

## **Coronavirus: Advice on Giving and Donations**

During the pandemic there will be concern about the strain current restrictions could place on church finances. Thanks to the commitment and faithfulness of regular givers, we can all draw hope that, for many churches, income will remain relatively steady. But we must not take that for granted.

I hope the following material will assist your church, whatever your local context. Please let me know if it is insufficient and I will work to improve these materials for you. The national church has also released guidance with information on government-backed support measures, and you can find this on the [Parish Resources website](#).

I will be available throughout the next few months to talk through any concerns and to provide advice. Please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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### **The challenge**

Four areas of income will be particularly vulnerable:

- giving in the collection plate
- rental income
- fundraising income such as summer fêtes
- investment income.

Where these do not represent a large proportion of your church's budget, you may not need to take any urgent action. Otherwise, action could be needed now to minimise the effect of the reduction in income.

With fewer activities taking place, there may be a corresponding reduction in costs such as utility bills, church supplies and musician fees. However, the Diocesan Board of Finance is unlikely to be able to make any wholesale reduction in Parish Share due to fixed costs, and especially our commitment to pay clergy stipends.

It is helpful to undertake a comprehensive review of your budget before making any firm plans regarding giving. You may also want to think about using your reserves, if you have them, to cover the short-term impact. Reserves are there to smooth out fluctuations in income and expenditure, so it would be entirely reasonable to use them to help you through the current period. Church guidance on reserves can be found [here](#) and the Charity Commission formal guidance CC19 can be found [here](#).

One final note before looking at some of the specifics: at a time like this it can be difficult to discern the right course of action. We can be tempted to worry at the scale of the financial

challenge, or instead (or perhaps as well), we can be tempted to avoid it and assume that all will be well.

In reality, as Christians we must walk the *via media* between the two extremes. It is the wise man that builds his house on the rock. As church leaders, we are called to the stewardship of the resources that have been handed down and donated to us but at the same time we are reassured that God will never abandon his church.

I am reminded of the words of Christ: *'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'* (Luke 12:32). As long as we are calm and prudent with our financial resources and continue to pray and strive for the kingdom, God will guide us through this time and bring us out the other side with a renewed vision of the Church.

## **1. Thank people**

This is the first and most important point to make. Authenticity is important in how people see us as a church, and this is especially true when it comes to finances. Over the coming months regular giving will be key to sustaining most churches' finances. So it's a great time to thank those who give regularly by the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) or standing order.

A simple telephone call or email thanking your givers and highlighting how they are making a material difference to your church could be very well received. You'll find an example in appendix D.

A thankyou shows how highly you value the people who give and could potentially have an impact on their receptiveness when you next come to review regular giving. At a time when many people are feeling vulnerable, a thankyou can also be an opportunity to initiate (or come as a part of) a pastoral conversation.

## **2. Reflect on Christian giving**

Before thinking about how to raise your current church income, it is worth considering the wider context of Christian giving. There are many reasons that people give to church:

- supporting their community
- looking after their historic place of worship
- Christian duty
- a devotional commitment.

Whatever the reason(s), the underlying truth is threefold: Christians donors give in response to their faith; they give because they want to make a difference; and they give because they care. In other words, they give to the church out of faith, hope and love.

This is an important point to make. Churches are much more than charities, we are a community of people seeking to follow Christ. So any discussion about giving must be grounded in Scripture and motivated by our individual and communal response to God.

Under normal circumstances, Generous Giving advice would focus on how to promote giving as a faithful response to God, in the hope of making a difference through local mission.

We are not in normal circumstances so this message might feel a lot harder to promote. Nevertheless, Christian donors continue to be motivated by faith, hope and love during this crisis.

In short, if you need to ask people to consider their giving, they will still give because they love God and want to make a difference. Their donation might be different to what they would have given in normal circumstances.

### **3. Cash/Cheque Giving**

One of the main opportunities will probably be to ask those who currently give by cash and cheque (including envelopes) to move to the [Parish Giving Scheme](#) (PGS) or standing order. To help churches reach out to people remotely, PGS has introduced telephone registrations. From Monday 27 April new donors can ring PGS directly and set up their Direct Debit over the phone without the need to post in a physical form. The number to ring is 0333 002 1271, and you can read more about the details of how it works [here](#).

As with all requests for giving, a personal approach, either through a one-to-one telephone conversation or a personalised email, is likely to be most impactful. An example of the latter is included in appendix A.

Given the potential urgency of the situation your message should focus on the direct need facing your church, i.e. a reduction in income leading to a cash flow issue, while also being sensitive to any pastoral concerns facing your donors.

Your congregation will understand that coronavirus will have had an impact and will be open to helping if they can. Remember that people value authenticity and they want to feel they can make a difference. So if you are asking people to change because you have a cash flow issue, straightforward honesty is the best course of action.

Remember to make changing as easy as possible and that many people who give by cash/cheque may not be confident in understanding PGS or standing orders. You might want to explain how your preferred method works and provide the means to sign up such as a PGS form or standing order form.

#### 4. Increasing Regular Giving

If you believe that moving cash givers onto PGS/standing orders will not be enough on its own to avoid a cash flow crisis then you may also need to approach the wider congregation with a request for a general increase in giving.

It is very important to consider the pastoral implications of such a request. Many people could be facing personal financial pressures of their own at this time so this avenue should only be used where it is essential to do so and with the utmost sensitivity.

Messages will be similar to those for switching from cash giving, with a focus on explaining the potential impact on your church's finances. It is also important to be sensitive to the personal difficulties people may be facing. Appendix B gives an example email targeted at people who are already giving and Appendix C is addressed to congregants who are not yet regular givers.

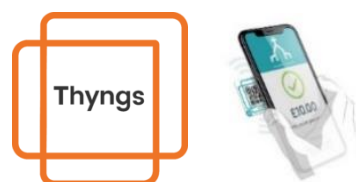
#### 5. Online Donations

Online donations have been a rapidly growing part of charity finance for some time. The coronavirus pandemic will no doubt accelerate this growth, but it has become increasingly important even in normal times to provide potential donors with the option to give via the web.

You can find some guidance on setting up online donations on the diocesan website [here](#). Take a look and find a solution that works for your church.

You may still be planning to hold some summer events (either remotely or after the end of lockdown). If so, consider setting up an online fundraising page on [JustGiving](#). Sharing a link to your fundraising page can also be used as a way to highlight and raise money for special services and local community action, or it can simply be shared as part of an appeal for help to get the church through the current crisis. Don't forget to add this link to your A Church Near You page as well.

And even though churches are unable to open at the moment, contactless giving is still possible through [Thyngs](#). Thyngs is a free to register service which provides you with a "QR code" that can be included in any communication (paper, email, online). When someone scans the code on their smartphone, they are taken to a donation page which also collects their Gift Aid information.



## Appendix A: Example Request to Cash/Cheque/Envelope Donors

Dear N,

I am writing to you as a donor to [N] Church. I would like to begin by saying thank you for financially supporting our community. As we head into an uncertain few months without regular public worship, we face a major challenge to our income whilst still having to cover our financial commitments. During this time, it will be our financial supporters, like you, that will enable us to stay afloat and ensure we are ready for the eventual return to normality.

Unfortunately, due to our inability to gather together we have lost the income from those who currently give when they come to church. As a result I am writing to all donors who give by cash or cheque to ask if they would consider switching to [PGS/standing order] so that we can maintain our cash flow and continue to pay our bills during the current period.

I understand that you may feel some trepidation about moving to another form of giving and I have *[included below an explanation of how our regular giving system works alongside information about signing up]*. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. I would like to assure you that the decision to make this request was not taken lightly. Having reviewed our finances we believe that unless we are able to increase our monthly giving we risk running out of cash and being unable to pay our bills.

Regardless of your decision I thank you for your continued financial support for our community and for considering our request to help us through this difficult time.

Although we are unable meet in person to worship, our community is still active. The mission and ministry of the church continues, but in adapted forms. We are *[local information e.g. remote worship plans; local support projects etc]*. If you would like to know more about how to access or support these please do get in touch with [N]. Do also check the Church of England website ([www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)) where you will find details of national services being held online.

I hope you understand why I have had to write to you with this request. This is a strange and worrying time for all of us but I take comfort that, even as we try to find our way forward, ultimately I know that God is watching out for us and will be with us.

*But now, this is what the Lord says – “Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.”*

From Isaiah 43:1-3

Finally, I would like to emphasise that [N] will continue to be available for pastoral support during the current outbreak. If you are facing any difficulties during this time, either financially or personally, please do not hesitate to get in touch via the details *[below]*.

Yours sincerely,

N

## Appendix B: Example Regular Giving Increase

Dear N,

I am writing to you as a donor to [N] Church. I would like to begin by saying thank you for financially supporting our community. As we head into an uncertain few months without regular public worship we face a major challenge to our income whilst still having to cover our financial commitments. During this time, it will be our financial supporters, like you, that will enable us to stay afloat and ensure we are ready for the eventual return to normality.

Unfortunately, due to the reduction in our ability to raise funds and the loss of income from [room rental, investments...] we are expecting a serious cash flow crisis over the coming months. As a result, I am writing to all our donors to ask if they would consider increasing their giving.

I understand that this will be a challenging time for many of us and I would like to assure you that the decision to make this request was not taken lightly. Having reviewed our finances we believe that unless we are able to increase our total giving by [x%] we risk running out of cash and being unable to pay our bills. This is why we are asking you to please consider your giving and, if you are able, to increase your donation through [PGS/standing order].

I know that this may be a difficult time and I would like to emphasise that we understand and appreciate that an increase may not be possible. If you would like a confidential conversation about any issues you are facing I would encourage you to contact the vicar.

Regardless of your decision I thank you for your continued financial support for our community and for considering my request to help us through this difficult time.

Although we are unable meet in person to worship, our community will still be active during the coronavirus outbreak. We have plans to [local information e.g. remote worship plans; local support projects etc]. If you would like to know more about how to access or support these please do get in touch with [N]. Do also check the Church of England website ([www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)) where you will find details of national services being held online.

I hope you understand why I have had to write to you with this request. This is a strange and worrying time for all of us but I take comfort that, even as we try to find our way forward, ultimately I know that God is watching out for us and will be with us.

*But now, this is what the Lord says – “Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.”*

From Isaiah 43:1-3

Finally, I would like to emphasise again that [N] will continue to be available for pastoral support throughout this period. If you are facing any difficulties during this time, either financially or personally, please do not hesitate to get in touch via the details [below].

Yours sincerely,

N

## Appendix C: Example for Non-Regular Donors

Dear N,

I am writing to you as a *[member of/worshipper at] [N] Church*.

As we head into an uncertain few months, I would like to assure you that even though we are unable to gather together in person to worship, our community will still be active during the coronavirus outbreak. We have plans to *[local information e.g. remote worship plans; local support projects etc]* and if you would like to know more please get in touch with *[N]*.

Despite these activities, the restrictions on social gatherings have led to a severe reduction in our income, especially from *[donations, room rental, investments...]* and we are forecasting a potential cash flow crisis over the coming months. As a result, I would also like to take this opportunity to ask if you would consider joining our community of regular donors.

I know that this will be a challenging time for many of us and I would like to assure you that the decision to make this request was not taken lightly. Having reviewed our finances we believe that unless we are able to increase our total giving by *[x%]* we risk running out of cash and being unable to pay our bills. This is why we have had to ask all our members who don't currently give regularly if they would consider doing so. I have *[included below an explanation of how our regular giving system works alongside information about signing up]* and if you have any further questions please feel free to contact me.

I would like to emphasise that we understand and appreciate that you may not feel able to sign up at this time and I encourage you, if you would like a confidential conversation about any issues you are facing, to please feel free to contact the vicar via the details *[below]*.

I hope you understand why I have had to write to you and, regardless of your decision, I thank you for considering my request to help us through this difficult time. This is a strange and worrying period for all of us, but I look forward to being able to gather again in worship once the current outbreak has passed. In the meantime, I take comfort that, even as we try to find our way forward, ultimately I know that God is watching out for us and will be with us.

*But now, this is what the Lord says – “Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.”*  
From Isaiah 43:1-3

Finally, I would like to emphasise again that *[N]* will continue to be available for pastoral support throughout this period. If you are facing any difficulties during this time, either financially or personally, please do not hesitate to get in touch via the details *[below]*.

Yours sincerely,

N

## Appendix D: Example Thankyou

Dear N,

I am writing to you as a regular donor to [N] Church in order to take this opportunity to thank you for your financial support towards our community. As we head into an uncertain few months without regular public worship we face a major challenge to our income whilst still having to cover our financial commitments. During this time it will be the members of our community, like you, who have committed to regular giving that will enable the church to stay afloat and ensure we are on a stable footing to continue and renew our ministry when we are once again able to meet together to worship and give thanks.

Although we are unable to come together to worship in person, our community will still be active. We have plans to [local information e.g. remote worship plans; local support projects etc]. If you would like to know more about how to access or support these please do get in touch with [N]. Do also check the Church of England website ([www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)) where you will find details of national services being held online.

This is a strange and worrying time for all of us, but I look forward to being able to gather together again once the current outbreak has passed. In the meantime, I take comfort that, even as we try to find our way forward, ultimately I know that God is watching out for us and will be with us.

*But now, this is what the Lord says – “Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.”*

From Isaiah 43:1-3

Finally, I would like to emphasise that [N] will continue to be available for pastoral support during the current outbreak. If you are facing any difficulties during this time, either financially or personally, please do not hesitate to get in touch via the details [below].

Yours sincerely,

N