

No need to write: the review leaflet and letter

A simple annual review leaflet will for many churches be a core element of the annual review. A covering clergy letter is certainly an option to consider. This paper outlines the purpose of the leaflet, the options around guidance for giving and writing a covering clergy letter.



In 2 Corinthians 9:1 Paul tells the church at Corinth that he has 'no need to write' about the Jerusalem offering – and then writes a whole chapter of our bible all about it! Paul had already given practical advice about giving (1 Cor.16:2) but he knew the human heart and was leaving nothing to chance!

Now, as in Paul's day, there is a place in biblical stewardship for the written word alongside our preaching. An annual review leaflet and a covering clergy letter serve that purpose today. A customisable template of both a review leaflet and a clergy letter can be downloaded for local editing at the Leaflet and Letters [tab](#) under *Why an Annual Review?*

Information

The first function of the Review leaflet is to provide information to the congregation and it is important to get the blend right. Clearly there must be headline information of the financial cost of running the church as a centre for ministry and mission, broken down into weekly or monthly amounts. Keep it simple. This is not the place for presenting the church budget.

However, financial information alone will not motivate greater generosity. People may be prompted occasionally by a financial crisis but what motivates is not so much your past or even your present but a vision for the future. Alongside the financial headlines the review leaflet will also provide information about the ministry and mission of the church and opportunities that lie before it. The review leaflet tells of what has been achieved in the past year and what the church hopes to achieve in the year ahead. Now, congregations are notoriously poor at grasping the financial facts of life! This annual exercise is an investment for the future, not a quick return.

A call to action

The second function of the review leaflet is, like Paul's planning, very practical. The leaflet is a reminder to turn intention into action. However arresting the sermon may be, people often need something tangible that reminds them to do something. A leaflet is a simple takeaway that helps people to take action.

Note also that the review leaflet may also carry with it a response form that encourages people to consider Gift Aid and to request information about methods of planned giving. For more on this see the guidance under About the Annual Review at the Response Forms [tab](#).

Contact

Many, if not most, churches will focus their annual review on a single Sunday service with, of course, appropriate attention to any main midweek worship and activities. Inevitably a portion of the regular congregation will not hear the preaching (unless the sermon is streamed via a church website) and, without a review leaflet, they will have no information and no invitation to act. The leaflet therefore serves as the point of contact for those who are not in church for the annual review. This may require making the leaflet available after church services on following Sundays and at midweek services and events.

Annual Review

How much to give?

A key question that is often asked is whether the annual review should include specific guidance on how much people should give. The answer is always governed by the local situation but a general rule of thumb is this: the greater the financial challenge, the greater is the need for guidance to givers. Here are some options to consider.

One of the sections in the Annual Review leaflet is titled, *Knowing How Much to Give*. The body text in this panel contains some general advice to church members about giving but does not include a specific financial challenge. This may be all that is required if, for example, the focus of the review is a request for planned givers to move to standing order or direct debit giving or where the desired increase in giving is deemed manageable.

The body text in the *Knowing How Much to Give* panel also includes optional text for a generic, across the board figure: 'if everyone increased their giving by £1.50 we would hit all our goals...'). Many churches will wish to offer some clear, practical guidance and should edit this text appropriately.

This 'single figure guidance' offers clarity and simplicity. The downside is that it asks the same of everyone, while some could give much more and as an expression of biblical stewardship it is inadequate. But clear and simple guidance may be just what is needed for this year's annual review – so long as it does not define the entire stewardship ministry of the church.

Including a gift array

Finally, where a budget deficit is significant, a ministry opportunity urgent or the opportunity for a larger stewardship programme scarce, some churches will include a gift array, a range of giving responses that will enable the church to meet its financial target. The back panel of the review leaflet is blank in order to facilitate the inclusion of a gift array.ⁱ Be cautious, however. Using a gift array for a smaller financial target or using it too often will diminish its value as a tool for a stretching ask at a later date and in a more appropriate context such as a stewardship programme or a capital funding campaign.

Writing letters

Should we write a covering letter to accompany the review leaflet? Once again, the question is best answered locally. A personal letter is a welcome courtesy and can add value. For a first annual review, where stewardship is new to the congregation or where there is a significant deficit or opportunity, writing a cover letter from the clergy is recommended.

If you do write letters you must do the job well. Never send a generic, photocopied letter with the greeting, 'dear friend' and an electronic signature. To send personal letters means having a carefully prepared mailing list or database, time to handwrite the greeting and sign off and prepare envelopes. You will need to ensure that letters that cannot be picked up from church are delivered by hand or post as appropriate.

The same principle of doing the job well applies to sending *differentiated* letters to church members.ⁱⁱ Differentiation simply means that we adapt our letters to three different groupings of people within the church: our leaders, our planned givers and those who give by cash or cheque on the offering plate. Differentiation is effective and you can sensitively edit the template letter to send slightly different letters to the differentiated groupings in the church. The critical question is this: do you have the time, energy and resources to do the job well? It will add value if you can; don't do it if you cannot.



Distributing letters and leaflets

If you are writing personally addressed letters to accompany the leaflet then you have the option of sending the letters out *in advance* of Review Sunday. This serves to focus people's minds on Review Sunday and, if response forms are to be included with the letter and leaflet, then their return on the review day can be requested.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alternatively, the leaflet plus any letter and/or response form can be distributed on Review Sunday and the covering letter edited to reflect that and to remove any request to return any response forms by or on a given date.

Conclusion

A review leaflet communicates both financial facts and the church's ministry goals while also serving as a tangible reminder of the need to act. It can be enhanced by a covering letter if you have the time to prepare personally addressed letters.

Notes and Resources

- i. See the guidance at the *Gift Array* tab in the Stewardship Programme strand of the website.
- ii. On differentiation see the guidance at the Differentiate [tab](#) in the Stewardship Programme strand of the website
- iii. On response forms see under About the Annual Review at the Review Response [tab](#)