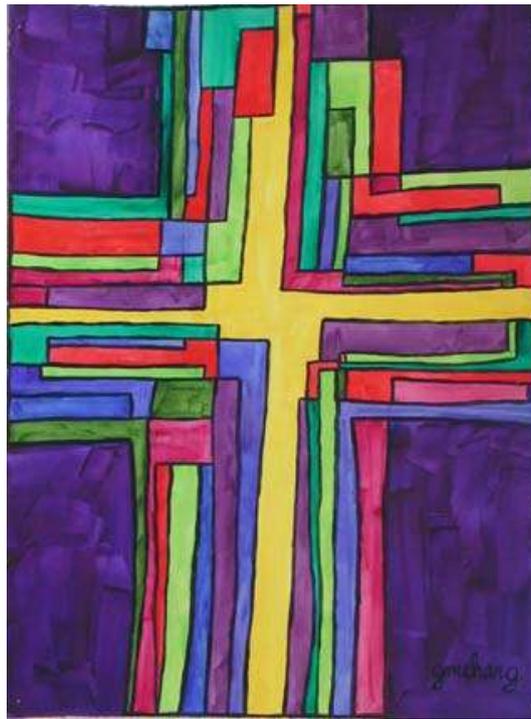


# Gratitude and Generosity

*enabling the Mission of your church*

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A Stewardship Season – *A three year cycle of Christian Stewardship*

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## Background

Stewardship campaigns involve a considerable amount of time and effort in preparation and completion. The planning is usually over a four month period, the month of the campaign itself and then the follow up of responses and evaluation.

Many parishes have seen the fruits of their labours in increased giving and increased involvement and sharing of areas of ministry. Once completed there is a natural tendency to forget about stewardship and wait for a number of years. If they wait too long they risk losing the benefits they have gained.

One of the four key tasks of the giving for life report is the Annual review of stewardship which some churches have adopted and made part of the church calendar. They do keep stewardship on the agenda but the focus is inevitably on money and how to continue to meet the parish expenditure and pay the bills. This over time can become boring and familiar evoking donor fatigue from members of the congregation who have heard it all before and parish officials struggle in presenting the message in new and imaginative way. The holistic view of stewardship being part of Christian discipleship is not given the prominence it deserves.

It is important that parishes take seriously the traditional aspects of Christian stewardship – time talent and money and by proposing a three year cycle to deal with each in turn can help promote Christian Discipleship in its fullest sense and avoid the possible familiarity that an annual review simply on money.

## Stewardship Season how it works

- The church will need to pick a month preferably one that does not already have special occasions e.g. Easter, Christmas or in the main holiday time such as August
- This month will be designated the STEWARDSHIP SEASON
- Reflect on Christian Giving of TIME or TALENT or MONEY during the month with each being considered over a three year period.
- Focus the church on the theme during the STEWARDSHIP SEASON in the worship themes, study groups, children and youth groups.
- Give everyone and opportunity to respond in some way.
- Arrange and plan a Thanksgiving service to mark the end of the STEWARDSHIP SEASON

## **Christian Giving of TIME**

TIME is a fundamental part of God's creation (Gen1 v14-19) and should be seen as a very important gift from God. The stewardship of TIME is often the poor relation in the three and is neglected by the church as the greater emphasis is put on talent and money.

In considering the Christian giving of TIME church members will be encouraged to reflect on the way they use their TIME – all of it

**The following themes and supporting questions will provide a useful exploration of TIME**

### **Time for God**

- Why is corporate worship and private devotion essential ingredients for a healthy human life?
- In what ways does time for God differ from time for the Church?
- Should time for God be regarded as time spent in activity or time when we stop doing and being busy?

### **Time for Family & Friends**

- In what ways does time spent with family and friends enrich human life?
- How important is time for friends and family when we prioritise our use of time?

### **Time for Work**

- What are the benefits from spending time working?
- In what ways is the balance of life upset when there is no opportunity to work or when time for work encroaches on time for other things?

### **Time for Rest & Recreation**

- How does time for rest and recreation differ from time for family and friends
- What was Jesus saying when he emphasised the second great commandment 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'

### **Time for the Church**

- In what ways do we give time for the work of the church?
- Does the Church make the best use of the time we give?
- In what ways could the Church make better use of our gift of time?

Consideration of the stewardship of TIME in this way takes people beyond the life of the church to the whole of life. Focusing on the stewardship of TIME is also an

opportunity to reflect on the different amounts of free time that are available to people at different stages in their lives.

## **Practical Exercise**

Invite church members both adults and children to keep a TIME DIARY for a week before the month when the Christian Giving of TIME will be considered. This will show how much time is used on eating, sleeping and work or education. The time is left is the time when we make choices about we do.

- What choices do we make?
- Does our use of time lead to a balanced life?
- What different choices could we make?

## **Response**

The response which will be sought from Church members is a re-commitment to giving TIME for God through the participation in worship and creating space for Bible reading and private prayer.

## **Christian Giving of Talent**

The story of the birth of twins, Esau and Jacob, to Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25: 19-28) reminds us that each person is unique, with his / her own physical characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.

Paul in the New Testament letters to the Romans/ Corinthians (Rom 12:3-8; 1Cor 12: 1-31) refers to Christians as different parts of the body of Christ and encourages them to use their particular gifts for the glory of God.

The Christian Giving of TALENT is concerned with church members identifying their particular skills gifts and strengths- knowing what they can do well (and what they cannot do well) and recognising that everyone has some gift or particular talent. This process will reveal a POOL OF ABILITY which is available in the congregation for involvement in worship mission and service of the church.

The POOL OF ABILITY will distinguish between those skills and strengths which are people – oriented for instance children’s ministry pastoral care leadership and those of a more practical nature such as maintenance of the building and grounds, music and administrative tasks.

Once the POOL OF ABILITY has been identified church members will be encouraged to be more involved in the life of the Church by giving their skills and strengths in appropriate ways.

Consideration of the TALENT available within a congregation will ask questions about the existing structure of the congregation:

- Do current members and supporters have the skills and strengths necessary for all the traditional roles in the Church?
- In what ways can the patterns of Church life be changed to make better use of the available skills and strengths?
- Are there any skills and strengths which are surplus to the church's requirements that could be made available in a neighbouring church?

## **Practical Exercise**

At meetings of the PCC/ Choir / study or Youth groups etc. Invite each person to share with another whom he/she knows well. In each pairing one will tell the other their particular gifts and skills and then reverse the process. Hopefully this will overcome the difficulty that some may have of being too modest to admit their own gifts. In some circumstances it could be enlightening experiences for some.

It is meant to be a wholly positive exercise and it is not meant to be an opportunity to tell people what gifts and talents they don't have.

## **Response**

The response which will be sought from church members is a commitment to give their TALENT to enable the sharing of the gospel through the work of the Church. This commitment has to begin with the person's skills and strengths and not a list of jobs which 'need' to be done.

## **Christian Giving of Money**

For some people stewardship is solely concerned with MONEY. For others a broad view of stewardship can be a way of ignoring MONEY for as long as possible. Money is an important aspect of the consideration of Christian stewardship and Christian giving.

There are many references in the Old Testament to the way in which people of Israel and Judah should use their MONEY and POSSESSIONS (e.g. Deut 26:1-15; Samuel 12 1-6 and Ezekiel 18:5-9)

In the gospels we read of many occasions when Jesus spoke of MONEY and POSSESSIONS (e.g. Luke 12:13-21; 18 18-25; 21: 1-4)

Some of the most practical comments in Paul's letters are concerned with MONEY (1Cor 16 1-4; 2Cor 8: 1-5)

Encouraging a financial offering to God is theme which runs through the whole of the Bible and has been an essential part of Christian discipleship throughout the history of the Church.

The various biblical models of giving – First fruits, tithes, sharing sacrifice made in the image of a Giving God can be explored and developed during the stewardship season.

Church Members will be encouraged to give regularly, proportionately and generously:

- To show gratitude for all they have received from God.
- To make a difference to individual lives, and the life of the community, by enabling the work and mission of the Church to continue.

Members will be encouraged to think about their OFFERING of MONEY .How does it relate to their total income? How generous is it?

## **Practical Exercise**

Invite church members both adults and children to consider their own personal budgets – all they have and how it is spent,

- What proportion is given to the church and to other charities?
- How does this giving relate to what I spend on myself?

## **Response**

The response which will be sought from church members is a commitment to make a generous Offering of Money

- Using planned giving envelopes
- Bank standing orders
- If taxpayers signing a Gift Aid Declaration to enable the church to claim the income tax back
- Leaving a gift in your will to the church

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