

This guide is based on diocesan implementation of #iGiveCatholic within the Diocese of Lubbock and is intended to support stewardship leaders serving rural and mission parishes.

Walking With the Parish: Rural Fundraising Success Through #iGiveCatholic

Across rural America, small parishes often carry big dreams and even bigger faith. They are close-knit communities that give deeply, serve quietly, and sustain the Church's presence in places where resources are often stretched thin. When I first introduced #iGiveCatholic to our rural parishes in the Diocese of Lubbock, I did not see it simply as a fundraiser. I saw it as a formation opportunity to teach digital fundraising, nurture confidence, and help parish leaders build a sustainable toolbox for their future.

Our diocese approaches #iGiveCatholic not as a vehicle to fund diocesan programs, but as a hands-on learning experience for parishes, schools, and ministries. Participation is free to anyone that wants to participate. We even waive the diocesan Cathedraticum assessment on all funds raised, giving pastors a window for tax-free giving and encouraging participation without hesitation. We promote the use of a weekly email series to drive the program, and I make it very clear that we are there to accompany them from start to finish. The focus is simple: empower the parish, build confidence, and walk with them as they grow.

Steps for Building a Successful Rural Campaign

The key to rural success begins with relationships. For our parishes, digital fundraising can feel intimidating, but with the right accompaniment it becomes a joyful experience rooted in community. Over time, we have developed a simple process that works for small parishes with limited staff or resources.

1. Start with a personal champion

Every successful campaign begins with someone who loves their parish and is willing to learn. It does not have to be a tech expert, finance whiz, or professional writer.

Authenticity matters far more than experience. When that person believes in the mission, their enthusiasm spreads naturally. Encourage your pastors to find their champion.

2. Keep the story real and visible

Photos, short updates, and honest storytelling are what move hearts. Instead of generic appeals, we encourage parishes to post pictures of their own needs and milestones.

Transparency builds trust, and trust inspires giving. If they struggle to pick a need, walk through the parish with them, chat with PCLs, or attend the most popular mass and see if you can spot something they can focus on.

3. Provide one-on-one support

Walking with each parish is the cornerstone of our program. I spend time on evening calls, on a Zoom walking them through a manual entry, and help leaders feel confident

using social media or uploading images to their Giving Page. When people feel supported, they keep going even if it feels challenging. As a fundraiser it is important for us to realize that fundraising is an intimidating experience for most people, especially if they have never done it. Asking for money is taboo in many cultures as well. They may need help overcoming those hurdles.

4. Simplify goals and celebrate progress

We set modest initial goals that can be achieved reasonably, then use that momentum to expand the vision once the goal is met. Each small success motivates donors to give again and parish leaders to dream bigger.

5. Focus on formation, not perfection

Our goal is not to make every parish a polished marketing team, but to build their confidence and understanding of stewardship in the digital age. By teaching these skills through #iGiveCatholic, we equip them for future fundraising beyond the campaign.

Empowering the Parish Voice: St. Peter Catholic Church, Olton

One of the best examples of the formation approach is St. Peter Catholic Church in Olton. Their 2024 #iGiveCatholic campaign began with a modest \$6,000 goal to repair electrical issues at their Jamaica grounds, the heart of their parish festivals. Their coordinator was Janie, a retired teacher who had never used Facebook before and was apprehensive about learning. I told her that I would be happy to accompany her and show her how to use Facebook. She loved her parish deeply, and with her pastor's blessing, she was eager to try. I spent an evening in Janie's living room helping her learn to post updates and photos. What she lacked in digital skill, she made up for in authenticity and faith.

Once they met their initial goal, Janie was motivated to fix as much as possible. She started sharing photos of other parish needs on social media: torn vestments, an old refrigerator, a broken chasuble, and a crucifix soldered back together crookedly. Her honesty and transparency struck a chord with the community. People began giving again, often twice. In just two weeks, St. Peter raised \$11,753, nearly double their goal and the equivalent of 19% of their annual operating budget. That kind of generosity can only come from a parish that trusts the story being told.

The Power of Visibility: St. Clare Catholic Church, Lubbock

That same year, St. Clare Catholic Church set a goal to raise \$25,000 for the first phase of their new church building. Through consistent posting, a video made on Msgr. David's iPhone, and heartfelt storytelling, their campaign gained national attention from #iGiveCatholic itself. That

visibility led to anonymous donors, people they had never met, who helped push them over their \$25,000 goal.

This experience revealed one of #iGiveCatholic's greatest gifts: it places even the smallest parish on a national stage. It reminds rural communities that their stories matter and that their needs are worth seeing and are supported by the wider Church.

Building Confidence: St. Michael Catholic Church, Levelland

In 2023, St. Michael Catholic Church in Levelland participated for the first time. Their youth classrooms were overcrowded, they could no longer write on their chalkboards, and their catechists were doing the best they could with very limited tools. They set a goal of \$5,000 to repair 10 classrooms, but their photos of small rooms bursting at the seams with children of all ages eager to learn about Jesus told the story better than any words could.

By the end of the campaign, they raised \$8,769, enough to not only repair the classrooms but also install new projectors, purchase laptops for their parish hall, and stock up on art supplies. They posted updates on the renovations throughout the summer and the next year they experienced similar enthusiasm from their donors. This showed them firsthand that their community would respond when they shared a clear, honest need.

A Diocesan Culture of Accompaniment

What unites these successes is not marketing sophistication or high budgets. It is relationships. Each of these parishes had someone who loved their community and was willing to learn. My role was simply to walk beside them, answer questions after hours, help them upload images or videos, train them on Facebook, and celebrate their small wins.

That flexibility and accompaniment are crucial for rural parishes. When we meet parishes where they are, they rise to the occasion. Over time, #iGiveCatholic becomes more than an annual campaign. It has become a professional development opportunity that builds local leadership and stewardship capacity for years to come.

A Field Guide for Mission Dioceses

You probably wear a lot of hats in your Mission Diocese, where “little money and lots of work” might feel like the unofficial motto of ministry work. Maybe the idea of running this campaign alone or as a first-time fundraiser is overwhelming. It was for me. The first year is a blur of learning, excitement, and gratitude. Ask for help, and you will be supported by the National #iGiveCatholic team and your peers.

This field guide outlines a month-by-month framework designed specifically for mission dioceses. It is practical, realistic, and built for stewardship leaders who balance multiple responsibilities while accompanying parishes that may be new to digital fundraising.

April: Grant Opportunity

April usually kicks off the busiest part of the spring grant cycle. This is also when Catholic Extension opens its *Giving Day Online Fundraising Assistance Grant*, which helps cover registration fees, promotional materials, and prize structures. Usually, the grant will provide \$1,500 towards registration for the #iGiveCatholic program and \$1,500 towards promotion and prizes. You will need to provide an endorsement letter from your Bishop for the Catholic Extension grant request.

Time: *Approximately 8 hours.*

May: Commitment and Coordination

In May, the focus shifts to preparing the #iGiveCatholic commitment form and obtaining the Bishop's commitment letter for program registration. I confirm contact lists and communication channels for participating parishes and ministries. Our Diocesan Secretary keeps a beautiful spreadsheet with this information up-to-date year-round; you probably have a similar resource in your Diocese and if you do not, this is the perfect time to create one and share it internally.

Time: *About 4 hours.*

June: Kickoff and Deanery Presentations

June begins with the National #iGC onboarding webinars for new dioceses and the partner kickoff for all organizations. This is also when I begin presenting at deanery meetings.

Coordinating this effort requires early planning. The Diocese of Lubbock has five deaneries, many of which meet simultaneously. To reach everyone, I spread my visits over the summer months and secure time on each deanery's agenda well in advance. Priests talked with each other between meetings and as a result the later meetings had more depth in the Q&A discussions.

Time: *Around 15 hours total.* Maybe longer depending on travel time, number of meetings, if you stay for the whole Deanery meeting, and how long it takes you to develop your presentation. I was asked to leave most of the meetings since they were private. But do stay if they ask you to! Build up that rapport!

July–August: Sponsors and Community Partnerships

During these months, I focus on sponsorship development rather than design work. National #iGiveCatholic provides excellent bilingual materials, so I invest my energy in cultivating local business relationships.

I create a sponsorship packet and hand-deliver 10–20 copies. Keep a current W-9 on you since many businesses require it. These personal visits open doors and strengthen community ties beyond the campaign itself. The remaining vendors receive their packet in the mail with a stamped return envelope. We had better luck with responses from businesses that offer gift cards (car washes, fast food restaurants, arcades, nail salons) when we included the return envelopes. Prizes do not have to be cash. Gift cards can help create fun prize structures for Peer-2-Peer Giving, random drawings for your parish admins, and class prizes for schools. Have fun with it!

During this time, it is important to get approval for a solid budget for your #iGiveCatholic program. Your Diocese may be able to contribute, or they may not. You need to know that to proceed. Through #iGiveCatholic you will receive Giving Day envelopes from OSV for free. I always recommend ordering the bilingual envelopes. Juggling two different envelopes is a struggle you do not need. I recommend using part of your \$1,500 budget from Catholic Extension for prizes and part of it for promotion. My first few years I used part of my budget to order enough yard sign for each participating organization to have two signs. The remainder of my budget went towards the prize structure. Now that we have seen proven results, our Diocese matches Catholic Extension's grant so that we can provide more a stable prize structure and promotional items (up to four yard signs per location, stickers for students, branded mugs, and shirts as prizes).

Time: *2–4 hours per week.*

September: Registration and Engagement

Registration opens after Labor Day. I send weekly emails aligned with the national #iGiveCatholic calendar. The Weekly Email Series provided by #iGiveCatholic is great. I recommend tailoring each message to fit the reality of your Diocese. I remove irrelevant information and expand on the concepts that may be unfamiliar to my organizations (marketing, matches, challenges, etc.).

September's topics usually include:

1. Setting Goals
2. Building Your Profile
3. Marketing and Storytelling

4. Matches and Challenges

I order yard signs through a local printer, use FlowCode to design QR codes, Canva to make flyers, Vimeo to upload videos made by the parishes, and order branded stickers from Sticker Mule for school students and parish giveaways.

Time: 6 hours per week.

October: Encouragement and Visibility

October's work centers on support and engagement. I use my popsicle stick method—each parish's name and preferred communication method on a popsicle stick in a jar—to guide random, personal check-ins. Messages like “Your page looks great!” or “Need help adding photos?” build rapport without overwhelming anyone.

This month's emails cover:

1. Peer-to-Peer Fundraising
2. Housekeeping and Page Completion
3. Marketing Timeline
4. Promotion

When I travel through small towns, I often stop for coffee with parish leaders to brainstorm and troubleshoot in person, or to just check in. Even if they cannot meet with you, the act of inviting them alone is building a relationship with you and your Diocese.

Time: 8 hours per week.

November: Promotion and Advanced Giving

Advanced Giving begins about two weeks before Giving Tuesday. November's emails follow a simple rhythm:

1. Marketing
2. Final Steps
3. Advanced Giving Opens
4. Thanksgiving

This is the busiest and most rewarding part of the year. My time is spent amplifying parish posts, reviewing pages, and answering questions as the campaign gains momentum. Our

Communications Office helps me a lot during this time. You most likely have a plethora of other fundraising activities going on at this time with your appeal and also grant deadlines. It is a season of hard work, I recommend advocating for schedule flexibility during this season. Balance prevents burnout.

Time: *10–15 hours per week.*

December: Gratitude and Wrap-Up

December is a high-energy close to the campaign. My communication schedule includes:

1. Day Before Giving Tuesday
2. Giving Tuesday
3. Day After
4. Final Thank You and Data Wrap-Up

I also help parishes process manual gifts, thank donors, and share results. Try to teach people how to record manual gifts themselves but also recognize that you may have a few people that truly need your help here. Janie sent me texts of her envelopes as they came in, and I took time each evening to enter them for her so that we stayed on top of them.

Time: *About 20-25 hours total, depending on how much assistance is needed entering gifts.*

January: Reflection and Renewal

In January, #iGiveCatholic national hosts a debrief webinar. I collect parish feedback, document results, and plan improvements for the next cycle. I also take time to personally thank every participant and sponsor. After this I take a break from #iGiveCatholic until April.

Time: *About 3 hours total.*

Traps to Avoid

Every diocesan leader approaches #iGiveCatholic with the same hope: to see parishes flourish, leaders grow in confidence, and gifts multiply for the greater glory of God. But even with the best intentions, there are a few common traps that can slow your progress or drain your energy. Over the years, these lessons have helped me keep perspective, stay focused, and protect my bandwidth so I can serve well.

1. **Registering Everyone** – It can be tempting to register every parish, school, and ministry in your diocese just to boost participation numbers, but this approach can quickly become overwhelming. Instead, invite parishes to register and focus your time on those who follow through. When participation is voluntary, you build stronger relationships and invest your energy where it matters most. It also keeps your diocesan dashboard clean and your giving page manageable for donors to navigate.
2. **Falling into Comparison** – One of the hardest lessons for smaller or mission dioceses is to avoid comparing results. You will see reports from other dioceses raising \$100,000 or more while you are celebrating your first thousand. Be genuinely happy with their success but remember it is not a fair comparison. Larger dioceses have greater capacity, staff, and donor bases. Focus on your own growth and celebrate each milestone. A single parish success story in a rural area can have far greater spiritual and community impact than any large number on a national report.
3. **Setting Unrealistic Goals** – When you are just starting out, keep your goals centered on participation, not dollars. The first year is about building awareness and helping parish leaders gain confidence. Some pastors will need to see their brother priests succeed a few times before they feel comfortable joining in. Your goal should be to help them see that this program works, that it is manageable, and that it is meant to support their parish—not burden it.
4. **Taking It Personally When Parishes Don't Return** – Not every parish will return the following year, and that is okay. Some will have other fundraising efforts underway, experience donor fatigue, or simply need a break. Respect their decisions and keep the invitation open. Often, when they see neighboring parishes succeed or hear parishioner's feedback, they will come back when the timing is right. #iGiveCatholic is about accompaniment, not pressure.
5. **Chasing Perfection** – This was my hardest lesson to learn. I am a perfectionist by nature, and in the early years I spent far too much time on things like overanalyzing every word of my emails before sending them. Do not fall into that trap. Weekly emails can survive a small typo. What matters most is that your message is timely, encouraging, and consistent. Save your perfectionism for things like donor acknowledgements or sponsor packets, and even then, ask for a second set of eyes before publishing.
6. **Forgetting to Celebrate and Share Results** – After Giving Tuesday, Christmas is right around the corner and it is easy to rush into wrapping up reports or closing out the year, but celebration and gratitude are vital. Your parishes and ministries worked hard, and their efforts deserve to be acknowledged. Share their stories in diocesan newsletters,

social media posts, and at deanery meetings. Highlight creative campaigns, small successes, and moments of grace. When parish leaders feel seen and celebrated, they are more likely to return next year with even more enthusiasm—and others will be inspired to join them.

Conclusion

The most powerful takeaway from our experience is that small rural parishes are never too small to make a big impact. When we remove barriers, offer tools, and nurture confidence, faith communities step forward with incredible generosity.

For diocesan leaders, this is also an opportunity to model stewardship and give of our own talents to help uplift parish communities. When the diocese walks with its parishes—not above them but beside them—it builds unity, joy, and trust that lasts well beyond Giving Tuesday.

Our rural parishes have taught me that the Church grows strongest not through competition but through collaboration, when we share knowledge, celebrate one another, and empower every community to serve with joy, confidence, and love.

As Scripture reminds us in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “God loves a cheerful giver,” a truth reflected in the generosity of the parishes we serve.

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April 2026