



End of the Year Letter Guide and Checklist



www.church-development.com

Why end of the year?

25-35% of giving happens between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Giving Tuesday, the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, has notable participation in younger generations. Tax season drives year-end gifts, which must be dated by Dec 31 to count for the current tax year. Although, when portfolios do poorly, sometimes giving is postponed until the following year, meaning January is also a big giving month.

The #1 reason non-profits (including churches) don't receive is because they don't ask.

With this in mind, I recommend you send out an end-of-year ask letter to your congregation. Keep it short. Attention spans are shortening (are you reading this whole guide or skimming?). People will skim your letter. Here's what our eyes look for. In order:

1. One-Page Wonder

I know, you've got so much you need to say, but we live in the TL;DR world (that's "too long; didn't read"). This means that if the letter looks long, sometimes people will save it until later... only sometimes later never comes.

Keep it on one page, header and all. This is the first step to get eyes scanning over the rest of your letter. If you *really* need to communicate something longer, offer a QR code, a website address or an insert to review that is separate from the letter with the call-to-action.

2. Dear "Me"

You don't have to become a technology master, but please learn how to mail merge your church mailing list to print personalized letters. Avoid the "friend of the church" or the ever pleasant "Dear member" greeting. With modern technology everywhere else, people expected to be addressed personally when receiving any kind of communication. Start off each letter addressed to the first name of the recipient(s).

3. Blue Ink Signature

Once someone sees their name at the start of a letter, eyes will drift down to the bottom to see if it's from a person. Use a blue ink electronic signature. Although black is easier to copy, blue signatures look more personal.

For more how-to guides, stewardship checklists, and pro-tips visit
www.church-development.com

4. P.S. Statement

Yup, the last line of your letter often gets read before the first. This means that you'll want to summarize the content of your letter with a bolded P.S. statement, Try something like this:

P.S. Thank you for considering financially supporting [church name] in [year]. You can make a gift online or deliver it to the parish by [final date]. Every gracious gift of any amount helps us share the love of Jesus during the holidays and beyond.

5. Tell a Story

The first paragraph requires a fair amount of creativity. It is not actually what people look at first, but now that you've structured your letter and you've passed the subconscious smell test, let's focus on your hook.

Use the fun side of your brain. Tell a story. As this letter is going out during the holiday season, talk about taking your family out to cut down the tree, or talk about memories of Christmas growing up, or share a way God has surprised you recently.

Whatever you do, don't start with statistics. If you're the pastor, you've probably learned this technique already in starting your sermons. Bring this same hook to your writing. Make sure that first sentence makes your reader want to go on, then get into the details of why you're asking for an end-of-year financial gift and what you'd like to pursue.

6. Make it Pretty

Need I say more? Print on your church letterhead or add some festive design. You can create a letter header image in a graphic design software like Canva.com and add it to a Word or other document to work with your mail merge. Invest in a quality paper.

7. Say "Thank You"

Our favorite thank you is a Christmas ornament from the church. Lots of vendors will create a custom ornament, say a metal cutting of your church building or logo, for just a few dollars a piece. Say "a donor sponsored this gift" if someone has stepped forward to do that. People LOVE these, and the church benefits many times over for the money spent. A handwritten, "Merry Christmas & thank you" note is also very appreciated.

Checklist & Final Thoughts

Letter Structure:

- ❑ Keep it to one page
- ❑ Use a mail merge
- ❑ Use a blue ink signature
- ❑ Include a bolded P.S. summary statement
- ❑ Share a story to engage people with your first sentence / paragraph
- ❑ Make it look nice and festive
- ❑ Say Thank You with a gift or a card to donors

In addition:

- ❑ In your letter, share some of the highlights of the past year, what their giving has helped do already, and then how it will bless people in the future
- ❑ Talk about the end-of-year gift several times in church and communicate the message in the bulletin, via email, social media, etc.
- ❑ Send the ask letter to arrive in time for Giving Tuesday or just after Christmas. If doing an Advent/Christmas appeal, leave the response date open to allow people to give in January (if they want the tax benefits the following year)
- ❑ Make sure people can give online, include a url or QR code to your giving page of your website
- ❑ Have givers designate these gifts—on their check / online—as being for the “end-of-year gift”
- ❑ Ask people to consider making a “Christmas gift”

Sample Letter Text

<enter date>

Dear <enter first name(s)>,

Merry Christmas! As we celebrate of the birth of the Savior, I trust that the season of Advent has been meaningful for you.

At this time of year, we remember that the Magi brought gifts to the Christ child. Likewise, I want to make a final invitation this year to support the church this Christmas season. We will be taking a special offering to be used for [enter purpose here].

This past year our efforts have been blessed and, together, we've:

- [ministry success]
- [ministry success]
- [ministry success]

If you would like to make a contribution to our Christmas offering, you may:

- Drop an offertory envelope in the collection at Mass
- Mail a check to the parish office
- Send your contribution via the online banking offered by your financial institution
- Use the online giving button on our parish website: [church giving page URL] to set up a gift from using your bank account, credit or debit card or call the parish office for assistance with an automated gift
- Donate appreciated assets (i.e. stock, mutual funds, etc.)
- Make a charitable distribution from your IRA, if allowed.
- Bring your offering to Mass on Christmas

Thank you for your generosity to God's work at our church. May you be blessed this Christmas season with joy and peace.

Merry Christmas,

[Pastor's blue signature]

[Pastor's name & title]

P.S. Thank you for considering financially supporting [church name] in [year]. You can make a gift online or deliver it to the parish by [final date]. Every gracious gift of any amount helps us share the love of Jesus during the holidays and beyond.

Bulletin Insert Text Sample

GIVING AT [CHURCH NAME]

As we near the end of 20XX, we would greatly appreciate fulfillment of 20XX pledges by year end. For those of you who have not pledged but consistently give a year-end gift, we are grateful for your past support and for any contribution you are able to make this year. Please allow adequate mail/processing time depending on your type of transaction to enable us to credit the donation by [DATE] for possible tax-deduction purposes.

You may:

- Drop an offertory envelope in the collection at Mass
- Mail a check to the parish office
- Send your contribution via the online banking offered by your financial institution
- Use the online giving button on our parish website: [church giving page URL] to set up a gift from using your bank account, credit or debit card or call the parish office for assistance with an automated gift
- Donate appreciated assets (i.e. stock, mutual funds, etc.)
- Make a charitable distribution from your IRA, if allowed.

If you have any questions regarding your pledge balance or need assistance initiating an automated withdrawal, gift of stock or any other type of transaction, please contact [NAME], Director of Stewardship, at [PHONE NUMBER] or [name@email.org]. As always, we are grateful for your ongoing support of our parish.