, and the individual change agents who support them.



# RECOVERY IS JUST BEGINNING

BY JIM WEIGERT  
OSV CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

In the third quarter, parishes began re-opening and at least in some part, returning to work. However, parishioners are continuing to stay home out of caution for their families' health or in compliance with changing local restrictions. Government support programs have also either stopped, paused or been inconsistent in helping parishes. In any case, the next several months will continue to be challenging. However, we have seen success with parishes and dioceses that implementing new strategies to reach their parishioners.

Communicating with parishioners is key to recovery. Yet it is communicating in ways that are new to many parishes and dioceses. No longer can a parish rely on the same printed bulletin as the main source of communication especially as printed materials are often restricted and not all parishioners are returning to the church. Customers have found success with digital bulletins, emails, text messages and auto-calling to keep in touch, engage, reach out and inform. Even curriculum programs require digital elements to be successful as parents continue to support learning at home for their religious education support.

## TAKING ACTION YIELDS SUCCESS

Customers are seeing success in fundraising with adapted programs as well. While traditional fund-raising programs are still important and should be part of a regular approach to financial health, customers are taking advantage of programs that have been adapted for the current times as their first steps to recovery. Those are shorter and quicker programs that require less resources to execute and provide faster results. Parishes that have been transparent and open with the parishioners about their needs are finding the most success, especially when they have used that open communication approach and have also acted on implementing programs.

The first five parishes that have implemented Capital Infusion Programs have raised more than \$320,000 for their recovery needs. One parish had pledges of more than \$150,000 which was over 15% of their annual offertory in the 90-day program. Offertory Recovery Programs have also seen success with the first four parishes who have implemented their programs seeing an average of over 900% return on their investment and projected offertory increases of over \$360,000 above their previous year offertories.

In addition, while many parishes and diocese had an online giving solution in place, there is a large percentage of parishes that have yet to implement their own programs. Those that have acted and implemented a digital giving solution of their own have seen a 40% increase in digital donations since March 2020, and a 74% increase year over year. This is through implementing the digital giving program as well as promoting its use to parishioners. Parishes who implement an envelope program that includes pre-paid postage return envelope options combined with digital giving solutions see the most success.

## RECOVER AND PLAN FOR 2021

The new year will continue to be challenging but the parishes and dioceses that plan for 2021 and beyond will see the most success. Parishes are not only seeing success with adapted fund-raising programs, but also in preparing for feasibility studies which will be key to help determine the best approach and timing as well as realistic goals for their programs in 2021 and beyond. The road to recovery is much more of a marathon than a race, but those who take action to start are finding their communities both understanding and generous.



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THE CHURCH**