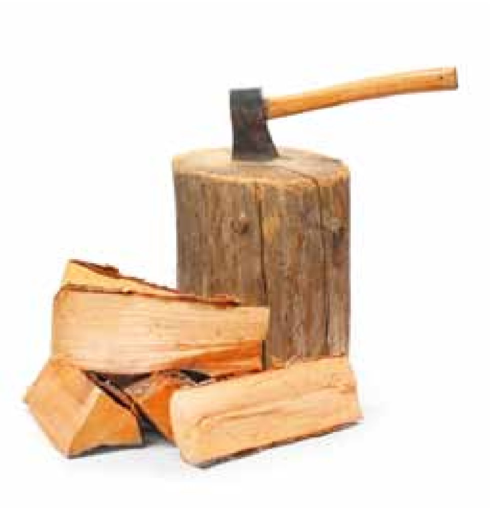
Sharpening the axe: the planning group

The planning group is critical in terms of planning and delivery and as early champions of the case statement and of the programme. Time invested by group members is time well spent. This paper offers some practical guidelines on the role of the planning group.



Giving in Grace, indeed any stewardship programme, is an investment of people and time along with a little money. A small, committed planning group makes the most of these scarce resources. In some churches this task will fall to an established stewardship or finance group. In others it may be a separate task and finish group incorporating some finance committee members and others from the leadership team and/or the wider congregation. It's the planning group who spend time sharpening the axe.

Honing the blade

The planning group focuses on four broad phases which are captured on the blue chevrons in the top level navigation menu.

- preparation of the case statement
- designing the programme
- preparing the literature
- following up response forms.

At the end of the programme the planning group will do some simple evaluation and suggest aspects stewardship that require further attention.

Group members will need to work well together; the work requires their individual and shared commitment. They will need the skills to access online resources, populate simple spreadsheets and good administration.

Champions and advocates

Planning group members are the early champions of a biblical, discipleship approach to increasing giving. There can be a nervousness, a reluctance to address generous discipleship, a fear of giving offence or a sense that all are giving what they can. Planning group advocacy makes a difference.

The group will pray together, holding together complementary concerns of biblical stewardship and balancing the books. There's no tension here. But early along the planning journey the group must signpost the nature and intent of Giving in Grace. The aim is not simply to solve an immediate financial problem but the long-term task of growing generous givers.

Who is on the planning group?

As management guru Jim Collins says, get the right people on the bus first: people of prayer, committed and reliable. Invite people personally. Including recognised leaders affirms the commitment of church leadership. Try to include folk from outside the leadership team. When working across a team of churches include members from each congregation.

Group size depends in part on the size of the church and secondly on the depth and breadth of the programme you wish to run. A small church running a simple programme need only a small group. A team of three is adequate, perhaps with additional support for the financial analysis in the case statement. A larger church and/or a comprehensive programme will need a larger group, perhaps five or six. The group must be small enough to gel, large enough to do the job without exhausting people.

Some early thinking
Before the first meeting planning group members should take a little time to review the documents at the *Key Principles* tab.

The early work of the group
First off the planning group will focus on the completion of the *case statement*. The first two sections of the case statement are the early opportunity for the group to talk together. The financial information is likely worked up offline by one person (see below). Together the group reviews the picture that the analysis paints, drawing conclusions and setting the financial target.

Preaching, prayer ….and more?
With the case substantially completed the planning group turns to the content of the Giving in Grace initiative. There are comprehensive resources at *Designing the Programme.* Managing the options and the workload is important.

Begin with the preaching. Usually clergy will lead on sifting and deciding upon the preaching options and sorting practicalities from who will preach and which dates fit with the flow of church worship. Clergy may also pick up the accompanying liturgical materials for worship which sit under the Prayer tab.

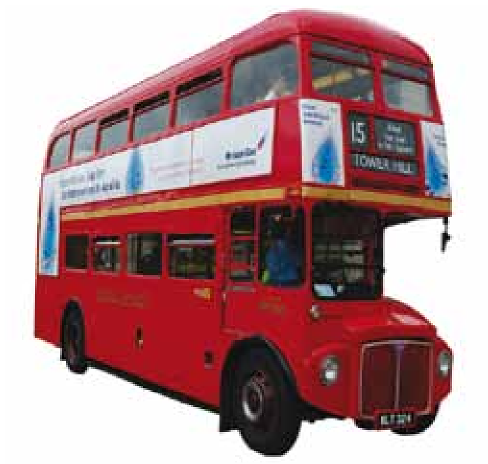
Prayer must crown and cover the work. Leading on prayer is a twofold responsibility: ensuring that the planning group is a praying group and that prayer, individual and corporate, underpins the programme.

Once the preaching and prayer is sketched out the planning group should decide on optional elements, if any: young people, small groups, social events and, less likely, home visiting. Avoid biting off too much and consider what options best serve the life of the church. If an option is chosen, for example small groups, a planning group member should lead on exploring the resources.

Letters, brochures, response forms
Early doors one group members should take the lead on getting ready the literature that will be used in the programme. The guidance can be found at *Preparing the Literature* along with templates designed in Canva and sample text for clergy letters. Pay attention to the GDPR compliant guidance on building the mailing list or database. The planning group will review and sense check draft literature and ensure efficient the administration of the programme literature.

Chairing the planning group
Ideally the planning group chair is a lay appointment. The research of *Dean Hoge* and colleagues (page 43) suggests congregations prefer lay leadership in financial matters or for joint participation of clergy and lay people. Interestingly lay leadership is associated with higher levels of giving.

The Chair calls meetings and oversee the tasks of the group. They will be accountable to the church council or leadership for the work of the planning group. Equally important, they must balance the practical



and prayerful aspects of Giving in grace and model generous discipleship.

The role of the clergy
Clergy should actively serve on the planning group as a visible sign of their commitment to the process. Not engaging may suggest, or actually reflect, a lack of enthusiasm or even a distancing from stewardship. If serving on the planning group is simply not possible clergy must be visibly supportive in other ways.

The treasurer's role
The support and engagement of the church treasurer is invaluable but they are busy people. Serving on the planning group is desirable but not essential. However, the treasurer will assist in preparing the financial information for the case statement and much of this work is done outside of the group meetings. If not on the planning group, be sure all the financial elements in the case are discussed with the treasurer.