



## Why visiting matters

Visiting matters because, quite simply, personal invitation is the most effective way of encouraging people to review their giving levels. This is the experience of fundraisers across the country and that alone should be enough for us to take it seriously in the church. But we can say much more about visiting than that.

### Parish visiting is a normal way of growing disciples

Giving in Grace is about our response to the grace of God in our lives. It is about personal discipleship in the difficult and sensitive area of money. Our experience is that personal relationships are the midwife of all spiritual birth and growth as Christian people. So it should not surprise us that personal invitation to discipleship in the area of money should be so important. One to one conversations are a normal way in which people are encouraged to grow in faith, whether they are new to the church or long established members.

The reality, however, can be quite different. Even where pastoral visiting is a strong feature of parish life rarely do we incorporate personal giving and financial discipleship into our spirituality. In a 2004 speech Archbishop Rowan Williams refers to a bishop who stated that in 40 years of seeing a spiritual director and making confession, he had never once been asked about his use of money. The church family also often relegates giving to the margins of church life. We talk, often endlessly, about money and budgets and the problems they pose but rarely address giving as such. We tend to treat our congregations as passive givers. We assume their continued support; we assume that that they know the financial needs of the church and the need of the Christian to give as part of their

worship.

When parish visiting is carefully prepared and sensitively undertaken there are significant benefits not only to the Giving in Grace programme but also in changing the culture of money within the life of the church.

### Parish visiting is about building upon relationships in the church

In parish visiting we call upon people who are already members of the congregation. This is not about cold visiting to recruit new givers. The emphasis is upon retaining and building relationships with existing givers, upon promoting fellowship, discipleship and a greater depth of relationship and discussion in the church. Despite initial anxieties visiting often proves to be a satisfying and enjoyable experience. Visiting also extends appreciation to and affirms the importance of the giver who supports their church.

### Parish visiting is about consultation

The visit is a genuine two way conversation. We want to know the views and concerns of those we visit, the things that move them to give and the things that make them hesitate about increasing giving. Parish visiting can play a significant part in changing the dynamic in churches from passive giving to active investment in ministry.

### Parish visiting is about education

For all too many people there is no connection between their faith and their giving to the church and other missions and charities. Christians who are diligent about their patterns of prayer, public worship and personal discipleship often fail to relate

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their income to giving. Many, both experienced Christians and those new to faith, perceive the church as a wealthy institution and their response to financial need is conditioned by the fundraising culture around them. Fund-raising events supplement low level direct giving to meet a threadbare budget. This is an illusion. Neither the financial need of the church's ministry nor the spiritual growth of the individual giver can be met by fundraising activities. Personal committed giving is essential. Parish visiting plays an important part in changing the culture in which money is discussed within the local church. A new awareness of financial reality prompted by genuine discussion in the church is a major benefit of parish visiting.

### **Parish visiting underlines the importance of Giving in Grace.**

The presence of the visitor is an indication of the importance of the issue both for the church and for the person who visits on behalf of the church. This is important and it matters to someone so much they are prepared to call on others to talk about it.

### **Parish visiting is story telling**

During the visit two stories are being told. The Giving in Grace literature tells the story of why the church needs financial resources; the parish visitor tells the personal story of why Giving in grace is important to them. Parish visiting is about story telling not arguing a financial case in someone's home.

Those responsible for encouraging people to share their faith story with others in the field of mission and evangelism know that it is a liberating process to put something into words and share it with other people. This is no less true when parish visitors learn to become effective lay advocates of the need to adequately resource the ministry of the church. Becoming a lay visitor often cements and secures the commitment of the visitor to financial discipleship and can be a stimulus to personal spiritual growth.

Taking the analogy of faith sharing a little further it follows that a prior personal commitment to reviewing giving is an essential qualification for parish visitors. No one can ask someone else to do what they are not prepared to do or have not done themselves. This is explored further in Recruiting and Training Visitors.

### **Organising visitor training**

The benefits to Giving in Grace of a parish visiting programme are enormous. However, like all good things in life it does not come cheap! Time and careful planning and effort are required to set up a carefully administered visiting programme.

The website contains advice on how to recruit a team of visitors and how to make the visiting programme effective in churches where it is impossible to attempt to visit the entire congregation. It will be necessary to undertake some form of segmentation in order to visit a portion of the congregation. For example, the planned giving scheme might be in some disarray or neglect. The parish visiting strategy might then focus on a visit to all those who currently do not give by envelope or standing order.

Potential members of the visiting team may also have some hesitation about making their visits and perhaps some confusion as to why it is important to do so. There may also be visitor anxieties around being asked questions to which they do not know the answers and some technical questions around the completion of Gift Aid or standing order forms.

A visitor training session should give opportunities for people to ask questions and answer anxieties. But it runs deeper than that. The parish case statement is important as a summary of the issues facing the church. It is not just finance but vision and direction, mission and ministry that is addressed by Giving in Grace. Potential visitors should be encouraged to see that this is not a fund raising exercise as such but the church identifying and meeting the need for the resources necessary for sustaining and developing the ministry and

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mission of the local church.