



Discussion document

Why prayer matters

Introduction

In 2004 Archbishop Rowan Williams preached a sermon at a service at Westminster Abbey celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Queen Anne's Bounty. (The Bounty was a gift of around £17,000 in 1704 which returned to the church some of the money confiscated in the time of Henry VIII. The purpose was to guarantee a clergyman in every parish in the land and in a modern version the Bounty is still with us.)

In his sermon Archbishop Rowan dealt very directly with matters of funding parish ministry and the need for creative, new models of doing this. In the same sermon the Archbishop also mentioned the testimony of a colleague from the House of Bishops. In many years of making his confession and receiving spiritual direction the said bishop had never once been asked about his personal finance or his use of money. An important and powerful part of life had been left out of the sphere of spiritual maturity.

Do we give to the need or do we need to give?

This is an important question. On the one hand we know the needs we see in our churches, our communities and the wider world. On the other we need to give in order to challenge the claim of possessions on our lives and to reflect the nature of the God who loved the world so much that he gave.

The answer of course is that both elements matter but in the church it is often giving to a need that takes centre stage! Month by month PCC members discuss the difficult financial situation of the church, magazine articles are written and fundraising appeals are run. It is entirely legitimate to have this concern and to take action because our churches

and our ministry do need money to be effective and viable. Such action is part of the whole picture.

What we cannot do is forget the other side of the coin. We do not just give to the need; we need to give if we are to grow in our spirituality and discipleship. The purpose of Giving in Grace is not to extract reluctant or guilty gifts but to grow cheerful givers. If we do not talk about money and giving as spiritual matters then we can hardly be surprised if Christian people think and act around money in a worldly wise way.

Paul invited the Corinthian church to excel in the grace of giving. "*Just as you excel in all things - in faith, speech, knowledge in utmost eagerness and in our love for you - so we want you to excel also in this grace of giving*" (2 Cor 8:7) Corinth was proud of its spiritual gifts and Paul recognises the good things that they have. He wants them to add generous financial giving to the list of spiritual gifts. He calls this not fundraising but 'grace'.

Prayer matters to us

Money is a spiritual issue and our use of it is crucial to our spiritual growth. It is no accident that Jesus talked about money matters more than he ever did about prayer or faith. This is because how we handle our money has a direct bearing on how we grow in our faith. The parable of the Rich Ruler makes that very clear. For all his faithful religious upbringing and his desire to follow Jesus it his relationship with money that leads him to walk away, knowing with sorrow what he is leaving behind.

William Ramsey once described prayer as being in the presence of God with what is on your heart. To pray about money and the challenge of giving is to invite the Holy Spirit to search and challenge our hearts into

letting Jesus be Lord of a very personal, sensitive and powerful area of our lives. The evangelist Billy Graham once said that when we get our decisions in the area of money right somehow many other things also fall into place. A willingness to let God be God in this area of life can release joy and freedom in much more than just financial giving.

Prayer matters to our churches

Archbishop Rowan linked together the need for personal accountability before God and future patterns of funding parish ministry. One of the legacies of an effective, prayerful Giving in Grace programme in a church is a change in the culture and tone of money talk in the church. Money is increasingly talked about as a blessing rather than a burden. Resources for ministry and mission are available and a renewed commitment to mission giving in this country and abroad. It has even been known for PCCs and AGMs to become opportunities to celebrate rather than worry about the financial situation!

Funding parish ministry and the spiritual maturity of individual Christians are closely linked. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians to encourage them to rekindle enthusiasm for the Jerusalem collection he used the Macedonian church as a model. What Paul values in Macedonia is that despite poverty and persecution there is a joyful generosity that is born from an experience of the grace of God- a spirituality that affects our use of, and attitudes to material possessions.

When prayer is at the heart of Giving in Grace it enables Christian people to make connections between their faith and their giving by encouraging prayer about what many regard as a secular concern rather than a spiritual one. Without prayer we run the danger of divorcing money from the spirituality of

both individual Christians and the ethos of the church. Thinking, talking and acting with integrity around money is not a necessary evil but a natural part of the worshipping, praying, missionary life of the Church.

Liturgical resources

There is a strong biblical tradition of financial gifts being accompanied by offertory prayer characterised by celebration, thanksgiving and praise.

- The Law of the Tithe in Deuteronomy 14:22-29 closely associates the giving of 10% of the harvest with the coming together of the people, both rich and poor, to worship together. There is also a promise of continued blessing at the harvest if the people honour God. In
- 1 Chronicles 29 King David prays a glorious prayer of thanksgiving in response to the overwhelming generosity of the people in providing the gifts for the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed we still retain a portion of this prayer in our Communion liturgy at the bringing of the gifts: *Yours Lord, is the greatness, the power the glory the splendour and the majesty. Everything in heaven and earth is yours. All things come from you and of your own do we give you. (1 Chronicles 29:11,14)*
- In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul is writing to the Corinthian church inviting their renewed participation in the collection for the church at Jerusalem. He is quite clear that a generous financial response will not only produce spiritual blessings for the church at Corinth but also will overflow with thanksgivings to God (2 Cor 9:12).

Giving in Grace reflects this connection of giving and thanksgiving. A wide range of liturgical material accompanies the preaching tracks for Matthew, Exodus and 2 Corinthians.



Fruit of the loom

An illustration might help to explain the importance of prayer. In weaving on a loom the warp is the threads that make the length of the fabric and these are set up first on the loom. The weft is the threads that make up the fabric width. As the loom operates the shuttle flies across the fabric binding the warp threads together.

Giving in Grace is about weaving together the warp and weft of Christian discipleship in the area of money. The warp is akin to the gathering of financial data, the preparation of a careful Case Statement and effective communication through written literature. This is the raw material without which Giving in Grace will never succeed. The weft is the preaching, teaching and prayer which binds the threads together and completes the picture. The shuttle is constantly passing back and forth between the warp threads building up the design and keeping the warp threads.

Make use of the liturgical resources to assist in promoting both public and private prayer in the church to underpin the Giving in Grace programme. It is never too early or too late to start praying for God's blessing on the church. However, resources alone will not do the job. Planning groups should ensure that a creative balance between prayer and planning is a characteristic of the planning process. The planning group and the leadership of the church should model the priority of prayer within Giving in Grace.

Suggested questions

1. Does prayer ever feature when we discuss money matters in the leadership or the congregation?
2. How can the planning group and the church leadership commit to pray and model prayer to the congregation?
3. How can we encourage the congregation to pray about our financial situation and Giving in Grace?
4. What practical considerations are there in using the liturgical resources as part of the Giving in Grace programme?

