



THE NARRATIVE BUDGET

GROWING FAITHFUL GIVERS THROUGH THE NARRATIVE BUDGET

The Gospel narratives of the life and teachings of Jesus illustrate profound and memorable truths in simple everyday stories. How can one forget the call of fishermen to be followers - to be disciples - or Jesus' visits to homes for healing and rest? How can one be unaffected by parables like *The Prodigal Son* or *The Good Samaritan*?

Just as the Gospel stories imbue everyday life with meaning and insight, stories of hope can inject invigorating life into a seemingly dull and tedious document like a church budget!

While line-item budgets are effective planning and resource allocation monitoring tools for finance committees, they say nothing about the impact of ministry on people's lives. Line item budgets do not show the transforming power of the love of God when shared through mission outreach, worship, and discipleship training. In fact, they often communicate the wrong information about the church's priorities and ministry.

Consider the amount your church's line-item budget commits to "youth ministry." In most budgets, this is a very small amount-listed separately from staffing and facilities that support youth ministry. The amount does not take into account special funding efforts by youth or fees for activities. If a church's annual budget is \$200,000 and youth ministry is allocated \$1,500, does this mean the church's commitment to youth ministry is less than one percent of the church's resources? Certainly not, but that is the message the line-item budget conveys.

Churches that tell stories of mission and ministry through testimony, offering meditations, newsletter articles, and website information excite people about giving to make a difference. The Narrative Budget in the annual stewardship emphasis is another means of communicating the link between faith and giving, between resources for God's work and positive outcomes in the lives of individuals, families, communities, and the world.



CONSIDER WHY STORIES OF MINISTRY ARE SO IMPORTANT:

- Multiple worship services limit members' view of the whole picture of congregational life. In addition, most members do not participate in all programs of the church; knowledge of those programs and their impact, however, is crucial for an understanding of the mission and vision of the church.
- Often church reporting of mission outreach is episodic-the youth return from their mission trip, for example, and tell their story in Sunday worship services. Only those attending that Sunday will hear the story.
- The worship schedule offers limited opportunity to communicate ministry stories. Again, irregular attendance patterns prevent all members from hearing those inspiring stories.
- Churches, particularly in large urban settings, are much more diverse today, with fewer opportunities for interacting with one another in their communities outside church activities.
- **Stewardship and giving studies confirm people do not give to budgets. People give to people, to needs, to causes, and to make a difference.**

Steps for producing the Narrative Budget are detailed below. However, creating and introducing a Narrative Budget in your congregation requires several important **preparation activities**.

- Does your church have a mission statement - a statement of vision and purpose? If so, obtain a copy; if not, meet with the pastor and key church leaders to write a simple statement that expresses who you are and what you do in ministry. How would your community be different if your church was not active there?
- Engage in conversations about stories of your church's ministry. What are the expressions of ministries currently active in your church? Until you can articulate what your church does in mission and ministry, you cannot craft a narrative budget.
- Will you use last year's budget or next year's budget for determining how the church's financial resources are used in ministry? The Narrative Budget often uses next year's projected budget for communicating ministry. It is not, however, intended to substitute the annual budget. The finance committee will establish an appropriate line-item budget, for accounting and monitoring purposes, based on your church's policies.



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- Will you include non-budgeted items in your Narrative Budget expenses? In the missions area, for example, some churches include regular (monthly communion rail) and special mission offerings in addition to budget items, including apportionments.



- The line-item budget is an important tool for planning, approved by the charge conference, administrative board or council, and monitored by the finance committee per your church's policies. It should also be available to anyone who requests a copy. Do not mail it to the entire congregation, but make it available in the church office and mail it to anyone who requests a copy.
- Request sample copies of narrative budgets from other churches or the Texas Methodist Foundation Stewardship Services staff. You will not want to replicate another narrative budget since your church and ministry are unique. However, models can be used as a guide in creating your narrative budget.

STEPS IN CREATING YOUR CHURCH'S NARRATIVE BUDGET

1. Select and enlist a team to create your Narrative Budget. This can be the Stewardship Team; the group responsible for annual stewardship emphasis; or the senior pastor and a few creative persons and ministry leaders.
2. Coordinate the Narrative Budget with the theme and activities of your annual stewardship emphasis. In addition, create a consistent "look and feel" for all annual stewardship printed materials, using the same color scheme and graphics.
3. Review or write your church's mission and ministry statement. In addition, describe your church in narrative form. Who are you? What has God called you to do in ministry?
4. Select five to seven mission areas, depending on the size of your church. Write your ministry stories, including worship, Christian education, music, youth, missions, and other important ministries unique to your church. Use language familiar to your congregation and community. For example, "spiritual formation" is a phrase often used in describing discipleship training ministries, such as Sunday school and bible studies. Will all members of your congregation understand the term? Try to avoid "exclusive" language or be sure to clearly define uncommon terms. Incorporate photographs (obtain permission for use of others' photos and from individuals pictured), graphics, and white space to improve visual presentation and break up blocks of text.
5. Using the line-item budget approved by the finance committee (see preparation activities above), divide the total budget into the selected ministry areas. For example, using a reasonable formula, determine how much of staff salaries and benefits, utilities, insurance, building cleaning and repair, etc., is committed to each ministry area.
6. Request that staff and appropriate church leaders identify areas where ministry can be enhanced or expanded as a result of increased giving. Be faith-challenging but have reasonable expectations.
7. Write a descriptive narrative of each ministry area, reporting effective ministry, new opportunities, and the difference continued and/or additional funding will make. Remember to tell compelling stories! Numbers of participants may be helpful, but what they are doing and how their efforts are changing lives (of both recipients and givers) are more important.
8. Prepare the information in a brochure format. This may mean designing a print ready document or gathering the information to be conveyed to a graphic designer.
9. Determine how the Narrative Budget brochure will be used in your annual stewardship emphasis and year-round stewardship activities. Multiple mailings or distributions are recommended, as a single mailing is usually not enough to gain attention. Include that quantity in your print order.
10. Notify appropriate church officers of the expected printing costs.
11. Proof the document thoroughly before signing off to complete printing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GROWING FAITHFUL GIVERS, VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT WWW.TMF-FDN.ORG OR CALL 800/933-5502.