



The Episcopal Diocese *of* Vermont

Stewardship Plans for Congregations

In the Episcopal Church, stewardship is “our personal response to God’s generosity in the way we share our resources of time, talent, and money.” We often say stewardship is *“what I do with all that I have, after I say ‘I believe.’”* But how that plays out feels entirely different in a room of 12 people versus a room of 120.

In the **Episcopal Diocese of Vermont**, where most of the congregations are small, applying a corporate, multi-committee capital-style campaign to a tiny congregation will only cause burnout. Conversely, relying on casual, informal asks in a larger congregation leaves substantial funding on the table.

Here are two distinct stewardship models tailored to the structural realities of Vermont’s small and large congregations.

Plan 1: The "Kitchen Table" Stewardship Plan

Target: Small Churches (6–20 average Sunday attendance)

Core Philosophy: Relationship, survival, shared ownership, and radical transparency.

In these congregations, there is no “them”—there is only “us.” Traditional anonymous pledging or slick trifold brochures can feel clinical or even evasive. This plan treats stewardship as a household meeting.

1. The Strategy: Radical Narrative Transparency

Instead of hiding the budget until the annual meeting, small congregations thrive when they understand exactly what keeps the doors open.

- **The "Line Item" Translation:** Convert the budget from abstract numbers into felt realities. Instead of a line item for *"Facilities: \$6,000,"* frame it as: *"It costs \$500 a month to keep the sanctuary warm enough for winter worship."*
- **The Shared Burden Conversation:** Host a "Kitchen Table" meeting—literally over a shared meal after Sunday service. Walk through the exact financial reality together. When 15 people realize that an extra \$20 a week from each household covers the deficit, the goal feels attainable rather than daunting.

2. Implementation: The Low-Friction Approach

Small congregations often lack the administrative bandwidth for complex data entry or intensive mailings.

- **The Personal Letter:** Skip the generic stewardship packets. The Senior Warden or Priest-in-Charge should write a highly personal, handwritten or customized letter to each household, acknowledging their specific lay leadership (e.g., Altar Guild, mowing the lawn, baking the coffee hour bread) and asking them to prayerfully renew their financial covenant.
- **The "Time and Talent" Equalizer:** In small congregations, time is currency. If someone cannot increase their financial pledge, explicitly invite them to pledge hours—such as taking over church cleaning or administrative tracking—which directly saves the church from paying outside help.

3. Key Messaging

"We are a household keeping this sacred space alive for our community. Every single gift directly keeps the lights on, the heat moving, and the Gospel present in our town."

Plan 2: The "Missional Impact" Stewardship Plan

Target: Larger Congregations (30+ average Sunday attendance)

Core Philosophy: Vision casting, intentional systems, and organized gratitude.

In a larger congregation, people do not always see where every dollar goes, and they rarely know everyone else in the pews. They don't give to "pay the electric bill"—they give because they want to see lives changed by the congregation's ministries.

1. The Strategy: Narrative Budgeting & Testimonials

Larger congregations need to shift the focus from *maintenance* to *mission*.

- **The Narrative Budget:** Create a visual budget document that groups expenditures into ministry buckets (e.g., Worship & Music, Children & Youth, Community Outreach, Pastoral Care) rather than line items like insurance or copier leases.
- **Lay Testimonials:** Over a 3-to-4 weeks period in the autumn, invite a different lay person each Sunday to give a 2-minute "stewardship reflection" before the Offertory. They shouldn't talk about money; they should talk about *why this church matters to them* or how an outreach program changed a life.

2. Implementation: The Structured Campaign

Larger congregations have the scale to implement a systematic timeline.

1. The Vision Launch: Week 1.

Mail a high-quality narrative budget packet to all members. Preach on the theology of abundance and gratitude, setting the spiritual tone for the weeks ahead.

2. The Lay Witness: Weeks 2-3.

Incorporate weekly lay testimonials during Sunday services. Send targeted follow-up emails highlighting specific ministries funded by congregation giving.

3. Ingathering Sunday: Week 4.

Invite members to bring their completed pledge cards forward during the Offertory as an act of worship. Follow the service with a celebratory congregation-wide festive brunch.

4. Gratitude & Follow-Up: Post-Campaign.

Send a formal thank-you letter from the Rector/PIC and Vestry within two weeks. Reach out individually via phone or personal note to households that haven't responded.

3. Key Messaging

"Your generosity is the engine of our mission. When you pledge to the church, you aren't funding a budget; you are feeding the hungry, forming our youth, and creating a sanctuary of hope in Vermont."

Comparison of the Models

Feature	Small Congregations (6–20 Attendance)	Larger Congregations (30+ Attendance)
Primary Driver	Relational Duty & Survival: "If we don't do this, the doors close."	Inspiration & Impact: "Look at the good our resources can achieve together."
The Pitch	Detailed, line-by-line financial transparency.	Vision-casting, story-driven narrative budgets.
Method	Casual, face-to-face table conversations.	Structured, multi-week liturgical campaign.
Administrative Load	Low (Personal letters, verbal checks).	Medium-High (Database tracking, print packets, email segments).

Here are a few stewardship themes tailored to the specific vibe and theological landscape of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. They are broken down by how they can be adapted for both smaller and larger congregations.

Theme 1: "Rooted and Grounded"

Theological Focus: Deepening our faith, drawing from our heritage, and growing where we are planted. (Ephesians 3:17) **Vermont Resonance:** Connects deeply with Vermont's natural landscape, agricultural roots, and the idea of deep, resilient root systems that survive harsh winters.

- **For Small Congregations:** Focus on the *depth* of the roots. "We may be a small grove, but our roots run deep in this town. Your pledge keeps this specific patch of soil nurtured."
- **For Larger Congregations:** Focus on *growth and shelter*. "Because we are rooted and grounded in love, our branches can spread wide to offer shade, community, and outreach to the broader region."

Theme 2: "Keeping the Fire Lit"

Theological Focus: The Holy Spirit as a spark, the warmth of Christian community, and hospitality (Luke 12:35). **Vermont Resonance:** Plays on the seasonal reality of Vermont autumn and winter, where gathering around a woodstove or fireplace represents safety, comfort, and survival.

- **For Small Congregations:** Highly literal and intimate. "Our church is a warm hearth in a cold world. It takes everyone bringing a log to the woodpile to keep this fire burning for our neighbors."
- **For Larger Congregations:** Focus on illumination and sending out. "We gather to tend the fire of faith, and we give so that we can carry that light and warmth out into the darker corners of our community through our ministries."

Theme 3: "Every Good Gift"

Theological Focus: Gratitude as the baseline of faith; recognizing that everything we have is on loan from God (James 1:17). **Vermont Resonance:** Pairs perfectly with the stunning, abundance-focused imagery of the Vermont autumn harvest and foliage season.

- **For Small Congregations:** Focus on the micro-gifts. "Every pot of coffee, every cleared sidewalk, and every dollar given is a good gift that builds our shared life. We honor the unique gifts each of our 15 members brings."
- **For Larger Congregations:** Focus on collective stewardship. "God has showered our congregation with an abundance of resources, talents, and hearts. How do we return a portion of these 'good gifts' to fund the kingdom of God in our neighborhood?"

Theme 4: "Small Seeds, Deep Shade"

Theological Focus: The Parable of the Mustard Seed. Faithfulness in small things leading to unexpected impact. (Matthew 13:31-32) **Vermont Resonance:** Speaks directly to the quiet, unassuming, but sturdy nature of small-town New England life.

- **For Small Congregations:** Validation and empowerment. "Jesus never measured the faithfulness of a community by its headcount. We are a small seed, but we provide essential spiritual shade and presence in this village."
- **For Larger Congregations:** Focus on the ripple effect. "Our collective pledges are the seeds that fund massive canopies of grace—our youth programs, food pantries, and worship arts. Small individual sacrifices combine to create an ecosystem of hope."

Theme 5: "Rowing Together"

Theological Focus: The church as a vessel (the ancient image of the church as a ship or ark) navigating the waters together. (Mark 4:35-41) **Vermont Resonance:** Nods to Vermont's lakes, ponds, rivers, and the cultural appreciation for teamwork, outdoor grit, and community effort.

- **For Small Congregations:** Every oar matters. "In a boat this size, if one person stops rowing, the boat spins. We need every hand on an oar to move our church forward into the next year."
- **For Larger Congregations:** Trusting the captain and the crew. "We are navigating changing cultural waters, but our ship is sturdy. Your financial commitment ensures our crew is equipped, our hull is sound, and our mission stays on course."

Small Church Appeal Letter--Examples

Here are two distinct drafts for a small church personal appeal letter. Both are designed to feel like a personal note from a trusted leader rather than a mass marketing piece. They use the "**Kitchen Table**" strategy of absolute transparency, translating the budget into tangible, everyday terms.

Option 1: "Keeping the Fire Lit" Theme

Vibe: Cozy, intimate, urgent but warm, focused on mutual survival and hospitality.

Dear [First Names, e.g., John and Mary],

Every Sunday when I walk into [Church Name], the very first thing I feel is gratitude for the warmth of this community. In a world that can often feel cold and isolating, our little church is a hearth—a place where we are known by name, where we pray for one another's families, and where the doors are always open.

But as you and I both know, a fire doesn't keep burning on its own. It takes a community tending it together.

In a congregation of our size, we don't have an anonymous corporate budget. Our financial reality is simple and close to home. To put it in perspective: it costs us about \$120 a week just to keep the sanctuary warm enough for winter worship, and another \$80 a week to keep the lights on and the insurance current. When you look at our weekly offering, there is no "them" covering the deficit—there is only us.

This year, as we pledge our financial support for the coming year, I am asking you to prayerfully consider what it means to keep our fire lit. If every household in our congregation could

increase their weekly giving by just \$10 or \$20—the cost of a few cups of coffee—we will completely bridge our budget gap and ensure our doors stay open.

Beyond your financial pledge, please know how much we rely on the other gifts you bring—[insert a specific personal touch, e.g., Mary, your care for the altar guild / John, your help with the property] keeps our spirits up just as much as the heat keeps our toes warm.

Thank you for being a vital piece of this woodpile. Let's keep the fire burning together.

Faithfully,

[Name]

Senior Warden / Priest-in-Charge

Option 2: "Rooted and Grounded" Theme

Vibe: Resilient, historical, focused on a quiet but deep presence in the local town.

Dear [First Names, e.g., Robert],

For [Number] years, [Church Name] has stood on [Street Name/Town Square] as a quiet witness to God's love in our town. We have never been the biggest church, but our roots run incredibly deep into this soil. We have weathered cultural shifts, economic downturns, and harsh winters because our community is rooted and grounded in love.

Being a small church of fifteen to twenty people is an incredible blessing. We don't get lost in a crowd here. But it also means that every single person holds up a vital corner of our shared home.

When we look at our budget for the upcoming year, the numbers are modest, but they are real. It takes roughly \$15,000 a year just to maintain our historic building and provide basic supply clergy so we can take Communion together. If you divide that across our active households, it means our foundational stability rests entirely on our collective, intentional giving.

As we look toward next year, I am asking you to make a financial covenant—a pledge—to help keep our roots nourished. Your gift both directly ensures we have a physical, living home right here in our town for another year and helps ensure the future mission of our diocesan household to which we belong.

If you can step up your pledge this year, it will give our vestry the breathing room we need. If things are tight financially, please know that your presence in the pews and your prayers are gifts we cannot do without.

Thank you for being part of the deep root system that holds this sacred place up.

With deep gratitude,

[Name]

Senior Warden / Priest-in-Charge

Narrative Budget for Larger Churches

A **narrative budget** transforms a traditional spreadsheet of line items (like line-item numbers for phone bills, copier leases, and clergy pensions) into a story of **missional impact**.

For a larger church (30+ members), it shows members exactly how their financial pledges are converted into lives changed. The secret to a narrative budget is **proportional allocation**: you take the total overhead (utilities, staff salaries, building insurance) and divide it proportionally across the church's actual ministries.

Below is an outline of how to structure a larger church narrative budget document, followed by a concrete visual example of what a page from that document looks like.

The 4-Part Narrative Budget Outline

1. The Cover & The Vision Hook

- **The Hook:** A bold, mission-focused graphic or photo of your congregation in action—not a picture of the empty building.
- **The Theme:** A clear statement of your stewardship theme (e.g., *"Every Good Gift"* or *"Missional Impact"*).
- **The Letter:** A brief, 300-word introduction from the Rector setting the spiritual tone: *This booklet isn't about what we need to buy; it's about who we are called to be.*

2. The Ministry "Buckets" (The Core Content)

Instead of standard accounting categories, break the entire budget into 4 or 5 descriptive ministry areas. For example:

- *Worship, Music, & Liturgy*
- *Faith Formation & Discipleship (Children, Youth, & Adults)*
- *Community Outreach & Social Justice*
- *Congregational Care & Community Life*

3. The Financial Proportions

- A clean, easy-to-read chart or table showing the percentage of the budget allocated to each bucket.
- A transparent look at the total projected revenue needed from pledges to make the vision a reality.

4. The Invitation to Covenant (The Call to Action)

- A clear explanation of *how* to pledge (online, text-to-give, paper card).
- A concluding prayer of thanksgiving for the congregation's generosity.

Example: A "Missional Impact" Narrative Budget

Here is an example of how a larger congregation would present its ministries, using data to show how a total hypothetical budget of **\$250,000** is put to work.

Where Your Generosity Goes: Our 2027 Ministry Impact

Ministry Sector	What it Funds	% of Budget	2027 Investment
Worship & Sacred Music	Liturgy, choir, altar supplies, music staff, streaming tech, and sanctuary upkeep.	35%	\$87,500
Outreach & Community Care	Local food pantry, community meals, and pastoral care visits.	25%	\$62,500
Faith Formation & Youth	Sunday School, adult forums, EfM scholarships, youth retreats, and nursery care.	20%	\$50,000

Ministry Sector	What it Funds	% of Budget	2027 Investment
Sacred Space & Hospitality	Maintenance of our historic building, coffee hours, and community event space.	20%	\$50,000

Deep Dive: Outreach & Community Care (25% / \$62,500)

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." — Matthew 25:35

When you pledge to our congregation, a quarter of every dollar goes directly out our doors to love and serve our neighbors in Vermont. This bucket includes a proportional share of our Rector's time spent coordinating community care, the electricity that lights our congregation hall during community meals, and direct financial grants.

What your giving accomplished this past year:

- **4,200 lbs of food** sorted and distributed through our volunteer-run regional food pantry partnership.
- **36 hot community dinners** served to neighbors facing housing and food insecurity during the coldest winter months.
- **114 pastoral visits** made by our clergy and lay eucharistic visitors to homebound members and those in local care facilities.
- **\$8,500 in direct emergency assistance** provided to local families to prevent utility shut-offs or assist with winter fuel oil costs.

Our 2027 Vision:

With a 5% increase in collective congregation pledging this year, we plan to expand our seasonal community dinners into a year-round, bi-weekly program and launch a new support group for local caregivers.

How to Use This in Your Campaign

When mailing this to larger church members, pair it with a **Pledge Card** and a short **Lay Witness Testimony** at Sunday services that aligns with one of the buckets. For example, on the week you mail the budget, have a volunteer from the food pantry speak for two minutes about the people they met that month.

Here is a draft for the Rector's introduction letter, designed to sit on the inside cover of the larger church narrative budget. It focuses on shifting the mindset from scarcity to abundance, setting a pastoral and vision-driven tone.

The Rector's Introduction Letter **Theme:** *Every Good Gift / Missional Impact*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every Sunday, as the bread and wine are brought forward and we prepare the altar, we sing a familiar truth: *"All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee."*

It is a beautiful reminder that stewardship isn't a fundraising campaign or a corporate budget drive. It is a spiritual practice. It is our collective, joyful response to a God who has showered our lives—and this congregation—with an abundance of grace, love, and community.

When you look around the nave on any given Sunday, you see the living proof of that grace. You see it in the choir filling our sacred space with music, the children gathering on the rug for the gospel story, and the volunteers packing bags for our local food pantry.

But have you ever wondered how a financial pledge actually transforms into those moments of grace?

In the pages of this booklet, you won't find a dry spreadsheet of line items, utility bills, or insurance premiums. Instead, you will find a **Narrative Budget**. This document takes our entire operational cost and translates it into the real story of our mission. It shows you exactly how your financial generosity is converted into changed lives, deepened faith, and hands-on service here in Vermont.

As you flip through these pages, I invite you to do two things:

1. **Celebrate:** Look at what your generosity accomplished this past year. Be proud of how this congregation has shown up for one another and for our neighbors.
2. **Pray:** Ask God how you are being invited to invest in our shared future.

Our ability to grow our ministries, sustain our historic space, and serve our community depends entirely on the financial covenants we make to one another. I ask you to prayerfully consider making a pledge—or, if you are able, stepping up your giving—for the coming year.

Thank you for your faith, your presence, and your radical generosity. We are a stronger, more vibrant witness to the Gospel because you are here.

With deep gratitude and blessings,

The Rev. [Rector's Name]

Sample Commitment or Pledge Cards

Here are two pledge card layouts designed to match the themes and specific church sizes we discussed. They are structured to be printed on standard cardstock, with a perforated "stub" on the side or bottom so the parishioner can tear it off and keep a record for themselves.

Option 1: "Keeping the Fire Lit" (Small Church Card)

KEEPING THE FIRE LIT | 2027

Stewardship Covenant for [Congregation Name], [Town]

"Our little church is a warm hearth—a place where we are known by name. It takes a community tending it together to keep the fire burning."

My/Our Personal Information:

- Name(s): _____
- Address: _____
- Email: _____ Phone: _____

My/Our 2027 Covenant: To support the life, heat, hospitality, and mission of our home congregation, I/we covenant to give a total financial gift of:

\$ _____

☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Annually

My/Our Time & Talent (Optional Equalizer): ☐ I want to help tend our space by volunteering for:

(e.g., Altar Guild, mowing, snow clearing, baking bread, coffee hour)

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Tear off this section for your records.

MY REMINDER FOR 2027 I/We covenanted to support [Church Name] with:

\$ _____ per: ☐ Week ☐ Month ☐ Year

Option 2: "Every Good Gift" (Larger Church Narrative Card)

EVERY GOOD GIFT | 2027

Financial Pledge for [Church Name], [Town]

"All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." — 1 Chronicles 29:14

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

My/Our 2027 Faith Investment: Recognizing that my resources are a gift from God, I/we joyfully pledge to invest in the missional budget of our congregation:

Total Pledge Amount: \$_____ for the 2027 calendar year.

I/We plan to fulfill this pledge:

- ☐ Weekly (\$_____ / week)
- ☐ Monthly (\$_____ / month)
- ☐ Annually (One-time gift)
- ☐ Via recurring online giving

Where Your Investment Goes: Your total pledge will be proportionally distributed across our core ministries:

- **Worship & Sacred Music (35%)**
- **Outreach & Community Care (25%)**
- **Faith Formation & Youth (20%)**
- **Sacred Space & Hospitality (20%)**

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Tear off this section for your records.

MY 2027 STEWARDSHIP RECORD My/Our 2027 pledge to [Church Name] is:

\$_____ total, fulfilled _____

If you plan to design these in a word processor like Microsoft Word or Google Docs later, a classic, highly readable serif font like **Garamond**, **Georgia**, or **Sabon** fits the traditional Episcopal aesthetic beautifully.

Tips for Printing & Gathering

- **For the Small Congregation ("Fire Lit"):** Print these on a warm, earthy cream or light tan cardstock. If the congregation is small enough, the Senior Warden can write the member's name at the top by hand before dropping it in the mail.
- **For the Larger Congregation ("Every Good Gift"):** Print this on crisp white cardstock that matches the color scheme of your printed Narrative Budget booklet. Include a return envelope pre-addressed to the church's bookkeeper or congregation administrator to maintain confidentiality.

Thank You Notes

Here are two follow-up thank-you notes designed to close the loop on your autumn stewardship campaign.

In the Episcopal tradition, gratitude is just as much a spiritual discipline as giving. For a small church, the note should feel like a warm, informal thank-you from a friend. For a larger church, it should emphasize the collective vision and invite them to see their pledge put into immediate motion.

Option 1: The Small Church Thank-You Note

Theme Link: "Keeping the Fire Lit" **Tone:** Deeply personal, informal, and appreciative of their unique role in a small community.

Dear [First Names, e.g., John and Mary],

Thank you so much for returning your stewardship covenant for the upcoming year. I am incredibly grateful for your financial pledge of [insert pledge amount, e.g., \$40 a week], but even more so, I am grateful for your presence in our congregation family.

In a church of our size, every single person matters. When you commit to keeping our congregation strong, you aren't just balancing a budget—you are directly ensuring that our community has a warm, welcoming hearth to gather around for worship, prayer, and fellowship.

Your generosity is exactly what keeps our fire lit. Thank you for tending this sacred space alongside me. I look forward to walking in faith with you through the coming year.

Faithfully,

[Name]

Senior Warden / Priest-in-Charge

Option 2: The Larger Church Thank-You Note

Theme Link: "Every Good Gift" **Tone:** Vision-driven, organized, and encouraging. It reinforces the narrative budget categories they saw in the campaign booklet.

Dear [First Names, e.g., Robert],

On behalf of the Vestry and the entire community of [Church Name], thank you for your generous financial pledge of [insert pledge amount] for 2027.

By making this commitment, you have chosen to return a portion of "every good gift" God has given you to fund the vital mission of Christ in our neighborhood. Because of your faithfulness, we are able to move into the new year with a clear, ambitious vision for our shared ministries.

Your investment will be put to work immediately across our core ministry areas: from sustaining our vibrant worship and sacred music, to expanding our youth formation programs, to keeping our outreach and food ministries fully equipped to serve our neighbors in Vermont.

We will keep you updated throughout the year on the missional impact of your giving. Thank you for your partnership, your prayers, and your radical generosity.

With deep gratitude and blessings,

The Rev. [Rector's Name]

Implementation Tips

- **The Personal Touch for Small Congregations:** If you have the time, the Senior Warden or Priest-in-Charge should handwrite Option 1 on a simple note card. It takes less than a minute per household but leaves a lasting impression.

- **The Data Match for Larger Congregations:** For Option 2, it is highly effective to have your congregation administrator mail merge the exact pledge amount into the bracketed space. It acts as both a warm thank-you and a formal, confidential confirmation of their financial commitment for their household records.

How to Integrate Stewardship into Congregation Life

The biggest mistake churches make is treating stewardship like an annual autumn switch—flipped on in October to raise money and flipped off in November once the budget is set. When stewardship is compressed into a four-week campaign, it feels transactional, and members start to feel like donors rather than disciples.

True stewardship is a spiritual discipline, not a financial deadline. To change the culture, congregations must cultivate a **year-round rhythm of gratitude and transparency**.

Here is how both small and larger Episcopal churches can seamlessly weave stewardship into the fabric of congregation life across all four seasons.

1. Liturgical & Preaching Integration (Every Sunday)

You don't need to preach about money every Sunday, but you should explicitly connect faith with our use of resources.

- **The Offertory Sentence Elevation:** Don't let the Offertory be dead air or just a musical interlude. Use the invitation sentences in the Book of Common Prayer intentionally. Regularly vary them to highlight different aspects of giving (e.g., "*Walk in love, as Christ loved us...*" vs. "*Render unto God the things that are God's*").
- **A Revised "Prayer after Communion":** If the post-Communion prayer sends us out to "do the work you have given us to do," occasionally pair it with a brief bulletin note or verbal commission highlighting a specific lay ministry that week.
- **Preach the Lectionary's Natural Economy:** The Gospels are filled with parables about money, land, work, and vineyards. When these texts naturally arise in the Revised Common Lectionary, don't shy away from them. Address the spiritual weight of our relationship with wealth directly and pastorally.

2. A Four-Season Stewardship Rhythm

Break the year into distinct focal points so members see that stewardship encompasses time, talent, creation, and treasure.

Winter: Transparency & Celebration (January – February)

Coinciding with the Annual Meeting, this is the time to show the fruits of the previous autumn's campaign.

- **The "Gratitude Report":** Instead of just handing out a dry annual report with text columns, send a colorful "Impact Flyer" or email. Show photos of congregation life and state clearly: *"Because of your 2026 pledges, this winter we were able to..."*
- **Volunteer Appreciation:** Host a festive gathering or coffee hour solely dedicated to thanking everyone who mows the lawn, bakes bread, serves on the vestry, or sings in the choir. No asks—just pure gratitude.

Spring: Care of Creation & Legacy (March – May)

Spring in Vermont is the perfect backdrop to focus on the earth and the future of the church.

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Around Rogation Days or Earth Day, connect stewardship to how we manage the church grounds, reduce our carbon footprint, and care for Vermont's natural beauty.
- **Legacy & Planned Giving:** Spring is a great time to gently educate members about the congregation endowment or how to leave the church in their will. Frame it as ensuring that the congregation roots remain strong for the next generation.

Summer: Time & Talent (June – August)

Attendance fluctuates in the summer, making it the ideal season to focus on relationship and hands-on service.

- **The "Ministry Fair" or "Time Talent" Drive:** Instead of asking for money, ask for presence. Use the summer months to recruit for fall ministries (Acolytes, Sunday School teachers, Ushers, Altar Guild).
- **Sabbath Stewardship:** Teach that resting, taking vacation, and spending time with family is a holy stewardship of the bodies and minds God gave us.

Autumn: The Financial Covenant (September – November)

Because you have spent the last nine months talking about gratitude, impact, and community, the autumn financial campaign feels like a natural continuation of congregation life rather than an abrupt financial demand.

3. Quarterly "Quarterly Reports" with a Twist

Most larger churches mail out quarterly contribution statements so people can track their tax deductions. Small churches often give verbal updates. Change the format of these updates:

- **Add an Impact Story:** Never mail a financial statement or present a vestry report without attaching a short paragraph detailing a win.
 - *Instead of:* "Pledges are down 4% this quarter."
 - *Try:* "This quarter, your financial giving funded our youth retreat and replaced the leaking valve in the congregation hall heating system. Here is a look at our numbers..."

4. The "Ministry of the Month" Spotlight

Dedicate one Sunday a month to celebrating a specific congregation ministry.

- **How it works:** In the bulletin, on the announcement board, and during a brief 1-minute announcement before the prelude, highlight a ministry (e.g., The Altar Guild in October, the Food Pantry in November, the Flower Committee at Easter).
- **The Connection:** Explicitly tell the congregation how much that ministry costs annually and how many volunteer hours it takes. It demystifies church operations and shows that every ministry requires a combination of time, talent, and treasure to survive.

Other Fundraising Ideas

If you want a fundraiser to do double duty—both **generating funds** and **attracting new people**—you have to design events where the "barrier to entry" is low. If an event requires someone to already know Episcopal liturgy or feel comfortable inside a sanctuary, outsiders won't come. You also want to take advantage of the opportunity to share your spiritual and outreach ministries.

The best community-facing fundraisers offer **hospitality, fun, or practical utility**. Here are six strategic fundraising ideas, tailored specifically for the scale of Vermont's churches, designed to draw the wider community onto your property.

1. The "Great Vermont" Chili Cook-Off or Pie Baking Contest

Best For: All sizes (Highly scalable)

How it raises money: Charge an entry fee for contestants, and sell "Tasting Tickets" to the public. Attendees get a ballot to vote for the "People's Choice" award. You can boost revenue by selling cider, cornbread, or baked goods on the side.

How it attracts new members: Food is a universal language. Advertising a neighborhood pie or chili contest on local Front Porch Forum networks draws people who love friendly competition. It reframes the church building as a warm, community-centered hub rather than a private club.

2. "Parents' Night Out" (Pop-Up Childcare)

Best For: Medium to Larger Churches (Requires a vetted, Safe Church approved team)

How it raises money: Set a Friday night from 5:30 PM to 8:30 PM. Charge a flat fee per child (e.g., \$25 for the first child, \$15 for siblings) to provide dinner (pizza), crafts, and a movie in the congregation hall.

How it attracts new members: Young families in Vermont are often starved for affordable, reliable childcare. By providing a safe, high-quality evening for their kids, you build immense institutional trust with local parents. When they come to pick up their children, hand them a flyer for your upcoming congregation events or family-focused ministries.

3. The Great Congregation "Thrift Flip" & Rummage Market

Best For: Small Churches with a big lawn or parking lot

How it raises money: Instead of a traditional, messy yard sale, run a curated "Thrift Market." Ask members to donate *only* high-quality clothing, books, antiques, and home goods. Alternatively, "rent" parking spaces or tables to local crafters and neighbors for a flat fee (e.g., \$25/table) so they can sell their own wares. Arrange with a nonprofit (Goodwill, Salvation Army) to take the remaining items at the end of the day.

How it attracts new members: Antiques and thrifting are practically a pastime in Vermont. A bustling outdoor market draws heavy foot traffic. Set up a free, highly visible hospitality table with coffee, sell homemade snacks and dynamic signage about the church's outreach missions with members available to speak with people who are interested in learning more or may help with that outreach effort.

4. Pub-Style Trivia Night in the Parish Hall

Best For: Larger Churches (or small churches partnering with a local venue)

How it raises money: Charge an entry fee per team (e.g., \$40 for a team of four). Sell snacks, mocktails, or locally baked soft pretzels during the rounds. Invite a charismatic parishioner or local celebrity to act as the trivia host.

How it attracts new members: Keep the trivia general—pop culture, Vermont history, science, and music—not religious. Trivia nights are highly social; people naturally invite their non-church friends to pad their teams. It breaks down the intimidation factor of entering a church building.

5. The "Blessing of the Animals" Dog Wash & Pet Fest

Best For: Small to Medium Churches with green space

How it raises money: Time this around the Feast of St. Francis (early October). Offer a by-donation dog wash run by the church's youth or volunteers. Partner with a local pet photographer for a "Pet Portrait" station where a portion of the digital photo sales goes to the church.

How it attracts new members: Vermonters love their pets. An event celebrating animals brings out neighbors who might never attend a standard morning service. While their dogs are getting washed, the priest can offer a brief, casual blessing for each pet, opening the door for gentle, pastoral conversation with the owners.

6. The "144 Envelopes" Wall (Internal/External Hybrid)

Best For: Any size church needing a low-overhead fundraiser

How it raises money: Place 144 envelopes on a prominent wall or board in the church narthex or at a community event, numbered sequentially from \$1 to \$144. Invite people to take an envelope and return it filled with the corresponding dollar amount. *If every single envelope is filled, the church raises exactly \$10,440.*

How it attracts new members: While primarily funded internally, you can put a twist on this for the wider community by tying the wall to a specific, tangible outreach project (e.g., *"Help us fund our winter emergency fuel assistance registry"*). Neighbors who are hesitant to give to a church's "operating budget" are often incredibly eager to buy a \$20 or \$50 envelope if they know it directly buys heating oil for a local family in need.

Comparison of Community-Facing Fundraisers

Idea	Upfront Cost	Volunteer Bandwidth	Primary Draw for Outsiders
Chili/Pie Cook-Off	Low (Prizes/Cider)	Medium (Judges, setup)	Food & friendly competition
Parents' Night Out	Low (Pizza/Crafts)	High (Vetted childcare staff)	Free, trusted childcare
Curated Thrift Market	Zero	Low-Medium (Sorting/Organizing)	Bargain hunting & local crafts
Trivia Night	Low (Snacks/Tech)	Medium (Host/Scoring)	Social night out with friends
Pet Fest & Dog Wash	Low (Shampoo/Towels)	Medium (Outdoor setup)	Celebrating their pets

Food is central to the identity of the Episcopal Church in Vermont, where small congregations have a rich history of feeding neighbors—from Christ Church in Bethel to St. Paul's in Vergennes.

When a fundraiser focuses on food pantries or meals, it naturally lowers the barrier to entry for outsiders because the cause is immediately understood and universally respected. People who might never give to a church's general operating budget will enthusiastically support keeping a local family fed.

Especially for Small Congregations

Here are five community-facing fundraising ideas designed for small churches that elevate meal and food shelf ministries while simultaneously inviting new people into the congregation community.

1. The "Empty Bowls" Soup & Bread Dinner

How it works: Partner with a local school art department, community pottery studio, or regional craftspeople who donate handmade ceramic bowls. The church hosts a simple meal of gourmet soups and artisanal breads (cooked and baked by members).

- **The Ticket:** Attendees pay a flat admission fee (e.g., \$25). They choose a beautiful, handmade bowl, fill it with soup for dinner, and **take the empty bowl home** as a permanent reminder of those in the community whose bowls remain empty. (If you can't do handmade bowls, buy inexpensive bowls that relate to Vermont in some way.)
- **The Membership Draw:** This event blends local art, food, and social justice. It is highly appealing to neighbors, crafters, and families who love community gatherings. The physical bowl sits in their kitchen for years as a tactile advertisement for your church's heart.

2. "Reverse Offering" Community Drop-Offs

How it works: Turn a standard Sunday service or a Saturday community coffee hour into a festive "Reverse Offering" event.

- **The Twist:** Instead of passing an empty plate for money, the church puts out a "Reverse Offering Plate" containing slips of paper, each listing specific, highly needed non-food or high-value items the pantry is low on (e.g., "diapers size 4," "hearty canned stews," "cooking oil").
- **The Public Angle:** Set up a canopy on the church lawn on a Saturday morning with free coffee and baked goods. Invite the town via Front Porch Forum to drive by, pull a slip from the basket, buy the item at the local market, and drop it back off.
- **The Membership Draw:** It provides a zero-intimidation, high-utility way for neighbors to interact with the church. They get a free cup of coffee, meet a smiling face, and complete a bite-sized act of service.

3. Pre-Order "Family-Size" Winter Meal Pickups

How it works: Small churches often lack the seating capacity for massive sit-down crowds, but they usually have a commercially certified or well-equipped kitchen. Tap into this by offering a monthly or seasonal pre-order meal pickup (e.g., a "Friday Night Lasagna Bake" or "Thanksgiving Pie Drive").

- **The Model:** People order and pay online or over the phone ahead of time for a family-sized, ready-to-heat meal. All proceeds go to purchase fresh produce or protein for the local food shelf.
- **The Membership Draw:** Busy parents and working professionals are always looking for a night off from cooking. When they pull up to the church side door to pick up their hot dinner, hand them a postcard detailing the food pantry's impact stats and a warm invitation to join you for Sunday worship or the next community meal.

4. "Ticket for a Can" Concert or Contra Dance

How it works: Vermonters love live music and community dancing. Host a casual acoustic concert, folk singer night, or traditional New England contra dance in your congregation hall or on the church lawn.

- **The Admission:** The "price of a ticket" is a specific financial donation or a heavy grocery bag filled with items from the food pantry's "Most Wanted" list (e.g., canned tuna, peanut butter).
- **The Membership Draw:** Secular individuals who love music or dance will gladly cross the threshold of a church for an evening of entertainment. It completely reframes the congregation hall as a cultural asset for the village, making the church feel vibrant, accessible, and deeply woven into local life.

5. "Plant a Row for the Hungry" Harvest Market

How it works: In the spring, challenge both your members and the wider community of local gardeners to "plant an extra row" of tomatoes, squash, or greens in their home gardens specifically for the church's food ministry.

- **The Harvest Fundraiser:** In August and September, host a weekly or bi-weekly "Harvest Exchange Table" on the church lawn. Gardeners drop off their extra bounty, and community members can "purchase" hyper-local, fresh organic produce via a freewill donation to the food shelf fund.
- **The Membership Draw:** This taps directly into Vermont's deep agricultural and environmental ethos. It brings local gardeners, backyard farmers, and food lovers straight to your doorstep, uniting the congregation and the town around the shared stewardship of the earth.

Implementation Tip for Small Congregations

When tracking the success of these events, remember to measure **both** metrics:

1. *"How much money/food did we raise to feed our neighbors?"*
2. *"How many new email addresses, names, or handshakes did we collect today?"*

Always have a simple, casual way for people to stay in touch—like a sign-up sheet for a monthly congregation newsletter or an invitation to an upcoming book study.