



The national church of England advises that all parish churches ask their congregations to review their giving every year, this is called 'an annual review of giving'. Asking for money can feel difficult and some churches struggle to adopt this discipline. How do we find confidence, encouragement and inspiration to adopt this stewardship practice? 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 can help us as we reflect on how to practically ask for money in our churches in a way that is appropriate and helpful.

### **What can the Bible teach us about how we ask for money?**

In these two chapters Paul is dealing with the very practical task of how the early churches should financially support one another. The Jerusalem church has found itself in real financial need and so Paul is attempting to organise a collection from the other churches in order to support those Christians worshipping in Jerusalem. Paul is asking for financial support from a broad spectrum of churches – from the “impoverished Macedonians” (who interestingly find it easiest to express heartfelt generosity) right through to the relatively affluent and urban Corinthians. Paul’s letter is explicitly asking for financial support to fund the flourishing of the wider church.

Reading these chapters from my perspective as Stewardship Enabler for Carlisle Diocese, it feels that Paul could be addressing the churches of Carlisle Diocese with regards to the Parish Offer system, just as much as he is addressing the first churches in the Middle East and Southern Europe. How can Paul’s practical instructions around financial giving inform the way our churches approach giving and financial support across the Diocese?

### **Paul Asks for Money**

There is often a fear in churches of asking for money. Reasons for this fear include not wanting to put peoples’ backs up; make people feel guilty or make people think the Church is only interested in our money! Paul would have faced all the same dilemmas in his churches and yet he is unashamed in his ask for financial support - lasting two whole chapters of the book of 2 Corinthians. He is coming to collect the offering in person, and he asks the Corinthians to give generously and have the offering ready for when he arrives.

Paul’s actions are eminently practical – if Paul didn’t ask, his churches would not have known about the sufferings of the church in Jerusalem and there would have been no way of ‘supplying for the needs of the Lord’s people’ (2 Corinthians 9:12).

This rationale still holds today. If we believe that our communities need a worshipping presence, need the hope of Jesus Christ and need to know a God who loves them completely, then we need to be practical about asking for the financial resources that are going to enable the mission and ministry of the church to happen. Asking for money is a sign that we see the mission and ministry of the Church as incredibly important and even urgent.

### **Paul only asks for money to be given with the right attitude**

It has been a privilege to work with many churches on stewardship programmes over the last year. Occasionally after such programmes I will meet with PCCs to review the outcomes. I am delighted that to date, every stewardship programme we have reviewed has had a positive impact on church finances. However, I have occasionally met treasurers who are disappointed that not everyone in the congregation responded. I applaud those treasurers’

passion and conviction, but we mustn't be surprised when this happens. After all, we are not in the business of making people feel guilty, we are looking for people who love the local church and who genuinely want to partner in the gospel through the giving of their finances.

For Paul, attitude of the giver is everything. It is about inviting everyone to be a part of the "grace of giving" (even the hard pressed and impoverished Macedonians) but leaving room for individuals to make their own response. Paul makes it clear in 2 Corinthians 8:8 that he is "not commanding you [to give]" but that giving is "a test of the sincerity of your love" (vs 8) and a "proof of love" (vs 24).

Over and over again Paul puts right attitude at the heart of his ask for financial support: "if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable" (2 Corinthians 8:12); "then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given" (2 Corinthians 9:5); "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). And, of course, Paul addresses those of us who are genuinely not in a position to be able to financially support the church at the present moment in time: "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:13) and "the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have (2 Corinthians 8:12).

What does this mean for us in our churches? It means that it is right that we ask everyone in our congregations for financial support, to invite all to be a part of the "grace of giving" for "the service of the Lord's people". However, if the invitation is to all, the response is up to individuals. We must respect people's decision, and their anonymity. All we are called to do is make the invitation to give in a clear and inclusive way.

### **Christian Giving**

For Paul, giving is rooted in our personal response to God. It is amazing how little Paul talks about the needs of the Jerusalem Church in this letter. Instead, Paul describes financial giving as "an overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (2 Corinthians 9:12); a witness "because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ" (2 Corinthians 9:13) and an indication of the "surpassing grace God has given you" (2 Corinthians 9:14).

### **What does this mean for our PCCs?**

Therefore, this year we encourage you to follow Paul's example and ask all in your churches to "excel in the grace of giving" through writing to all in your worshipping community and inviting them to review their giving to your local church. Template giving letters and/or leaflets can be found at <http://www.givinggrace.org/Review-leaflet>. If you would like support or advice in putting together an annual review of giving you can contact me on [Sophie.hodge@carlisle-diocese.org.uk](mailto:Sophie.hodge@carlisle-diocese.org.uk) or phone 01768 807777.

We believe that the local Church is critical to God's purposes in this world. We believe the Church brings hope to individuals; hope to our communities and hope to our world. As Church, we are looking for partners in our congregations who love God's Church and are prepared to give financially to see the flourishing of this incredible mission and ministry for generations to come.