Ideas for an Annual Stewardship Programme

Here are some different ideas to run an annual stewardship programme. Do pick the ones that you feel are most relevant to your situation and try and vary the approach from year to year.

Other resources to run a stewardship programme can be found on the Diocesan website at www.blackburn.anglican.org

- Why should we hold a renewal programme every year?
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Why should we hold a renewal programme every year?

- We all need a regular opportunity to review our levels of commitment to God (time, skills, possessions, income) and take a step forwards in our discipleship.
- Everyone’s circumstances are constantly changing, both for better and for worse.
- The parish’s ministry should be steadily developing year by year.
- Many church-related costs go up every year.
- Newcomers need to be informed about giving and different giving methods.
- An annual renewal becomes a natural part of the church’s calendar.
- Other dioceses and churches have found that a low-key renewal every year is much more effective than a major ‘one-off’ stewardship programme every few years or when you are facing a crisis – so aim for steady improvements.

When should we hold a regular renewal campaign?

- Most parishes hold their renewal some time in the period mid-February to mid-July (missing Easter and May Bank Holidays) or in September to November (missing harvest, remembrance and half term) – about thirty weeks.
- Some parishes link it to Lent or their annual church meeting.
- Some parishes link it with their harvest celebrations.
- Others use the autumn and focus on plans for the coming year.
- Avoid times of major festivals and holiday periods, including half terms and Bank Holidays.
- Remember you need to have a thanksgiving at a main Sunday service some two to four weeks after the launch.
- If held in spring, summary figures from the draft PCC parish accounts for the previous year should ideally be available to be inserted in any leaflets in an understandable format.
- If held in the autumn ideally a summary of the draft budget for the following year should be available to show the church’s plans for ministry development, again in an understandable format.
- It should not overlap with any one-off fundraising appeals e.g. for missions or church buildings. Try and organise that these occur at different times of year from the stewardship renewal, at least three months before or after.

**Who should help to organise the renewal?**

Ideally a small working group should start work before a planned public launch or main event. The group needs a variety of skills and experience, including:-

- Clergy or reader to advise on implications for services, teaching, etc
- PCC treasurer to provide information about accounts, budgets, etc
- Planned Giving Officer (often acts as secretary to the group)
- Someone who is good at publicity, design, sales and marketing
- Someone with access to the church computer and membership lists who can produce lists of people, personalised letters, mailing labels etc
- Someone who can help organise the social parts of any events (for example supper) if required
- Someone who is fairly new to the church to give an ‘outsider’s’ view

Whilst one of the above could act as chair of the group, it may be more sensible to ask someone else without a key implementation role to lead the group for a few months.

The group will need to meet three or four times to plan the details including at least one meeting after the launch to review progress, evaluate and make suggestions for the following year.

Some churches find it worthwhile for the group to become a permanent stewardship committee meeting say every couple of months for the rest of the year. They can follow up newcomers, produce half-yearly reports for the PCC and church and get involved in promoting the latest matters to do with stewardship.

**What objectives should the programme have?**

There is always a temptation to try to cover all aspects of stewardship every year. However, it is generally better to try and focus on one or two key issues each year, helping most people to take an appropriate step forward in their personal discipleship journey. Most people cannot make several significant changes in their behaviour all at once so it is suggested you take a ‘drip-feed’ approach, concentrating on one main theme each year.

The working group should analyse the church’s finances and volunteering needs to determine what the stewardship priorities are and map out say a five year strategy for dealing with the key factors. Stewardship objectives can generally be measured by improvements of the following type of indicators:

- Number of new and existing committed givers (compared to regular worshippers)
• number of tax efficient Gift Aid donors
• Number of bank standing orders and proportion of total income through the bank
• Percentage increase in giving by existing committed donors (compared to inflation)
• Number of donors committed to giving about 5% or more of their finances
• Growth in number of Gift Aid cash donations
• Number of wills that have been reviewed and updated recently
• Hours of committed volunteering in lay ministry roles

The resulting plan for the next five years might look something like:-

1. More regular pledge donors – bankers orders or envelopes
2. Gift Aid and other forms of tax-efficient giving
3. Calculating the proportion of giving levels and moving towards 5% or tithing
4. Stewardship the environment, fair trade, etc
5. Managing personal money and possessions, legacies, etc
6. Skills and talents identified and used

In any one year the overall theme should predominate, although information on other areas should be available if people ask.

Why not give the renewal event an attractive title and/or logo related to the theme? For example the first year above might be promoted as ‘First to the Lord’.

It is important to try and set the renewal challenge into any vision and plans that the church has for developing its ministry activities and outreach to the local community. People are more likely to be generous to a cause they see as committed to developing activities that interest them. So try and include a range of different development items that will appeal to different sections of the church.

**Time and talents**

Most parishes have found that it is more effective to focus on a few priority jobs that are currently needed to fulfil key ministry developments during the coming year, rather than listing all the jobs the church needs volunteers for. This way there is a key time and talents component every year.

**What kind of event?**

Most renewals have a ‘Stewardship Sunday’ (it may be called something different, perhaps related to the main theme) that includes some stewardship teaching at all the services that day. This may be extended to children’s and youth groups and midweek services if the participants don’t normally attend Sunday worship.

It is important to give people a chance to hear a simple presentation of the key facts about the church’s financial position, although a more detailed explanation is difficult to fit into most worship services, particularly Eucharistic ones. People should also be given the opportunity to ask the church leadership team (not just the treasurer!) questions, perhaps at the end of the service and perhaps over refreshments. Allow say fifteen minutes for two or three people to speak and fifteen minutes for questions and discussion.
More churches are organising non-worship stewardship renewal events typically including a meal, for example Sunday lunch, midweek supper or drinks and nibbles reception. The longer time-frame allows more people to speak on different subjects:

- Clergy on key talents needed
- Churchwardens on the PCC’s plans
- Treasurer on the financial situation
- Planned Giving Officer on different methods of giving

Many churches arrange to pay for the meal as a thank you for past giving, or have a bring and share meal. A neighbouring church might be willing to organise catering so that every member can participate fully without the responsibilities of serving or clearing away.

An alternative approach would be to organise smaller social gatherings every three to four years for different groups for people at similar stages on their stewardship pilgrimages:

- For loose cash givers
- For low level givers who rarely upgrade their pledges
- For those who upgrade their weekly envelope pledge most years
- For loyal supporters who regularly upgrade their bank standing orders
- For sacrificial donors who probably give direct to other Christian causes as well

Most renewals involve a liturgical ‘thanksgiving’ service on Sunday three or four weeks after the launch, which is also an opportunity to remind people who have not yet returned their pledges. The ‘results’ are announced and what they will mean for the development of ministry.

**Who should we approach?**

- Most churches send a personalised invitation to some kind of central event to all regular worshippers.
- If you want to approach fringe members (such as those who attend monthly all-age services, major festival services or people who attend church-sponsored organisations) tailor the message appropriately, or it may be worth organising a separate event for them.
- Children and youth could be included with age-appropriate teaching and resources.

**Stewardship teaching**

The fundamental purpose of any renewal programme is to help each individual to take a step or two further forward in their personal stewardship pilgrimage. But everyone is at a different point on their journey. Most people can only take one or two steps at a time, and you may need to help them in developing a longer term plan as they move through the different phases. The overall journey might include the following steps:

- ‘Tipping God’ with loose change, an insurance policy
- Weekly or monthly envelope, club membership
- Gift Aid declaration if taxpayer (backdated if there is evidence of past gifts)
- Monthly bank standing order, putting God first in the monthly budget
- Calculating proportional giving levels
- Increasing percentage giving levels towards ‘5% to the church’ or tithing
- Joyful generosity, giving to God all that isn’t needed for everyday living

If there hasn’t been much teaching about stewardship in the church for some years, it may be useful to organise a short series of sermons before the stewardship launch tackling key
Stewardship issues are also mentioned frequently throughout the Lectionary.

You may wish to have an external speaker to reinforce the message, for example another local member of the clergy or someone suggested by the Diocese. Book them early and brief them carefully about the church’s situation and the points you want them to focus on.

**Information packs**

- Where possible the approach to each person or family should be personalised to their specific circumstances, for example non-taxpayers or people who have already signed up do not need Gift Aid information.
- Packs could also be individually labelled for each adult or family with appropriate contents
- Most churches include some kind of covering letter from the clergy or church leadership, which can be tailored to encourage different groups of people at each stage of the giving journey
- Most churches include a leaflet summarising their financial position and setting out their ministry development goals
- The pack should include a pledge form so that everyone can complete and return it. In this way everyone is able to participate in the liturgical thanksgiving service, even if they are unable to change their commitment to the church at that time
- Also include a sealable envelope marked ‘Confidential’ and possibly ‘My response to God’s generosity’ or something similar
- For infrequent attenders it may be a good idea to put a postage stamp on the envelope to make returning as simple as possible
- Have some spare packs for newcomers who may join throughout the year
- You may also wish to include:
  - Stewardship prayers and Bible passages
  - Details of specific volunteer roles currently needed
  - A bank standing order form
  - A proportional giving calculator

All resources for parishes are available on the diocesan website

**Promoting the renewal programme**

- Ask someone with design talents to mount an eye-catching display about the key themes for the year in a prominent location around the time of the stewardship campaign
- Aim to have a common design theme for the various materials e.g. posters, banners, letters, invitations, information packs, prayer cards, pledge forms
- Use the weekly notice before and during the launch to convey concise messages and after the launch regular progress reports

**Visitors – the personal touch**

These days few churches train and send visitors to visit people at home to challenge their personal commitment. However, visitors can still play vital if more limited roles at several stages of the renewal process. Typically members of the PCC or other established members of church pastoral teams might be invited and trained to take on the Visitor role for a few weeks. The first role for Visitors could be to deliver personal invitations to the main stewardship event, and collect replies. This is particularly important if the main event involves catering. Many people could be approached whilst at church events, but some might need home visits. The
Visitors key task is to encourage high attendance and assist with estimating catering requirements. Visitors can also provide a vital role during the stewardship renewal by distributing Information Packs to those who were unable to be at the main event(s). When they deliver each pack it is important to stress the importance of returning the pledge card by the due date – if necessary the Visitor should volunteer to come and collect it.

Visitors may also be able to collect pledges; research has shown that this personal approach in following up can improve the response rate by up to 40%. A telephone call may also be sufficient to remind people to bring their pledge back to church in time.

Some churches publish a list of visitors (along with their telephone numbers) and assign church members to them. Members are invited to give their pledge to “their” visitor next time they are in church, in this way people also have a specific point of contact if they have any questions or would like their invitation and pledge to be collected. Notably many churches run excellent stewardship renewal days but then do not manage to encourage everyone to respond in a timely fashion in order for people to really remember the inspirational sermon or enjoyable supper.

Pass It On

Some churches use a different approach to visitors called Pass It On (originally developed by Truro Diocese). The membership list is split into groups of eight to ten families who live fairly close to each other. Folders are made up for each group containing enough information packs for every family on the list. At the stewardship launch, the first person on each list takes the folder and is invited to read their information pack and make their confidential pledge in the privacy of their home. They then keep their information pack, put their sealed pledge in the folder and deliver the folder to the second person on the list within twenty-four hours. This person repeats the process and so on down the list.

Pass It On works fairly well with committed church members but may not be appropriate for others. It needs careful monitoring as folders can ‘get stuck’ due to illness or holidays, perhaps a telephone call from a visitor would be useful to check on progress.

Church / PCC stewardship commitments

It is good practice to show how the stewardship renewal fits into the church’s wider mission and ministry developments, perhaps by showing the volunteer time and financial resources needed for different projects.

It is a good idea to make up sufficient information packs for PCC members and distribute them at a PCC meeting two or three weeks before the stewardship launch. Ask the PCC members to return their pledges before the launch so that the organiser can announce that PCC members have already improved their commitments by X% or £Y a month.

Christian stewardship is not just about personal commitment to God. Corporately the PCC may want to improve the wider church’s practices.

Thank you!

It is vital to thank everybody who returns a pledge card personally as soon as possible. It may be possible for the clergy or churchwardens to do this in person using phrasing along the lines of “I don’t know the details, but our treasurer tells me that he/she has
safely received your renewed/new pledge. Thank you very much for your commitment to this church.

**Evaluation**

It is vital for the working group to meet again after the thanksgiving service at the end of the renewal programme. The agenda might include:

- Analysis of the results achieved so far against original objectives, both financial and in terms of volunteers offering their time and skills
- What worked well in the renewal process and what could have been done better – lessons for next year
- Arrangements for following up people who have not yet responded
- Other issues that need to be followed up such as feedback from visitors
- What to do during the rest of the year
- Agreeing the contents of a short report to the PCC
- Communicating the results to the wider church

It usually takes a few weeks before new envelopes are used, or bankers orders start to be implemented, or increased cash pledges turn up in the collection plate. It may be sensible to have another meeting a couple of months later to review giving, volunteers and people who still need to be followed up discreetly.

Thanks to the National Stewardship network Dioceses of London and Southwark for this information.