Communication

Writing the Ask letters

Introduction

The brochure that is sent out to every member of the congregation sets out both the financial needs of the church and a range of financial responses sought from church members. The brochure can be informative, compelling, and attractive but it can never be is a personal ask for a personal response – and personal is what the "ask" letter is all about.

Templates of letters to the Core, the Congregation and the Fringe and guidance on editing the templates can be found from links on the Letters page of the Giving in Grace web site.

Keep it personal

The ask letter is written from the clergy or the church elders or the wardens in an interregnum and should be a letter from one individual to another. To keep it personal do observe the some golden rules:

- Take seriously the principle of differentiation because it helps make the letter as personal as it can be. The web pages for writing differentiated letters to the Core, Congregation and Fringe give advice on how best to do this and give access to the sample letters for each group.
- The letter should be a letter from one individual to another. There should be one signature only from the Vicar, the senior pastor or a single elder; it should never look like a letter sent from a committee!
- In interregna make the decision as to who will sign - is it one of the wardens, or the lay reader or both wardens in which case divide the letters between them so that each signs half. A paragraph might be inserted such as *"between us Mary Smith and I are writing to every member of St Vincent's …."*
- By all means write to your core leadership but visit them as well. Letters should never be the primary communication with church leadership.
- Keep the style conversational and sentences short. Make sure it is brief and to the point.
- Make liberal use of "you"; in fact make sure there are at least three "you"s" for every one "I".
- Handwrite both the salutation and your signature in blue ink.
- Use the PS, the PostScript to underline your key point in the letter.

Keep it spiritual

Clergy will sign their own letters of course. However, someone else will usually open the response envelope and therefore know the financial details of each response. The natural and understandable instinct for many churches is for the treasurer or the Gift Aid secretary to receive the response forms. These church officers are identified with good money matters and sound financial practice, are well respected and trusted to preserve confidentiality. These are important values. However, our strong advice is that response forms are addressed to a planned giving officer. This preference is to avoid the impression that because this is about money it is primarily a financial issue rather than one of discipleship, spirituality and resourcing ministry.

Keep it confidential

The clergy will write a thank you letter to each person who responds. Consequently it is important that the original letter states that the clergy will know when an individual's response has been but not the details of that response. The Vicar can thank John for his response and reflect the general level of increased giving in that letter but will not know the details of John's increased giving or request for more information. It is important not to give the false impression that there is a lack of confidentiality in the handing of response forms. This is set out clearly in the body of the sample letters to the Core, Congregation and Fringe

Confidentiality is an important part of creating trust but beware of over stressing the confidentiality issue. It is important and recognised to be so and will be acted upon. Don't heighten concerns by stressing the issue. Money talk and action should identify it as a part of our corporate discipleship and not as a privatised affair for the individual. It is personal and confidentiality is appropriate but ensure that words and actions don't send out the wrong signals.

Keep it focused

The ask letter addresses a specific need with a specific request so bear in mind the following as you edit your letter from the templates provided. Make sure that the letter

- presents a clear and unambiguous challenge to the recipient to do something definite in response. Don't leave the recipient wondering what to do or how to do it.
- explains how the giver's gift will make a difference. People need to feel that their gift will achieve something and that their giving is appreciated.
- puts the emphasis church ministry and changed lives not upon church bills and day to day costs.
- asks for the money. Don't assume people give because we tell them there is a need. Don't subconsciously avoid the issue or soften the ask by requesting that church members "*consider*" their giving or "*reflect*" upon their financial commitment to the church.

In conclusion

Follow the A to D of letter writing:

- **A is for Asking**: don't forget to do it - clearly and unambiguously.
- **B is for belonging**: keep the letters personal so that the emphasis is upon belonging to a church in which relationships are primary. Check that the letter is more about the difference that the giver's gift will make to ministry than the financial needs of the church.
- **C is for challenge... and for clarity**: your letter must clearly answer the question, "What do you want me to do?" and challenge people to act
- **D is for differentiating**: make sure that the letters meet people where they are: differentiate your data base and so differentiate your letters.