

Briefing for PCCs and clergy on collections taken at funerals

Background

A number of clergy have raised with us the question of collections taken at funerals, when the family of the deceased wish to have donations to a charity.

Guidance

The law is quite clear: all collections taken in church at a service are the property and responsibility of the PCC, which must account for them properly. So, for example, the placing of a separate collection box by Funeral Directors, which they then take away, is illegal because the PCC could not account for it.

The most important thing is for the PCC to discuss the matter and to have a clear policy which needs to be communicated clearly to both Funeral Directors (perhaps through a general letter to the Funeral Directors you usually deal with), and to bereaved families (when you make your funeral visit, and perhaps also in a leaflet which you can leave with them, and which would also offer guidance about the planning of a funeral services and burials: a template for such a leaflet is available on the Diocesan website: www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk/our-churches/funerals.html).

In formulating your PCC policy, it is worth bearing in mind that your church is a charity which is as worthy of support as any other; and also that mourners should be allowed the opportunity to make a thank-offering to the church.

Many PCCs have a policy of offering to split the collection 50-50 between church and a charity of the family's choice if they wish (of course some families want all the collection go to church). Your policy would then read: "this PCC has a policy, where requested, of splitting the collection taken at a funeral 50-50 between church and the charity or charities of the family's choice".

It would be perfectly proper for you to have a policy saying that all the money collected in church goes for the work of the church, but this can sometimes be seen as ungenerous/restrictive.

Operation

It is confusing and impractical to have separate collection plates, some for church and some for the charity – almost no mourners would put money in both, but instead would donate simply in the nearest plate. Instead there should be as many plates as is necessary/convenient, and all the money should be counted (by a pair of people!) and banked in the PCC account in the usual way. The PCC Treasurer should then send a cheque for the appropriate amount directly to the charity or charities in question, and a letter to the next of kin confirming the amount sent; these donations should be shown in the annual accounts.

Sometimes cheques made out to a specific charity are deposited on the collection plate. These could be passed onto the Funeral Director straight after the funeral, or sent directly to the charity named (and mentioned in the notification to the family). It is then the loose collection which is counted, banked, and split 50-50 or whatever proportion is your policy. (You should not add to the loose collection the cheques made out to the charity to give a total which is split, part of which is paid by the cheques made out to the charity.)

Many funerals have a printed order of service, and information about what will happen to the collection should be included in this for all the mourners to see. You could also do a notice by each collection plate with the information on.