

HOW TO RAISE MONEY FOR YOUR COMMUNITY PROJECTS

A congregation's community project often starts with someone's idea or dream, followed by a plan designed by a core team, and then, a group of volunteers willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Yet how can this worthy work be sustained over time? Whether the project involves food, clothing, or housing assistance; counseling and job training; or organizing residents around an issue of local importance like the need for a community garden or more stop signs, at some point the program might require funding in order to continue.

Plan for Sustainability

In order to raise money effectively, leaders must develop a plan for future spending, that is, a budget. Some leaders prefer to build long-range planning into their thinking at the outset. The Reverend Constance Delzell, Rector at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Denver, decided to factor the necessity for funding into her dream of a children's ministry for the community. She describes waking from a dream, which she believes was divinely inspired, telling her that now was the time to take action on her wish to start an arts ministry.

Based on this vision, she founded the Children's Center for Arts and Learning, a neighborhood ministry serving a low-income community in the city of Denver. From the beginning, she began developing a plan for sustainability. She thinks that many congregations often make a mistake by failing to plan for their project's financial future. Because St. Andrew's was small with few resources, she approached members of previous churches she had served whom she thought might be interested and who had financial means. Then a personal friend provided \$10,000 in seed money over three years. At this point, she took some of the total received to hire a secretary and part-time grant writer. Thinking strategically helped the program move from vision to funding.¹

Beyond Grants

As this example illustrates, individual giving plays an important role in fundraising efforts. In fact, a vast majority of funding for nonprofits originates from individuals, not foundations. In 2017, foundations provided only about 15% of all donations to U.S. nonprofits, while 72% originated with individuals.² With this in mind, leaders can keep their eyes on the prize by reaching out to both close ties and community members, letting foundations take a secondary role. Basing a budget strategy on individual gifts provides more stability than funding from foundations, whose priorities tend to change every few years.

Joy Skjegstad, who advises churches on their community ministry programs, suggests starting with church members who already have the strongest connection with the project, including volunteers currently working in the program or previous volunteers. Meet with potential donors face to face and ask for a specific amount, following up with written materials (no more



"ANYONE INTERESTED IN SERVING AS THE NEW FUNDING APPEAL COORDINATOR IS ASKED TO SEE ME IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE SERVICE."

than one or two pages long) that describe the project's activities, its mission, and various amounts that could be given. Make sure to follow up, which could be as simple as sending a brochure or program budget.

Asking church members may be complicated by the fact that other appeals are being made at the same time of the year for some other worthy cause. Check with the pastor or staff to avoid inadvertently blindsiding other ministries. When possible, coordinate with others. Skjegstad tells of one scheduling conflict that required just such coordination. While working on the church staff, she sought to make a funding appeal for the nonprofit she directed, which had close ties to the church. Her group's appeal sought funding for a health clinic, tutoring, and a computer-training center. Yet at the same time, the church's food pantry was making a funding appeal for Christmas food baskets and the trustees had launched a drive to fund special "fix-it" projects. All three appeals happened at that prime time in the church's life—the end of the year. After some discussion, the three groups decided to coordinate their appeals, making joint announcements from the pulpit three weeks in a row, and providing bulletin inserts with all three appeals listed together.³

A Miracle Sunday

Church leaders can take the idea of joint fundraising to a new level through planning a "Miracle Sunday" offering. The Miracle Sunday approach utilizes a strategy found in a variety of annual stewardship campaigns: an extensively planned campaign culminating in a single, celebratory event in which church members make their offerings at the Sunday worship service and tabulate the results that same day. As with other stewardship campaigns, Miracle Sunday relies on a team of people with strong financial giving records, a promotional campaign built up over a period of weeks (twelve weeks is recommended), and an explicitly stated and ambitious financial goal. However, unlike most stewardship campaigns, Miracle Sunday focuses not on the overall budget, but on one to three worthy causes, such as community projects, building improvement, or music or education that benefit church members. Another difference between Miracle Sunday and traditional stewardship campaigns is that donors are asked to give not from current income, but from their accumulated resources, such as savings, stocks, or from the sale of other valuable items such as cars, boats, or real estate.

A Miracle Sunday campaign typically lasts about twelve weeks and takes place in the spring so as not to interfere with the fall stewardship campaign. The planning team sends four mailings spread over several weeks, holds two informational meetings, and makes a series of worship service announcements. No home visits are required. The goal for the Miracle Sunday is a single offering that exceeds anything the church has given before (hence the name, "Miracle Sunday").

To make it most effective, set an ambitious goal, usually at least one-third of the church's annual budget. Herb Miller states, "Miracle Sunday has raised an amount equal to between one-third and three times the size of the church's annual operating budget in countless congregations across the United States." He observes that congregations that experienced a budget shortfall in the previous year are surprised at the success of their Miracle Sunday campaign the following year, which may be due to the fact that contributions come from accumulated resources and may even represent a once-in-a-lifetime gift. For that reason, Miracle Sunday should not be relied on as a yearly event, but used sparingly.⁴

Providing funds can help community engagement work grow and thrive. When projects reach a certain size, fundraising may provide an answer to previously insurmountable challenges such as maintaining volunteer involvement, acquiring needed equipment, or ensuring enough space to make it all work. While funding should never be considered an end in itself, it can help keep the lights on, the bills paid, and the program thriving. Funding just might be the key to future success.⁵

Do you have stories or comments to share about your church's experience with Herb Miller's Miracle Sunday? Please email them to info@theparishpaper.com.

1. Linda-Marie Delloff, *Public Offerings: Stories from the Front Lines of Community Ministry* (Bethesda, MD: Alban, 2002), 32-33.

2. "Giving USA 2017: Total Charitable Donations Rise to New High of \$390.05 Billion," <https://givingusa.org/tag/giving-usa-2017>.

3. Joy F. Skjegstad, *7 Models for Community Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013), 177-181.

4. Herb Miller, "Planning and Leading a Miracle Sunday Campaign," <https://www.theparishpaper.com/sites/default/files/resources/Planning%20and%20Leading%20a%20Miracle%20Sunday%20Campaign.pdf>

5. Excerpted from Dana Horrell, *Engaging the Community: Tools for Church Leaders* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, forthcoming).