

# This article is taken from Catholic San Francisco Parishes



Father Brian Costello

## **‘People want to give to something positive’**

January 25th, 2012

By George Raine

### **Pastor excels at fundraising: Clear goals, personalized message are key**

Father Brian Costello is serving at his fourth parish in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, at Star of the Sea Church, and at all four he has reversed subpar giving for the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal and raised money in excess of the parish goals.

It’s no small feat, particularly in a recession and snail-paced recovery. But Father Costello has found that drilling home the notion that everyone is expected to participate and that the parish can keep the money collected in excess of the goal for worthy projects – plus the fact that giving gives people a sense of ownership – pay dividends.

Here’s another key: He ties the appeal, called the Triple A, to the beginning of Lent, of which there are three parts, prayer, fasting and almsgiving. He tells his parishioners that almsgiving has been a part of Lent for the past 2,000 years and “there is no bigger charity than the archdiocese.”

The Triple A goal for 95 parishes combined is roughly 17 percent of the total ordinary income of the archdiocese, said Msgr. James Tarantino, the moderator of the curia and vicar for administration. For 2012, the goal is \$5.7 million. Its theme is “Give them some food yourselves,” Jesus’ instructions to the apostles to distribute the loaves and fishes.

The appeal funds parish and archdiocesan ministry and centralized services, clergy support and support for the universal church, which includes the Vatican, California and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic San Francisco and other communications endeavors.

It's a critical fundraising effort, but not every priest or pastor warms to the task of asking for money and people are fatigued by hearing one more fundraising pitch. There's also competition. Msgr. Tarantino offers a hint or two to pastors:

“People want to give to something that is positive, give to something that quite frankly has legs and has a future to it. People want to give after success, not after failure, and so if you come with a message that is hope filled, that says that what they give and who they are and what they do make a difference and you show it to them, that is a sure formula for success.”

Father Costello learned the art of fundraising at his first parish, St. Anthony of Padua Church in Novato. Several parishioners who were experienced businessmen arranged for parishioners to give brief presentations over five or six weeks about how the appeal affected them, rather than talk about it in the third person, and Father Costello learned the importance of a personalized message.

In his years at St. Anthony, 2000-2005, the goal was exceeded.

Then Father Costello was off to St. Charles Church in San Carlos where the goal was twice that of St. Anthony – \$100,000 – and, once again, it was exceeded.

This time, he condensed the campaign into two weeks, and made it personal. “I told the people that I was a beneficiary of your annual appeal, that I could have never gone to the seminary unless appeal funds supported me.”

A year later, Father Costello was pastor of Mater Dolorosa Church in South San Francisco. It was a struggling parish but the condensed, two-week-long appeal formula worked again. He made the case that with extra funds over the \$30,000 goal the fence out front could be replaced, “and we will be able to make the parish a little bit more beautiful.”

Father Costello said, “I have learned that if you are going to fix the place up, first fix up the places that the people see. Do not fix up the rectory, which very few if any people see. It might be good for me but not so good for the rest of the parish. If they see that you are doing stuff like this, people have told me, the more they will give.”

Last year, the target at Star of the Sea in San Francisco was \$33,000, and it was exceeded by \$12,000. Father Costello introduced “the one percent club,” asking parishioners to give one percent of \$33,000, or \$330, which is reasonably close to \$33 a month or a dollar a day, paid over 10 months if preferred. In other words, it's affordable.

Club members were feted at a parish dinner in May.

There's no better Gospel source on giving, said Father Costello, than the story of the widow's mite. The Pharisees were making a big show of dropping money into the cauldron in a temple, the heavier the coin the louder the clang. A poor widow followed them, donating a small coin that made hardly a sound. Jesus told his disciples that she gave more than all the Pharisees combined, as small sacrifices of the poor mean more to God.

"I don't expect people to give all that they have but I do expect them to give," said Father Costello. "This is part of being Catholic."

Part of being a pastor is often dealing with debt. Star of the Sea's finances have improved in the past year, although its investments lost \$400,000 in the past quarter and the parish can run \$2,500 short in paying bills for the week. A few times a year the parish dips into savings.

School bathrooms date to 1920 and all parish facilities need paint. Father Costello has been asking parishioners to remember the church in wills. "We are certainly not going to survive on Sunday collections," he said.

In his 13 years as pastor of St. Hilary Parish in Tiburon, Msgr. Tarantino had Triple A goals that ranged from \$40,000 in the first year to \$115,000 in his last, in 2010. He exceeded all of them.

Like Father Costello, Msgr. Tarantino had a fundraising device: He asked parishioners to give money equal to one hour's pay of 40 hours per week.

"I believe people are very generous and I also believe that, quite frankly, for people to give, you are doing them a favor. It is a privilege to be able to give, and to donate and be a part of something greater than yourself," said Msgr. Tarantino. "What a privilege. What a grace."

"A nonprofit has to be run like a business," said Michael O'Leary, director of the Development Office of the archdiocese. "As the CEOs of these parishes, Msgr. Tarantino and Father Costello really saw the importance of making sure there is a shared responsibility to get this done, and they have their ways of doing it."

*From January 27, 2011 issue of Catholic San Francisco.*