



CASE STUDY

Diocese Fundraising

Reversing the Catholic Donor Decline

How a Donor Survey Unearthed Ways to Revitalize a Diocese's Fundraising



BACKGROUND

While the number of Catholic donors has been decreasing over the last 25 years, Dioceses really began feeling the impact about ten years ago. Since then, Dioceses across the board have been losing between 2-6% of their donors annually, which in turn has presented many obstacles with maintaining fundraising revenue. One Diocese set out to reverse this trend.

In addition to multiple individual parishes, nearly a dozen charitable programs rely on the Diocese's fundraising—schools, support groups, shelters, and more. These programs were in jeopardy without consistent fundraising and donor support.

CHALLENGES

Year after year, the number of the Diocese's donors was continuing to decrease, resulting in a slew of challenges. Traditional fundraising tactics were not nearly as effective as they were in the past, the costs for communications were rising, and Mass attendance was in decline. The Diocese found themselves at a crossroads trying to figure out how to reach, retain, and inspire giving from its parishioners.

It weighed an array of options ranging from cutting costly publications to combining campaigns to restructuring its entire donor outreach approach. After a few years of trial and error, the Diocese knew that it needed a fresh perspective to understand its donors and create a well-informed, donor-focused fundraising strategy. It thus turned to The Lukens Company (TLC) to conduct survey research and identify ways to reengage donors support of the church and ministry programs.

OBJECTIVE

TLC sought to revitalize the Diocese's fundraising program by creating and evaluating a survey that would unearth if its decrease in donors will continue, key indicators about current and recently lapsed donors, and ways to retain and increase donors.

TLC SOLUTIONS

TLC's market research division, Morey Group, developed a comprehensive online survey that gathered a variety of information about parishioners, including demographics, Mass attendance intentions, and awareness of the Diocese's mission and church services.



The survey also assessed parishioners in the following five areas:



Email invitations were sent by the Diocese to over 22,500 parishioners with over 2,000 surveys completed. The response to the Diocese's survey was outstanding and unearthed that **without any changes, the number of its donors will decrease by 10% in the next twelve months.**

Based on survey results, TLC's experienced Catholic Institutions team made specific recommendations that included how to:

- ▶ Reduce barriers to giving
- ▶ Develop messaging that connects with parishioners
- ▶ Align communications with parishioner interests
- ▶ Deliver motivating campaigns
- ▶ Convert more parishioners into donors

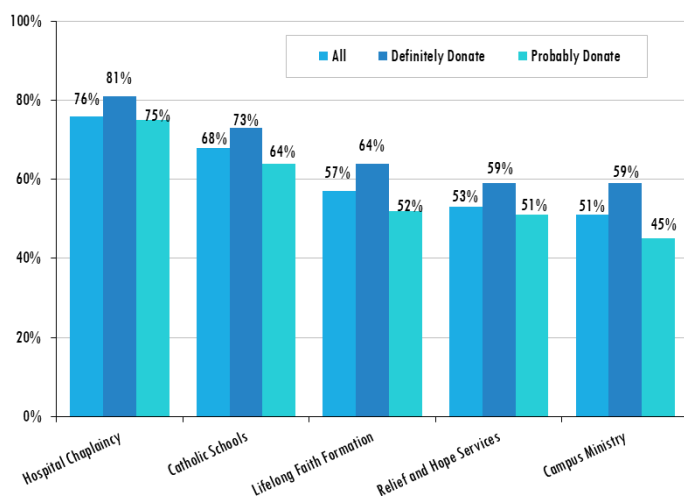
The survey also provided crucial insights about the Diocese's donors, which led the TLC team to make essential recommendations to help the Diocese attract, retain, and raise donations.

MOTIVATIONS TO GIVE

The survey results revealed that **the top two reasons to donate are to support the Diocese and personal responsibility.**

TLC'S RECOMMENDATION

Tell stories of service, as those who support ministry programs and services that the Diocese supports are more likely to donate. Along these lines, appeals language should focus on responsibility to the Diocese and personal responsibility to the greater mission of the church.



CAUSES THAT MOTIVATE GIVING

When breaking down donors' motivations to give even further, **the survey ranked five aspects of the Diocese that definite donors and probable donors are most likely to support, the top two being hospital chaplaincy and Catholic schools.**

This information was revelatory for the Diocese and resulted in a shift in messaging for future appeals.

TLC'S RECOMMENDATION

Appeals should include messaging that outlines the impact donations have on the top five services that the Diocese provides. Additionally, the Diocese should deploy small test campaigns that focus on the two top ranked services.



COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

The results indicated that **parishioners are most likely to receive information about the Diocese from its bulletins, magazine, and Mass.** This information was a game changer.



The Diocese was considering cutting or reducing funding for its magazine, but instead found that over 65% of its parishioners use the magazine to get updates and learn about church happenings.

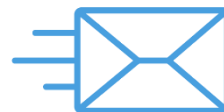
When it comes to parishioners' use of online communications, we found that:



35%
Refer to the Website



19%
Refer to Social Media



18%
Refer to Emails

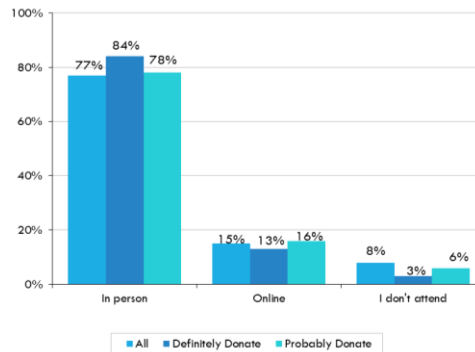
TLC'S RECOMMENDATION

The Diocese should continue distributing and even consider expanding the distribution of its magazine, as it's an essential source of information for parishioners. Moreover, the Diocese should use a multichannel approach to share its stories of service, examples personal responsibility, work of the hospital chaplaincy, and importance of Catholic school education. This should go beyond direct mail and include its magazine, website, social media, and email. Expanding communication methods as well as increasing the awareness and impact of its ministry programs will drive donor support.



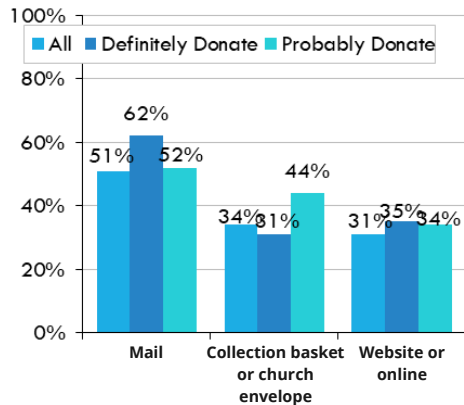
GIVING POTENTIAL

Our findings confirmed that **there is a direct correlation between Mass attendance and donor likelihood.** Moreover, the survey reaffirmed that the biggest donors are those who attend Mass more frequently—one or more times a week.



TLC'S RECOMMENDATION

Get parishioners back to attending Mass in-person. They should be the primary target of appeals, with online-only Mass attendees being a secondary audience.



DONATION METHOD PREFERENCES

We learned that parishioners who marked that they would “definitely donate” to the Catholic Appeal overwhelmingly preferred to donate through the mail. However, **those who marked “probably donate” had an almost equal preference between the mail and in-person donations through a collection basket or church envelope.**

TLC'S RECOMMENDATION

Our data shows that conducting a multichannel ask campaign that includes mail and online collection would resonate with all donors. For the “probably donate” segment, specific language should be included to encourage donating via mail or online versus in-person.



RESULTS

The donor survey was a resounding success in terms of both response and insights.



After years of a declining number of donors followed by the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, TLC's survey allowed the Diocese to better understand donor behavior and intent in this new era. It enabled the Diocese to pull back the curtain and gain critical insights into its parishioners' habits, preferences, and most importantly, motivations for giving. In turn, the Diocese was able to develop a data-driven, donor-centric fundraising and communication strategy to convert more parishioners into new and recurring donors.

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.