

Why should congregations prepare narrative budgets?

As congregations we come together each week to celebrate the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through worship. A story that has touched the lives of countless people, speaks of profound generosity and challenges us to live out our own lives in response to God's abundance. Each congregation has a story to tell about how it responds in thanksgiving to the call to serve God's people. It is a story that includes worship, fellowship, evangelism, faith development, outreach and pastoral care.

Your congregation's budget can also tell the story. A narrative budget integrates dollars, people and ministry to tell the story of a congregation's mission and ministry. It is the representation of the line item budget in simple, easy-to-read descriptive terms, often with congregational pictures, quotes, illustrations, graphs and pie charts; however, it does not replace the financial statements. It is often developed by the treasurer and/or finance committee, presented in PowerPoint at the annual congregational meeting and distributed as a printed resource. A narrative budget gives a vision of ministry rather than just a spreadsheet of line items. It reflects how the congregation spends its time, talent and treasure in a different way, rather than just how we pay the bills.

Narrative budgets can assist with stewardship conversations. They help focus stewardship on the core message of celebrating God's gifts to us, and every member's opportunity and obligation to celebrate and offer in return their gifts to God.

In the resource "Narrative Budgeting, Christian Practice, Purpose and Narrative," Judith Johnson <http://www.centerforfaithandgiving.org/Portals/CFG/Narrative%20Budgetting%20Judith%20Johnson.pdf> shares how important it is to help each member in your congregation develop a picture of the whole mission of your church, particularly when you are asking them to give both their time and money. Narrative budgets bring the ministry of the church community to life.

Additional resources with worksheets and examples for preparing narrative budgets are:

The Importance of a Narrative Budget by Dave Ponting
http://www.churchleadership.com/leadingideas/issues/pdf/2014/140910_article.pdf

The Narrative Budget: A Workbook for Writing Your Parish's Sacred Story, Stewardship Development Department. Diocese of Toronto, March 2013
http://www.stewardshipmontreal.ca/uploads/3/6/7/7/3677530/the_misional_narrative_budget.pdf