

Giving thanks: why appreciation matters

Two things are essential in stewardship ministry. The first is asking. The second is saying thank you. We think we thank enough. Mostly we don't. Not saying thank you is the quickest way to constrain generous giving.

'If the only prayer you ever say is thank you, it will be enough' (Meister Eckhart). Gratitude is at the heart of the life of prayer. Paul frequently expresses thanksgiving (Eph. 1:15-16; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3, 12; I Cor. 1:4) and urges his readers to 'be thankful' (1 Thess 5:18; Eph 5:19, Col 3:15-17). It's no accident that his two chapters encouraging generous giving end with: 'thanks be to God for his indescribable gift' (2 Cor 9:15).

When church members respond to the clergy ask letter we say thank you: for the gift; for the giver; for a generous God. Saying thank you might seem obvious. But the [2020 Anglican Giving Survey](#) found just a third of respondents were *definitely* thanked for their giving.

Acknowledgement and receipt

The bottom line is that saying thank you is a courteous acknowledgment of the return of a response form. It is an informal receipt for a transaction, in the best sense of that word. A thank you should always be sent, ideally within 48 hours of receiving a response. Saying thank you increases the chances that helpers will help charities again, including by giving.

Appreciation for the gift

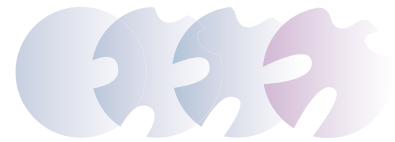
In his book *Thanks!* Robert Emmons suggests that gratitude is a coin with two sides. One side, as above, acknowledges that *somebody else has given something*. The other side acknowledges that this is a *gift*. There is no obligation to respond, to increase giving, to ask for information. It's a shift in perspective from transaction to transformation.

For our church, saying thank you for a gift given is part of a year round task of saying thank you, many times and in creative ways. It is about continuously building a culture of gratitude. For the giver our thank you letter is part of their personal journey of generosity and their growing emotional engagement with the life and ministry of their church.

Our letter of thanks is part of a rich, transformational cycle of generosity: receiving, asking, giving and thanking. Personally we count our blessings for what we have received: from God, from our church, from others. People also thank us for our giving: to God, to church, to others. Gratitude affirms our personal value, connects us with others, motivates our own generosity. In some [gratitude experiments](#) saying thank you doubled the chances that someone who had offered help would do so again, saw a 50% increase in volunteer activity and 15% increase volunteer time.

The thing to note here especially is that when someone is making a 'first response' then our letter of appreciation should help people feel good about the new step they have made: to join the Parish Giving Scheme, to ask about Gift Aid, to request legacy information. We help people to feel good about the gift they have given.





Thanks for making a difference

When making a response people want to *feel* they are supporting their church. But we also *think* about our giving. A letter of thanks should briefly mention the difference that giving makes to ministry. There are three things to note here:

- In our thanks let people know that their giving is making a difference. This helps nurture generous giving amongst those who already give to their church. In one experiment a thank you indicating the difference donations made resulted in a 60% increase in average gifts.
- Our letter of thanks connects the giver with others who also want the ministry of the church to flourish. It is an early and personal update on the congregation's response to Giving in Grace.
- Our thank you letter should affirm that we will use the gifts entrusted to the church wisely and well.

A relationship with the church

People don't give into a vacuum. They give to the work of God in their church, their community. A first decision to give regularly is a milestone on our journey into generous discipleship. Decisions to review and refresh our giving are other personal milestones. They are also milestones in our relationship with our church. Our thank you letters nurture that relationship between the church and those who give to its mission.

In charity terms this is called 'donor loyalty', defined by [About Loyalty](#) as: *the feeling of a connection, support and allegiance towards a charity*. They list 10 drivers of charity loyalty but the most important are:

- Commitment: the passion that the giver and the church share; the shared belief that what the church is about is all important.
- Satisfaction: how we communicate with church members and, critically, how we say thank you.
- Trust: this grows when the church can describe the impact it is making and people know the difference that their support is making.

The thing to note here is that the thank you letter can't be the one time we say thank you. Say it in many creative ways, old and new: pulpit, notice sheet, church magazine; website, WhatsApp, Facebook. Never forget the lasting value of a written thank you. Gratitude lists and journals help nurture 'attitude of gratitude'. Writing our thanks matters.

Appreciation for the giver

Finally, and most importantly, our thank you is not only for the gift but for the *giver*. In Phil 4:17-18 Paul

says thank you for a gift which meets his needs. But more than the gift, Paul appreciates the givers. There is spiritual credit to their 'account' with God. They are partners in the Gospel.

Our letter of thanks is again part of that rich cycle of generosity. Generosity is not just what we give, it is who we are. People are not just giving gifts, they are giving trust and commitment and sharing common purpose. From generous discipleship flow gifts that make possible ministry and mission. Our thank you appreciates the giver. If we don't thank appropriately we may get the gifts but not nurture the giver.



We want to say: '*you are the gift*'. No one and no one's giving is taken for granted, But appreciation runs deeper. It thanks our givers for *who* they are, not just *what* they give. Saying thank you helps to avoid the risk that regular, planned giving becomes routine, stale. Sometimes our giving can 'rust-out'; it might even 'burn-out' unless we feel valued for who we are not only what we give. Key to this is nurturing our personal [journey of generosity](#).

Top tips

The thank you letter helps bridge the natural gap between our best intentions and our actions.

- Review and edit the template thank you letter
- Thank *everyone* for their response, including those who say they cannot give more.
- Hand write your greeting and sign off in blue ink, printing each letter; never sign photocopies.
- Don't clutter your thanks with other information or requests and never a hint about giving more.
- Update the thank you as responses come in; folks can know their gift is part of a shared response.
- Let your thank you be thank you; add no more.

Helpful resources include: Learning to Say Thank You (Institute of Sustainable Philanthropy); a David King blog; The Definitive Case for Growing Supporter (About Loyalty); Robert Emmons Thanks!; Gratitude at the Great Good Science Center)