



Communication

Writing to the fringe

Introduction

Fringe givers are defined as those who attend worship but are not formally members of the planned giving scheme. While some will be church members who resist the idea of using envelopes the majority will have more erratic patterns of attendance such as Parade Sunday services only and will include many people who could be characterised as belonging to the fringe of the church. Accordingly they will give to the church when they come; if they are not there they do not give. For a variety of reasons giving levels will be low and some will give nothing at all.

Key characteristics of the Fringe

We can make the following general observations:

- Fringe members regard the church as “theirs” but have other commitments which they prioritise above church attendance most Sundays.
- As a group they will have multiple motives e.g. schools, uniformed groups.
- There is often a preference for colourful or traditional times e.g. Harvest, Mothering Sunday.
- There is often a loose connection between their spirituality and church going.
- They may not feel welcomed by regular church members or find some aspects of church life difficult to understand or enter into.
- Giving in Grace must be careful to include participation and commitment to giving sensitively as part of a faith journey and growing ownership of their local church community.

Key financial characteristics of the Fringe

We can make the following general observations:

- Fringe giving is erratic in that it is entirely dependant upon attendance. By default if people

are not in church they are not giving.

- There are usually very low levels of giving though there will be isolated instances of very generous giving - to the frustration of the Gift Aid secretary!
- Significant numbers of fringe givers within the local congregation may result from failure to effectively manage and recruit to the planned giving scheme.
- Fringe giving is usually passive in nature. It is rooted in a residual assumption that we should give a little something to the church rather than in a response to a request to give.
- They may not have realised the existence of a planned giving schemes or the actual ministry enabled by giving regularly. If people understand the needs they can be motivated to participate not simply in financial terms but in their time and talents.

The key message to the fringe

The primary aim of defining and then writing to the Fringe grouping is to invite them to join the planned giving scheme by taking weekly giving envelopes. With this group no attempt is made in the letter to request an increase in actual giving. For some people this will happen as a result of the preaching and the brochure that sets out the financial needs of the church. But the letter and response form is restricted to an invitation to join the planned giving scheme. Why is this?

- Firstly changing patterns of church attendance means that open plate giving is the most vulnerable source of the church's income. While actual membership may remain stable people are coming to church less in any given month. Planned giving means weekly or monthly support by default.
- Open plate giving is the expectation and practice of visitors and new church members. Research

suggests that after 6 months only 17% of new attenders are giving anything financially to the church. An approach to join the planned giving scheme is an opportunity to engage people, perhaps for the first time, in any meaningful thinking or conversation about the financial needs of the church and giving as part of learning to be a Christian.

- Willingness to join the planned giving scheme is part of the individual church member's identification with the life of the local church. Taking an envelope will not of itself create that identification but it can be a creative and significant part of the pastoral process of welcome and discipleship if appropriately and sensitively done. As Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*". The decision to give regularly can seal personal commitment. It follows that a request to join the planned giving scheme cannot stand alone. It must be integrated into and understood as part of the wider pastoral and evangelistic task of welcoming and nurturing new members into faithful discipleship.

The key stewardship tasks

- Firstly, use the database. It will be obvious that the fringe is a group with very blurred boundaries. The planning group timetable has very specific advice on this for the people with responsibility for this task.
- Understand that the primary purpose of the ask letter is to build relationships with people not simply to secure significant financial response. A frequent misunderstanding is that all that is needed for increased giving is more givers. This is untrue. It is far easier to increase the giving from existing members than to recruit new donors.
- Ensure that recruitment strategies onto the planned giving scheme are as personal and informative as possible. Extensive advice is given about how to develop a [Follow up strategy](#) which addresses the twin needs of building relationships and giving appropriate information. All too often envelopes are given with the assumption that people know why they matter and simply what to do with them. If we want to build long term givers we need to lay some solid and lasting foundations.

Some considerations

- Ensure that the database is both comprehensive and pastorally sensitive.
- Initial preparation of the database will be some months before the launch of the programme. Ensure that it is updated regularly
- The key stewardship task is to join the planned giving scheme - by weekly envelopes in the main, more rarely by monthly standing order.
- Emphasise benefits received by the fringe recipient of the letter from church membership.
- Stress the value of regular planned support for the church.
- Give some indication of the actual costs of church ministry.

