

FUNDING FOR CHURCH BUILDINGS: APPEALS

FUNDING SHEET 4

How are you placed ? Do you actually need an appeal ?

There is plenty of advice on the Internet about how to run an appeal for your building fund. What follows here is mostly about planning the appeal process. There is a danger of rushing in with organising events, before the fundamental decisions have been thought through.

Parish reserves

One of the first questions you need to ask is how much your PCC can commit to the work you have planned. It could be that you have reasonably healthy fabric reserves, but there are those on your PCC who are most reluctant to commit them. Many PCC members (not only the Treasurers !) are keen to sit on cash reserves for some unspecified 'rainy day' and may be quite affronted by the suggestion that the PCC should simply write out a cheque for the work.

There are some serious questions here. To what extent should a parish regard a major gift to a Fabric account as a 'nest egg' not to be used unless absolutely necessary ? To what extent should we try and provide for the future viability of our church ? What reserves does one need in case of the totally unexpected emergency, and how much money do we need as a cash float, for example to maintain common fund payments during those bleak months of January and February ?

There was a time when the funding situation was much more buoyant, and grants were easy to come by, but now grant-making bodies are looking very closely at parish accounts. Who can blame them ? Among some recent prospective applications to the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust, there were two parishes which could afford to pay for their entire repair project from their cash reserves, in one case twice over. Both had to be told that the trustees would be bound to spot this and would wish to reserve their grant-making for more needy cases. Both applications were withdrawn from the process.

There are several Gospel images which come to mind. One is that, regrettable as it may seem, grant-makers are more likely to favour the foolish virgin with empty pockets rather than the wise virgin with substantial cash reserves. A more positive slant comes from the Parable of the Talents. Cash is there to be put to work, rather than buried in a financial nest egg, particularly at a time of record low interest rates.

The advice therefore in the current climate would be to commit your parish reserves to your project, keeping back only a sensible amount for cash-flow and genuine emergencies. This way, you will show the grant-making trusts that you are not expecting them to pay for something while at the same time you are keeping your own powder dry (if you will forgive the mixed metaphors).

Appeal Committee

Depending on the scope of the work and the resources of your church, it may be helpful to set up an Appeal Committee. However much your instinct may be against yet another committee, it is probably sensible for a **small** group under a dynamic and efficient leader to be entrusted with the co-ordination of all the effort needed to raise the necessary money.

Not all members of an Appeal Committee need be on the PCC or even regular church attenders. Try to draw members from other sections of the community. With luck you may be able to recruit people with financial and IT skills. The choice of a good chairman will be crucial. It is usually wiser if the parish priest is not the chairman, but he or she should try and attend at least some of the meetings.

However, it is important to be clear that such a committee must be **under the direction of the PCC**. It is the PCC and not the Appeal Committee which has to give instructions to architect or builders and which is legally responsible for any debts incurred.

Some more detailed advice about launching and running the appeal is contained in the next section.

Timing and phasing

Don't rush into things. Larger appeals need careful planning, and this must be done **before** going public. You can only do one launch. But it may then be a good idea to set a time limit for the public phase, for example twelve months from the launch of the appeal. A small parish in the Cotswolds a while back raised a large sum in under a year and the appeal organiser said at the time: "It is more practicable in our experience to go flat out for a defined time, than to struggle on, gradually losing revs, over a long period until the sum is raised."

It may help to think in terms of phases of your appeal. Before you go to a public launch, you will need to go through a planning phase. You may also want during this early stage to identify and approach major donors who can hopefully be persuaded to lay the financial foundations of the appeal. This will help reduce your fundraising gap, thus making it easier to secure the grants for which you will be applying and, after the public launch, the fundraising phase will have a more achievable target.

Presenting your church

What's special about your church ? Why should people dip into their pockets to help your appeal ?

Take a fresh look at your church. Remind yourself of its architecture, its history, its place in the landscape and above all its place in the local community. Each of our churches is unique - even the most humble of our buildings has something special which can be brought out in an appeal letter. Don't underestimate the quality of your church – 70 percent of the 400 churches in this diocese are listed either Grade I or II*. **Never say – or even think – "It's only Victorian"!** Even modern buildings can be good examples of their type. St Barnabas, Tuffley is an instructive case in our diocese. Completed in 1940 and well and truly out of fashion in the 60s and 70s, it is now listed grade II* as an important example of twentieth century architecture, and its first major restoration has been completed, with the help of a 50 percent grant from English Heritage.

Presenting your appeal

Always look critically at your paperwork. If you know anyone who is involved in marketing or PR, ask them to look through what you have produced and be guided by their reactions. You know your church and you know what you are trying to achieve. Other people don't. The whole question of making applications to grant making bodies is dealt with in a later section, but the principles are the same whether you are producing literature for local consumption or to be looked at someone in London who is never likely to enter the building.

Unfortunately many parish appeals fail badly in this respect and paperwork is unimaginative and/or not sufficiently informative. Try to cut out ponderous verbiage, but ensure that the key questions are answered :

What is the money needed for ?

How much have you got in hand ?

How much do you still need ?

What is to happen once the money is raised ?

How soon do you hope to start ?

And so on. Language needs to be clear, unambiguous and positive. Keep figures nice and round. '£12,000' is so much clearer than '£11,972.44'.

The DAC Secretary has some examples of good (and not so good) brochures etc from recent appeals, which you are welcome to look at. Some recent appeal organisers are willing to be quizzed on how they did it, or where, with hindsight, they could have done better. Contact the DAC Secretary if you want to be put in touch. Why reinvent the wheel? By the way, don't make the mistake of thinking that a classy brochure looks extravagant. On the contrary, it looks as if you mean business, and are prepared to invest money and effort in pursuit of a worthy goal.

Launching the appeal

A typical approach is for the Appeal Committee to produce a mailing to go to every household and business in the parish, explaining the scope of the appeal and giving details of a public launch meeting to be held in the near future. This should also be sent to people who used to live in the parish but no longer do so, and to others who have links with the parish, e.g. those who were baptised or married in the church or whose family members have been buried there. The appeal literature must be attractive, concise and clear as to the aims of the appeal.

The launch event could take a variety of forms, but must be cheerful and positive in atmosphere. Short speeches (maximum five minutes!) may be made setting out the nature of the appeal. If the expertise is available, a short video or PowerPoint presentation can be given, but again beware of excessive length. The event could be in the context of a special service or a major festival, or perhaps the stewardship supper approach may be used. Certainly refreshments and a festive atmosphere are important. People should get some fun out of your appeal and the catering and drinks should be upmarket. Church functions do not always shine in this respect !

Posters and graphs can be used to good advantage, for example breaking down the overall target to a human scale e.g. how the weekly equivalent of a newspaper or pint of beer will accumulate into large sums of money. A colourful and professional-looking appearance works wonders.

It is vital that forms and information regarding Gift-Aid and standing orders should be available, together with people who can explain what is involved. Where necessary, follow-up visits should be made as soon as possible after the launch event, to encourage people to complete the necessary forms, or to answer any queries.

Keeping supporters informed: An appeal website ? Or newsletters ?

Depending on the scope of the appeal, and the availability of the necessary talent, it may be worth having a website. Alternatively an occasional progress report might be put together – celebrate some milestone achieved, look ahead to planned events and thank those who have already helped.

Gift-Aid

It is fundamental that your appeal takes full advantage of Gift-Aid, which enables tax relief to be claimed even on small, one-off contributions, provided the donor is a tax payer. The documentation could not be easier: any donor can sign a simple form which authorises the treasurer to reclaim tax on all future donations by that person. Many of your donors will rightly expect their giving to be maximised in this way.

For the larger appeal there is great benefit in persuading people to give regularly to the project, by monthly, quarterly or annual standing order...Gift-Aided of course, where possible. Help on Gift Aid is available from the accounts department at Church House or on the diocesan website at: www.gloucester.anglican.org

Be very clear that you can only Gift-Aid a straight financial payment *to the PCC*. Gifts in kind, or payments direct to contractors do not count and valuable tax reclaim is thereby lost.

Buy a Brick etc

Way back in the 1950s, Guildford Cathedral pioneered the idea of 'Buy a Brick' and this has been adapted and used by countless parish appeals ever since. 'Sign a Slate' was a recent local example, where people can buy their own personally dedicated component and can write a message on it, which perhaps one day will be read, when the roof is once again recovered. This sort of approach gives people the chance to feel that they have moved the project forward by a measurable amount, and gives them a feeling of 'ownership'. Of course, not all projects lend themselves to this sort of thing.

Fund raising events

Provided that the requirements are clearly understood in the parish, it is surprising how willingly subscribers and event organisers appear and offer their ideas. That is always heartening, but it's important that the Appeal Committee should carefully co-ordinate the offers of help, so as to prevent repetition of events or a clash of dates.

There is a danger of 'Fundraising Fatigue', so keep a close eye on the cost of proposed events in terms of financial outlay and organisational effort. One village church Appeal Committee made a rule that any fund-raising event in their one-year programme must aim to raise at least £500 and ideally not less than £1,000.

For example a proposed pantomime was ruled out because it would have involved an enormous amount of effort and would have detracted from other fund-raising events, but would probably have netted only a few hundred pounds.

There is no limit to the variety of events which can be organised. An auction has often proved successful, preferably with a celebrity to conduct it. Proceeds might be divided 50/50 between the appeal and the donors of the objects being sold. Sponsored events of every description are usually popular. The media may be a source of new ideas. Parishes have borrowed ideas like the X Factor or celebrity cooking – but the standard needs to be good.

There is definitely a need for novelty and imagination. Possibly abseiling down the tower has become rather a commonplace, though people still seem to enjoy it. Keep an eye on what other charities are doing and perhaps combine forces. For example, why not invite your local birds of prey sanctuary to one of your funding events? They will get some useful publicity out of it and the feathered friends may enjoy spreading their wings in the church.

Ideas have included a scarecrow exhibition, model railway show, sponsored walks, Christmas tree festival, wedding dress display etc, etc. It's good to involve children, too. A novel idea from Swindon Village was bungee-jumping from the tower.....for teddy-bears!

An example of a first-rate appeal event

The recent appeal at Selsley included a concert which was a real winner. Someone who lives in the parish is a professional mezzo-soprano with an international reputation. The appeal organiser felt that it was at least worth asking her whether there would be any possibility of a concert in aid of the appeal. She replied at once, offering a selection of dates but warning that an immediate decision was needed, or they would be looking at the following year. Her response was even more generous in that she undertook to find a group of instrumentalists, who, like her, would be giving their services.

The appeal committee seized the opportunity and decided to make it into a gala evening, with Prosecco and canapés, and they charged accordingly. The ticket price of £37.50 raised one or two eyebrows locally, but was actually a proper reflection of the quality of the soloist and the music being offered.

Every available seat was crammed into the church and every seat was sold, with a waiting list in case of cancellations. Unfortunately the heavens opened on the day of the concert, but thanks to careful planning and meticulous organisation, everything went smoothly. The concert itself was deliberately kept quite short – about 50 minutes without an interval, and a very brief introduction was given by the incumbent, followed by a four minute talk extolling the qualities of the architecture and the appeal, by the DAC Secretary.

The result was a truly unforgettable concert, ending with a standing ovation. The total raised for the appeal was over £6,000 net of expenses, and the musicians were so appreciative of their reception that they all offered to come back to do something similar in the not too distant future. It was a lot of work, but hugely enjoyable for its own sake, not just as a money-raiser.

Not everyone is lucky enough to have such a helpful professional performer living in their parish, but the following general points should definitely be noted:

✦ **don't** be afraid to ask.

✦ **don't** under-sell the opportunity.

leave nothing to chance in ensuring that the evening goes smoothly.

Local businesses

Many people expect to do well with an appeal to local businesses, but are usually disappointed.

The fact is that businesses get numerous unsolicited requests for grants or sponsorship and the smaller firms in particular may have a policy of consigning the whole lot to the bin. Unless you have a good relationship with particular firms, you will find this a tough nut to crack. This was the case even before the recession.

We also have to accept that we live in an increasingly secular age, and many businesses will be very wary of being seen to give financial support to the Church. Also, if they give money to the Church of England, will they be expected to support other denominations or religions ?

The situation may be different if you have someone on board who knows the current local business scene well and who has the confidence and the persistence to follow up his or her contacts in person.

If you do decide to do a cold mailing, make sure your information is as accurate as possible. This sort of research is best done on the internet, or failing that there will be various directories at the main reference libraries. If possible, write to the managing director or chief executive by name. A Google search will help verify that information is up-to-date.

You may find it helpful to ask for a **specific** amount, rather than making an open-ended appeal for 'any contribution, large or small'. For a local business which does not normally give money to church repairs, it may be easier to make a quick decision as to whether or not to respond to your appeal if a reasonable figure is suggested in your letter.

You will probably find that most firms are unwilling to give cash directly to the appeal, but you may have more luck with sponsorship of an event or some other 'in kind' response. You would be well advised to do your thinking in advance, and to have a list of possible things which could be sponsored. An obvious example is that a printing firm may produce the appeal leaflet, in exchange for some publicity for the firm. Other specialist contractors may provide or pay for the catering or drinks or a marquee for the launch evening or some other event.

This whole area is one where local contacts are of great importance and should be used for all they are worth – Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. etc.

The Gift-Aid Scheme is also available for corporate donors and there may be tax advantages for the company from this form of giving. Have your forms at the ready!

If you need further advice in relation to this guidance sheet, please contact us at Church House on 01452 410022 or by email at dac@glosdioc.org.uk