



# Discussion Paper

# Differentiation

One of the common jokes about the English abroad is that when faced with people who speak another language they simply shout louder! When it comes to money churches often make the same mistake. We treat everyone the same, saying the same things, writing the same letters and often asking for the same amount of money. If enough comes in we sit back until we have to shout again. If not, we crank up the volume and shout louder! In reality the average parish church is made up of lots of different people from a range of different backgrounds, lifestyles and experiences of church life. In any church there will be people at different stages in their spiritual journey and it is important to recognise this in order to help accelerate a journey of faith and action in the ministry of giving.

## Differentiation

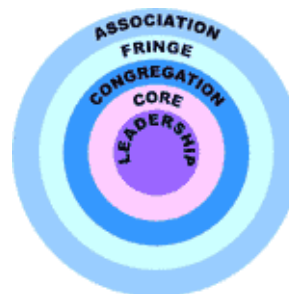
The truth is that if the people in our churches are to hear the message then we need to speak to them where they are and in a language they can understand. We call this process “*differentiation*” and in practice we do it all the time in church. The same pastoral sensitivity we attempt to show in caring appropriately for new baptism families, adults preparing for confirmation and committed members of the Shared Ministry team needs to be extended to the area of financial giving. We must acknowledge and respect the different places in which members of our churches find themselves with regard to finance.

## Concentric circles

The Giving in Grace programme uses the terms *Core*, *Congregation* and *Fringe* to describe three main groupings within the church. We can best picture this as a series of concentric circles. In the centre is our leadership team and a wider group of core members.

A wider circle is made up of our regular congregation and further out again our fringe members, people who worship periodically and consider themselves church members and *associational* members who rarely if ever attend but have some association with the church, such as membership of an electoral roll or receipt of a church magazine. The teaching, pastoral ministry and worship of the church will mean different things to each group - and so will the financial message we wish to communicate.

The crucial thing is that this is not a static model. Our aim is that people should move towards the centre as they grow in faith and maturity. The marvellous thing about this image is that it is not a financial model but a mission model, drawn from Church growth thinking. It



does not categorise people for ever but identifies a starting point and enables people to move and grow.

It is important to understand that this differentiation of the congregation into these main groupings is a functional definition - ***it is never based on what people financially give to the church.*** We identify the key groupings and then draw some broad financial conclusions. We do not categorise people by their giving and then allocate them to a group.

## Defining the Core

These are the people within the church who give of their time and talents as well as their treasure, who exercise leadership and are in many ways the godparents of the church. Defining the core depends on each individual church. As a minimum it should



include the PCC or other formal leadership group. Some churches will include recent past members while others will include lay readers and members of shared ministry teams. In some churches the core might be extended to include cell or house group leaders or leaders in areas of ministry such as children's work or pastoral care.

This core group is crucial because it is *likely that a substantial portion of the direct giving of the church will come from within this group*. Typically around 80% of the direct giving income will come from perhaps 15-20% of your congregation. The weekly giving analysis undertaken as part of the case statement in the early stages of preparation for Giving in Grace will almost certainly confirm this. The stewardship task with the core is to invite them to reflect upon their giving prayerfully, to ask again whether it is an appropriate response to God's love and generosity and to consider renewing their giving by beginning to give proportionately of their income.

### Defining the Congregation

Our **Congregation** grouping are those who attend regularly, usually weekly, and who are sufficiently committed to be members of the planned giving scheme. That is to say they are giving regularly via weekly envelopes, standing orders or a charitable giving account. As a general rule for most churches, membership of a planned giving scheme says something about identification with and commitment to the church.

However, there are two exceptions. In some churches only tax efficient givers are encouraged to take envelopes or make standing orders and it would be inappropriate to denote them as congregation exclusively. In other churches community members who never attend take planned giving envelopes and give a nominal amount. Such giving in practice

belongs to a fourth category, discussed below, which is called 'Association'. But broadly speaking for most churches regular worship and membership of the planned giving scheme reflects identification with and commitment to the church. The stewardship task with the congregation is to invite them to think about their giving realistically and spiritually and to review that giving, perhaps for the first time for some years.

### Defining the Fringe

Our **Fringe** grouping is functionally defined as those who give by a loose gift on the offering plate. While some loose plate givers are regular worshippers who do not take envelopes for most there is a looser identification with the church and possibly faith. In many churches the fringe will attend with some degree of regularity to support their children in church organisations, in preparation for baptism, because they are attracted to faith but not yet ready to commit or in order to get their children into church schools. Whilst they do so we have the opportunity to help them explore their faith and their commitment. The stewardship task with the fringe is to invite them to begin to give regularly through the planned giving scheme, increase their understanding of both the financial realities of the church and biblical teaching on money, including giving.

### Defining the Association

Our **Associational** grouping is defined as those people who rarely, if ever, attend the church except perhaps for the occasional offices such as baptism or funerals and a festival such as Harvest. Nevertheless they identify with the church, may well be on the electoral roll, receive church magazines, pastoral visits and consider the church to be 'our church'. The church may be a calling point at a time of personal need. Associational identification can be immensely strong in rural churches. In addition increasingly active urban churches with strong community focus can build





associational links. The stewardship task with the association is to build and maintain relationships, increasing the sense of identification with the church. There should be little expectation of significant giving to the general fund of the church from the association. However, there can be a good response to appeals to restricted funds around the church building. In rural communities a greater response from associational members is more common.

### Discussion points

1. Do we recognise these differentiation categories? How could we apply them to our church?
2. Consider the following personal descriptions and discuss the questions that follow:

**Mary** is a young single mum on benefits. She kept coming to church after the baptism of her daughter because the church people were so friendly and she wants to do the best for her baby.

**Mark** is a long standing church member on a final salary company pension who attends the 8.00am Eucharist. He has been putting £1 in an envelope for the last five years.

**Janice** is a PCC member. She tithes her net income believing proportionate giving to be the biblical standard and is passionately committed to overseas mission having served with Christian Aid in Uganda

**Andrew and Jayne** are a young couple who married in the church last year and appreciated the pastoral care provided by the church. They remain on the electoral roll and attend perhaps every six weeks.

- In which category would you put them?
- What are *their* different perspectives on giving?
- How would you present the financial challenge as part of Giving in Grace to each of these people?
- How does our church fare with numbers of core, congregation and fringe?

- Are we happy to use these categories in order to “speak to people where they are”?
- As a long term aim, how might we build relationships and connections with our fringe and association members?

### Differentiation - in practice

Differentiation honours people by taking seriously diversity and allows *their relationship with us* to determine how we communicate with them. We are not putting the needs of the church at centre stage but the relationship of the giver to both the church and to the Gospel. Differentiation is absolutely central and so we are careful to differentiate:

1. The **content of the letters** we send to our church members. We do not ask the same thing of everyone in our church regardless of faith, economic circumstance and faith maturity.
2. **The content of our brochures.** A single brochure to the congregation should contain multiple messages, giving enough information to people but also focusing on the ministry of the church.
3. **The style of our preaching.** A single sermon should contain clear challenges to different constituencies.
4. **Our style of communication.** Who is it most appropriate to visit? How will we most effectively distribute the literature to our church members?

