

Narrative Budget Examples

(provided by Dan Dick)

Figures and numbers only communicate so much. Often, we think we are providing people with good information when we hand them a budget, but some estimates say that only about 5% of adults in the United States can read and understand a line-item budget.

For this reason, many churches use a form of “narrative budget” which ties the dollar amounts to stories of what the money will be used for and the ministry that will be accomplished. Narrative budgets do not need to be long, highly-detailed, or complex. In fact, the simpler, the better. Here are three examples from narrative budgets.

Example #1

Our education program is the heart of our congregation. We offer classes, studies, and programs for all ages, from our nursery programs to our older adult learning groups. Currently, we have over 20 small group learning opportunities for adults. Our children’s Sunday school and youth program are small but growing. We are asking everyone in the congregation to think of our excellent education program as you consider your financial commitment for the coming year. We are estimating that we need \$4,100 to continue to provide our current program. This is about \$35 per member for the year.

Our missions and outreach ministries are our fastest growing ministries, with over 30 members actively engaged in the community food pantry, the tutoring program, the thrift shop, our new prison visitation ministry and our first ever Volunteers in Mission trip. Last year, we spent almost \$3,000 on mission projects, and we are hoping to raise that by \$500 so that we can expand our mission trip to include youth. If each giving family will include \$30 in their pledge this year for missions, we will reach our goal.

Example #2

We have exciting plans for the coming year with our youth program. The youth group has grown from 8 members three years ago to over 20, and we are looking to reach out to grow even more. We meet Sunday evenings, and are beginning to meet after school on Wednesday as well. If we can count on a budget of \$1,000 for the coming year, we will be able to maintain the current level of ministry with our youth. But it is our hope to expand in new ways. If our budget was \$1,500, we could send a group of youth to the national Youth event in Knoxville, Tennessee. If our budget was \$2,000, we could buy new audio-visual equipment for the youth room. This technology would allow us to do different kinds of ministry and learning than we do now. If our budget were \$2,300, we could also replace the carpet, paint the walls, and fix some of the furniture in the youth room.

Example #3

The greatest financial challenge we have at the moment is covering our pastoral support. Pension support and health insurance costs have skyrocketed and place our congregation in a difficult position. \$67,000 sounds like a huge amount of money, but only \$51,000 of that is salary. \$16,000 covers housing

and insurance and pension payments. However, what are we getting for this amount of money? Pastoral support guarantees that we will have a leader to work with us to strengthen our church and do good ministry. We get a preacher, and a teacher, and a counselor, and a planner, and a care-giver. We get guidance and encouragement and support. We gain a theologian and a spiritual leader. We pay a pastor to help us be strong and visionary in our work. We ask that you think of our pastoral support as an investment – in the present ministry as well as in our future.

We also pay “apportionments” – money given to support the missions and ministries of our connectional church – the work of the conference that we are a part of and the work of the denomination nationally and globally. The majority of this money goes to provide ministry and service too large and too complex for any local church. The apportionments are actually mission giving that strengthens the whole church. \$27,000 of our budget goes to pay our apportionments. This seems like a large sum, until we realize that literally over 200 ministries and programs are supported by this money. About \$75 of each person’s financial support of the congregation goes to apportionments annually – about \$1.50 per person per week. For this small sum of money, we are able to amazing ministry in our communities, in our state, our conference, our nation, and our world.