



Communication

Writing to the congregation

Introduction

The congregational grouping on the church database is defined as those who are members of the planned giving scheme of the church but excluding those who are included within the Core grouping. The primary task in communicating with the congregational grouping is to encourage a review of giving and to communicate appreciation. Standing orders or Gift Aiding are important but secondary issues. Do not leave the impression that completing a standing order is the desired response.

A combination of low giving levels and failure to review giving by congregational givers is often at the root of the financial problems of a church.

Congregational givers can be a large and varied group in terms of weekly attendance, giving levels, church experience and personal commitment to faith. The varied nature of this grouping often gives rise to unexamined assumptions which can hinder the stewardship process e.g. "*there's no more to give*" or "*we are all state benefit pensioners here*" and it is often from congregational givers that the most vociferous opposition comes to talking about money. Ensure that there has been a thorough analysis of weekly patterns of giving to challenge assumptions which can hinder effective stewardship.

Key characteristics of the congregation

We can make the following general observations:

- Congregational givers form the majority of the church membership in many churches.
- The motivation for giving can be difficult to assess because this group is so varied. Some churches attract congregations through access to schools, others by the provision of midweek activities or certain types of worship.

- There will be a relationship with the church. However people can be at very different stages in their faith journeys; this is the hardest of the three groupings to typify.
- Patterns of church attendance have been changing especially within this group with the pressure on Sundays for family time and the growth of leisure activity.
- Many of this grouping have a fairly parochial understanding of the church. There can be a limited concept of the wider church or of the need to support ministry in other areas

Key financial characteristics of the congregation

In financial terms we can make the following general observations:

- The percentage of regular church members on the planned giving scheme will vary across churches depending on the health of the scheme.
- Many planned givers are unaware of the significance of planned giving as part of discipleship.
- The majority will give by envelopes while a smaller percentage will give by Standing Order.
- The majority of tax payers are willing to make their giving tax efficient via Gift Aid but many may not be aware of it as an option.
- Levels of giving among some congregational members can be very low indeed and entirely unrealistic in relation to the church's need, to household income and also to the Christian's need to give as an act of worship.
- The majority of givers may not have reviewed the amount they give in the last three years - or even more.
- There can be extraordinary generosity to special

appeals, especially building appeals.

- There is often a remarkable ignorance about both the financial needs of the church and where the expenditure of the church goes. This is particularly true of the myths around the parish share as a “tax” on the parish or that the Church of England spends all its money on old buildings instead of ministry.

contained in the [brochure](#) which sets out the range of giving requests from which church members can choose.

- The letter must appreciate and value the relationship with the church financial support through the planned giving scheme.

The key stewardship task with the congregation

As noted above a combination of low giving levels and failure to review giving by congregational givers is often at the root of the financial problems of a church. In one large suburban church 60% of the planned givers had not increased giving in five years. Paradoxically this group also has the greatest capacity to solve the problem.

- The primary task of our communication with congregational givers is to encourage them to review their giving and to grow in their discipleship. Giving by standing order or Gift Aiding are important but secondary issues. Never leave the impression that making a standing order is the desired response.
- Make connections between financial giving and spirituality. The [preaching ministry](#) within Giving in Grace is crucial to forming a Christian mind and attitude around money. Not talking about money in kingdom terms means necessarily speaking about it in worldly terms.
- Make connections between financial giving and the impact on people **through the ministry of the church**. People give to people not buildings or institutions, so measure the impact of financial giving in terms of ministry and mission not budgets and buildings.
- Inviting a response. The key message is to review giving, not to *consider* doing so. Carefully link the [congregational letter](#) to the [gift array](#)

