

How to... plan a gift day

What is a Gift Day?

A Gift Day provides a one-off opportunity for people to give a gift to the church in addition to their normal planned giving. If it is successful, your Gift Day can raise substantial amounts of money – much more than an ordinary charity collection, and it can be a way to enable your wider community to give to your church.

Gift Days can raise funds for a variety of causes:

- You may have been fundraising for a big capital project and want a final push to reach your target.
- You may have an exciting mission project which needs extra money to get it off the ground
- You may have a crisis in your church housekeeping budget and need some extra funds to balance the books

The amount you can expect to raise will vary widely depending on what you need the money for. Raising funds to install a toilet, for example may be more motivating for givers than an appeal to boost depleted general funds.

Gift Days can be an extremely effective way of producing funds for the church but they should not be relied upon as a way for church family members to avoid reviewing their own personal, regular giving to the church for two reasons: As Christians we recognise that everything we have comes from God – we are just stewards of these gifts and so we each have a responsibility to support our church through our regular giving; and regular giving from members of the congregation is the financial backbone of the Church of England. Too many 'one off' gift days are likely to upset this regular income and could put the financial stability of our parishes at risk.

On a Gift Day people are invited to come to church to offer their donation. This can be during a special service, or perhaps during a church open day. People invited to the Gift Day may include:

- Those on the Electoral Roll
- People who attend the church
- Members of the church fringe
- The Friends of the Church
- People living in the parish or village.

Planning your Gift Day

Picking a time

The date you choose for your Gift Day can affect the response. You want as many people as possible to come. You may choose an important day in the life of your church – the Patronal festival, or a major Church festival, for example. If you are aiming the gift day at just the church family a Sunday might be appropriate, but if you want the local community to become involved a Saturday, or the whole weekend may work better.

The case statement

You can't run an effective Gift Day more than once a year, so careful planning is needed if you are to get it right. Begin by deciding how much you want to raise, and what it is to be used for. Prepare a short document which can be used as the basis for any leaflets, brochures, letters or posters or social media posts you produce. This document is known as a 'case statement' in fundraising jargon and should answer these questions:

- Why are we asking for money?
- How much do we need to raise?
- What are we going to use it for?
- How urgent is this appeal?
- Who will benefit from the money raised?
- What difference will it make?
- Why do we deserve support?

Ask yourself, 'why should anyone want to give us money?' and have very clear answers.

Who is our target?

- Which groups of people are we going to approach?
- Church family?
- Church fringe?
- The wider community?
- All of the above?

It is important to decide who you hope to contribute and think about what is important to them. This will make a difference to the way we run the gift day.

Encouraging larger gifts

If you are trying to reach an ambitious target you will need to do some work ahead of the Gift Day. Put together a list of people who may be prepared to give a generous donation and approach them directly ahead of the Gift Day. Those contacting potential donors should ideally be friends, or at least known to the donor, but may be the parish priest. Look at the questions above, think about the good reasons you are appealing for money and tailor your conversation to the interests and concerns of the people you are visiting.

You will need to receive a response from these people before you issue any general publicity about the Gift Day, and once these larger gifts are secured you will know how many smaller gifts are needed.

An effective tool is a Gift Table, which shows how many gifts at what level are needed to reach your target. Although it may seem a daunting task to raise very large gifts, it is, in fact easier to raise one big gift, than many small ones. Here is an example of a gift table, where the total amount needed to be raised was £500,000:

	No of donors	Gift range	Total
Premier	1	£50,000	£50,000
Major	14	£10,000-£30,000	£200,000
Key	100	£1,000-£5000	£200,000
Community	150	£200-£500	£50,000
Totals	265		£500,000

Printed materials

You will need some printed materials – probably posters, a leaflet or brochure setting out:

- An effective case statement
- Facts and figures
- Date, place and time of your Gift Day
- What you want people to do
- Something which will encourage people into the church on the day

Keep the amount of text short and to the point. The aim is to get people's attention and give them the information in a concise way. If the text on the page is too dense your leaflet probably won't be read at all.

Social media and other digital platforms

Make the most of your church website and your page on A Church Near You to tell people about your gift day. Make the best use you can of your Facebook, Twitter and any other social media you use to post or tweet regularly in the run up to the gift day. Many communities have local residents' groups on Facebook or Whatsapp – make the most of those and post about your event on those as well. You may think that no-one in church looks at these groups, but you might find that there are several thousand people who don't usually see information about your church who are checking it regularly.

Segment your market

It's worth tailoring your letters or brochures and posts to the interests of each different constituency – these might be regular members of the congregation, people on the church fringe, people who have come to the church for a baptism, wedding or funeral, non-churchgoers who live in the locality, parents at the local school etc. Decide what is it about the project you want to raise money for which will be of particular interest to these groups and make that the focus of your communication. Any letter should be signed by the incumbent or churchwardens.

Publicity

All or some of the following can be used:

- Posters advertising the event – put these up on church notice boards and take them round to any shops of businesses in your locality which might display them. Members of the congregation might also be willing to put them up in their windows or cars.
- Facebook, Twitter web pages and other social media.
- Advertisements in service sheets, parish magazine or parish notices before the day.
- Information prominently displayed on your website.
- A large banner or billboard outside the church just before and on the day
- Envelopes for gifts in pews prior to the day.
- Envelopes with a covering letter.
- If you live in a rural area large signs can be displayed on the side of roads around the village.
- Local press – send a press release to your local paper and any other media, ideally addressed to a named person, rather than 'The Editor'. The press release should be short – no more than one double spaced side of A4. It should answer the following questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? Be sure to include a contact name and phone number. If you can, include a good quality photograph. Follow up the press release with a phone call a few days later. Offer an interview.
- Listings – local papers often include a 'listings' section, which includes all sorts of local events and are generally free.

The Gift Day

The format of the day will depend to a certain extent on who you are expecting to receive gifts from.

If the church family is the target for your day, and you have chosen a Sunday, think about:

- A special service.
- A prayer vigil throughout the day. If you do this make sure there is a rota of people to pray in twenty minute or half hour slots, so that the prayer is continuous.
- An outside preacher.
- Special prayers.
- Drama produced by the children.
- A presentation during or after the service about the project you are raising money for.
- Something a bit more elaborate than the usual after-service coffee. You could lay on some cake, or cheese and biscuits or wine, for example, or a parish lunch.

If you are casting your net wider than the church family you will need to provide something to interest people and encourage them into the church. Some examples might include:

- Music – an organ recital, or singing group or chamber music.
- A choir practice, which anyone can join in.
- Guided tours of the church.
- Climbing your church tower.
- Brass rubbing.
- Flower festival.
- Exhibition showing your project plans.
- Refreshments – if you can provide home made cakes, so much the better.
- A board or box with pen and paper for people to leave requests for intercessory prayers.
- A quiet place for prayer.

Make sure you have plenty of friendly people around, who know their church and are willing to help.

Receiving the gifts

Decide on the most appropriate method for your parish. You will probably collect the gifts by more than one method, but they may include:

- The person who has made an individual request for a particular gift should receive that gift.
- Someone, possibly the vicar, will be there to receive gifts in the church on the day at set times, 10.00am – 12.00pm or 2.00pm – 4.00pm, for example. The times will have been advertised in advance.
- This may be an opportunity to think about investing in a contactless card reader so that people who are not carrying cash can easily donate.
- Include a QR code on posters and leaflets so people can scan their phones and go directly to your online donation page.
- Gifts can be received at all the Sunday services, and laid on the altar.
- They can be returned over a period of time to the church, clergy, treasurer, churchwarden, or other parish officer.
- A small team of people can visit people after the day in their homes.

Provide plenty of envelopes for people who would like to give cash. A gift aid declaration either printed on the envelope, or provided as a separate form will help increase the take up of gift aid. Generally these envelopes are becoming less useful as Gift Aid can be claimed on smaller gifts under the GASDS. But for Gift Days they still have their place.

Afterwards

Tell people how well you did. You can make an announcement during a service, or publish the results in the parish magazine, notices or on the church notice board. If you have a website put your results where people will easily see them, and this will be some good news for your social media pages.

Bring the gifts to the altar during a service and offer them to God in thanksgiving.

And don't forget to say....

Thank you

Remember to thank everyone involved. Anyone who has given a large gift as a result of a direct approach should receive an individual letter to say thanks, signed by the incumbent.

It goes without saying that we should express our gratitude to those who have given money, but it's easy to forget people who have spent time and worked hard to organise the day and make it a success. Don't forget them. You'll need them for your next Gift Day!