

Planning and Leading a Miracle Sunday Campaign

Miracle Sunday has raised an amount equal to between one-third and three times the size of the church's annual operating budget in countless congregations across the United States. Two factors crucial to Miracle Sunday success: (1) Establish one, two, or three causes or needs that almost everyone will enthusiastically support. (2) A goal that is less than one-third of your annual budget apparently does not stimulate imaginations sufficiently to produce a successful effort.

Warning: Do not merely announce a Miracle Sunday for next week or next month and expect success. Carefully follow the suggestions below, which are adapted from Lyle Schaller's how-to timeline in *The Parish Paper* (August 1984) and Wayne C. Barrett's timeline in *The Church Finance Idea Book* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1989), pages 96-98.

How Does a Miracle Sunday Work?

All of the various models of the Miracle Sunday method have three things in common:

1. *Clearly stated high expectations.* Do not present Miracle Sunday as merely a "special offering." The leadership invites the membership to experience "the largest single offering in the history of our church"!

2. *Recognition of the substantial stewardship value in avoiding congregational debt.* The church members over age fifty, who are especially important to ensuring Miracle Sunday's success, are also the people most likely to prefer avoiding congregational debt.

3. *Gifts derived from donors' capital.* Miracle Sunday requires more than a just a little extra out of this month's paycheck. Money to fund the congregation's annual operating budget and missions giving comes from donors' current income. However, many donors' Miracle Sunday contributions are once-in-a-lifetime gifts derived from accumulated resources. This explains why congregations that may have experienced a budget shortfall within the past year or two often experience surprising success with a Miracle Sunday program.

Organizing for a Successful Miracle Sunday

Allocate twelve weeks for this process. During this time build momentum. Successful Miracle Sundays are always the climax of a lengthy preparation period filled with redundant communication regarding the total financial need and its mission/ministry benefits.

Develop a Miracle Sunday lay leadership team comprised of five people with strong (a) financial giving records and (b) belief in the ministries its successful completion will accomplish.

During the campaign's twelve weeks, provide high-quality, repetitive communication. When the congregation's members ask numerous questions, your communication is probably effective. When members do not ask many questions, feel alarmed! Either people are misunderstanding your messages or are rejecting their content. Positive Miracle Sunday results are likely when you receive many questions about the project(s) and Miracle Sunday itself.

Because the results of Miracle Sunday are determined by the most active members, home visits are typically not needed. Your best prospective donors are relatively active in the congregation; thus, they will come to you.

The major components of the campaign are (a) a direct mail program consisting of four mailings spread over a period of several weeks, (b) two informational meetings, and (c) a series of worship service announcements. The following timeline thumbnails the campaign and summarizes the content of each component.

Timeline for Twelve Week Campaign:

- Weeks 1-3 Recruit leaders and assign campaign responsibilities.
- Week 4 Letter #1 announces Miracle Sunday and describes the project(s). Print a project brochure to include with the letter. The campaign chairperson or building-improvement committee chairperson writes the letter.
- Week 5 or 6 Meeting #1 presents building-improvement plans. Emphasize the functions of the project (the benefits) rather than form of the project; what the building will do for us rather than what it will look like.
- Week 7 Letter #2, from the most senior or respected member of the committee, gives an update on Miracle Sunday and invites the congregation to Meeting #2.
- Week 8 Meeting #2 presents information on “How to Give to Make a Miracle Happen.” Distribute brochures such as those that describe the advantages of giving stocks and other tangible items, some of which provide tax benefits about which typical parishioners are unaware. Obtain these brochures from the regional and national stewardship departments of your denomination. Because of the importance of everyone attending this meeting, schedule duplicate sessions.
- Week 9 & 10 Letter #3 contains a “testimonial” from a respected lay leader or leaders. This is not so much a “sales” presentation as it is a statement of support for the project.
- Week 11 Letter #4 is a pastoral letter from the senior pastor, inviting everyone to attend Miracle Sunday and to pray for the success of this effort. Schedule a prayer vigil prior to Miracle Sunday.
- Week 12 Miracle Sunday! Along with receiving cash donations, include response cards for donors to use indicating gifts they will give that are not practical to bring to church that day (boats, automobiles, real estate, etc.).

If possible, quickly tabulate the receipts so you can announce the total before people go home from worship. What excitement when you announce that you’ve exceeded your goal!