

*Some New, Some Old*

# Important “How-To’s” For Every Mailer

by  
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# Should You Go To The Mail for Money?

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There must be thousands of non-profit organizations in need of more funds to properly conduct their missions, which have considered the possibility of expanding their contribution income by means of mail appeals.

And, there must be thousands of similar organizations thinking of expanding a low-level mail appeal into a larger one.

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## Pros and Cons of Direct Mail

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Is it a good idea? What are the things you need to know before instituting - or expanding - a mail appeal? What are the problems, the pitfalls? What can you hope to gain?

On the dark side: you can easily put in a great deal of work and money - and wind up with both being wasted.

On the bright side: you can reach thousands of people that you can reach in no other way, you can increase your organization's income, and numbers of givers, tremendously, and you can develop a long list of people who may consider leaving a fortune to your organization in their wills.

It must be pointed out, also, that it is very possible to steer a middle course, one in which you'll regain your expenses plus some additional money, but never really make the effort worthwhile. You'll just be spending donors' dollars in the mail.

One indicator which many smaller missions can use to make up their minds: if your organization is a purely local one, *and* if your corporate name identifies you as such - for example, "Amesville Home for the Aged," you must determine that there is a sufficient number of rental names available in your area. One of the basic requirements for success in a mail appeal program is a potentially large audience to which you can logically mail.

Most smaller institutions fall into the "Amesville" category. However, size alone is not the criterion. Suppose the "Amesville" home is allied to a large hospital or research institution - and is doing important research into new methods of treating diseases of the aged - its purpose opens the whole nation as a logical audience.

There are other exceptions to the don't-mail-if-you-are-too-small rule. The name of your institution may be one which does not clearly tie you down to a particular area - "St. Mary's Home for Abandoned Children," for example, or your organization might be the small headquarters for international missions.

Those are the exceptions. Most high schools, small dioceses, local religious and charitable centers, and even many colleges would probably find it difficult to present an appeal to a potential donor in another part of the country.

Such organizations might more logically attempt to raise funds in other ways: a strong, concerned board of directors, well-organized

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women's auxiliaries, alumni and alumnae groups - all of these offer strong potential for personal solicitation of foundations, industry, and wealthy individuals. In fact, every not-for-profit organization should develop any and all of these supporting groups *before* beginning a mail appeal. The mail, because it reaches people not otherwise reachable, should be the last string to your fund-raising bow - but if a mail appeal is feasible for your organization, and you truly need more funds, it should never be neglected.

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## Ten Basics of Mail Appeals

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Most important is the appeal itself. Much has been written about how it should be prepared and the form it should take. Here are just some of the most basic fundamentals:

1. The appeal should be in the form of a "personal" letter. The "Dear Friend" salutation, if necessary, immediately takes the letter out of the personal category, of course, but every other feature of the letter should attempt to retain the personal approach. It should be printed from a typed copy - not set in type, but employing a typewriter face, large enough to be easily read.
2. The appeal letter should be in black or blue ink, with a signature in whichever of the two is *not* used.
3. There should be no artwork behind the copy - just plain white paper - and nothing to make the letter look like anything but a letter.
4. The wording of the appeal must be calculated to interest the prospective donor immediately - and to hold that interest right through to the end of the letter. The copy must, if it is to do its job, move the reader emotionally and spiritually. You must ask for the contribution. It is not enough to "suggest" one. Your own deep conviction about the importance of your mission must shine through the letter, and enlist the reader's cooperation in your work.
5. A return envelope, addressed to your organization, must accompany every appeal, it is not necessary to affix a stamp, or to use a "return-postage-paid" envelope.
6. Each appeal should also carry a form which the prospect can fill in, with name, address, and information about how he or she would like to help him or her. For example, the form could request the names of persons the new donor would like you to remember in your prayers - or in a novena, or in any of the other traditional ways. In short, the donor should be offered, if you possibly can do so, something for his money other than the knowledge that the giver is helping you to do God's work - important as that is.
7. Enclose also a small brochure or pamphlet telling more facts about your mission, stressing the importance of its work, the costs involved, and its need for financial assistance.
8. The outer envelope should not carry the phrasing needed to have the post office return undeliverable appeals. There is no need for you to pay the expenses of getting corrected addresses for a rented list of contributors. That's an expense

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which should be borne by the list owner.

9. Be certain to test the strength of your appeal with a modest portion of each list before ordering larger numbers. Five or ten thousand is the usual minimum. Remember that, if you mail 5,000 appeal letters, you will receive a small percentage of undeliverable letters returned to you. Even the cleanest of lists has such addresses, because the population is now so mobile and because a deceased person's name and address can continue to be carried as "deliverable" on a list until the surviving spouse, or some other family member, has the name removed from whatever source is used in cleaning that list. "Undeliverables" should constitute only a small percentage of a clean list - but even one or two percent returned mail looks huge to the beginner.
10. In renting prospect lists, it is wisest to mail to known contributors to Catholic causes - if yours is a Catholic organization. Reason: God did not give the gift of true charity to many people. Only a very small percentage of people will respond to a mail appeal, so it is better to direct your appeal to people who have already demonstrated not only their charity, but their willingness to respond to an appeal sent through the mail.

All of this is designed to give you some general information about mail appeals - so that you may judge the wisdom of going into the mail yourself.

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## **Developing Your Donor Base**

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You should also know that most appeals

directed to new prospects do not make money for the mailing organization. Most are happy to break even, or to lose 10 to 20 percent of the total amount spent. The eventual profit comes in mailing future appeals, four to eight times per year, to the new donors. Those appeals, to your "house list," will return a much higher percentage of returns than will new prospective appeals. The latter, of course, are vital in developing the "house list" in the first place - and in enlarging it later, as well as merely replacing those house list donors who do not renew for several mailings.

Mention of those who do not renew prompts me to add this caution: do not consume any donor's gift with repeated renewal appeals. Should he or she fail to respond to three or four appeals, don't waste any more money or attempting to restore that donor to your active list.

All gifts of \$5 or more should be immediately acknowledged, and in a way that lets the donor know how much you appreciate his help, plus telling him enough about your mission to make him happy about the contribution.

While there may be too much "how-to-do-it" in this article, I don't want to overlook tasks that must be understood and weighed before making a judgment about starting a mail appeal program. It is not a one-man operation, unless the man is a skilled copywriter and knows enough about mail appeal mechanics to delegate most of the work.

Most organizations entering a mail program will need professional assistance in preparing the copy for the original appeal. To determine what your best appeal is, several

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should be carefully prepared, and then tested, one against the other, using different portions of the same mailing list. In short, you simply can not expect success by preparing your own appeal and mailing it. Mailing costs are too high for any but the very best appeals to work today.

Once the appeal is designed and ready for testing, and your Catholic contributor mailing lists are rented (they are for your one-time use only; you may keep on your list only those names and addresses which respond to your appeal) you'll need some professional help also in folding, inserting, addressing, and mailing your appeal.

Each different appeal form should be coded on the reply envelope, so that you can determine which of your appeals is the most effective. Sometimes this coding is forgotten, more often it is ignored in the opening of returns. Both are serious mistakes.

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## **Renting Lists of New Prospects**

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Mailers order the prospective donor names in whatever material the professional mailer doing the actual mailing prefers. Be sure to consult them on material and format. Costs will vary. Be very specific about the format if the material is magnetic tape, cartridge or disk. The mailing service can do the necessary preparation of your mailing, stuffing, sorting, etc. Be sure to consult them on the best class of postage to use to take advantage of whatever discounts are available. Most services allow you to use a permit they own.

You may order the names on self-adhering labels, called "pressure sensitive" and have

volunteers affix them. Usually this is a laborious, time-consuming task - and one which raises the expectations (so large does even the minimum mailing seem) so high that results bring a let-down so huge that future mailings are discontinued.

New mailers may rent lists of donors who live in the areas neighboring their own location. You will need to identify the "sectional centers" (the first three digits of the zip code) for the areas you wish to mail to.

But if your work has more far-flung implications - a cloistered order offering prayers, a children's home which accepts children from a wide area, a seminary training young men for the priesthood who may serve worldwide - then it is best to remember that you are attempting to reach Catholics of proven generosity - not just generous Catholics who happen to be neighbors. A generous Catholic in Grand Rapids is just as likely to want to support a seminary in Rochester as is the Catholic who lives down the street from the seminary.

When in doubt about your ability to draw from contributors who live outside your own area - try a few tests. Simply specify that you want, on your next rental, a few thousand names from other areas, code the labels, and evaluate the returns.

Another factor in your decision to go into the mail - or to stay out - is your ability to truly win over most of your newly-acquired contributors - to make them happy to give again and again. Newsletters which report how the contribution was spent, what it means to your work, etc., plus follow-up appeals which say a great deal more than "please send us another contribution" are

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essential. That means you will need someone with the training and skill to prepare excellent materials to cultivate all donors.

The way that is done - the quality of the material - will determine the success or failure of your mailing program.

It will also determine whether or not your organization will eventually receive much larger gifts - in the form of bequests. Studies we've made over many years prove that most bequests, large and small, come from persons first drawn to the organization through a mail appeal. Those persons may have made small, and even infrequent contributions, but they

have one thing in common: they have no family to name as heirs. They feel a bond to your organization and they name it in their wills.

The history of direct mail appeals must contain thousands of programs abandoned by missions which undertook them without adequate preparation. However, if your program of activity is one which deserves support, you can safely launch - or expand - a direct mail program, but only if you are properly staffed, properly prepared, and truly in need of more financial support. The rewards can be truly enormous, done right.

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**PJM**

# Important Tips On Mail Appeals

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"Tell me quick, and tell me true, or else, my friend, to hell with you!" That ancient command, describing the best way to open a good appeal letter, is just as true today as it ever was!

Once a Catholic mailer has selected a number of good lists from which to seek new donors - clean and moderately-priced - his appeal letter is all important. It is the best, cheapest, way to reach large numbers of new prospects, and to make them contributors.

Most mailers - but certainly not all - are well aware of the vital importance of the appeal letter. They have heard lectures, attended seminars, and read trade publications - all reiterating the urgency of well-done appeals; all giving sound ideas on how to write them.

*"...the preparers of poor appeals are simply not very good at it..."*

So, why do we see so very many poor ones? The answer, of course, is that the preparers of poor appeals simply are not very good at it!

One sequence of events we see frequently is as follows: the writer, the educated person, assumes he can write a good appeal, that all he need do is state the facts, and ask for money. He takes quite a while to hammer out the first draft, accepts no criticism or suggestions, or does not seek either and mails out his appeal. Very few preparers, we have found, are willing to re-write an appeal; it was too much work in the first place, and is now etched in stone.

Most such appeals are failures. They not only lose money, but they fail in the basic goal of any new prospect appeal - they don't secure enough new contributors to allow the mailing to profit, no matter how many follow-up appeals are sent subsequently to the few acquired donors.

Another frequent preparer of mail appeals which fail is the person who is not only well-educated, but is probably a teacher as well.

He or she just can't resist the opportunity to display erudition. The appeal usually fails to **communicate**, but succeeds in terminal boredom. Here is an example, from a real appeal:

"I bring you tidings of great joy! The light that shines on us today is the same light that shone on us today is the same light that shone on the very first Christmas! Immanuel. God is with us! Are your hearts open to once again celebrate the presence of God enfleshed as one of us? Gathered around this Holy Child we see each other as God sees us, sisters and brothers, all of us children of the one loving God.

For you and for me the center of this Holy Season is Christ. We find that great excitement thrills our hearts as we prepare for Christmas Day with its much-needed message of peace and good will."

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***“...will have dumped this appeal in the wastebasket...”***

Note that these two opening paragraphs are largely wasted in this high-flown introduction. It is true, of course, that this elaborate opening, even with such strange-to-the-ear words as "enfleshed" and "Immanuel" might well capture the interest of a few equally-erudite readers, but, you can be certain, most of the prospects will have dumped this appeal in the waste-basket before the end of the first paragraph.

Another highly-successful old-time mailer once observed that "the first one or two paragraphs of most letters could well be omitted." That's true.

Here is another portion of a different appeal letter - not the opening:

"Dedicated especially to the care of the financially-indigent, \_\_\_\_\_ provides intensive rehabilitation and hospital care to people with physical disabilities and long-term illnesses. Rehabilitation is our expertise. Our multi-disciplinary team works together to help patients reach their highest potential for living."

Now, if the reader were to slow down, and digest this message, the story is there. The grammar is correct, the words not too technical or institution-related. But - the reader is not going to be that accommodating. **You must use simpler, straightforward, sympathy-eliciting, everyday language.**

Capture the reader's interest immediately (tell me quick and tell me true)...or you have lost him or her forever.

Who gets the blame when these poor, or so-so appeals go out into the mail - and bring back poor results?

Take your choice: the list, first of all, "must have been no good." Then, the Post Office gets some blame. Also, "the time of the mailing was poor" - and that old stand-by, "economic conditions were poor."

***“...jump out and grab the reader!”***

In almost 50 years of direct-mail fundraising, I have **never** heard a mailer blame his appeal. Each "said what he had to say. It was all there in the letter." The writer totally fails to realize: that's not enough. It must be in the letter in such a way as to jump out and **grab** the reader!

If you plan to write your own appeal, here are some things to think about:

Prepare your thoughts in advance. List the important facts the reader needs to know. Think of ways to say that without technical,

social-work or religiously-oriented terminology.

Remember that if you are using a list of known Catholic givers, your audience has the same religious motivation to help you as you have for doing God's work daily. You must present your work, and your needs, exactly as you see them with your own eyes - to move the prospect to give.

***“...don't write, talk...”***

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To avoid technical or high-flown language, don't write, talk. As we all know, people use an entirely different "language" when they talk.

Now, keep your reader in mind at all times. What kind of person is she, or he? Most Catholic contributors-by-mail are women. The Catholic Donor Name Bank is made up of nearly 4,000,000 contributors, most are women over 55.

So, why not make an appeal, on paper, while "talking" to your mother? You'll be in no danger of trying to impress her with your erudition - she **knows** you. And, you will know the proper words to elicit her sympathy, her religious willingness to help God's work, and to make her want to help by sending a contribution, right now!

The "right now" is important. Your letter must have true urgency. Point out the reasons your organizations needs financial help - and why that help is needed immediately. An appeal letter with no sense of urgency is no appeal at all.

*“...an appeal with no sense of urgency is no appeal at all...”*

If you were truly writing to your mother, you'd certainly cite some examples of situations where help is needed. Do so in your appeal letter, it will make the appeal come to life!

Let your own motivation show through; it will move the reader to want to join in God's

work, to share in your concerns. The prospect must be made to want to help, and to realize that the best way is through **your** organization. Make him feel he's a participant, not just a donor.

Never just hint that you need financial help; come right out and ask for it, **beg** for it, in God's Name. Use specific amounts to elevate the amount of the gift as high as possible, but don't cut off the smaller gift in the process.

Once finished, it's wise to start over again - and prepare a good alternative appeal, with a different theme or approach. Then, test one against the other, using different portions of the same list. Remember, what works best in mail appeals is: what works! Not what any one **thinks** will work. Remember to mail similar amounts and be sure to code the reply envelopes carefully, so that you may know exactly how many replies came in from each appeal, and how much the average gift was in each case. Testing is the only way to discover which appeal works best for you - and different new-prospect appeals should be tried from time to time, until the very best one you can devise is found.

*“...copywriters have proved their skills...”*

Hiring a professional appeal writer to prepare your new-prospect letters is often a very good idea. The cost, amortized over a number of mailings, is very small compared to the rewards. Veteran copywriters have proved their skills to be worth paying for down through the years.

After nearly five decades of writing successful appeals, I have retired from writing, even for money, but I will cheerfully counsel you

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on all phases of direct-mail fund-raising. For no charge.

Now, there is often more to new-prospect appeals than just the writing. Many of them, as you must know, carry an "extra" to sweeten the message; to provide an added incentive to give. Every Catholic mailer should have a large collection of samples of such appeals - not to copy, but to see what the competition is doing, and to gather stimuli for variations of these appeals, or new ideas of his own.

Among the most common of these "extra added attractions" is the name-sticker labels (a small pack of labels, each with the name and address of the prospect), Mass cards, Novenas, rosaries, religious articles for your desk, your car, etc., and many others. You may well be able to create an article of your own that will have wide appeal. Remember, there is a fine line between these low-cost articles and one which clearly costs so much as to place an obligation, even though only

an implied one, on the recipient. For several excellent reasons, every charitable or religious institution should avoid any suggestion of that in a mail appeal.

*“...a growing list of donors...”*

It would be sinful, of course, to send out many appeals if your organization does not truly need the money. But - if it does need more support, the efficient way to get it is through a growing list of donors on your contributor's list - "growing" because you send regular, planned, new prospect mailings to carefully selected lists of known, Catholic contributors. Test many such lists, especially those with sufficient numbers to make such tests worth while.

The second biggest challenge in direct-mail solicitation is: how best to secure follow-up contributions from newly secured donors.

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**PJM**

# How To Get That Second Gift

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Millions of appeals are mailed annually with a wide range of enticements to give: mass cards, address stickers, etc. The number and size of gifts returned are important, but most important is the number of subsequent responses to follow-up appeals.

That's the basis of direct-mail fund-raising - the pyramiding of donors to build a large list of regular contributors.

*Dimensions* articles on the urgency for improvement in methods used to secure that second, third, and fourth gift have outlined some of the "How To's."

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## How NOT to Get That Second Gift

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Here are some equally important "How NOT To's:"

One is the failure to develop and use a simple, straightforward newsletter to inform and involve new donors. An 8 ½ X 11 sheet laid out like a newspaper, with human interest articles and photographs, looks best.

Do not use a "Dear Friend" letter to ask for the second gift.

What is wrong with that?

Put yourself in the donor's position. You have responded to an appeal which touched and motivated you to send a check to help a charity or a mission.

Later, you receive another envelope. You recognize the organization, of course, before opening the envelope - and recall the check you send. You still feel good about it...

Now you open the envelope - to be greeted with "Dear Friend" - Not "Dear (your name)." Obviously, you are not really a special friend, just one of many supporters, and you may well resent that fact. Your "good feelings" have been neatly erased.

The "Dear Friend" mistake can happen in several ways: in a routine practice of greeting all former donors in this way, or by accident, as when your donor's name appears on a list, or several lists you rented, and you did not bother with a merge/purge.

Worst of all is when both happen at the same time and your donor receives many of the same "Dear Friend" appeals.

All rented lists, of course, should be merged and purged, not only against each other but against your house list. This removes all duplicates and insures your house list donors are removed to be personally addressed.

Each new appeal must contain a renewed thank-you for former gifts, before asking for the next one!

All of this would seem fairly obvious. But it must not be so because too many mailers still treat donors as anonymous persons.

To prevent this, a basic mind-set must be

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established. From the moment a new donor's gift is received, everything possible should be done to show the warmest appreciation. The mailer must cultivate that donor as a newfound friend who shares his enthusiasm for the mission's work.

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## **Appreciate ALL Your Donors**

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From these friends will then flow a steady stream of repeat contributions, often of increasing size.

Further, it must be etched in concrete that such friends are more than a source of regular income. They are the primary source of bequests and deferred giving in all of its categories.

Without direct mail contributors, the "planned giving director" and the "bequest director" would have little or nothing to work with.

Where is it written that a donor who gave \$5 will never give more than that? Some fundraising experts stress the amount of clerical time and expense that missions could save by doing just that: banking the money and ignoring the "small" giver.

Consistent awareness of the donor's importance will prevent the use of such wasteful yet common practices as regarding the "small giver" (perhaps in the \$2 to \$10 category) as unworthy of a receipt, a message of thanks or, sometimes, even of recording the name and address for future mailings.

Automatically, that cuts off the largest percentage of your donors. It also destroys your chance of increasing the size of future gifts from the source.

It boils down to this: motivating donors, ideally, involves a great deal of thought, effort, and time. A personal visit by a priest or nun to each donor is usually impossible. But if the donor gave an especially large sum, such action becomes essential.

Other donors need appreciation. And nothing could be more worthwhile, eventually, to the missions who work at this.

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## **The First Challenge To Mailers**

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If donor cultivation is the "second biggest challenge to fund raisers," then what is the first challenge?

The biggest challenge to all mailers is simple: send their appeals exclusively to people who are there to receive them.

Keep your mailing list clean. Almost every new-prospect solicitation mailing and nearly all "house" mailings contain prodigious percentages of undeliverables. Since nearly all such appeals are sent third class, mailers have no idea of the amount of waste they have suffered.

There is now abundant proof in U.S. Post Office statistics, showing that more than 30% of all mail has address errors - and that lists develop undeliverables at the rate of about 2 per cent per month.

Cleaning lists before mailing is the number one advantage to mailers. It is, by far, the best way to increase both net returns and percentage of returns.

# How To Secure Bequests

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Of all the "how to's" in fund-raising, none could be more important than a simple and not-very-well-known explanation of how to get people to name your organization in their wills

Is it simply a matter of sending out leaflets about how wise it is to make your will now - "before the state does it for you?"

Well, no, it's not that easy. That's not the place to begin.

***The real starting point is knowing who is likely to name your nonprofit institution as a legatee - and why.***

To find out those vital answers, P.J. McCarthy and Associates, Inc., mail consultants and operators of the Catholic Donor Name Bank, began a study of where bequests come from - and what motivates them. We studied the records of each of our clients - national and charitable institutions.

Research was conducted to find out if those who gave very large amounts in their wills were cultivated, or motivated, any differently from those who gave smaller amounts.

Who is the typical maker of a large bequest to charity? Mostly, it is the person who doesn't have a family member to name as the inheritor of his estate.

Smaller bequests usually come from people who feel close to the nonprofit institution, but whose families get the larger portion of the estate.

How does the man who names your favorite charity in his will happen to select that one from all others? He has been a supporter for some years; perhaps, he has given only nominal sums, but he reads your newsletters, he considers your work valuable, and, in some way, your charity has been alert enough to make him feel that he is an important part of its work.

***We found out that bequests almost never seem to come from the sources one would expect*** - the directors, the officers, the principal donors, or the staff. They, it would appear, feel they've done their part in life - and after death, their estates go to their family members. The persons most likely to name your organization in their wills are those with no closer ties, no family members - persons to whom your organization is their closest "family."

Since you cannot enroll, exclusively, donors who are without logical heirs, you can only work diligently to enroll as many donors as you possibly can - and count upon the law of averages to provide you with your proper share, among all your contributors, of those who have no one else to inherit their money.

The next step is to cultivate them, to make them truly family members of your organization. That means informative, well-prepared newsletters, communicative letters, and personal contact whenever possible. It also means occasional mention of the possibility of naming your institution in a will: you might even use "bequest" leaflets - but don't overdo them.

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Organizations often boast of having a "bequest program," as though there was some magical method of securing bequests through the use of letters, leaflets and visits to attorneys and wealthy contributors. All of this is important, of course, and much of it must be done - but it is not nearly so important as securing the largest possible number of contributors to work this magic on.

***In fact, if you have a large enough number of contributors who understand and appreciate your work, you can forget the rest of the "bequest program" - except for the occasional reminder to givers that such gifts are needed.***

One very large metropolitan Catholic Charity did not fall short of \$2 million in bequests in any year - and sometimes attained a figure much larger. A nationally-known children's hospital is now collecting bequests from the more than two million contributors which were secured and cultivated for it.

So – a solid bequest program boils down to getting, and keeping, large numbers of givers. ***This is best, and easiest done by direct-mail.*** To be successful at this you must have a large potential audience of contributors.

Given that you have a wide appeal, potentially, you must be able to summarize your appeal in a letter - and send it, together with a small leaflet with more facts and good photographs, and a return envelope, to a list

of known contributors – “known contributors” at least to start.

Reason: a very small percentage of people respond to mail appeals. God did not give everyone true charity in equal amounts. When you've been mailing for a while, you'll begin to think He skipped about 90 percent of us. So - start with persons who have proved their generosity, then expand, while testing carefully, to other Catholic lists.

About 30 Catholic organizations whose work depends on response to their mail appeals have pooled the names of persons who contributed through their mail appeals. The pool is called "**The Catholic Donor Name Bank**" and among its members, and regular users, are diocesan Catholic organizations, plus many of the missions, seminaries, and charities operated by many religious orders.

These known, direct-mail, contributors are available to all Catholic mailers - at minimum rental charges, through the Catholic Donor Name Bank , which now has nearly four million such names. Other good donor lists are available through brokers of Catholic lists.

Thus, the prescription for a sound bequest program is to attain one as you develop a sound program of regular support through mail appeals. As your total of contributors grows, so will your bequest potential.

# When Does a Donor Become "Former"?

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## Should you go on mailing to a lapsed donor?

Exactly what do you do with names of people who have failed to renew their contributions for two years or more? It is important to have a sensible, constructive, policy on this - or lose money!

It's hard to cut loose of former donors. The temptation is strong to just go on mailing (and wishing). Soon, the original contributions are eaten up - plus some of the gifts of others. Waste is heavy.

Worse, those losses are nearly always hidden. Here's why: assume a house list is 125,000 in size. Assume also that 60,000 of those names have failed to renew in two years. Perhaps 10 appeals have been ignored.

From the 65,000 faithful givers, a 30% response is received, with a \$10 average gift, or a total of \$195,000. Assume 60,000 give nothing at all (though a few, of course, will respond). The **overall** return of \$195,000 will still measure more than 15% and with an average gift of more than \$10 - still respectable figures.

Those "respectable" figures often are enough to delude mailers that they are on the right track. - **while they waste a lot of donors' money.**

A wise rule is to drop from the active house list all who have not responded to the

previous five appeals. Then, send one more on the anniversary of the previous gift. Thus, in only 15 months, a donor could find his way to your "former donor" list.

## What is a "former" donor?

As all mailers know, there are many "former donor" lists on the market. But - just what is a "former" donor?

The term has such a final ring to it, it sounds as though all of those millions of givers have had their checkbooks recalled by their banks.

Many retailers, list brokers, and most people who work for list brokers believe that such lists are a waste of time and money. Some are just that.

Exactly how do known contributors acquire the title "former donors?" The confusion began when nonprofit organizations began to trade or rent names of persons who had stopped giving to them. **The "to them" is part of the answer to the whole thing.**

Such lists could be composed of names of people who have not renewed their contributions in quite a long period - **maybe from four to ten or more years.**

In such a long time, of course, many have moved or died; the remainder are those who have, temporarily or permanently, lost interest in the agency. Thus, when such a list is used by another agency, there is little

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chance that it will work.

But it is possible to remove the undeliverable and deceased names, and to verify that each name and address are current and correct. It is also economically feasible to thoroughly clean lists. Alert list owners and managers keep their lists clean. The result? Now, the lists will work! Stripped of the high cost of mailing undeliverables, the cost-to-return ratio can show a real profit.

In summary, here's what a wise mailer can learn from this about "former donor" lists:

1. **Don't be afraid to mail test quantities to "former donor" lists - but first be certain they have been recently and thoroughly cleaned.**
2. **Don't junk you own "lapsed donor" lists. Have them cleaned correctly and then go ahead and use them for your own mailings and for trading purposes.**
3. **Don't forget that one agency's "former donors" are probably very "active donors" to several other organizations.**

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