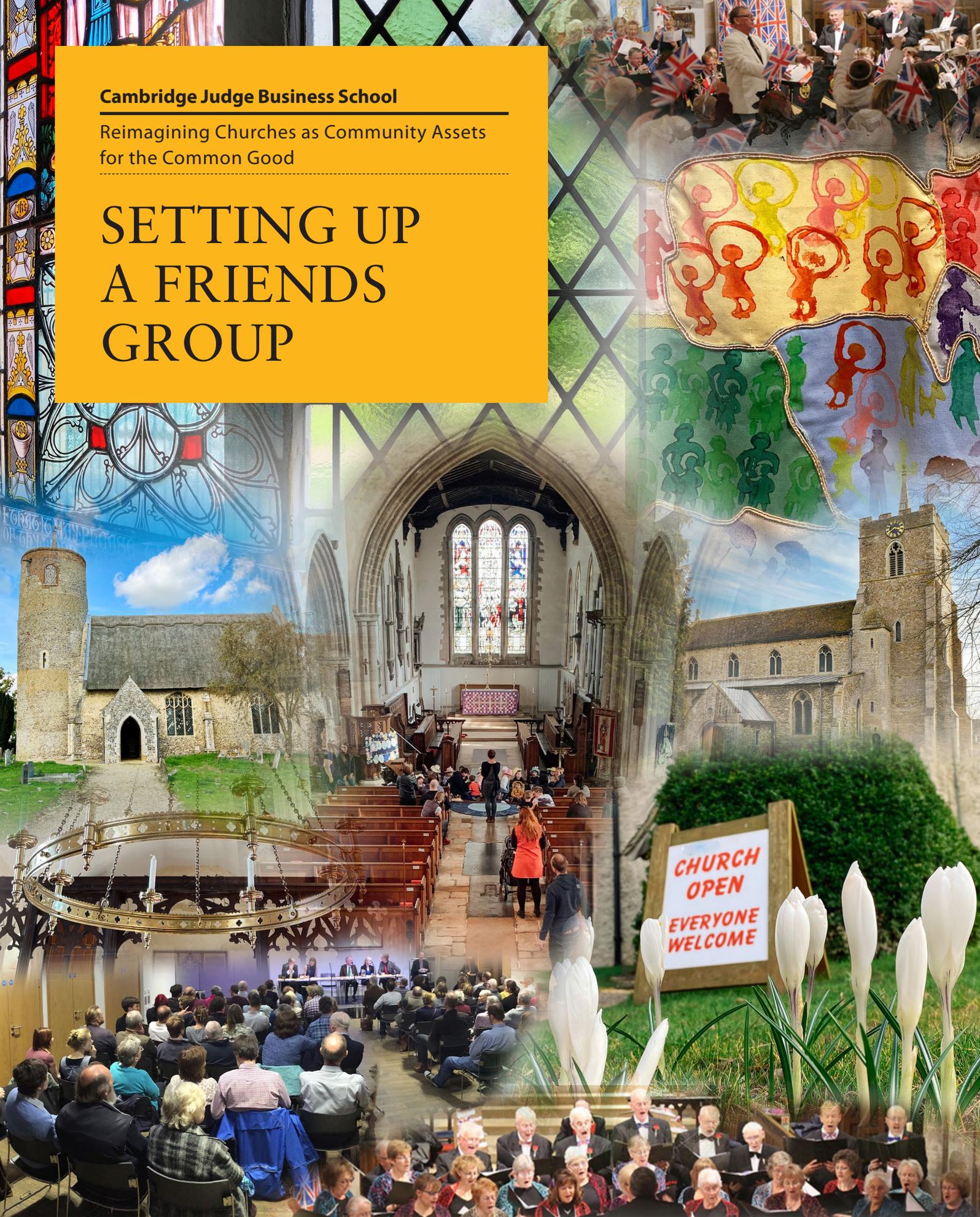


Cambridge Judge Business School

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

SETTING UP A FRIENDS GROUP





INTRODUCTION

Besides the primary function as a place of worship, your church is a **living building** that educates us about the past and the present of a local community. Churches are more than physical manifestations of faith; like open books they reveal local treasures through artefacts, tell local history through architectural features and decorations, and serve as a reminder of past generations through their graveyards and monuments. Churches, whether new, old, or historic, need upkeep and care for future generations since they are important structures in local life and gathering places for worshippers and tourists to explore.

WHY SET UP A FRIENDS GROUP?

With the increasing costs of maintaining and repairing church buildings, many parishes are facing a serious challenge in preserving their churches. Most churches have traditionally been run by volunteers – members of the church community who choose to give their time and effort to help sustain the Church – both the building and its worshipping community. However, this can result in church volunteers spending too much time on the building, and less on the church's core mission. To widen the support base for your church building, you can look to the wider community and think about forming a Friends Group. **A Friends Group is a proven way to harness the skills and fundraising potential of the wider community – people who don't necessarily attend church services very often.**

Friends Groups consist of people who feel affection towards your church building for a wide variety of reasons. Friends Groups (sometimes known as heritage or action groups) have an interest in **helping 'their church' flourish at the heart of their community, as well as keeping it in reasonable state to hand over to the next generation.** Your stakeholders are people who may be interested in the history and heritage of the church building. Some may cherish the church as the site of their weddings, baptisms, or ancestors' burials. Those who moved away can see the church as a reminder of home, others may be eager to explore how your church building could be able to better serve their community as a place for community events. Many people who run and belong to the Friends Groups are **not members of the church congregation**; some will profess no faith or may belong to another faith. What unites them all is the same vision that your church building is genuinely a valuable resource for the community. Having a Friends Group gives your church the chance to interact with the outside world and offers a platform for like-minded individuals to play a supportive and caring role in the life of your church, sometimes remotely, by offering the PCC and vicar their energy, thinking, skills and expertise.

KEY POINT TO NOTE

It is important to identify the purposes for which funds raised by a Friends Group will be used. The most successful Friends Groups focus on tangible projects - fixing the roof, restoring the clock, and supporting the PCC in its role of caring for the church building. Friends Groups do not normally contribute to the costs of running services or providing ministry in the parish; this remains the core role of the Parochial Church Council, and the support of a Friends Group should help the PCC to carry out that core role, better.

THINGS A FRIENDS GROUP CAN DO:

- help bring **new people** with useful skills, expertise and creativity to supplement your existing volunteer base
- help **raise funds** for one-off projects and ongoing maintenance or development. Friends can organise significant fabric repairs and renovation projects. When applying for major grants, having a contribution from a Friends Group can help raise match funding from external grant givers
- assist in **local fundraising** by reaching out to more local people and broadening the church's appeal
- volunteer the time and labour and help with **practical tasks** such as cleaning and caring for the churchyard
- increase **the use of your church building during the week** by running social, community and family events and activities, a café, a shop, an open work area, etc.

Remember, a Friends Group is about much more than raising funds and organising fabric repairs. A Friends Group can help turn a church into a lively and vibrant gathering place for the local community. This helps to make the church a familiar and friendly place for people who could otherwise find it forbidding and uninviting. A Friends Group can help complete church projects that have been sitting on your church's to-do list for years. Key to success about radical and positive change in your church life is mutually positive and trusting relationship between the PCC and a Friends group since they need to work closely together.



TYPES OF FRIENDS SCHEMES

There are three ways that a Friends Group can be structured: as a sub-committee to the PCC; as an independent charity; or as a charitable incorporated organisation. The normal recommended route would be a sub-committee of the PCC as an administratively simplest way to ensure less likelihood of the divergent aims and interests of the parish and a Friends group. The sub-committee model can also be a simple 'try before you buy' to get a Friends Group off the ground initially, before later considering separate charitable status.

OPTION 1: A FRIENDS GROUP AS A SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE PCC

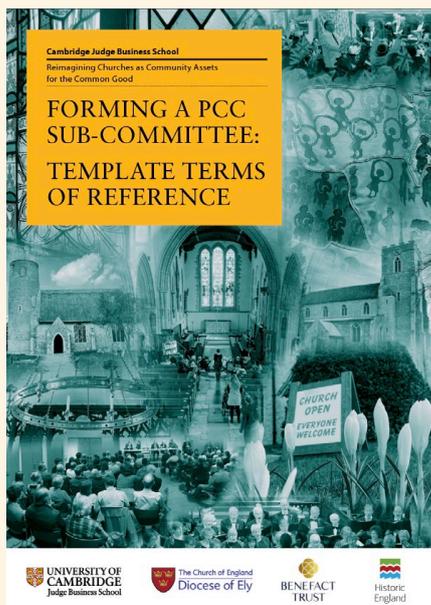
In this arrangement, the PCC adopts a resolution setting forth the terms of reference and creating a Friends group as a sub-committee. A Friends group can be established as a restricted fund just for the repair, maintenance, and insurance of the church building. This means any money raised by the Friends cannot be spent on any other purpose. To ensure that the PCC maintains complete oversight, it is recommended that the sub-committee should consist of at least two or three PCC members. The Friends group sub-committee reports to the PCC on a regular basis and is entirely accountable to it.

Advantages:

- The Friends Group is involved in decision making processes on the use of raised funds
- As part of the PCC, the Friends Group instantly has charitable status and can claim gift aid on donations via the PCC
- The Friends Group doesn't need to set up a separate bank account, which can take a long time
- No separate constitution or Annual General Meetings are required
- PCC members can serve on the sub-committee
- The activities of the Friends Group are covered by the PCC's insurance.

Things to consider:

- Lack of autonomy as the PCC is fully responsible for the receipt and expenditure of all funds
- It may be challenging to market the Friends Group to people who are reluctant to support the missional activities of the PCC
- Some Friends Groups prefer complete independence from the PCC despite the additional administrative burden and responsibility of being charity trustees
- Friends have no voting rights on the PCC.



We have published a **template terms of reference** for setting up a PCC sub-committee.

This document will need to be amended according to precise nature your Friends Group takes.

[https://www.elydiocese.org/
outcomes-and-documentation.php](https://www.elydiocese.org/outcomes-and-documentation.php)

OPTION 2: A FRIENDS GROUP AS AN INDEPENDENT CHARITY (CHARITY UNINCORPORATED ASSOCIATION)

In this arrangement, a Friends group functions as a separate legal organisation with charitable status, its own constitution, bank account, and officers to support and raise finances for the church building. The constitution must explicitly clarify how raised funds will be spent, while also acknowledging that upkeep and repair are ultimately the responsibility of the PCC.

Advantages:

- No extra workload for the PCC or incumbent
- May be easier to attract support from the wider community because the group is distinct from the religious activity of the church
- Can be easier to allocate people to the various officer roles.

Things to consider:

- Longer and complicated way to set up with a risk of losing momentum
- No automatic charitable status granted
- Friends Group must bear the responsibility for its own insurance
- The PCC has no control over the Friends' funds and would have to request for financing for specific projects. Similarly, the Friends group cannot do any work on the church without the authorisation of the PCC
- Potential for disagreements between the PCC and Friends over the mission, ministry, maintenance of the buildings and the use of funds
- Some Friends Groups prefer complete independence from the PCC despite the additional administrative burden and responsibility of being charity trustees
- Friends have no voting rights on the PCC.

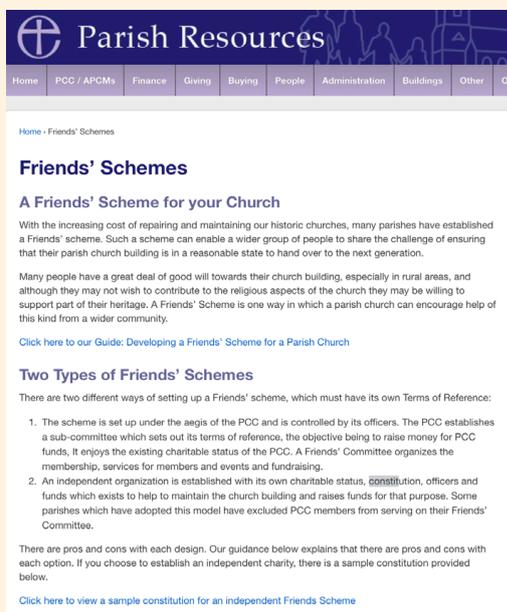
OPTION 3: A FRIENDS GROUP AS A CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION

This is a relatively new charitable structure. In order to obtain a charity number and collect Gift Aid, it must register with the Charity Commission.

Advantages:

- Such group can register as a charity without meeting the £5,000 income threshold
- No setting up fee
- Trustees are subject to limited liability

Things to consider are similar to the Option 2.



The screenshot shows the Parish Resources website. The header includes a logo and navigation links: Home, PCC / APCMs, Finance, Giving, Buying, People, Administration, Buildings, Other, and Or. The main content area is titled 'Friends' Schemes' and includes the following text:

Friends' Schemes

A Friends' Scheme for your Church

With the increasing cost of repairing and maintaining our historic churches, many parishes have established a Friends' scheme. Such a scheme can enable a wider group of people to share the challenge of ensuring that their parish church building is in a reasonable state to hand over to the next generation.

Many people have a great deal of good will towards their church building, especially in rural areas, and although they may not wish to contribute to the religious aspects of the church they may be willing to support part of their heritage. A Friends' Scheme is one way in which a parish church can encourage help of this kind from a wider community.

[Click here to our Guide: Developing a Friends' Scheme for a Parish Church](#)

Two Types of Friends' Schemes

There are two different ways of setting up a Friends' scheme, which must have its own Terms of Reference:

1. The scheme is set up under the aegis of the PCC and is controlled by its officers. The PCC establishes a sub-committee which sets out its terms of reference, the objective being to raise money for PCC funds. It enjoys the existing charitable status of the PCC. A Friends' Committee organizes the membership, services for members and events and fundraising.
2. An independent organization is established with its own charitable status, constitution, officers and funds which exists to help to maintain the church building and raises funds for that purpose. Some parishes which have adopted this model have excluded PCC members from serving on their Friends' Committee.

There are pros and cons with each design. Our guidance below explains that there are pros and cons with each option. If you choose to establish an independent charity, there is a sample constitution provided below.

[Click here to view a sample constitution for an independent Friends Scheme](#)

The Church of England Parish Resources website has published a **template constitution** for setting up a Friends Group as a separate charitable trust.

See the Parish Resources website:

<https://www.parishresources.org.uk/friends-schemes/>



GETTING STARTED

INTERNAL DISCUSSION

The first stage in establishing a Friends Group is for the clergy, PCC, and churchwardens to have an **internal conversation** about how a Friends group might operate in your local context. Decide at the beginning the primary function of the Friends Group – to raise funds for the church maintenance and repair, or to raise funds for improvement and development works, or to provide a forum for interested people to stay in touch with the church; or a combination of these things.

To make an informed decision whether a Friends group is right for your church at this time, consider the following discussion questions:

- What are the problems your church building is facing?
- How do you envision your church in the future and why set up a Friends group now?
- What structure is best for a Friends group (options 1-3 above)?
- Who might become members of the Friends Group – or to put it another way, who is the audience? Membership can sometimes go far wider than just the local area.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

If a Friends Group is right for your church, the next step is to canvas opinion from your local community by holding a **public meeting** or by a **community survey**. Reach out to local households by asking questions:

- If they are prepared to support a Friends Group to raise funds for the upkeep of the church fabric?
- How much would they be prepared to pay to be a Friends Group members
- What sort of events and activities would they be interested to see in the church?
- Using online survey tools it is also possible to promote the survey to a much wider audience. If your church maintains a mailing list, or has a web presence, you can promote the survey that way.

FORMING A COMMITTEE

Based on the community consultation feedback, make sure there is sufficient support for the Friends Group idea. Invite interested parties to an inaugural meeting of interested people to discuss forming the core committee of a new Friends Group. This meeting can also begin to define the aims of the group and work towards a constitution/terms of reference setting out the operation of Friends, the process of selecting Friends committee members, the Group's responsibilities, membership subscription fees (usually a fairly nominal sum), and set priorities for the first few months. It can be an encouragement at this early stage to start planning the first Friends event to give prospective members something more tangible to work towards.

Key point to note: Make sure to clearly communicate from the start that Friends Group is focussed solely on the church building and not the missional activities of the church.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING YOUR FRIENDS CIRCLE

Organise a **launch event** taking note of the feedback from the community consultation. Try to keep your church building open during the day and promote the event as widely as possible. Promotion might include the church newsletter, flyers, posters, the local press, other local community groups and influencers, church and community websites, social media, and via the diocesan communications team. Make sure you have an application form ready, and this can be accessed and returned online.

The Friends' **annual programme of events** should appeal to your community and can include: concerts and theatre, exhibition and heritage talks, open gardens, café and social events, fairs and festival celebrations, quizzes, games and family events. Make sure not to cut across your church's normal fundraising activities, or to compete directly with other community organisations – in smaller communities partnership is always best.

COMMUNICATIONS

As in any good partnership, it is important that your Friends Group and your PCC maintain good communications and keep each other informed about new plans and activities. This will be crucial if new building projects are planned and assistance with fundraising is required. The PCC will also need to be updated about progress on fundraising. Develop a system for the Friends Group and the PCC to communicate updates to one another, such as by providing brief reports at regular PCC and Friends Group meetings, or, when necessary, by arranging for a representative of one group to attend meetings of the other.

SUPPORTING YOUR FRIENDS GROUP

To maintain Friends' support and keep them engaged and updated, consider a Friends webpage on your church **website** (or a separate Friends website) and **social media** channels (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) to share news, photos and updates. The online presence of your church's and Friends' activities can get you more exposure and generate new membership.

Consider some sort of an annual **gesture of thanks** to the Friends by offering more than a newsletter in return for their subscription, e.g. holding a special event for them.



FURTHER RESOURCES

- **The National Churches Trust** guidance on setting up a Friends Group with a model constitution
<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/friends-group>
- **London Diocese** has also written a toolkit on setting up a Friends Group with a sample of discussion questions at the initial meeting with your community
<https://www.london.anglican.org/kb/building-friends-a-toolkit-for-new-friends-groups>
- **Reimagining Churches as Community Assets for the Common Good** project produced a video case study on Friends Groups at St John the Baptist Somersham (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xva4B36Ee-c>) and also a template for a terms of reference for setting up a PCC sub-committee which will take a direct role in the management of a church building (<https://www.elydiocese.org/outcomes-and-documentation.php>)
- **Growing the Rural Church** guide on setting up a Friends group with a sample of terms of reference for a Friends group as a sub-committee of the PCC
<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/generous-giving/friends-group-2/>
- **Parish Resources** provide a sample constitution for an independent Friends scheme
<https://www.parishresources.org.uk/friends-schemes/>
- **Church in Wales:** A guidance note for parishes
https://churchinwales.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Property_Dept_-_Friends_Groups.pdf

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Good)** is a multi-partner research project
that aims to help communities make
fuller use of their churches.

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