

Tools & Tips for Your Pledge Campaign, Special Appeals, & Letters

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Over the last few years research has been conducted in the Episcopal church into pledging. The research has indicated that many parishioners no longer pledge and are not inclined to do so. You may have seen this in your parish. The reasons behind this disinterest in pledging have more to do with the lack of mission-driven information being shared, as well as a lack of a clear understanding of how resources are being used in the church.

Instead of ongoing communication that strengthens a church's mission and vision, with a focus on biblical stewardship, many parishes simply announce that the annual pledge campaign is upon us, and a letter can be picked up at the back of the church. The letter often sounds like a homily on giving with the last paragraph asking parishioners to help the church know what it can expect for the new year's budget and often a request to help prevent a deficit. Such a letter is lackluster and uninspiring. No wonder parishioners lose the letter in the pile of bills.

Here are some resources to help refresh, renew, and invigorate your Pledge Campaign. Used in conjunction with a year-round stewardship focus you will see an increase in giving – of time, talent, and treasure.

Stuck on what to write? Short on time? Need inspiration? Check out [The Episcopal Network for Stewardship here](#). They have many resources and tools to help get you started. Or become a member of TENS and download their letters and other resources and fit them to your context.

[Annual Pledge Campaign](#) - What comes in an Annual Pledge Campaign through TENS

TENS members can view and download complete pledge campaign packages for use in congregational stewardship. Each year, the TENS members and our extensive network help us to create a theme around which our stewardship campaign materials revolve. This theme is a common point we can use to highlight a particular nuance of our stewardship theology.

TENS organizes our annual campaign resources by liturgical year, beginning Advent One and continuing through Christ the King. Resources are added as they are created, and the entire pledge campaign package will be ready by mid-June. As a member you will find:

- A theological statement about the annual theme and how it can be used
- A timeline and instruction guide for the annual campaign resources
- Sample letters from the clergy and wardens/stewardship committee
- Prayers of the People for use during your pledge campaign
- Logos for use in marketing and materials in English and Spanish
- Sample pledge cards – customizable and ready for use
- Seasonal reflections, available in .doc and .pdf which relate the theme of the season to stewardship perspectives

- Weekly reflections on the October and November Sundays which tie to the lectionary readings and highlight stewardship themes

A Note on Special Appeals

If you are looking for guidance on a Special Appeal – so *not* the annual Pledge Campaign and *not* a large Capital Campaign for an extraordinary purpose [here is a document I recommend from the Episcopal Church Foundation](#). I have also saved the PDF, entitled *ECF How To Run A Special Appeal* to the Pledge Tools and Plans file folder.

Also, here are some [customizable tools for your special appeal](#). These are also provided by the Episcopal Church Foundation. Please remember to make these tools fit your church's context.

Other Tips to Help Letter Campaigns

Please keep in mind the following (which some of the above-mentioned resources do not). These tips will increase the envelope open rate and response rate for all your church letters:

- Use no less than a size 13 font for the letter. Most people aged 40 and over have differing seeing abilities – don't harm your readers trying to squeeze everything into one page.
- Use rhythmic sentences – a mix of long and very short.
- Have plenty of white space.
- Images are *not* needed but can be used sparingly *if* they add to the letter and tie into what is being shared. Only use images if the letter will be printed in colour and the image is clear.
- A letter may be several pages in length so long as it is compelling. And always make every word count.
- Write at a grade 8 level or less. That said, picture different parishioners reading the letter and write to them. If your parish would resonate with a more formal tone, do that. However, if your parish would respond better to a more informal letter please write with that tone.
- Keep regular or wide margins. Do not shrink the margins.
- Use a bold typeface occasionally for short phrases that are key and help sum up the letter – it helps the skimmers to keep skimming.
- Utilize a P.S. that is short and summarizes the call to action. I.e., "P.S. St. Timothy's is invaluable to our community here in Shad Bay. Continue to make a difference in the lives of parishioners and the local community. Please mail in your completed Pledge Form today. Thank you!"
- Use a full page for a pledge sheet response form and insert the name/s and address of the individual/family the sheet is for (mail merge can do this for you from the excel spreadsheet you are likely using). If you do not know how to use mail merge there are

many tutorials and step-by-step instructions that can be found on YouTube, Microsoft Windows help, etc.

- When you mail the letter do not use a window envelope unless you want the letter to look like a bill (which you don't of course). To increase the open rate of the letter, use an irregular-sized envelope, and/or one that is any colour but white or beige. Also, handwrite the address and use a real stamp. A written letter may be amazing, but no one will know if they don't open the envelope.
- For the letter salutation, mail merge the name/s of the individual/family you are writing to with the name that the signatory uses when speaking to the addressee. For instance, if the letter is from a Warden and it's to a friend it would be, "Dear Jo and Reese," - no titles. Do not use "Dear Friend" or "Dear one" etc. No one feels like a 'friend' when they know the writer and their name is not used. Learn to mail merge and use names.
- Do not cross out "Dear Friend" and handwrite in "Dear Jake" – that just looks like a mistake and not like you are taking time to address them. The same applies to handwriting in "Dear Jake" at the start of the letter. Nether elicits a positive response.
- Handwrite the signature in blue ink. Unless you are sending over 1,000 letters there is no need to use an electronic signature. Also, if you have the time, add a quick "PPS" that is personable to the letter. For instance, "It was such a delight to meet your tabby, Ben, at the blessing of the animals".