



Communication Follow up strategy

Introduction

It is important to have a simple, well prepared and efficient system for following up responses – and non responses – to literature distributed in Giving in Grace. The purpose of stewardship in the church is not simply to release the gift but to nurture and grow the giver; not to raise money but to raise people in the likeness of Jesus. We cannot talk about money and handle financial responses in isolation from the relationships that are at the heart of the church.

When we express thanks for a response or respond to requests for information by making personal visits the purpose is not to secure finance but affirm and build people's relationships with the church. We want our new planned givers to feel valued as part of the church. We want our new Gift Aid givers to feel that their new commitment increases the resources necessary to the life and ministry of the church. We want people to know that this ministry of giving matters and that a failure to respond has both cost and consequences, does not go unnoticed and that their response is missed.

Triple A ratings

Financial institutions are given an "A" rating for the security and management of their funds, the highest being a triple "AAA" rating. Follow the three A's below for a sensitive and well managed system in handling church members' response to the challenge of stewardship.

Administration

Effective and professional administration is important. There is no place for poor practice and casual attitudes. Research shows that one of the key factors in determining people's giving is the

trustworthiness, credibility and transparency of financial practices within the church. How you handle this follow up will be perceived as a measure of financial credibility and the quality of relational skills and pastoral care.

- A single person should be charged with the responsibility of opening and recording the response forms. This is the person whose name will appear on the pre addressed envelope which is provided for response forms.
- The person who opens the response forms must carefully record who has responded against the database of letters sent. This record keeping is essential; we do not want to send reminder letters to those who have responded or fail to pass the Gift Aid declaration to the person who requested it.
- Responses from unaddressed blank packs of literature distributed at Sunday services should be added to the database and these people included in the church membership database for the future..
- Pledged amounts from individuals remain fully confidential but a running total should be available. For example, one week after the distribution of the literature there might have been 25 responses received pledging an additional £97 per week. This information which will change week by week will be reflected in the thank you letters and the non response letters and will need to be up to date as and when these letters are sent.
- Carefully record the specific requests from individuals that require positive follow up action, including requests for Gift Aid declaration, planned giving envelopes, standing order forms and legacy information. It is important to keep this information up to date as action must be taken quickly to reply to requests for further information. These requests should be followed up promptly and personally.

Action

The second A is Action. Failure to act promptly and courteously on receipt of response forms from church members devalues the prayerful response of the church member and increases the likelihood that thought will not be translated into action. Whether we are thanking people, providing the information they have requested or reminding them of the urgency of a response, we are valuing both the initial request and their response. The sidebar on this page indicates the action that needs to be taken.

Authorship

Thirdly, be careful with the authorship of thank you letters and letters written to remind non responders. In most cases the Vicar has signed the original letters to church members while the response envelope will be addressed to someone else - the planned giving officer by preference, the treasurer or Gift Aid secretary otherwise. Accordingly beware of giving the false impression that lots of people know the details of the individual response forms. The sample thank you and reminder letters are careful to clarify this by stating that the clergy are aware of the overall response but not the details. Affirm an appropriate confidentiality while not colluding with the privatisation of financial discipleship.

Differentiation and response

Response rates will always vary between the different groupings in the church. If differentiated letters have been sent out assess the percentage of responses against the different groupings. For example, 80% of the core may have responded, 40% of the congregation and 18% of the Fringe group. Reviewing the response rates can be a tremendous encouragement. When a church mails to a large Fringe and sometimes to associational membership the overall percentage response can be low as responses from these groupings can be poor. The

same church may have had an excellent response from the core and congregation groupings. Even if the same letter went to everyone you can still differentiate the database and measure the response against each grouping on the database.

Parish visiting

Please be absolutely clear about the distinction between follow up visiting which concerns us here and a Parish Visiting programme which may optionally form part of Giving in Grace.

- Follow up visiting, which concerns us here, is about managing the responses forms *after the programme ends*. It involves visits made to the homes of those who have specifically requested further information in their response forms.
- Parish Visiting is an entirely separate and optional element within Giving in Grace. Parish Visiting is concerned with the actual distribution of the literature as part of the Giving in Grace programme.
- If parish visiting will take place in addition to follow up visiting please consult [Administering the Parish Visiting Programme](#) for advice on the administration tasks there as a complement to this page.

Personal follow up

It is entirely appropriate to say thank you and remind people to respond by sending a letter. Ideally a personal visit to thank people is in order but in many churches this will simply not be possible. However, all follow up to requests for further information should be done by personal visit. For more information see [Handling Requests for Information](#).

