

How to... communicate with the wider parish and community about giving

The big challenges

For most churches today, the weekly collection is no longer enough to cover regular expenditure. This has been true for some time, though reserves have often softened the impact. If we want to sustain our mission and ministry and care for our buildings, we need wider and more diverse sources of income.

This guide focuses specifically on communicating with the wider parish and community — the people who value their church but may not attend regularly and may not understand its financial challenges.

Many people genuinely care about their local church. This is especially true in smaller communities: close a church and the concern is immediate! Yet this passion rarely translates into ongoing financial support except through some Friends groups (which have benefits and challenges of their own).

So why is this the case? There may be a few reasons (not an exhaustive list):

- **Misunderstanding how the church is funded**
For example, “The church receives government funding”; “But isn't the Church of England rich?” How do we respond gently, clearly and confidently?
- **Different priorities**
Some people want to fund mission and ministry. Others value the building and its maintenance. Our communications need to speak to both.
- **Decreasing trust in institutions**
The ongoing issues around safeguarding; internal conflict within the church; perceived irrelevance can undermine confidence in the church.
- **Competition for generosity**
There are so many charitable organisations seeking support, and many communicate more clearly than the church about need, impact and outcomes.
- **Costs of living pressures**
People are having to give more selectively and want to know that their support genuinely matters.

The big challenge is - how do we clearly communicate both the need and the impact of giving, in a way that encourages our wider community to want to support their local church?

Purpose of this guide

There doesn't seem to be much guidance available online, and there is a good reason for that. It's not very easy and whatever you produce needs to be specific to your own context. This guide does not offer a step-by-step formula, but it will help you ask the right questions so that you can build a communication approach that fits your own parish and community.

Principle 1 – Laying good foundations

We have more communication tools than ever before, but effective communication requires two core elements:

1. Building relationships.

Communication only works if people are already listening.

On social media for example, posts reach people who have chosen to follow. In a parish, communication reaches people who have a relationship with the church. Ask:

- Who actually sees what the church shares?
- How can we widen the circle of people who hear from us?

2. Ensuring communication really reflects who we are

If the only messages people receive from the church are about money, the church can appear needy or transactional.

We need a more rounded communication pattern that includes:

- stories of hope
- involvement in the community
- the difference the church makes
- meaningful invitations to support financially.

Without strong relational foundations, messages about giving are unlikely to land well.

Ultimately: **Money is a resource that enables the church's mission and ministry. It should never overshadow that mission and ministry.**

Principle 2 – Shape the message of giving carefully

Ask yourself these foundational questions:

1. What exactly do you want to communicate?

Is the aim to:

- explain ongoing financial needs?
- invite regular giving?
- fundraise for a specific project?
- provide an update on something underway?

Keep each communication focused on one clear purpose.

2. Who are you speaking to?

Name your audiences:

- regular congregation
- local residents who value the church
- wedding or baptism families
- tourists or heritage visitors
- parents and carers
- community groups using the building

Different people will connect with different messages.

3. Why should they care?

Identify what each group values:

- heritage
- worship
- community space
- social action
- music
- children's work

Connect your message directly to those values.

4. What is your story?

People respond to stories more than statistics.

You might use:

- a narrative about the church's impact
- a personal testimony
- a clear and concise case for support

5. What is the best medium?

Options include:

- website
- A Church Near You
- social media
- community newsletters
- printed leaflets
- posters
- local radio or newspapers
- email newsletters

Some tools are general; others allow for personalised communication. Choose what best fits your audience and your message.

Principle 3 – Be clear about what is in and what is out

1. Avoid jargon.

Most people outside church circles don't know what "benefice share" or "ministry costs" mean. Explain plainly and simply.

2. Address misunderstandings — but gently

Tackle persistent myths, but don't overload every message with explanations. Respond to what people in your community are actually asking.

3. Use the right tone

Should the message be formal or friendly?

Should it include photos?

Does it sound like your church?

Above all:

Make sure people understand why their support matters.

If they don't sense a need, they probably won't respond.

Principle 4 – Plan what happens next

Before you send anything out, ensure the next steps are ready.

Examples:

- **Inviting regular givers?**
Make the giving mechanism clear, simple, and easy to find.
- **Encouraging legacies?**
Have an accessible legacy policy.
- **Fundraising for a project?**
Provide transparent ways to give and update donors on progress.

Clarity after the communication is as important as clarity within it.

Principle 5 – Openness, honesty and impact

These three qualities build trust and encourage generosity.

Be open about finances If the church is struggling, say so gently and truthfully.
People cannot respond to needs they do not know about.

Be clear about impact Impact builds trust.

Ask:

- How do we share why we exist here?
- How do we show the difference we make?
- How do we communicate what God is doing in this community?

Annual reports are important but rarely enough on their own. People need stories, examples, and updates throughout the year.

For more ideas on impact reporting, please see our “how to” guide on demonstrating impact.