

Making your Freewill Offer for Next Year

Give everyone a copy of the A5 sheet.

Work through each of the five sections, inviting different PCC members to read each section.....

- The heading
- The verse of Scripture
- The question

Then introduce a discussion by adding some reflections on each section. You may wish to draw on the paragraphs below.

End with the question and invite PCC members to discuss this.

PRAY

Whenever it is suggested that we should pray about something to do with the life of our church, it is easy to nod in agreement and assume that this will happen. However, there's no guarantee that it does! So how might we make our annual freewill offer a matter of focused prayer? Here are some suggestions.....

- Might there be a member of your PCC, or someone in your congregation who could compose a short prayer about this? Copies could then be given to all church members, encouraging them to pray this prayer every day for a specific period. The prayer could be included in every service of worship during the pledge period.
- Could someone lead a short one-off "Service of Prayer" about the annual Freewill Offer? It need only last 20 minutes and could include a relevant reading with prayers led from the front, a period of silent prayer, a period of open prayer, or whatever form would fit naturally with your church. It could conclude with an appropriate hymn or song.
- Could you hold a special prayer meeting?

In the verse from Ephesians (on the A5 sheet) we are exhorted to "use all kinds of prayers", so let's be creative in the ways in which we pray about our freewill offers.

For discussion: How might you as a PCC pray in a focused way about your freewill offer?

BE GENEROUS

How does the approach of the Churches of Macedonia compare with the way we often talk about money in our Church meetings? How often do we find ourselves "urgently pleading" to be allowed to give generously?

They did this because they were caught up in a movement of God's grace. (See verse 1: "We want you to know what God's grace has accomplished....") Grace is a shorthand term that refers to God's amazing generosity to us even when we don't deserve it!

We have a generous God who wants us to be like him. We all like generous people. We don't tend to like people who are mean. Would you like to be known as a generous person? At your funeral will people say that you were a generous person? Is your church known for being a generous church?

For discussion: What would being generous look like for your PCC?

BE REALISTIC

In the verse from 2 Corinthians on the sheet we find that Paul is being realistic. So PCC members need to be realistic when making their freewill offer. There are two sides of the coin to this.

First, if a PCC makes an offer that is so high it cannot be fulfilled, at the end of the year members will probably feel disappointed and embarrassed, or even have a sense of guilt. That would not be good. What's more, those who have responsibility for the finances at a diocesan level will feel disappointed if the pledged targets are not achieved.

And yet there is another side to this coin. If we are going to be able to pay for our clergy and all the support services in the diocese, we need pledges to be realistic from that point of view as well.

***For discussion:** What will being realistic mean for your church?*

HAVE FAITH

Can you recall an occasion in the life of your church when a decision was made to embark on a venture that was beyond what you would normally have imagined would be possible? It might have been a decision to build a church extension, or to appoint (and pay for) a youth worker, or something else. Even though it seemed to be a huge step to take there was a sense of excitement, vision and faith that was shared by virtually everyone and you achieved your vision.

That is an example of what happens when, through the working of his Holy Spirit, God gives his people the gift of faith to step out in a new direction.

So as you discuss your pledge, pray for a gift of faith. Are there one or two people on your PCC (or in the wider congregation) to whom you sense God has given that sense of vision and gift of faith? Listen to what they may have to say, and pray that God will give you a gift of faith.

***For discussion:** How might having such a gift of faith affect the way that you as a PCC make your freewill offer?*

Cont...

BE COMMITTED

As members of the Church of England we have lots of local churches, yet one diocese. Paul speaks of how the church has many members but is one body, and this principle can be applied to us in the Diocese of York. As part of the Church of Jesus Christ, we have many local expressions of church and one diocese to which we all belong.

So when we think of the need to raise the necessary finance each year to fund the mission and ministry throughout the whole diocese, whose responsibility is it to ensure that the money comes in? Is it the responsibility of Archbishop? The Finance Team in York? The Archdeacons?

Surely, the responsibility falls to every one of us who belong to the church. This includes every church member and every PCC member.

You may be familiar with the attractive map of the Diocese that Eleanor Course produced when we embarked on freewill offering. David Butterfield, the Archdeacon for Generous Giving and Stewardship, had a jigsaw made of this map and he stuck it onto a board. He then deliberately left out two or three pieces.

When he shows it to people, they point to the missing pieces. When this happens, he explains how frustrating and disappointing it is when, having spent a few hours doing a jigsaw, we find there is one or more pieces missing.

It is also frustrating and disappointing if there is a church or churches in the diocese that are "missing" in the sense of not being committed to doing their bit by taking responsibility for ensuring that we have the financial resources for the mission of the church across our diocese.

For discussion: How could your church feel more of a sense of belonging to the other churches in the Diocese of York?

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PRAY

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.
(Ephesians 6.18 NIV)

- How might you as a PCC pray in a focused way about your freewill offer?

BE GENEROUS

The Churches in Macedonia gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. It was more than we could have hoped for! First they gave themselves to the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 8.3-5 NIV & GNB)

- What would being generous look like for your PCC?

BE REALISTIC

For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

(2 Corinthians 8.12 NRSV)

- What will being realistic mean for your church?

HAVE FAITH

Without faith it is impossible to please God.....he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

(Hebrews 11.6 NIV)

- How might having faith affect the way your PCC members make their freewill offer?

BE CONNECTED

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

(1 Corinthians 12.12-13a,20 NRSV)

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