



The Annual Review

Designing Review Sunday

Playing with light

From Monet painting in his garden at Giverny to TV house doctors preparing a house for sale people know that lighting is crucial in setting feel and atmosphere. Giving in Grace as a fully fledged stewardship programme had a clear and unambiguous focus. The programme put stewardship in the church under the spotlight. There was a clear presentation of financial need, connections made with personal discipleship and a clear ask, the invitation to respond financially.

An Annual Review is not a stewardship programme. It has a different feel and character, one which conceivably might change year to year to meet the stewardship needs of the church and its people. It will draw on the resources in this web site and elsewhere but be flexible and sensitive in approach. This sensitivity means that it is not always necessary to expose the stewardship message to the bright light of a fully fledged programme. An analogy might be found in the use of floodlighting which throws light upon the building to show it in relief rather than exposing it to direct and full light.

When white light is passed through a spectrum it is broken up into the different types of light, each of which has its own unique properties. The core elements within Giving in Grace are akin to the colours of the rainbow which taken together, produce illuminating white light. Underwritten by Prayer and enhanced by opportunities for Interaction, Preaching outlines the principles of biblical stewardship, Leadership models them while Communication presents the financial needs of ministry to the congregation and seeks a specific response. A full

Giving in Grace programme is a prism that combines these colours and directs bright, white light onto stewardship in the local church.

The Annual Review

The Annual Review will also seek to combine the several types of light to cast light on stewardship. But the work of the planning group is more akin to acting as a filter, mixing light to cast stewardship in the church into relief. The Annual Review will reflect the stewardship needs of the church, the energy levels of the leadership and the other priorities that make demands on time. One year there may be a real emphasis on renewing the planned giving scheme and moving appropriate givers to standing orders; another year a simple thank you and update may be all that is required while another year a definite ask to review giving may be in order. Planning groups should feel free to mix and match the core elements of the review to adapt to current needs.

Heartbeat and pulse points

Remember that the Annual Review is the focal point for stewardship in the local church but it is not the only time in the church's year when the principles and practice of biblical stewardship are addressed. If the Annual Review is the heartbeat then there are other pulse points during the year where stewardship is tangible and measurable. Preaching the lectionary will require frequent addressing of stewardship themes given the richness of biblical material on money and possessions. (It is often quoted that the Bible has some 2,350 verse on this theme compared to around 500 on prayer and 500 on faith.) The AGM requires a focus on the financial life of the church



which should rise above a dour presentation of the accounts and should reconnect with the ministry and mission of the church. Issues of personal money management, breaking the culture of silence around debt and money anxiety in the church can be the subject of sermon and small group. It is entirely appropriate to bring these concerns of congregation and community to God in intercessory prayer and meditation on personal spiritual growth.

Preaching

Not too many years ago a devotional booklet noted from a survey of preaching in London churches over several months that just a handful of sermons touched upon the subject of money. In a consumer society moulded by expectations and fed by advertising it is important that Christians are given teaching on how to think in a clear and biblical manner about money. Sensitive, humorous and carefully prepared preaching is invaluable in Christian formation, perhaps even more so in regard to preaching about financial stewardship. Preaching can gently challenge the conspiracy of silence around money matters in the church, a silence often driven by a fear of causing offence.

While it is naive to think that a single sermon can redress the balance it is culpable to do nothing at all. A complex, emotive and multi layered issue such as money cannot be addressed in a single sermon. Scripture provides rich opportunities for preaching from the blessing of wealth to its liabilities and often embedded in story. Preaching should address the need for personal money management and the Christian conviction that we are stewards of a gift, that our money and possessions are a covenanted gift: the blessing itself conveys obligations of justice and generosity up on us. Be alert also to issues of personal debt in the congregation and the

responsible use of credit and borrowing. The Annual Review is the opportunity to address giving directly as the transforming key to financial freedom. It goes without saying that the purpose of the sermon on Stewardship Sunday is not an appeal for additional funds to meet the current financial deficit of the church. Always communicate the ministry of the church and the key place of giving as an aspect of personal discipleship.

The reason giving is so formative is twofold. Firstly giving runs counter to the innate desire to retain what is "ours" and to accumulate more. As Henry Drucker comments: *In this act [of giving] we disenthral ourselves by overcoming our slavery to possessions. We demonstrate that there are values in the world more important to us than our own selfish aggrandisement. True giving is an act of self-liberation. It becomes one of the major achievements of our life.* Secondly giving requires not just that we consider something or adjust our thinking but that we act in a very specific way.

Communication

The primary purpose of preaching stewardship is to open and shape the hearts and minds of the congregation to the grace of God and the organic relationship of our giving to God's gift, of generosity to the outpouring of grace. Preaching is not the place for attempting to communicate financial facts nor requesting a personal response. That task is the specific purpose of the written communication. Communication complements preaching by communicating simply and transparently the financial facts and what has been achieved since the last year's programme.





Leadership

The role of the church leadership remains as crucial in an Annual Review as in a full Giving in Grace programme. Clergy and lay leadership play a vital part in sustaining the message and practice of stewardship in the local church. This section explores a general concern and two specific issues that leadership should address around an Annual Review.

In 2002 Laura Edwards undertook research into factors influencing the decision of the affluent and the wealthy to give to charity. The research indicated that both motivations and reasons for not giving amongst wealthier individuals were no different from those proffered by those on lower incomes. The research noted the several ways in which the denial of personal responsibility for charitable giving was expressed and justified. Edwards comments that in the UK *"Giving to charity is seen as a nice thing to do rather than an obligation or duty, a spontaneous act rather than something to be planned or budgeted for and a catching mechanism for spare pennies rather than spare pounds"*.

In general terms the modelling provided by the church leadership around finance and giving must address the resistance to real generosity often experienced by individuals for all sorts of reasons. It is in the main not the actual levels of income that resist generosity but the self perception that that is not enough to give that drives this resistance. But leaders also have two specific concerns to address within ongoing annual reviews.

The first concern is the very real temptation after any stewardship initiative to believe that the problem is solved and that the awkward subject of money can be left well alone. This is especially pressing when

the campaign or initiative has been successful and giving levels have risen significantly. The leadership should address this often unexpressed conviction that the church no longer needs generous giving directly. Leaders must keep the subject on the agenda and be advocates for continued attention to stewardship. Planning groups are encouraged to make fresh use of the [Discussion Paper on Leadership](#) as part of the preparation for the Annual Review.

The second concern is focused around the changing nature of leadership in the church year on year, especially where new members are elected to leadership bodies. When the resourcing of ministry and mission is the crying need of the local church it is inappropriate for those called or elected to leadership to be unaware of or unwilling to accept that the modelling of financial stewardship is a core element of leadership. Formally or informally the induction process for leadership should make clear the expectation that those elected to leadership will:

- be committed members of the planned giving scheme in the local church
- review their personal giving at least annually and when personal circumstances change
- be natural and unembarrassed advocates of the planned giving scheme and of the invitation to renew giving.

Attention is drawn, by way of illustration, to the fundraiser Harold Jenas' experience of a Board of Trustees recounted in [Who will do the preaching?](#)

Interaction

Because the Annual Review will normally focus upon a single Sunday opportunities for Interaction are perhaps more limited or require a creative approach. An Annual Review in January might be built around a





congregational Epiphany meal and make use of a short financial presentation. One Pentecostal church uses the AGM as the focal point for a church meal with an invited guest of honour such as the local MP. The AGM becomes an occasion for sharing the vision for future ministry as well as a review of the past year. Alternatively the Annual Review may be the kick off event for a lent home or cell group series on giving making use of the small group resources in the Giving in Grace website.

Interaction may be focused especially on 'Targeted Parish Visiting'. This simply means visiting a portion of the church database, maximising the undoubted value of personal visiting without overburdening the church with a huge visiting programme. Targeted visiting has a specific purpose amongst a specific target group in the church:

- Inviting the take up of envelopes amongst the fringe members of the church
- Promoting Gift Aid amongst the non tax efficient givers
- Promoting Standing Orders amongst the tax efficient (or indeed all) planned givers.

Prayer

The liturgical resource for the Annual Review is the Methodist Annual Covenant Renewal Service and permission to reprint this service in full is gratefully acknowledged. The Covenant Service has a significant place in Methodism. The idea of a Covenant service, though not the form of the service as currently used was established by John Wesley himself. In August 1755 he writes in his journal:

On Monday, at six in the evening, we met at the French church in Spitalfields. After I had recited the tenor of the covenant proposed.... all the people stood up, in token of assent, to the number of about

eighteen hundred. Such a night I scarce ever knew before. Surely the fruit of it shall remain for ever.

Within Methodism the fruit did keep. In 1785 Wesley wrote "Sat. JANUARY 1, 1785. — *Whether this be the last or no, may it be the best year of my life! Sunday, 2. A larger number of people were present this evening at the renewal of our covenant with God, than was ever seen before on the occasion*".

The Covenant Service has remained a significant part of Methodist worship and discipleship ever since. The Service is historically associated with renewed commitment to discipleship at New Years Eve or Day and is celebrated now on the first Sunday in January. With the sense of re-dedication to God at the start of the New Year the Covenant service offers a powerful resources for prayer and worship to accompany Stewardship Sunday. As Archbishop Rowan Williams notes, all our actions speak of who we are before God and that cannot exclude our money.

