

A Successful Giving Program Means Following Up Show People They Matter in Order to Build Relationships, Increase Return Rates, and Increase Income

By Rev. Roger Janes, Community of Faith Stewardship Support staff.

You've just completed a giving program with your community of faith. Your team has worked hard to inspire, invite, and thank participants. You had a good turnout for your five weeks of worship focusing on stewardship, and all the mailings went out on time. Everyone received an estimate of giving response card with the encouragement to prayerfully consider their giving and make a pledge for the coming year. This past Sunday was the date for people to return their estimate of giving cards. It looks like a good job done by all. Time to celebrate and relax, right?

Not quite. There is one very important step remaining that will make a real difference to your congregation's giving in the coming year—the follow-up!

One of the best ways to increase the success of your giving program is to build in a two-part follow-up with your participants: to contact those who have not returned their estimate of giving response cards, and to say thank you to everyone.

Let's start with those who didn't respond to your invitation.

Since relationships are at the heart of church life, good follow-up strengthens the relationship people have with the church community and shows people they matter. No one is left out.

Modern psychology tells us that when we make an intentional commitment to someone, we tend to live up to that promise. So, the process of making a pledge and sharing it on a response card is important.

How do you follow up and grow your pledge response rates? Here are a few tips:

- **Tell people from the beginning that the pledging process is an important part of their faith life.** If you explain it, model it, and value it, they will too.
- **Build follow-up into your giving program plan.** Communicate your intention to follow up when you send out your invitation packages.
- **Follow-up methods should be personal.** Telephone calls are more personal than e-mail and can elicit important conversations.
- **Position follow-up as a service to people.** When you call, ask if they have any questions about the response process and if they would like to have their response card picked up.

The second, and equally important, part of the follow-up is to say thank you! Generosity is born out of thanksgiving, so it is very important to create a culture of gratitude. We all want to know that our gifts make a difference, and saying thank you does that!

A church board was pleasantly surprised at one year-end to discover a significant increase in giving. However, with no giving program and no extra stewardship emphasis, they were perplexed. Then they recalled that for one month they had had a very intentional emphasis on thanking their donors individually and personally. The unintended result—increased commitment and gifts!

When you offer thanks, keep these three things in mind:

1. **Be personal:** In person is best—either a telephone call or a personalized note is great.
2. **Be timely:** A thank you offered as soon as possible is more powerful than one offered a month or two later.
3. **Be sincere:** You can't do your mission without your donors. Tell them how they matter to your community of faith and how their gift made a difference.

A good giving program takes work. Be in touch with those who have not responded to your invitation to make a commitment—and always remember to say thank you.

