

Why Pledge?

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Why is pledging so important? We have always been resigned to the fact that "our congregation is not a pledging church". They have always given--just enough, just what we need, and just in time. And for that we are extremely grateful. Each year our struggle is keeping expenses under control and figuring out how much more we dare to ask our congregation for. Truthfully, we haven't been daring enough.

–Christy M., Laguna, CA

In recent years, some of our churches have moved to "faith budgets" with strong response—at least for the first few years. Most campaign approaches will work for 2-4 years; then it's time to try something else. I would recommend trying a pledge campaign.

From a pragmatic standpoint, it makes sense to include pledging in your plan. Studies show you will get more money. According to Hoge, Zech, McNamara and Donohoe in Money Matters, a pledging church receives almost twice as much money (1.5% versus 2.9% of income) as a church without a special annual campaign. Of course, churches that emphasize percentage giving (that is, percentage of income) receive 4.6% of members' income—but we'll save that for another time. For more information, check out Herb Miller's Parish Papers, May, 2007.

There is another—more important—reason for pledging. For me, it's primarily about the commitment. We live in a society that does not value commitment. The advertising industry is built on enticing us into buying things we don't really need. They know if we took a little time to think these decisions through, we wouldn't buy most of it. So the advertisers work hard at "helping" us to not think about it! They want us to react impulsively, knowing that we are more likely to "commit" without a conscious thought.

As a pastor, I worked very hard at inviting members to make conscious, intentional, informed decisions about their faith and their service. I could have filled more positions if I had just "you want to serve here, don't you?" and pressured people a little more. I didn't fill as many positions, but the people who filled positions knew what they were getting into—and did better jobs!

I often say, **"To give without pledging is like living together without being married."** Some people think this is okay, but I think people should make commitments and then fulfill them. Making a commitment changes the relationship. I remember doing pre-marital counseling with a couple. I told them to expect their relationship to change when they married—even though they had lived together several years. They both started laughing and the bride-to-be started hitting her husband-to-be. Between gasps of laughter he manages to get out, "It changed for us when we got engaged!" They went on to describe the changes their relationship experienced once they had made that

commitment and began preparing to make "the big one." Commitment changes the way we see our world—and ourselves. And I like it!

These are a couple reasons why I like to encourage people to pledge. Making commitments and fulfilling them helps members to feel a part and to grow in faith. And the church ends up with more money. How does this sound to you?

We're all in this together!