



# Annual Review

## Why does it matter?

### Introduction

Having a child, buying a new home or even getting a pet - one thing is for certain: life costs money! It is no different in the kingdom of God. As long as our local church has life, as long as it is worshipping, caring for others in church and community and nurturing new life in Christ it will always cost the congregation money. The only time the church will relinquish its claim on our money is when the doors are locked for the last time, the windows boarded up and the church closed for good. Until then, life costs time and money, and the leadership will need to revisit the congregation with a fresh challenge to review giving.

### Giving to a need; needing to give

The Annual Review section of the Giving in Grace website provides resources for a regular, low key revisiting of the financial aspect of discipleship. Reflecting the approach of Giving in Grace this consideration of the financial aspects of discipleship operates at two levels:

- Recognition that the financial needs of the ministry of the church do not stand still. Each year will see changes in the financial requirements of the church and opportunities to extend ministry that have financial implications. It is simply not adequate to look at last years costs and add an amount for inflation while looking to cut expenditure wherever possible. The church leadership needs to connect finance and ministry, communicate that to the congregation and make a clear and compelling "ask".
- Each individual must also be challenged to review and renew their own giving to the church

(and to Christian charities) as part of their own personal discipleship. The Annual review should offer a clear challenge to each church member to integrate their personal management of money into their walk with Christ.

### Breaking surface tension

A successful Giving in Grace programme will make a significant, immediate and measurable difference to the financial health of the local church. Headline results can be impressive and the investment of time and energy will pay dividends financially and in terms of a changing culture around money. But while Giving in Grace can and does disturb the financial equilibrium of a church over time things settle down again. An annual review may encounter the same resistance to addressing financial issues as the initial Giving in Grace programme did.

There is a very real danger that people will conclude after a successful programme that money is no longer an issue. A "balance the books" mentality is often lurking beneath the surface. Leaders and people are relieved to have "got money out of the way" and want to be able to move on from talking money.

### Friction compensated elephants

The only thing I remember from five years of physics at school is friction compensated elephants. It was all to do with inertia and the resistance that friction imposes. If you break the inertia and compensate for friction you could push an elephant anywhere you wanted it to go.

For many churches Giving in Grace helps to break through the inertia within both leadership and



congregation that resists addressing money and stewardship issues. The Annual Review provides tools which helps to keep the stewardship momentum. An Annual Review must, year on year, embed all talk of financial stewardship within the natural rhythm of the church's liturgical and organisational life. The essential principles of biblical stewardship must be embedded into the warp and weft of church life, ministry and mission to minimise the friction caused by out of the blue or reactionary, crisis driven money talk.

### Seed sowing

Luke 8 v 15, part of the parable of the Sower, reads, *"but the seed on the good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by preserving produce a good crop"*.

A Giving in Grace programme is a seed sowing programme; we sow God's word, and tend it through prayer, communication, interaction, and leadership. Do not be disheartened if some of your Giving in Grace programme appeared to fall on stony ground! Remember that eventually even stone is weathered and broken down into soil by a combination of seeds rooting and the rain and frost. A poor harvest one year can be transformed into a rich harvest by constant attention to teaching, good pastoral care, nurture and prayer.

But if we don't sow seed each year or till the ground, we will find that the yield gets less and less, due to our neglect and the competing demands of on the yield - today's equivalent of the birds, stony ground and the weeds. For churches that have completed a Giving in Grace programme Annual Review provides resources for ongoing sowing, tilling and reaping through an annual Stewardship Sunday.

Christian giving is not short term problem solving but an act of faithfulness. It needs regular review in order that we do not diminish our worship by failing to keep pace with inflation, responding to ministry opportunities or personal changed circumstances. Without a framework and reminder to review very few people in the congregation will consciously look afresh at their giving to the church on an annual basis in the same way they have to respond to other changing financial challenges and opportunities!

Giving in Grace is often a starting point for changing the culture, the ethos and the language of the local church around money. The preaching and practice of money matters in the church must consciously continue to articulate this new language and approach. An Annual Review provides the framework for continued learning and development.

