



# CASE STUDY

The Basilica of the National Shrine  
of Immaculate Conception

Spreading Holiday  
Cheer & Giving



## BACKGROUND

Located in Washington, DC and affectionately referred to as America's Catholic Church, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (Basilica) is renowned for its unique architecture, large art collection, and rich history and heritage. As one of the ten largest churches in the world, the Basilica is home to more than 80 chapels and oratories that reflect the people, cultures, and traditions that are the fabric of the Catholic faith and mosaic of the United States as a nation.



The Basilica was founded in 1920 and held its very first mass on Easter Sunday in 1924. Since then, it's added to its world-class collections, architecture, and programs that now inspire over a million visitors a year, including notable visitors such as Pope Francis, Pope Benedict XVI, Saint Pope John Paul II, and Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, among others.

Designated as a National Sanctuary of Prayer and Pilgrimage by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Basilica has an important role to play as our nation's preeminent Marian shrine. From daily ministries to seasonal programs and events, the Basilica depends on donations to ensure its doors remain open for prayer, reconciliation, and worship.

As its direct response partner, The Lukens Company (TLC) works hand-in-hand with the Basilica to create engaging direct mail campaigns that connect with faithful supporters and inspire donations all year round.

## CHALLENGES

The Christmas season is an incredibly important time for the Basilica. Every part of the church hums with excitement to prepare for celebrating the birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's also an important time for sharing the Basilica's joy and gratitude with donors.

Each year, the Basilica mails out a beautiful Christmas Ornament fundraising appeal package containing an inspirational letter, prayer, and Christmas ornament gift to its list of past and present donors. Since its inception, this package quickly became one of the Basilica's most successful annual direct mail fundraising packages. However, despite some modifications over the years, the balance between package costs and net revenue was tipping in the wrong direction and its impact was starting to plateau. TLC needed an out-of-the-box solution to engage with donors and inspire higher levels of giving for the Basilica.

## OBJECTIVE

**To revitalize the campaign, our team at TLC dug into our faith and experience to develop a fresh take on the Christmas Ornament package that connected with donors and invigorated results.**

## TLC SOLUTIONS

Our first step was to review packages from previous years, including all the modifications and data that goes with it. We saw that although the Christmas Ornament package was one of the more expensive packages that the Basilica mails, past efforts to decrease package costs were unsuccessful.

In our 35+ years of fundraising experience, we've found that donors respond more favorably to premiums that they consider valuable. However, determining the value can be a tricky balance. Too expensive and you lose that delicate net revenue

balance. Too low in quality or usefulness and your prospect's next step is toward the recycling bin, not their checkbook.

With this in mind, we decided that instead of trying to find yet another cost-saving measure, we'd boldly go in the other direction and include a more expensive, higher value premium.

The new Christmas ornament was completely redesigned to a round four-color epoxy-coated piece that featured a nativity scene with "Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception 2016" inscribed around the bronze edge.



Delivered in a standard #10 window envelope, the carrier included the message "Christmas Blessings" and teased "Limited-Edition Christmas Ornament Enclosed." Inside, the donor found a letter and reply form, return envelope, and Christmas ornament affixed to a beautiful 4-color insert.

Signed by the current Monsignor, the letter and reply form delivered a message of gratitude, blessings, and joy in celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It also included an ask to share in the giving spirit and contribute using the attached reply form.

With the redesigned ornament delivered in time for donors to hang on their Christmas trees, the reimagined Christmas Ornament package delivered a meaningful and inspiring message that donors couldn't resist despite it being a busy time of giving.



## RESULTS

The Christmas ornament was a complete success and undeniably inspired increased giving.



The Basilica was delighted see how our decades of experience in data-driven direct mail strategies resulted a significant growth in supporters' holiday giving spirit: its net revenue rose by 10%, and its average gift was 8.5% more than it was in the previous fiscal year.



**▲ 10%  
Net Revenue**



**▲ 8.5%  
Average Gift**

**Are you ready to grow your donor base,  
raise more funds, and increase your impact?**

Whether you're refreshing your direct response program, ramping up your fundraising, or expanding your donor file, we can provide you with dynamic strategies that champion your cause.

Get in touch with our team of experts to begin crafting data-driven, creative, and cost-effective communications that are finely tuned to your audience.