

## **Stewardship**

### **September 2017**

#### **Benedictine Stewardship**

Steven A. Peay

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. . . they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Acts 2:42-47 [1]

#### **The Rule of Saint Benedict**

The early Church did not act out of scarcity, but abundance – the abundance of the Lord’s presence, and of one another. The essence of the monastic movement was an attempt to recover the spirit of the early Church. Thus, when Benedict talks about stewardship in the Rule, what he’s looking to do is recreate what is described in those five verses of Acts 2. What we see there is a community that has worked out what its mutual relations are going to be. They have learned how they are going to be about the business of caring and being cared for.

We know little about Benedict himself, apart from his traditional dates of birth and death, 480-543, and that there is a section in THE DIALOGUES of Pope St. Gregory the Great devoted to Benedict’s life and miracles. Benedict’s most important contribution, his Rule, was composed sometime in the mid-sixth

century, and is a relatively brief document, consisting of a prologue and 73 short chapters describing the nature, content, and duties of monastic life. It has served as the guidepost for western monasticism, and, indeed, as a foundation for the development of modern western civilization, which was influenced by Benedictine monasticism and its offshoots. The Rule, almost 75% scripture quotations, offers much to those who take the time to dialogue with it. Additionally, the Church of England, the spiritual ancestor of the Episcopal Church, was largely formed by Benedictine monasticism, particularly liturgically and spiritually. So, taking some time to consider stewardship from this point of view might bear fruit.

### **Prioritizing people**

At the core of Benedict's understanding of stewardship is the care of persons. Whether it be the abbot (the head of the community) or the cellarer (the one in charge of the goods and services), the first order of business is how people are treated. This is an important lesson for us as we think about stewardship today. So often we think of it in terms of "time, talent, treasure," which is all well and good, but what we really think about is – money. If we think first of the gift of the people in our care, remembering our accountability before God for them [2] (see the RB chapters on the abbot 2 and the cellarer 31) it can make a difference in how we go about planning, and accomplishing the real stewardship we have. Benedict makes special mention of the sick, children, guests, the aged and the poor on several occasions, as do the scriptures, and this should remind us just how much these people make Christ present to us. As we go about our stewardship each year, how are we serving those Jesus called "the least" of his family, toward whom he holds special care? Stewardship, Benedict-style, goes beyond the budget, and into the heart of how we approach all aspects of life together.

### **Listening from the heart**

Further, perhaps we should extend that mutual care along to mutual obedience, another term dear to Benedict's heart. When he uses 'obedience' he's talking about listening to one another deeply, like we listen to God, with "the ear of the heart." It opens us to the community around us, which enables us to

make a difference because we've really begun to listen to one another. Thus, Benedict's mutual obedience opens us to the "good zeal" leading us to love God and our neighbor in the way Paul talks about in Romans 12, and Benedict describes in chapter 72. Aquinata Bockmann, OSB, offers this insight in her *Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict*:

Pursuing what suits me (or what I consider useful), seeking fulfillment of my inauthentic needs, leads into a vicious circle. With each fulfillment, desires increase and new ones keep arising. Benedict points in the opposite direction. It is in extending ourselves toward others that we also achieve true self-actualization, a happy life (Prologue 15). When we strive only for ourselves, we go astray; when we aim at the true benefit of the others, we attain happiness for ourselves. Here Benedict shows a concrete way of making the other, and ultimately Christ, the center of our own life. "Father John the Dwarf said: 'A house is not built by beginning at the top and working down. You must begin with the foundations in order to reach the top.' They said to him, 'What does this saying mean?' He said, 'The foundation is our neighbor whom we must win, and that is the place to begin. For all the commandments of Christ depend on this one.'" [3]

When we lay the foundation of care of persons, then we can move to the care of time, places, and things – the other aspect of stewardship, but which often takes most of our attention.

Benedict charges the cellarer to care for the utensils of the monastery as though they were "the vessels of the altar," because nothing is negligible. Benedict takes very seriously God's word at the end of each act of creation, "and it was good." (Genesis 1:44ff). If God's creation is good, and God has entered our world – taking flesh in Jesus Christ – then created reality takes on a whole new purpose, and so should our care of it. Time, places, and things all become the tools for the building up of the community; they are means to the end of life together.

Benedictine stewardship is about mutual care, about the right use of time, places, and things, and finding the holy in the ordinary...including money. Our stewardship should be about seeing abundance, not mourning scarcity.

**The Very Rev'd Steven A. Peay, PhD** is Research Professor of Homiletics at [Nashotah House Theological Seminary](#) in Nashotah, WI. History and historical perspectives have long fascinated Father Peay. His undergraduate study of Church History led him toward monastic life, which he entered at Saint Vincent Archabbey (Latrobe, PA) in 1977. Following his first profession of vows he studied for the priesthood and after final vows was ordained deacon in 1981 and priest in 1982. The studies he began in college and pursued in seminary continued following ordination. He returned to Saint Vincent to teach as Assistant Professor of Homiletics and Historical Theology. During his tenure at the seminary he was also engaged in parish work (including one year as a pastor), retreats for clergy, religious and laity, and served as the seminary's academic dean for five years. Leaving monastic life in 1994, he then devoted himself to parish work for the next fifteen years in Congregational churches in Wisconsin (Madison and Wauwatosa), while continuing to research, write and teach in various venues. Peay came to Nashotah House as adjunct professor of Church History in 2008 and was elected to the faculty in 2010. His orders were received in August 2010 and he is now a priest of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany.

[1] Acts 2:42ff is recognized as the Scriptural basis for the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.

[2] See the Rule of Benedict chapters 2 and 31 on the abbot and the cellarer

[3] Aquinata Bockmann *Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict: Expanding our Hearts in Christ*, Matilda Handl, OSB, and Marianne Burkhard, OSB, eds, Collegeville: Liturgical Press: 2005., p 64.

## Resources

- [Spirituality of Fundraising](#) by Anne Ditzler, ECF Vital Practices Blog, May 25, 2011
- [Spirituality of Fundraising](#) by Henri Nouwen (Upper Room Books, 2011)

- [Jesus is the Reason for this Season Too](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices Blog, September 10, 2014
- [God's Economy](#) by Jamie Coats, Vestry Papers, September 2014
- [Creating a Culture of Giving](#) by Angela Emerson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, January 27, 2012

### 10 Common Mistakes in Fundraising for Congregations

Erin Weber-Johnson

#### **1.) Treat fundraising as a means to an end instead of a ministry**

“Imagine the ministry we can do once we’ve received these funds!” exclaimed an excited fundraising volunteer a couple months ago. YES! I love dreaming of what is possible together and keeping a parish’s collective eyes on a common goal. And yet, when we fixate on the goal alone, we are tempted to miss an important point: the process of fundraising is itself a powerful and life-giving ministry.

In the Jewish tradition there is a theology of charitable giving, *Tikkum Olam*, in which God gives us the ministry to repair or fix the world. In the Episcopal Church, through the baptismal covenant, we commit our lives to reconciling ourselves to God and to one another. ***When fundraising is ministry, lives are transformed in the giving of gifts to change and repair a broken world as we reconcile ourselves to God.***

How does this happen? It begins with the act of inviting others to give, requiring both the person inviting and the person receiving the invitation to explore their relationship with money. When considering a gift, one can mindfully ask how their own finances are impacting their health and wellness while asking how to respond to God’s presence in their lives. This is an opportunity to invite others to draw closer to a life-changing God through their giving.

It is also an opportunity, in a time when values-based advocacy groups are seeing increases in their giving (see articles in [The New York Times](#), [Time Magazine](#), and [NonProfit Quarterly](#) to learn more), for people to make meaning of their lives and strengthen their individual sense of agency in the world. Humans are at our best when we are about the work of repair and reconciliation; we feel the craving for this work in the world deeply.

The Episcopal Church provides a powerful opportunity for people to do this very work: to invest their resources in God's Kingdom and to align their values with their giving.

## **2.) Treat church members as a monolithic body—without individual needs and diversity**

This winter, my young son and I were at a doctor's office for our annual treating of strep throat. Have you ever had a strep culture performed? That's when they take a Qtip-like instrument and swab the absolute back of your mouth--almost always producing a gag reflex in patients. When the doctor approached my son with said Qtip, there was a lot of explaining and a magical narrative provided with voices to ensure my son wasn't scared. For me, there was a quick in and out of the Qtip of torture. I didn't feel slighted: there was no need to prolong the inevitable as my needs were different from my son's. My son needed time and patience. I needed the swab to be done quickly and without much fuss. The doctor knew we were different and adjusted his approach accordingly.

The same is done every day with ministry. A priest meeting with an individual for pastoral care will have a very different conversation if the person is age 15 or age 75. Or, if the person has a history that requires a sensitive approach. Or, if the person has special needs or requires another loved one in the room at the time. Gender, race, culture, and a previous history are a few variables to be factored into the interaction.

When fundraising is a ministry, the invitation to give becomes an opportunity for transformation. This means a one-size-fits all approach is ineffectual and can be pastorally inappropriate. This may mean

moving beyond a singular letter or set of texts and seeking to adapt your congregation's approach to the [various needs of those in the pews](#).

### **3.) Don't communicate; "It's their fault they aren't tracking"**

Many a Stewardship Chair has wondered how many times the same message has to be communicated in various forms to be heard. The struggle is real!

The answer is simple. People won't give if they aren't aware that they are being invited. And in the end, everyone loses when an invitation isn't heard. In addition, if those in the pews do have diverse needs, then how messages are communicated becomes an important component of fundraising as ministry. Ask any counselor and you will hear that breakdowns in relationships are often characterized by, if not a result of, breakdown in communication.

Before your annual campaign begins, create a plan for what ways you will communicate with the congregation and how often. Facebook, Email, Newsletter, Bulletin Insert, Mission Moment, Adult Formation Meeting, Book Study, Texting----create a plan using your available tools. It may mean using multiple voices repeating the same message. Creating a plan ensures a greater likelihood of the [message being heard](#).

### **4.) Lose the "Why", but instead focus on need**

I once led a workshop where I asked participants "Why are you engaged in fundraising in your congregation?" and immediately I heard a response from a crusty rector: "to pay our bills, silly!" I followed up with another question, "So...how's that going?" Chuckles ensued and the rector was good naturedly chagrined. It highlighted for me an important lesson to be communicated: people will not develop a regular discipline of giving simply because an organization needs it.

Inviting people to give their gifts to God and to their faith community is always about the “Why”. What are the core values of your congregation? What is God doing now in your community? How will their gifts be utilized to ensure the congregation’s vision is made a reality? Why would volunteering for a stewardship committee [be important](#)? And, finally, why is giving to God a transformative act?

These are the fundamental questions to address why fundraising is of vital importance in your congregation. Begin with the “Why” each year as you determine your fundraising goals and evaluate your strategies for the annual campaign.

**5.) Don’t ask. We’ve done this every year. Folks should know to do this.**

A congregation was in the midst of a clergy transition a few years ago and opted not to engage in an annual campaign with direct invitations for giving, but simply send out a letter with a pledge envelope. It was brought in the following year for a workshop with the vestry. A young member raised her hand to ask an important question: “What is a pledge?” A newcomer to both this congregation and organized religion, she was unaware of the practice or its impact on her life.

Nationally, over 70% of members in the Episcopal Church were [not raised Episcopalian](#). This is exciting news as the Episcopal Church offers a faith tradition that is compelling and rich. It should not be assumed that newcomers know either how giving can be transformative or how funds contributed support the mission/ministry of the congregation.

Finally, a quick return to #2: People won’t give, no matter how long they’ve attended, if they aren’t aware that they are being invited. And in the end, everyone loses when an invitation isn’t heard.

**6.) Don’t tell the truth. You may have had a bad year, but there is no need to admit it.**

What to do when a previous year's fundraising effort didn't meet your congregation's goals? Be transparent: show how much was raised, how it was used, and communicate a plan for how things will be done differently in the following year. Fundraising is dependent upon healthy relationships which include admitting when things didn't go as planned.

Showing an ability to learn, grow and adapt is far more valued by potential donors than face-saving.

### **7.) Assume donors know you are grateful**

How many times do you thank those who pledge to your parish? The best practice for non-profits in thanking donors is seven times per year. Rest assured: this does not mean seven thank-you cards!

An important theological component of Stewardship is the act of saying "thank you". We are entrusted with gifts and we respond with gratitude whether they come from God or from one another. Humans are wired for gratitude and saying thank you serves a number of purposes:

- It acknowledges a giver's generosity
- It can inform the giver of how their gift was used
- It can provide a vehicle for formation for folks in our faith communities

Here's what happened when St. John's Episcopal Church in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan adopted a [discipline of gratitude](#):

- Members of the vestry meet with each of the ministry committees, bringing them pastries/cookies and a heartfelt word of thanks for their gifts to the parish.
- One member, who manages the local deli, was taken by this approach and now includes a "Round Robin thank you" in his weekly meeting with deli staff. Each week a staff member is invited to share a story of gratitude about their work.

- Another member is a social worker; she was surprised to receive a heartfelt thank you from her boss for her work. This was her first note of thanks in four years of service to her community.
- Gratitude is contagious. Originating at St. John's, its impact was felt in other sectors of the Mt. Pleasant Community.

The wise rector, when told of the news of this uprising of gratitude asked, "What if everyone in the world started to do this?" Indeed, what would it look like?

### **8. Bury the lead (See #4)**

Every fall my mailbox is full of long, lengthy letters asking for a donation to various causes. I can always tell if the individual writing the letter is comfortable with the language of giving by the amount of text used to explain why they are inviting me to give. Whether it is a theological explanation, logistical overview of expenses, or an emotional narrative, the invitation of "Will you join me in giving to our organization/church?" can get quickly buried. Sometimes the invitation is left out altogether!

Theological explanation, logistical overview of finances, and a compelling narrative are all very important. However, people can miss the reason for your communication or grow frustrated in trying to decipher the meaning of the text.

One rector once bravely confessed, "I just get so nervous and would rather write about what I'm more comfortable with---theology, liturgy, and my dog!" Fundraising as ministry requires a commitment to healthy relationships. One key way to foster healthy relationships is to communicate intent and expectations in ways that can be both received and heard.

Don't bury the lead by hiding your invitation in the text. This is an important opportunity for members of your parish to hear and receive an invitation to give.

## **9. Assume a Capital Campaign will negatively impact your annual campaign**

When thinking about fundraising, there [may be the assumption](#) that a capital campaign will negatively impact annual giving. Some believe a donor's willingness to give is capped at a fixed capacity and is immovable. Anna Doherty, priest-in-charge, St. Aidan's, Hartford, Wisconsin describes the concern expressed by [members of her congregation](#):

“Our parish can barely raise enough money to meet our operating expenses; how could we raise more for a capital campaign?”

Through a program of increased education about stewardship, and conversations centered around the congregation's mission and impact in the community, St. Aidan's capital campaign leadership team discovered that donors' willingness to give or to prioritize their giving increased. As the campaign progressed, Anna was pleased to report, “Folks at St. Aidan's were surprised--pleasantly so--to discover that capital campaign fundraising can actually increase annual stewardship giving!”

Here's a visualization exercise I do with people to help change their perception about fixed capacity:

I like pie. To help people overcome their perception that giving capacity is fixed, I invite them to picture a pie as representing donors' dollars. And then I ask them to visualize cutting the pie into slices to represent their budget. Now here's the twist: Once they have the picture of a pie in their mind, I invite them to visualize a bigger pie, rather than cutting the smaller pie differently.

## **10. Apologize for engaging in this holy work**

“I'm sorry to have to ask you, but would you be willing to give to our congregation this year?”

A couple years ago I was training a group of volunteers on how to make an invitation in a one-on-one setting. One of the volunteers was recruited by the leadership of the parish not for her desire for the work, but because of her deep relationships in the community.

She gave me the evil eye for the entire training and when we moved to role playing she began with, “I’m sorry to have to ask you, but would you be willing to give to our parish this year.” I asked her to adopt the lens of ministry. When meeting with individuals, see this as an opportunity to pray with others, learn about their needs, and seek to connect them with Jesus.

Two weeks later she called me---her voice thick with emotion. “I never knew it could be like this.” During her visits, she shared stories, cried with those in need of care, and prayed. She was surprised to be thanked consistently for her visits and for the invitation. In the end, the reluctant worker was transformed in her asking --- and by the ministry of fundraising.

*Erin Weber-Johnson is the [Episcopal Church Foundation's](#) Program Director for [Strategic Resources](#). She works with Episcopal leaders to faithfully answer the following questions, “What is God calling this organization to be/do?” and “How do we respond?” Erin provides financial and leadership resources through a broad range of services. She has facilitated diocesan workshops, vestry retreats, and live webinars on annual giving, volunteer engagement, generational giving characteristics, and debt retirement. Utilizing a year-round stewardship model, Erin has worked with parishes on annual giving and successfully completed capital campaigns widely ranging in size.*

*Previously, Erin was a grants officer at Trinity Wall Street in New York City, a consultant for the United Thank Offering (UTO), and she and her husband served as missionaries in Taiwan. Erin holds a master’s degree in public administration from New York University and is a member of St. John the Evangelist Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

## **Resources**

- [ECF's Top 10 Annual Giving Strategies](#) an ECF webinar led by Erin Weber-Johnson, August 22, 2017
- [Donations to A.C.L.U. and Other Organizations Surge After Trump's Order](#), The New York Times, January 30, 2017
- [ACLU and Planned Parenthood See 'Unprecedented' Rise in Donations After Donald Trump's Election](#), Time Magazine, November 14, 2016
- [How Far Does the Post-election Nonprofit Giving Surge Extend?](#), NonProfit Quarterly, April 17, 2017
- [Generational Characteristics of Giving: What to do?](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, October 8, 2013
- [Year Round Stewardship: Talking About Money](#), an ECF webinar presented by Chris Harris, February 11, 2014
- [Year Round Stewardship](#), an ECF webinar presented by Erin Weber-Johnson, February 11, 2015
- [Volunteers: The Value of Why](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, May 28, 2014
- ["Why I Give"](#) by Holly Stoeker, ECF Vital Practices' blog
- [New FACTs on Episcopal Church Growth and Decline](#), a report by C. Kirk Hadaway, the Office of Research and Statistics of the Episcopal Church, 2015
- [What if Everyone Practiced Gratitude Year Round?](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, May 6, 2014
- [A Culture of Generosity](#) by Kim Hanson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, June 16, 2017
- [Lessons from Fundraising Volunteers](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, Vestry Papers, September 2014

### **How Much is Your Congregation's Space Worth?**

Jerry Keucher

Many congregations have spaces that are not needed for the liturgical, educational, and social life of the parish. It is perfectly all right to make such spaces available to outside groups, but in order to make a

rational decision about how much to charge for the use of your space, it is necessary to have the answers to three questions:

1. What does similar space cost in your area? You need to do some real checking with local real estate agents.
2. What does it cost us to operate our space? The purpose of this piece is to give you a tool to come up with this answer, so we will return to this discussion.
3. What can the prospective user afford to pay, and is that amount sufficient to cover your costs?

Too often parishes think only of the third question and this may lead them to make space use arrangements on which they actually lose money.

The first thing to do is to check how much similar spaces are renting for in your area. Real estate prices are local and they fluctuate often. You need to find out what the current rates are in your locality.

[This link](#) will take you to a spreadsheet you can download and save that will help you find the answer to the second question above. You can add or delete lines and copy the formulas wherever you need to in order to reflect your situation.

The basic concepts are these:

- Measure every space in your facility.
- Enter the name of the space in Column A and square feet of every space in Column B.
- Enter the number of hours per week the space is used by the congregation in Column C.
- On a separate line enter the number of hours per week in Column C that each space is used by outside groups.
- In Column D enter the number of weeks per year each space is used by the congregation and by outside groups.

- There is a formula in Column E that will calculate how many square-foot-hours each space is used.
- In Columns H and I enter all the costs of maintaining and operating your plant, including the amount you are setting aside every year in your capital reserve. (If you aren't funding a capital reserve now, please start to do that. This is a separate, but very important, discussion that I would be happy to have with you. My email address is at the bottom of the article.)
- If you pay for services that are only for the outside users, enter those costs under the heading Direct Costs for Outside Users Paid by the Parish.
- There are formulas that add up the total square-foot-hours and divide that total into the total it costs you to operate your plant.
- This results in what it costs you to operate one square foot of your space for one hour.

Using the spreadsheet as described above will allow everyone to be satisfied that the congregation is not losing money when letting outside groups use your space.

Of course, this spreadsheet reflects only your current costs. If you are contemplating an arrangement that allows an outside group to use spaces that are normally not heated and cooled during the week, your utility costs will go up significantly. You will want to think about negotiating a way of having the user pay the excess utility costs.

It is one thing to allow 12-step groups and other users make use of spaces shared by the congregation. Such arrangements are called licensing agreements and rarely have any legal or canonical ramifications.

It is quite another thing to lease portions of your space to an outside group for their exclusive use. It is perfectly all right to do that, but, the lease may need the approval of the Bishop and Standing Committee of your Diocese. There may be property tax implications for a lease arrangement. You will not lose your tax-exempt status as a charity, but part of your property may need to be put back onto the

property tax rolls. There is nothing wrong with that, but you need to write the lease so that the tenant has the responsibility of reimbursing you for any taxes that result being due.

When you know the answers to the first and second questions posed above, then you can have a reasonable discussion with prospective users of your space. If what they can pay is less than what it costs you to offer the space, you need to make a careful, prudent decision about whether it is in the parish's interest to subsidize their operation. There may be compelling reasons to do so, but you need to consider whether such a subsidy is an effective use of your resources.

I encourage you to read Chapter 5 of *Remember the Future: Financial Leadership and Asset Management for Congregations* for a fuller discussion. Please feel free to be in touch with me if you have questions.

If you have any questions, please contact me: [jkeucher@episcopalfoundation.org](mailto:jkeucher@episcopalfoundation.org) or 347-713-2218.

***Jerry Keucher**, an Episcopal priest, is the author of [Remember the Future: Financial Leadership and Asset Management for Congregations](#) (Church Publishing, 2006) and [Back from the Dead: The Book of Congregational Growth](#) (Church Publishing, 2012). He serves as priest-in-charge at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, New York, and works with ECF as a consultant. Jerry has served as chief of finance and operations for the Episcopal Diocese of New York. He has held similar positions in financial leadership, including Staten Island Botanical Garden and Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. A gifted linguist he has taught Greek and Hebrew at Princeton Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School.*

*(This ECF article is part of a series designed to help clergy and lay leaders address the economic challenges of congregational ministry in the 21st century and is made possible through a grant from Lilly Endowment's National Initiative.)*

## Resources

- [Calculating the cost of operating your space worksheet](#) for congregations to decide how much to charge for space rental
- [Partners for Sacred Places](#), a non-profit that helps congregations make the most of their facilities as civic assets
- [Remember the Future: Financial Leadership and Asset Management for Congregations](#) by Jerry Keucher (Church Publishing, 2006)
- [A Ministry of Space by Louise Fortuna](#), Vestry Papers, July 2016
- [Tenants and Friends](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, March 3, 2016
- [Church Building Use](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices Blog, May 31, 2017

## Rummage Ministry

Lu Stanton León

When Christ Church, Winnetka, gears up for one of its twice-yearly rummage sales, it's all hands on deck. It takes a coordinator and the help of 400-plus volunteers, but as a result of their work, the church raises more than \$300,000 every year for local charities.

We're not talking trash here. This is a serious—but oh-so-fun—ministry.

"It's one of the biggest rummage sales in the country," says Charlotte McGee, who for 10 years has served as rummage sale coordinator for the parish which is just steps away from Lake Michigan in one of Chicago's North Shore suburbs.

## Rummage as outreach

“Rummage is our biggest outreach, and it is just up my alley,” says McGee, who has given herself the title of Queen of Rummage and wears a tiara on sales days. She moved to Winnetka from Boston 23 years ago and was the volunteer head of the rummage sales’ boys department for 13 years before being hired as a part-time coordinator, the only paid position associated with the ministry. “I thought I’d work in the boys department so I could clothe my two boys,” McGee says. “My motto in life is never pay retail. Plus, I’m super green, and this keeps all these perfectly good items out of the landfill.”

With the first sale dating back to 1925, rummage sales are the oldest and largest mission outreach at Christ Church, which collects donations year-round. The sales—a smaller one on a Saturday in June and the larger one on a Thursday in October—attract more than 4,000 customers from the greater Chicago area, as well as nearby states and Canada.

Why a Thursday?

“When the rummage sale first started, Thursday was the maids’ day off,” McGee says. “When I first became coordinator we thought about switching it to a Saturday because people work full-time, but with the way that families operate, with kids signed up for 25 different things on weekends, we would not be able to staff it on a Saturday.”

Plus, McGee says, the busiest time at the sale is between 7 and 8 am, so people can come shop before they go to work.

The Saturday summer sale started about 30 years ago.

“The idea was to have a mini-sale to clear out storage space and move out the shorts and t-shirts and swimsuits. This year we made \$64,000. That’s hardly a mini-sale, but it is compared to our fall sale.”

The fall rummage sale has 30 different departments that fill three buildings and five outdoor tents. Shoppers can find everything from clothes to furniture, stereos, jewelry and sterling silver. People often line up the night before to be first for early bargains.

The departments are run by 73 chairs who set prices and determine displays. About a third of the chairs and a third of the volunteers come from the community.

### **Making the most of space**

Why are the rummage sales at Christ Church, Winnetka so big and successful? Lots of factors come into play—years of experience, organization, parish buy-in, ATM on-site—but the not-so-secret secret is storage space.

“We own another building across the parking lot, and we use most of the main floor and all of the basement for collecting and storing,” McGee says. “We collect year round. Most places can only collect for two weeks. The only thing we store off-site is furniture. We rent a truck, I hire two guys and we pick up once a month. It goes right to a storage unit.”

At sale time, she says, “Basically, things just stop for 10 days. There’s an event, we call it flyover, which means we have all generations from the parish gather on a Saturday and things fly over the parking lot from the storage space to the parish house. It’s a day when everybody in the parish participates.”

### **5 Tips on running a successful rummage sale**

1. **Don’t accept everything that’s donated.** “Even if it is a small rummage sale, you have to be savvy about what you accept,” McGee says. “We’ve really learned what sells and what doesn’t. We presort what we receive. About 40 percent goes to the dumpster or Salvation Army or Goodwill, or a cloth recycling place. I put as little in my dumpster as we can. But you have to

know what to take and what not to take.”

Click [here](#) for a complete list of items Christ Church doesn't accept.

2. **Share information with other rummage sales.** Christ Church is a member of the North Shore Chicago Rummage consortium, a group of about 20 different churches that share information and produce a list of rummage sales in the area.

McGee says there is no feeling of competition among the church rummage sales.

What we found is that people who like rummage sales, like *all* rummage sales. Since being part of the consortium we've increased our customer base. They're savvy about online advertising, and you can advertise on their website for free.”

3. **Reward your volunteers.** At Christ Church, if you work for 10 hours for the rummage sale you can attend a presale. Prices are 25 percent more, but you get first dibs on merchandise.

“The presale agreement is a real enticement for volunteers,” McGee says. “And my chairs get an hour and a half before qualified volunteers when it is just other chairs shopping. That's great incentive to be chairs. Furniture and the French room sections are the most popular.”

4. **Don't expect to always have your best year ever.** “There are two factors you cannot control, and that's the weather and the quality of your donations. I start watching my weather app about two weeks before the sale because if it rains, it really affects the bottom line.”

That being said, McGee does believe “there's a separate god just for rummage because since I've been doing it, it has only rained once.”

5. **Success is about more than money.** “My definition of a successful rummage sale is happy volunteers and happy customers, and both of them coming back next year. I don't want it to be only about making money. And we give away a lot of stuff during the year. Because we collect year-round we are able to give furniture and items to people in need.”

For more information about Christ Church's rummage sales, go

to <http://christchurchwinnetka.org/serve/rummagebenevolence/shop/>

*Lu Stanton León is an [associate](#) at [Canticle Communications](#) and has worked more than 30 years as an editor, writer and media relations consultant for a variety of publications and businesses, including public affairs firms, business consultants, newspapers, academic institutions, religious organizations and other nonprofits.*

## **Resources**

- List of [Items Not Accepted for Donation](#) at Christ Church, Winnetka, IL
- [The Best Fit: Matching Volunteer Skill Sets to Needs](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, September 6, 2016
- [Gifts: Thank You But????](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices Blog, December 29, 2014
- [Simplify Scheduling and Sign-Ups](#) a tool to help with volunteers, by Brendon Hunter, ECF Vital Practices Ttool
- [Shared Calendar = Less Conflict](#) by Ann Mellow, Vestry Papers, November 2015