

Letter-writing guidelines

In preparing the text of your leadership letter, you will invest a great deal of prayer, thought, and energy. Your letter needs to sound authentic, natural, and true to the culture of your particular community. Nevertheless, certain basic principles apply. The following points are ideal guidelines, and the degree of detail you add to them will depend on the resources available.

Format

Strive to be concise, and to have a letter that is no more than one letter-sized page. Additional information can be included on the second side or as enclosures, but the less there is to read, the better.

Make the document easy to read. This means using a clear font in a type size no smaller than 10 points. Justify only the left-hand margin, not both sides.

Structure

Open with gratitude

Give thanks for past and current gifts as often as possible (with the total amount of gifts if appropriate). Include a biblical quotation on the theme of Giving Our Thanks & Praise.

Tell a story

Tell one that tells of the impact of generosity in your parish; connect the theme with your ministry.

Point to enclosures

Consider enclosing other documents that add more detail about the program, about what they might give, and about how that can be done. These might include

- plans and opportunities for the coming year
- testimonials about the impact of your ministry and the results of people's past generosity
- your narrative budget
- different methods of making the gift: cheque, Pre-Authorized Remittance, online giving, weekly or monthly envelopes

Invite

Invite them to give of their time and talent as well as of their treasure. Request that they make an informed and prayerful decision and return the enclosed intention card with whatever gift they choose to make by a particular date.

Conclude with gratitude

Celebrate all the good ways God has blessed the parish. Tell your readers to watch for more stories to come. Create some anticipation of more to come that is worthy of celebrating and being thankful for.

Hand-sign

Have two key individuals hand-sign the letter. Include contact details, such as a phone number and an email address.

Customize

Remind your readers that God is the provider of an abundance of resources for ministry and mission. Your parish is rich in faith, service, love, talent, life experience, care for one another, and financial capability. Communities of faith have many assets, including financial ones, with which to carry out their mission. Remind them of their “wealth.”

Include some financial facts and goals. Tell people what their generosity will do. Use positive language:

- Avoid language around “campaigning.” Instead, use terms like mission plan, annual ministry plan, and personal giving plan.
- Avoid any language that sounds like begging, using guilt as a strategy, or suggesting that it is the church’s need for money to pay the bills.

Adjust your letter to each recipient. If you are writing to people who fit different categories, such as regular givers and occasional givers, customize the different letters but keep the main elements the same.