

Introducing Stewardship

This paper is designed to resource discussions about Stewardship at parish level. Synod has asked that every parish considers this subject and makes a response to Synod via Standing Committee during 2016. This is not a definitive guide to every aspect of the subject and there are many web based resources that can help, some of which are mentioned in this guide. Most Anglican dioceses and provinces have a stewardship section on their websites. In addition, there are ecumenical resources and researches.

What is Stewardship?

Definitions of what stewardship is vary. Some are enigmatic: “Christian Stewardship is what I do after saying I believe,” (Methodist Church) others speak of freeing people from anxiety about money (US Ecumenical Stewardship Center) or adopting a definition that gives precedence to responding to the gifts of creation through commitment to conservation (Arocha). However there is a vocabulary of stewardship which is repeated many times, and which gives a sense of the area in which we are concentrating. This vocabulary is related to the particular theological approach taken.

One approach could be called ‘God and Me.’ This would see stewardship as a human grateful response to God for his gifts to us – a eucharistic response. Words like abundance, blessedness, grace, gratefulness, thanksgiving, response and generosity fit with this understanding.

A second approach might be called ‘The Church and Me.’ This would concentrate on what it means to be a baptised member of the Christian Church. What is involved in belonging? Words like responsibility, commitment, discipleship, ministry, mission and nurture are commonplace in this kind of discussion.

A third approach might simply be called ‘Me.’ This would be based on the understanding that the mature Christian life to which we aspire inevitably involves giving. A fully rounded human being, in the image of God the giver, will be a generous person. Words like freedom, hospitality, life, values and sharing are often used in connection with this approach.

Clearly these are not mutually incompatible. The Barnabas centre says bluntly and in summary: “Stewardship is a way of life.”

This is a useful corrective to the oft-expressed view that stewardship is a way of raising money for the church. Stewardship is reflected in social responsibility; in

issues of justice peace and the integrity of creation, as well as in every decision we make about how we make our money and how we spend it. That does include, of course, thinking about giving not just time and talents, but also money.

What does the term stewardship mean to you? Do you identify specially with any one of the strands above? What words would be important to your congregation from the ones listed?

How We Give

UK mainstream churches often refer to a piece of research carried out ecumenically by CTBI in 2011 entitled “Giving Insight” (free download). This was based on 1670 responses from the three British Anglican Churches plus the Church of Scotland and the Salvation Army. This provided definite figures on which to base strategy. The top 20% of givers (according to the survey) tend to give by Standing Order and give more than 50% of the total. On average they give £29.20 per week. The next 20% give £12.28 on average. The bottom 20% give £1.91, but when correlated with income figures the conclusion is that those who have more give more, though over 20% feel guilty that they do not give enough. 40% of givers contribute 75% of the total.

Some churches encourage proportionate giving: that is they ask members to aspire to a gift that represents 5% or 10% of their disposable income. (So the C of E, C in W and Ep C of Scotland among many others). The survey found that only just over 25% think about proportionate giving. When asked if they thought this was a good idea, about a third said ‘yes,’ about a third said, ‘no’ and a third were not sure. Those who agreed give more than those who disagreed. 50% of those who agreed had incomes over £20K (2011). This was one area that prompted outrage from those who left a comment. Some people felt it was regressive, and others objected to reducing giving to the level of an income tax.

Do any of these findings surprise you? If proportionate giving might be a problematic term, what adjective would you place before giving to sum up your commitment to it?

(e.g.: committed, sacrificial, regular,)

Being Informed

It is generally accepted for any stewardship campaign that it is important to get across how the church spends the money given, and to have an accurate idea of what the church needs in order to function as an effective church, and preliminary public or congregational meetings often concentrate on this. The survey showed that

those who felt best informed (strongly agreed with a statement that they knew what was going on) gave 50% more than those who just agreed. Those who strongly disagreed gave least. That being said, hardly anyone wants teaching on this subject. Only 3% were strongly in favour and 15% more generally in favour, as opposed to 43% who were broadly against. Those who agree, already give most. There is general support for the idea that teaching should occur naturally within the lectionary readings, thus treating stewardship in a holistic yet intentional way, but stewardship campaigns continue to bring financial (and other) results. What the figures do show is the need for people to have confidence that their money is being carefully stewarded by the church authorities, and the need for those authorities to find creative ways of gaining people's attention about that.

It is commonplace for Councils to despair about getting people to hear what they have to say about the Church's finances. How do you attempt it? How successful is that? What incentives (eg a free lunch) might help to populate a meeting?

Stewardship Campaigns

The two most popular within the UK appear to be, Giving in Grace, which derives from the Diocese of Liverpool and takes its title from 2 Corinthians 8:7; and The Responsibility is Ours (TRIO) which as its name suggests belongs to those approaches which centre on the church and discipleship. Giving in Grace commends a three 'cord' (Ecclesiasticus 4:12) strategy, with a full stewardship programme every three years, stewardship talks throughout the year and an annual review. The more popular TRIO is designed for those who want to claim membership of a church, through attendance at least once a month. "If your church income looks unlikely to meet the demands of expenditure TRIO may be for you," says their own promotional material. It records an average increase of planned giving of around 25%. The Diocese of York produces an explanatory leaflet (Appendix 1) that describes a four week process. Week one has a presentation within Sunday worship, week two introduces a guest preacher who speaks about Christian living and lifestyle, week three is when responses to the pledge cards distributed in week one are collected. Week four is a thanksgiving week. Various dioceses have produced their own variations on the York booklet, including Southwark, Blackburn and Canterbury. The last, for example, provides a specimen parish magazine article. Others devise invitation or pledge cards or orders of service for thanksgiving. All believe that grateful acknowledgement of giving is important.

Has anyone on the Council had experience of such a campaign? How did it go, and what was learned from that. How easily could it be applied in your context?

Making Stewardship Central

The relationship between practicalities and the concept of giving are handled differently in different places. The Church in Wales Parochial Administration Handbook has a chapter on Giving. It includes a reflection from the Provincial Stewardship Executive (stewardship is how we use our world and our money as we acknowledge them as gifts from God). It tells us that 2350 verses in the Bible relate to money and possessions and so we should not be embarrassed about speaking of these things in church, and it highlights the practicalities of Gift Aid and Direct Giving through some form of direct debit. Some of the UK material is unhelpful in our situation in that it relates specifically to the UK setting, such as the small gifts scheme which enables UK churches to claim an extra £1250 a year from the taxman, without a declaration.

Do you think that some kind of essay about stewardship published on our website would be of help?

Getting Personal

The Episcopal Church (US) has a network for stewardship (TENS) with lots of resources, some of which mirror the UK ones but some that have a different approach. Their theme for 2015 was "Creating a Culture of Generosity." Tithing is a key aim here though presently only 5% give 10%. One very interesting resource which would perhaps play better with an American than British dominated congregations, concerns the use of personal witness. There is guide for a Lay Witness Presentation, the themes of which could well be adopted in other circumstances. The speaker is invited to think about these headings.

- How is money a spiritual issue for you?
- Who or what helped you to think differently?
- How does giving reflect your values?
- What do you value about your faith community?
- What are the challenges, choices and outcomes and intentional and proportional (sic) giving?
- How is giving, a practice of transformation or thanksgiving?
- How has proportional and intentional giving strengthened your relationship with Christ?

Do you feel intimidated by these kinds of question, or are they a real help in focussing your mind on the issues? How would you answer the questions?

Creative Ideas

Those who want to place stewardship in a wider discipleship context include the Methodist Church and the Diocese of Llandaff. The Methodist Church has a downloadable workbook, produced under the auspices of CTBI. Interestingly it contains a section on sustainability, and asks what discipleship responsibilities are both individually, locally and internationally. Money is the subject of the last chapter. The Diocese of Llandaff says we must realise that giving to God through his church is a spiritual matter rather than a duty. In this diocese stewardship is placed in a context of diocesan mission and vocation called seven sacred spaces. Seven areas of a monastery are related to seven areas of Christian discipleship, each of which comes with a response form to indicate how we as individuals are responding. The areas are worship, prayer, work, study, meet, decide and share. Stewardship is both an overall theme and a particular element in each.

Current Church of England thinking is based on Giving for Life published (as the result of a Synod debate) in 2009. Published in conjunction with A Short Guide to Generous Giving, the latter aims to “nurture generosity in a holistic way.” This lists simple tasks any church can do. The predominant view is that churches should all be challenged to look at the way money is collected; the level of awareness in the congregation about how it is spent and the church’s need, and the absolute necessity of encouraging cultures of generosity, hospitality , responsibility and thankfulness.

The largest selection of resources available through the internet is probably the least helpful; namely, suggested sermon themes. There is nothing more lifeless or lacking in persuasive power than someone else’s sermon. However, the Biblical resources that accompany these sections will be useful in preparing contextually appropriate sermons. The breadth of these suggests what we have already hinted at: namely that stewardship can be one perspective on the whole of Christian experience and life.

From what you have read, which of the following statements come closest to what you believe?

the best stewardship approach is a holistic all year round one, intentionally thought through by the Council with annual objectives?

A stewardship campaign with outside specialists brought in is the best way to kick start action in this area

All that is really need is a tweaking of what we already do

This area is a private one, up to individuals and continual references to money are completely counterproductive

The Diocese's best contribution is to make sure that in all its publications, the stewardship angle is properly reflected.

Appendices

Appendix 1. TRIO (York Diocese)

What is TRIO? It is a teach-in to inform the whole congregation about the finances of their church. It is designed to encourage church members, once informed, to accept responsibility for the ministry, mission, and maintenance of the local church. It also seeks to ensure proper contributions to the Diocese, the Church of England, and the wider world wide Anglican Communion. It aims to focus on money, without apology or hesitation. It does exactly what the title says: to invite the local church membership to say together, 'the responsibility is ours'.

For which church is TRIO designed?

- Churches which have not previously run a Stewardship programme.
- Churches which have not held a Stewardship programme for several years.
- Those churches whose income in the year ahead looks unlikely to meet the demands of expenditure. If your church fits one of those situations, then TRIO is for you.

To whom will TRIO speak? The programme is designed to reach regular worshippers, (those who attend at least once a month), regular donors, and members of the Electoral Roll.

How long does it take to put TRIO into action? The programme has been devised to be a tried and tested, simple, and effective first step to overcoming financial problems. It is also inexpensive to prepare, and is designed to reflect the local church life. TRIO runs over three or four weeks, after the initial preparation by a small group and the PCC.

- Week 1. TRIO presentation in church to the whole congregation during the main Sunday services.
- Week 2. A guest preacher provides the theme on 'Christian giving and Christian life style.'
- Week 3. Response Sunday, during which church members bring back the response forms given to them in Week 1.
- Week 4. Thanksgiving Sunday. The Service theme is praise to God for the generosity of church members. Results of promises and pledges are announced.

WARNING TRIO tackles the widespread myths about church finances. It is truthful about the current financial situation. It proves the reality that 20% of church members give 70% of the annual direct giving. It addresses the widespread ignorance among those beyond the PCC (and sometimes within), about why parishes need to generate such large levels of income. It explains the myths and the truths in simple terms that people usually grasp. This may be a hard reality check

The reaction to TRIO can sometimes be 'shock-horror' This lasts only for a short while, because they are provided with an effective remedy- a response form of their own. Is TRIO a long term solution? No, it is the first step in a process. Consistent levels of giving, sufficient to meet the needs of the local church and beyond, can only be achieved with regular, effective, clear teaching on such themes as generosity, giving as response to God's love for us, and Christian attitudes to money, wealth and possessions.

These form part of the discipleship programme which every church will want its membership to grasp and put into action in their daily lives. In addition, the church should focus on Stewardship/Christian giving as a major theme on at least one Sunday in the year. How do we get started? A TRIO adviser will come along to meet with your Finance Group and the PCC. The adviser will go through the Presentation Pack with those at the meetings. The material contains a step by step guide to everything you need to know in order to run a successful TRIO campaign. The adviser will continue to be available throughout the time that the programme is running in your parish. The TRIO pack is available at £50:00. Christian Giving Resources Group Diocese of York, Diocesan House, Aviator Court, Clifton Moor. York. YO30 4WJ Tel: 01904-699500 e-mail: paul.lightburn@yorkdiocese.org.uk

Appendix 2 Possible annual objectives (a brief extract from a Diocese of Blackburn collection)

What objectives should the programme have?

There is always a temptation to try to cover all aspects of stewardship every year. However, it is generally better to try and focus on one or two key issues each year, helping most people to take an appropriate step forward in their personal discipleship journey. Most people cannot make several significant changes in their behaviour all at once so it is suggested you take a 'drip-feed' approach, concentrating on one main theme each year. The working group should analyse the church's finances and volunteering needs to determine what the stewardship priorities are and map out say a five year strategy for dealing with the key factors.

Stewardship objectives can generally be measured by improvements of the following type of indicators:

Ideas for an Annual Stewardship Programme

- number of tax efficient Gift Aid donors
- Number of bank standing orders and proportion of total income through the bank
- Percentage increase in giving by existing committed donors (compared to inflation)
- Number of donors committed to giving about 5% or more of their finances
- Growth in number of Gift Aid cash donations
- Number of wills that have been reviewed and updated recently
- Hours of committed volunteering in lay ministry roles

The resulting plan for the next five years might look something like:- 1. More regular pledge donors – bankers orders or envelopes 2. Gift Aid and other forms of tax-efficient giving 3. Calculating the proportion of giving levels and moving towards 5% or tithing 4. Stewardship the environment, fair trade, etc 5. Managing personal money and possessions, legacies, etc 6. Skills and talents identified and used In any one year the overall theme should predominate, although information on other areas should be available if people ask.

Why not give the renewal event an attractive title and/or logo related to the theme?
For example the first year above might be promoted as 'First to the Lord'. (Diocese of Blackburn)

The Diocese of Blackburn has a very accessible and wide ranging collection of downloadable pdf files, including one on TRIO. The Church of England has a good guide to legacies.