



# Breaking Through the Pledge Plateau

## Best Practices

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The Episcopal Network for Stewardship

# Learning Objectives

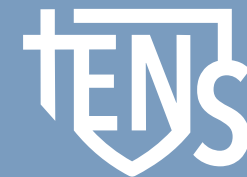
1. Analyzing trends in giving – understanding donor relations
2. Identifying and teaching the Mission
3. How to recruit, train, and support leaders who lead
4. How to measure impact in your community
5. How to adapt your approach to fundraising

*Introduction*



# Lessons from Nonprofits about donor relations

- ▶ Donor Relations can apply to churches as well as nonprofits
  - ▶ Our members have **many motivations to support the congregation**; we can't make simple assumptions based on old models
    - ▶ Generational changes
    - ▶ Some member still give out of a sense of *duty*, but many more give because of *impact*, or *belonging*
  - ▶ It is a responsible and ethical part of stewardship to **analyze our members' giving and understand how to motivate them**



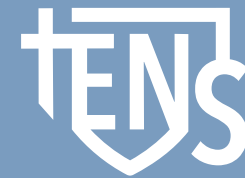
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*Why donors plateau*

# Lessons from Nonprofits about donor relations

- ▶ What does it mean to analyze **donor trends**?
  - ▶ **Congregational leadership should have a good sense of how members' giving is performing year to year.**
    - ▶ You can run reports with individual pledging units and the names removed, if your culture desires confidentiality
  - ▶ Run your report to show at least three years side by side

*Why donors plateau*

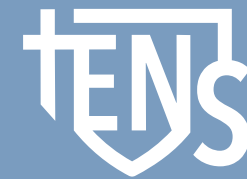


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# Lessons from Nonprofits about donor relations

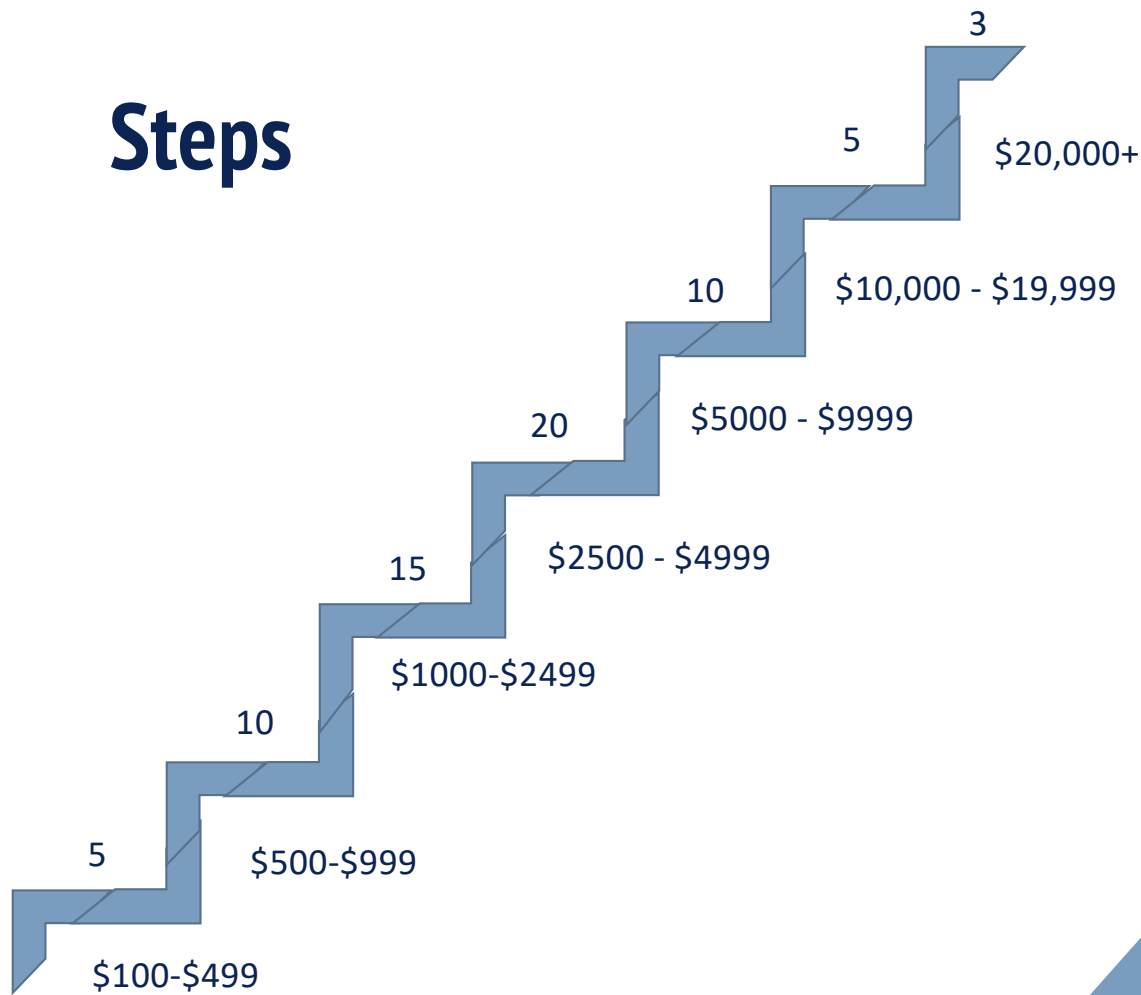
- ▶ Employ a *Moves Management* exercise to your pledge campaign
  - ▶ Process to learn, strategize, intervene, and move a donor from one level to another
  - ▶ Affinity – how does your mission resonate with a member
  - ▶ Access – how close are you to a member
  - ▶ Ability – how much is a member able to give / what can be expected

*Why donors plateau*



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# Steps



*Why donors plateau*

- ▶ This congregation has 68 households that pledge.
- ▶ Together, they contribute \$272,800
- ▶ Average gift size is \$4012, a little above the national average
- ▶ This tool can be used to envision what it would be like to move up a level, and how much that would increase the pledge campaign totals



# Proportional Giving

Annual Income	Weekly Income	Beyond the Tithe		Tithe	Proportional Giving								
		15%	12%	10%	9%	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%	3%	2%	1%
\$20,000	\$385	\$58	\$46	\$38	\$35	\$31	\$27	\$23	\$19	\$15	\$12	\$8	\$4
\$25,000	\$481	\$72	\$58	\$48	\$43	\$38	\$34	\$29	\$24	\$19	\$14	\$10	\$5
\$30,000	\$577	\$87	\$69	\$58	\$52	\$46	\$40	\$35	\$29	\$23	\$17	\$12	\$6
\$40,000	\$769	\$115	\$92	\$77	\$69	\$62	\$54	\$46	\$38	\$31	\$23	\$15	\$8
\$50,000	\$962	\$144	\$115	\$96	\$87	\$77	\$67	\$58	\$48	\$38	\$29	\$19	\$10
\$60,000	\$1,154	\$173	\$138	\$115	\$104	\$92	\$81	\$69	\$58	\$46	\$35	\$23	\$12
\$70,000	\$1,346	\$202	\$162	\$135	\$121	\$108	\$94	\$81	\$67	\$54	\$40	\$27	\$13
\$80,000	\$1,538	\$231	\$185	\$154	\$138	\$123	\$108	\$92	\$77	\$62	\$46	\$31	\$15
\$90,000	\$1,731	\$260	\$208	\$173	\$156	\$138	\$121	\$104	\$87	\$69	\$52	\$35	\$17
\$100,000	\$1,923	\$288	\$231	\$192	\$173	\$154	\$135	\$115	\$96	\$77	\$58	\$38	\$19
\$120,000	\$2,308	\$346	\$277	\$231	\$208	\$185	\$162	\$138	\$115	\$92	\$69	\$46	\$23
\$150,000	\$2,885	\$433	\$346	\$288	\$260	\$231	\$202	\$173	\$144	\$115	\$87	\$58	\$29



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*Why donors plateau?*

# Giving Data Tells a Story

- ▶ 110 Households (units) estimated for 2021
- ▶ \$255,156 total estimates
- ▶ **Average ( $\bar{x}$ ): \$2,320**
- ▶ *Median (M): \$1,810*



Church of the Advent  
Sun City West, Arizona



*Why donors plateau?*



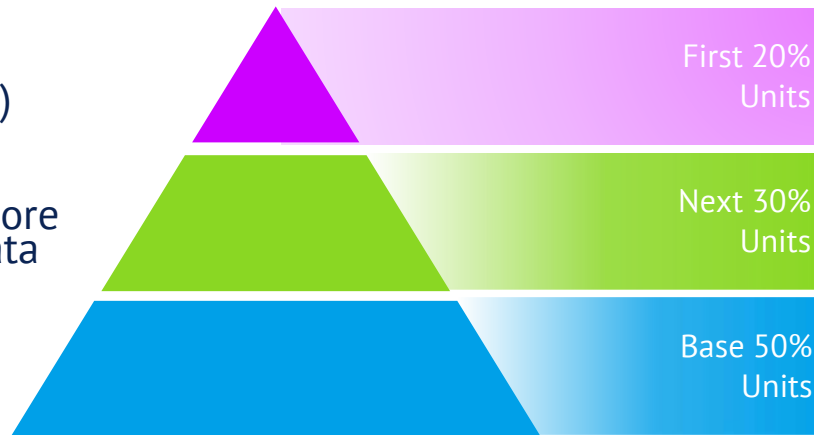
# Estimates of Giving Pyramid

Shows the wider range of giving in a congregation

**Total for 2021: \$255,156 Avg. \$2,320 Median = \$1,810 110 units**

It shows:

- ▶ Mean (Avg.)
- ▶ Median
- ▶ Provides more relevant data

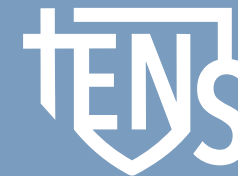


People mentally place themselves on the pyramid once they see it

*Why donors plateau?*

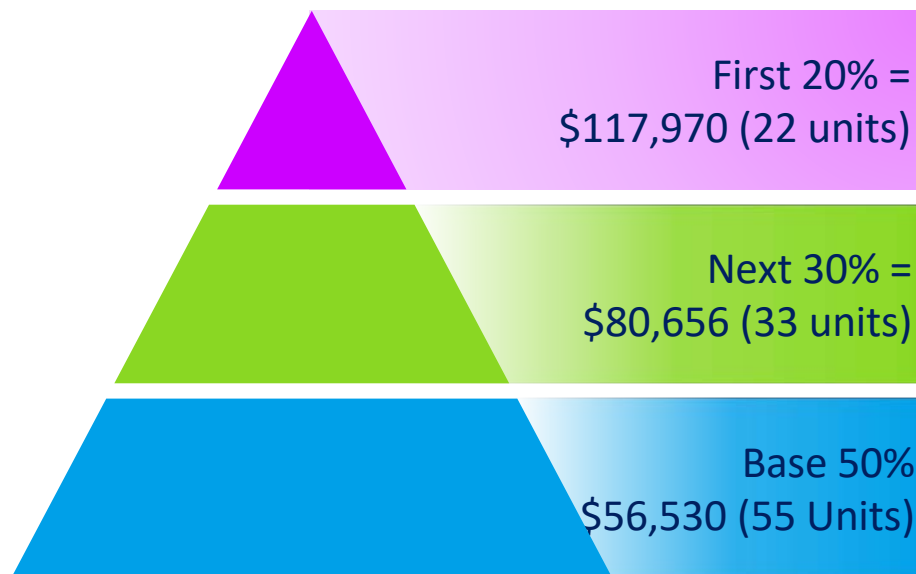
You can download all these templates and forms from TENS:

<https://www.tens.org/resource-library/tools-best-practices/evaluating-campaign-performance-a-toolkit/>



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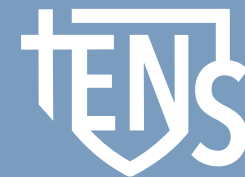
# Estimates of Giving Pyramid



*Why donors plateau?*

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# Estimates of Giving Data

Total of Estimates \$255,156      110 Units (100%)

*Avg. \$2,320      M: \$1,810*

▶ First 20% of Estimates 22 Units = \$117,970 (46%)

*Avg.: \$5,362      M: \$4,800*

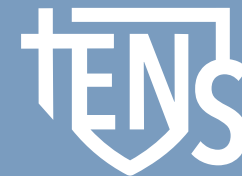
▶ Next 30% of Estimates 33 Units = \$83,646 (33%)

*Avg.: \$2,444      M: \$2,400*

▶ Base 50% of Estimates 55 Units = \$53,540 (21%)

*Avg.: \$1,028      M: \$1,080*

*Why donors plateau?*



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# Lessons from Nonprofits about donor relations

- ▶ Where does a pastoral relationship fit into all this analysis?
  - ▶ Donor Analysis sometimes feels like we are removing the individual from the relationship. **But in church, we know we can't do that.**
  - ▶ When we look at donor data in church we should
    - ▶ **Pray** for that individual or family
    - ▶ Note changes in pledge or fulfilment as **possible pastoral issues**
    - ▶ **Remember what we know about them** through our relationships to know how to approach them

*Why donors plateau?*



**Tip: It's not just the clergy who hold pastoral relationships with members. We all take on this role as sisters and brothers.**



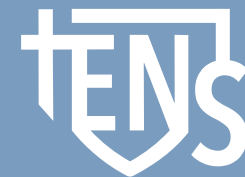
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# Lessons from Nonprofits about donor relations

- ▶ Donor Fatigue is real
  - ▶ Churches have often thought they were immune to donor fatigue, **but our members get just as bored** with our approach as any other donors would
  - ▶ Donors who are **still in their earning years** who are making the same gift year over year are likely fatigued. *These members are on a pledge plateau*
  - ▶ *Now, let's explore how to help them*



*Why donors plateau?*



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# Your Mission

- ▶ Do your members know what your mission is? Are you sure?
  - ▶ Bringing Christ to the World
    - ▶ Is a fine mission. It's a little big for a single church, though.
  - ▶ Serving our Neighbors
    - ▶ Serving them what? Or how? Be specific.
  - ▶ A Place Where All are Welcome
    - ▶ Sounds nice, but welcome to do what? Why?
- ▶ Everyone in your congregation should know what your mission is



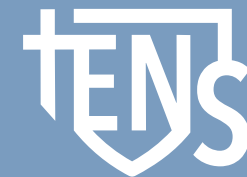
*Mission-focused Members*

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# Your Mission

- ▶ Mission should be
  - ▶ Impact-focused
  - ▶ Local
  - ▶ Inspiring
  - ▶ Inclusive
  - ▶ Aspirational
  - ▶ Easily articulated
  - ▶ Teachable
  - ▶ Accessible
  - ▶ Revisited from time to time as the neighborhood and membership change

*Mission-focused Members*



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# Your Mission

- ▶ When your members know your mission, they can
  - ▶ Tell others about it
  - ▶ Get behind it
  - ▶ Pray for its realization
  - ▶ Advocate for it
  - ▶ Input their ideas
  - ▶ Support it with their gifts of time, talent, and treasure
  - ▶ Pull in the same direction



*Mission-focused Members*

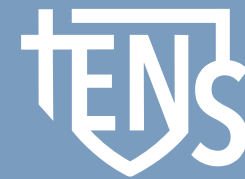
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# Your Mission

- ▶ Don't assume that members know what your mission is
  - ▶ Vestry goals for growth
  - ▶ Long-term plans
  - ▶ Capital plans
  - ▶ Program incubation
- ▶ Teach about your mission
- ▶ Preach about your mission
- ▶ Communicate frequently about your mission

*Mission-focused Members*



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# Are your leaders leading?

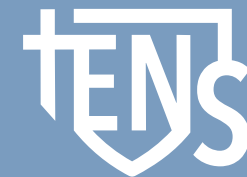
- ▶ One of the most significant reasons that members do not donate (or donate more) **is because their leaders do not ask more of them**
  - ▶ Stewardship or vestry that talk about money in public only during pledge season
  - ▶ Focus on the pledges and not on generosity



# Are your leaders leading?

- ▶ The stewardship team is NOT the fundraising committee. As important as it is to raise money for church ministry, **the focus of the stewardship team is to encourage Christians to use their God-given gifts in ways that honor God.**
  - ▶ Formation
  - ▶ Prayer
  - ▶ Generosity and Gratitude
  - ▶ Inspiration

*Stewardship Leadership*



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# Alignment

- ▶ Generosity and fundraising ministry **should be in alignment** with other program areas
  - ▶ Adult and youth formation
  - ▶ Confirmation and inquirers classes
  - ▶ Budget and finance
  - ▶ Planned giving / legacy
  - ▶ Capital committee / buildings & grounds
  - ▶ Communications, newsletters, website, social media



*Stewardship Leadership*

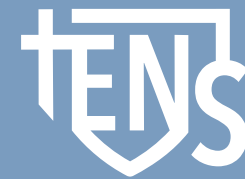
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# Generosity

- ▶ Are your leaders generous?
  - ▶ They don't have to make the largest gift, but their gift should set an example
  - ▶ Your leaders should talk about their giving
    - ▶ What inspires them
    - ▶ Why they choose to make a gift
    - ▶ Advocate proportional giving
  - ▶ Do they show up at events? Are they publicly supportive?
  - ▶ Do they support each other and the decisions that they make?

BE GENEROUS  
WITH GRATITUDE,  
FOR IT IS  
CONTAGIOUS.

*Stewardship Leadership*



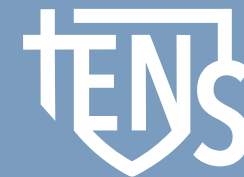
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# Recruiting Generous Leaders

According to the Rt. Rev. Dan Edwards, former Bishop of Nevada, **your stewardship committee should be in place by Easter.**

- ▶ An effective team will raise more money to *fund the church's mission.*
- ▶ They *engender support and appreciation* for all the other parish ministries.
- ▶ The project is a chance for the members of the team to *form or deepen relationships* that are the lifeblood of the congregation.
- ▶ They spread *a spirituality of grateful generosity*, thereby enriching the lives and enlarging the souls of the congregation.

*Recruiting Generous Leaders*



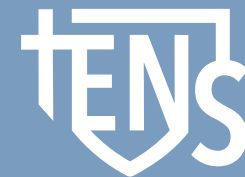
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# Recruiting Generous Leaders

- ▶ *People who know people:* The team's strongest influence is on their friends. You need people who are connected.
- ▶ Diversify the team according demographics like age, gender identity, and racial identity.
- ▶ If the congregation has more than one worship service, include people from the different worship services on the team.



*Recruiting Generous Leaders*



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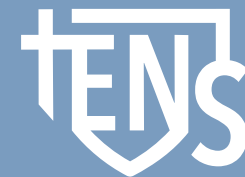


# Impact is Investment

Your church cannot simply expect people to give out of a sense of obligation.

*There is an increasing desire among donors to know that their financial contributions are doing more than keeping the lights on—they want to know that their money is making a difference.*

*Impact Inspires*



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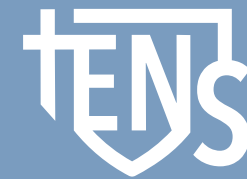


# Measuring Impact

Not every congregation has big visible outreach ministries that have wide and noticeable impact. How do you measure impact in your church?

- ▶ How many new people joined your church?
- ▶ Did attendance increase in your small groups or Sunday school?
- ▶ Did you partner with local nonprofits to accomplish mission-focused work?
- ▶ What was committee, guild, and task force participation like?

*Impact Inspires*



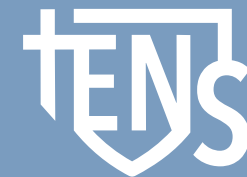
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# Measuring Impact

1. Attendance
2. Missional participation
3. Volunteering
4. Online activity
5. Giving
6. Event outcomes
7. Connections
8. Growth
9. Attrition

*Track, publicize, celebrate, analyze, and communicate about these measures*

*Impact Inspires*



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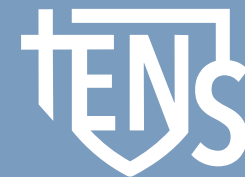
# Changing your Approach

Reasons members give uninspired gifts (in order)

1. No one personally reached out
2. Same letter as last year
3. Same theme or approach as other years
4. Nothing new to report, no reason to increase
5. Church isn't growing
6. Community is changing
7. Budget problems

*2018 Study from Tithe.ly*

*Adapting Case & Materials*



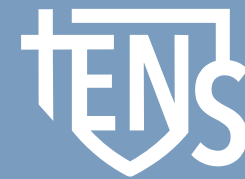
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# Changing your Approach

Are your campaign materials boring?

- *Do they tell the story of the congregation?*
- *Do they give measures and metrics about mission?*
- *Are they focused on the bills or the Bible?*
- *Are they focused on the budget or the mission?*
- *Do they have pictures? Testimonials? Videos?*

*Adapting Case & Materials*



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# Changing your Approach



This year we will:  
**Serve** 5200 hot meals  
**Educate** 58 children  
**Gather** for 124 services  
**Provide** Christmas gifts for 100 unhoused kids

**Plant** and harvest a community garden  
**... and so much more!**

St. Swithen's has been  
Serving the Blue Hill  
Community for 108 years



*Join us in doing God's  
Work today!*

[www.stswithens.org/donate](http://www.stswithens.org/donate)

[www.tithe.ly.com/stswithens](http://www.tithe.ly.com/stswithens)

[www.paypal.com/stswithenschurch](http://www.paypal.com/stswithenschurch)

Front of  
3x5 card

**Yes! Have a narrative budget**  
**Yes! Have a great pledge**  
**campaign website!**  
**Yes! Have a great brochure!**

And ...

**If you can tell the story of your**  
**church on the front and back of**  
**a 3x5 card, you really have a**  
**great pitch!**

Back of  
3x5 card



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*Adapting Case & Materials*

# Great Case Statement Elements

- ▶ What is the need?
- ▶ How can you tell this is a pressing need?
- ▶ How is your church going to address this need?
- ▶ What will be the benefits of your action?
- ▶ What are the negative consequences if you fail?

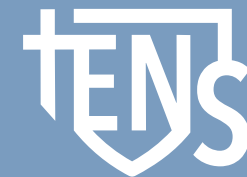
*Adapting Case & Materials*



# Consider creating a Narrative Budget

- ▶ A Narrative Budget tells the story of your money and mission
- ▶ Spreads the fixed costs (salaries, building, utilities, administration) across program areas instead of line items
- ▶ Helps members understand the real impact of their funding on the mission (funding mission instead of funding a budget)
- ▶ <https://www.tens.org/resource-library/tools-best-practices/creating-a-congregation-narrative-budget/>

*Adapting Case & Materials*



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# TENS Theme for 2023

The central act of Christianity is one of hospitality – invitation to abundant garden, the offering of that nourishment to all, and the reconciliation that comes by sharing a common act of love. Planted in such a garden of gratitude, we are Rooted in Abundance.

We are grounded in abundance, generosity, and welcome, and we share our gifts of wealth, works, and wisdom with the world in gratitude for having the opportunity to steward them.

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*They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. Jeremiah 17:8, NRSV*

*Keeping the Conversation Going*







Thank you!

For more information, resources, and videos,  
find us at [www.tens.org](http://www.tens.org)

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