

### Home visiting: one church's story

Home visiting is effective because it builds upon relationships in the church and that personal conversation makes all the difference. This short paper tells the story of how one smaller church visited each member of the congregation to good effect.



St Andrew's is an Anglican church serving a mixed parish of council and privately owned properties in Warrington, Cheshire. An average Sunday will see around 60 people at worship.

The church decided to run a Giving in Grace programme because it was facing a financial shortfall and things would get serious if nothing was done. Following approval by the 15-strong church council, a planning group of six, all members of the council, started its work. As part of the planning process members of the planning group decided to make their own personal commitment to increase their own giving before the programme was launched in the congregation. The result of this decision was to make planning group members much more confident about the impact of the Giving in Grace programme in their church and, just as important, their own confidence to speak about it to church members.

Quite early in the planning, the group agreed that Home Visiting should be an element of their programme. The original intention was to visit church council members *in advance* of the launch of the programme in the congregation so that the leadership of the church at least had received a personal visit. However, church life does not always accommodate our best-laid plans! The requirements of a major church festival made this visiting of council members before the programme impossible to implement.

The financial analysis that forms part of the preparation of the case statement prepared by the planning group suggested that levels of Gift Aid giving were noticeably lower than the deanery average. There were around 30 Gift Aid givers so the initial target was to visit all the Gift Aid givers, and this was felt to be realistic. In practice, however, the home visitors were able to visit the entire congregation.

Although a training session was considered, in practice it was not needed. The planning group formed the core of the visiting team. They knew intimately what Giving in Grace was all about and, because of that and their decision to review their own giving early on, they could communicate a high level of personal investment when they made their visits. Each visitor was asked to visit six or seven church members who attended church pretty regularly. There were no cold calls and no visits to electoral roll members who did not attend worship on a regular basis. Visitors felt comfortable both with the scale of what they were asked to do and with the fact that they were visiting church members.

The home visiting contributed much to a fruitful Giving in Grace programme. There was a good rate of response to the literature and giving increased significantly among both tax-efficient and non tax-efficient givers. The increase in giving established the finances of the church on a more solid footing. The planning group commented that, in addition to the financial increase, there were other benefits, including the feeling of being a closer community sharing the same 'problem' and an impetus to start new work, especially a home visiting pastoral scheme.