

An introduction to Giving in Grace

Since 2005, Giving in Grace has helped churches of different sizes and traditions to increase their giving and to sustain the increase. This paper offers a brief overview of the elements of this tried and tested, flexible and fully resourced giving programme.



Members of the congregation at the beautiful medieval church of St Botolph in Barton Seagrave near Kettering are generous givers but church finances were getting tight. The church leadership knew it was time to act.

A small group, fully supported by the leadership, planned and then launched a four-week programme. Planning group chair Geoff Curnock commented, 'Giving in Grace provided the biblical and practical resources we needed but it was down to us to pray, to plan and then deliver. We had some pretty clear goals, including getting mission giving where it should be.'

The result was that the church hit its ambitious target for increased giving with no need for a gift day to balance the books as in previous years. Overseas mission commitment was renewed: a remarkable 18% of income. Planning group member Jim Roughton said, 'For me Giving in Grace was an important reminder that costs go up and that I should review my own giving. It is so easy to let it slip but God deserves the best I can give.'

Since then, St Botolph's has run a low-key annual review to keep people aware and to encourage new church members to see that generosity is a natural part of discipleship. It feels like the burden of money has been lifted.

Money makes ministry and mission happen

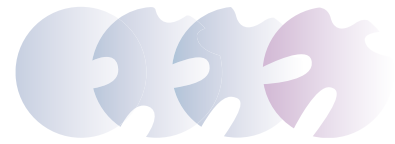
Churches need money to pay the bills that keep our doors open and resource the activities of the church that people value. Without money, our ministry and mission is diminished and hindered. It's that simple.

It is not just about church. Those 2000 bible verses on wealth and possessions, including some tough teaching from Jesus, pack a powerful punch. The joyful giving of the tithe (Deut. 14:22-29), Paul's challenge to 'excel in the grace of giving' (2 Cor. 8:7) and the women who supported Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:1-2) teach us that joyful, generous giving is the hallmark of our discipleship around money and the gift that resources the ministry and mission of our church.

Money talk

Stewardship, therefore, must be on our agenda but how do we start to talk about it? Many churches feel there is little the congregation can do differently. The culture is of scarcity while Scripture and worship speak of God's abundance. The money talk is often about surviving, coping and balancing the books while we are challenged to mission and growth. Our hope is that people will see the need and respond with greater giving without our actually raising the issue.

Giving in Grace is a fully resourced biblically based and practical giving programme that teaches generosity as the hallmark of Christian



stewardship and challenges congregations to 'excel in the grace of giving'. It will help to start or continue the money conversation in the church and crystallise the stewardship tasks. We want to be able to pay the bills and to maintain and grow the ministry. The opposite pole within Giving in Grace and what generates generous giving is not bills, budgets or buildings but our responsibility as disciples of Jesus to give generously, indeed proportionately, of all that God has given to us. So what does it look like?

Foundations: leaders who lead

King David led from the front at the building of the Jerusalem Temple (1 Chron. 29:1-9) and church leaders must do the same. No stewardship programme can flourish with reluctant, embarrassed support from the church council or leadership. Better to delay than do something half hearted and ill prepared.

Practically speaking, the heavy lifting is done by a small planning group following a step-by-step online process, using and editing downloadable resources. The first task is to prepare a case statement setting out plans for ministry, the financial situation, a simple budget and a giving target. The case is affirmed by the church leadership, whose advocacy of the case and the programme is vital.

The first pillar: preaching

Building on a solid foundation of leadership, the first pillar of a Giving in Grace programme is a three- or four-week preaching series. The website contains extensive preaching resources: Matthew, Mark, Luke and 2 Corinthians 8-9. There are background sermon notes, stewardship sermon reflections and bespoke liturgical resources. There is also an all age stream exploring Exodus. See Designing the Programme.

The second pillar: literature

Like St Paul, we should not be embarrassed to ask the church to give generously nor to remind church members to finish what they started (2 Cor. 8:10-11). We should never assume that people will simply respond to the need; we have to ask, as any fundraiser will tell us. The second pillar of Giving in Grace is the preparation and distribution of letters, brochures and response forms to the congregation and, where appropriate, to our community friends.

Linked to this is the sensitive and personal follow-up of all responses: thanking those who respond, reminding those who don't and responding personally to requests for information. Guidance and

downloadable templates are readily available under Preparing the Literature and Preparing to Follow Up.

All the literature is based on the key principle of differentiation. This simply means that different letters are sent to leaders, planned givers, plate givers and, where appropriate, our friends in the community, because they will be thinking differently about giving. If it sounds complicated, don't worry. The guidance is under Key Principles at the Differentiation tab.



Options: enhancing the core elements

All churches, even the smallest, can enhance a programme with optional elements. **Small groups** create space for discussion and engagement. **Social events** enhance a programme and are especially helpful in more rural churches with fluid boundaries between congregation and community. **Home visiting** to congregation members helps create opportunities for discussion and feedback to the church leadership. Finally, there are creative and age-appropriate resources for our **children and young people**. They need guidance and peer support on the choices they make in a consumer culture, and to grow up generous. All these optional resources are found under Designing the Programme.

The place of prayer

Paul tells us to pray about everything (Phil. 4:6) and money is no exception. Giving in Grace should be covered in and crowned with personal and shared prayer. Liturgical resources and ideas for creative prayer are found under Designing the Programme at the Prayer tab.

Conclusion

Giving in Grace is not a one-off fundraising programme but a lay-led stewardship programme connecting generous giving with personal discipleship and the ministry and mission needs of the church. It is not a magic bullet and cannot be isolated from the ongoing stewardship tasks that every church must tackle. But it can make a significant and sustained difference to giving levels and to how a church understands and practises Christian stewardship.