

Written inspiration: The narrative budget

The **narrative budget** shows how the generosity of the people of your parish makes a difference. It is a story of the life of the community in service to God's mission.

It recognizes that we do not give money TO the church so much as we give money THROUGH the church to translate God's mission into action.

It tells the story of what the money **DOES**, rather than where the money **GOES**.

A very effective tool for inspiring congregational giving, the narrative budget (called a "mission budget" or "ministry-based budget" in other circles), which is renewed and improved annually, tells the story of your ministry through words and pictures. It shows how generosity impacts your community and empowers your people to work for God's mission in our world.

The time it takes to produce this critical resource is a real investment. (We estimate up to 20 hours for the initial version.) Once you have produced your first narrative budget, you can update it annually with stories of the most recent year's accomplishments. It is important to commit to preparing and updating your narrative budget annually for five years. We are seeking to change behaviour, and we know from life experience that changing behaviour takes time and repetition. Making the narrative budget a multi-year project also means that if it isn't as polished or detailed you want in year one, there is time to improve it for the next edition.

What is a narrative budget?

A narrative budget is primarily a communication tool. It does not replace a line-item budget, but rather

- communicates complex financial information for a broader audience
- links your vision, values, and ministry with your financial priorities
- helps develop a deeper understanding of how the parish stewards the generous gifts that are given by members
- inspires generosity and giving because people can see how their gifts make a difference and change lives
- encourages people to discuss the needs of the ministry more deeply, tell others about the mission and ministry of the congregation, and see their own giving and stewardship as an expression of their faith

Creating your first narrative budget

If this is a new concept for you, or if you do not yet have the time and people to help with this, it may be more realistic to create a one-page narrative budget.

Just tell the story

The story of the ministry is the important element here. If the task of allocating the line-item budget into the ministry categories is daunting, **don't give up**. Just tell the story of what the money does in the areas of worship, learning, caring, and outreach. Use as few words as possible and as many pictures or visuals as possible.

The story of our ministry this year

This year, because of the generous giving of people in our parish, we lived God's mission in many ways.

This is what your generosity accomplished:

- Through **Service**
Within the congregation:
All the pastoral care and support of the people of God so they can in turn serve others in their daily lives.
Beyond the congregation:
All the ways the congregation serves the needs of the wider community (e.g., providing affordable space for community groups such as a daycare centre, AA, or Guides and Scouts).
- Through **Worship**
Include how many people contribute to your community worship. Think of everything that goes into it.
- Through **Learning**
Include all the ways people of all ages grow in understanding of their faith.

Present the narrative budget attractively

Once you have collected the information, create an attractive one- or two-page document (two sides of one page, or bulletin size). Find quotes, illustrations, and photos to increase the impact of the story. Samples from other parishes are found in the online resources.

Enhance your narrative budget

1. Add letters from clergy and/or lay leaders setting the theme for the coming year.
2. Include a prayer written especially for your congregation's ministry areas and used regularly throughout the year. (See "Writing a prayer for your giving program," p. 25.)
3. Track the gift of time: volunteer opportunities and impact in each area.
4. Include more information on how to make an informed and intentional gift, such as giving charts or a Q&A about the giving and generosity in your congregation.
5. If you are putting the narrative budget on your website, add short video testimonials, such as "Why I come and why I stay" or videos highlighting the impact of a ministry area.

Samples of narrative budgets can be found on line: anglican.ca/gtp