

It is obviously poor stewardship to wait until the needs of the fabric can be ignored no longer and then launch a big public appeal. Can we do more to widen the support base of the church, and thus to provide for future maintenance, staving off the crisis before it happens? In particular it may be sensible to find ways of spreading the fabric burden beyond the PCC and the regular churchgoers.

Here are three ways in which this might be done:

1 Friends Organisation

Quite a popular approach is to have a 'Friends' group - people who do not necessarily worship on a regular basis but who are anxious that the building be maintained. Subscriptions from the Friends can be used to maintain and improve the building. Very often members of Friends organisations have been drawn into a fuller part in the life and worship of the church, and can be a great support.

Broadly there are two ways of running a Friends organisation. The conventional approach is to set up a separate formal organisation, which will need to be a registered charity. The alternative is to have a loose group of individuals, perhaps kept in touch with an occasional newsletter, and the money from subscriptions and fundraising can be paid into a ring fenced account under the control of the PCC. This avoids quite a lot of administration, but would not be appropriate in all circumstances. The Tewkesbury Abbeys of this world certainly need a proper formal structure.

The Diocese of Canterbury produces an excellent book on setting up a 'Friends'. The book is called "A Friends Scheme for a Parish Church". See: www.canterburydiocese.org

2 Appeals to visitors

Most churches have an offertory box and in some much-visited buildings, this can give a significant income. More commonly it is a target for petty theft and most people are reluctant to leave more than a five pound note at the most, or (far more likely) a bit of loose change.

An alternative is to leave a supply of stamped addressed envelopes and Gift Aid forms, preferably with a nicely designed leaflet welcoming visitors and giving an idea of what goes on in the church and parish. When people get home, the stamped addressed envelope means that it is the work of a moment to write out a cheque and pop it in the post. People will be much more generous with a cheque especially if they know you will be claiming the Gift Aid.

The church which suggested this received a donation of £500 and another of £100 in their first year of trying it. They say it is based on the sound marketing principle of making it as easy as possible to respond. And remember the advice in the previous section: capture the name and address. People might respond to a future mailing, for instance an invitation to an appeal event such as a concert. Even if they can't come, they might send another cheque.

3 The Perpetual Fabric Fund

If you don't want to start another organization as with a formal 'Friends', the PFF concept may appeal. The idea of a Perpetual Fabric Fund (PFF) is to provide a capital fund to which anyone can contribute in the knowledge that their money can only be spent on the fabric of the church concerned. It is an arrangement which may attract substantial gifts or legacies from non-churchgoers - people who don't want to contribute to general PCC funds, but who do want to support the bricks and mortar of a particular church.

The general principle of the PFF has the support of the Board of Finance and the Diocesan Trust and there are now a number of these funds in operation. Further details and a draft deed, are available from Church House.

If you need further advice in relation to this guidance sheet, please contact us at Church House on 01452 410022 or by email at dac@glosdioc.org.uk