

Growing Generous Church

Equipping churches to reflect on
and develop a culture of generosity





When we unexpectedly receive generosity it comes as a welcome surprise, it prompts a smile and the feeling of being valued and loved.

This is even more true when we know and experience something of God's generosity towards us, through creation, the gift of Jesus Christ and the promise of eternal life. As Christian individuals and communities, we are called to respond to this Generous God, acting with generosity in our own lives and Everyday Faith. In conversations and encounters across the Diocese I have heard and been inspired by many stories of generosity. I hope this resource will encourage and enable all our churches and fresh expressions to reflect on their understanding and practice of generosity, and to discern and plan for how generosity can be nurtured and grown afresh. As you do this, I encourage you to celebrate the generosity already present in your church, to give thanks for God's generosity to us and the whole of creation, and to pray for the desire and opportunity to continue growing as generous disciples in a Generous Church.

+Guli Loughborough

**The Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani
Bishop of Loughborough**

Setting the scene

Throughout many generations the Church has spoken of giving; giving in service to the poor, giving in time and energy to ministry within the church and giving of money to charitable causes. Alongside this the Church also grapples with an anxiety that we are perceived to always be talking about money, and a reticence to do so as it can feel awkward, intrusive and embarrassing. In recent decades many churches have engaged with a concept of Stewardship; a responsibility to care for the resources that God has entrusted to us, and to make wise decisions as to their use. However in more recent years there has been an evolutionary shift across the Church of England towards a broader focus on Generous Giving. This explicitly roots our understanding of generosity within the very nature of God; God gave first to us, through the giving of his only Son, and with abundance beyond our imagination. As we grow in knowledge and understanding of God's generosity to us, so we seek to respond with generosity in our own lives. As such, Generosity is a core part of our Everyday Faith, a hallmark of Christian discipleship and a witness to God's love.

What do we mean by ‘generosity’?

To be ‘generous’ is regularly defined as ‘*showing a readiness to give more of something, especially money, than is strictly necessary or expected*’. Generosity is what happens when we put this principle into practice. As Christians, when we act with a generosity that flows from an understanding of God’s generosity to us, it can evoke reactions of surprise. This is because generosity is often a counter-cultural act that stands out in a society often steeped in a narrative of self-reliance and of putting yourself first. It also demonstrates an authenticity to the Christian faith which is particularly valued by emerging generations of adults, and is intriguing and attractive to those outside the Church.

Acts of generosity can take many forms; encompassing generosity of our *time*, of our *talents* and of our *treasure*. Taking it further there are forms of generosity deeply rooted in our faith stories, such as the generosity of attentiveness and comfort demonstrated by Mary as she anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume, or the generosity of self-identity and relationship demonstrated by Ruth as she chooses to remain with Naomi.

Introducing this resource

This resource is designed to help churches reflect on and develop a culture of generosity in the broadest sense, and also the practice of giving, particularly financial giving. It is structured around five key areas relating to generosity, and provides questions to prompt reflection and discussion, ideas and suggestions for growing generosity in each area. Each key area enables a church to identify aspects of local culture, or “how we do things here” and practical ideas for growth and development. The five key areas are:

Rooted in Discipleship

Enabling All to Give

Engaging and Valuing Our Givers

Embedded in Who We Are

Creative and Always Growing

Towards the end of this resource is a simple template to help prioritise and plan the next steps. One of the key ways of engaging the whole church community in the practice of generosity and giving is through a Giving Renewal or Campaign, and there is guidance on how to do this.

How to use this resource

In each of the five key areas is a **WAGOLL** or **What a Good One Looks Like**. This is a short description of what a church that has really embraced Generosity as part of its collective Christian life might be like. These are aspirations, designed to provoke reflection and questioning, and inspire churches to think about how we can grow as a generous church.

This resource is designed to be used by a small core group in a church. That could be the PCC, or might involve other key people who lead or represent different parts of the church's life. It is useful for one person to take responsibility for leading the group. The five key areas can be addressed in any order, together or one at a time, but all churches are strongly encouraged to consider all of the areas. It can be tempting to leave out parts that feel most difficult, or even ignore those areas that already feel like strengths. Yet we know that God's generosity abounds beyond our imaginations and there is always space to grow our understanding of God and respond anew.

Overleaf is a useful pattern to follow as we consider each area:

STEP 1

Identify, celebrate and give thanks for the ways in which we are already embodying and living out this part of being a Generous Church. Consider which bits of the **WAGOLL** we recognise in our church.

STEP 2

Identify where the “gaps” or areas for growth are for our church. Consider which bits of the **WAGOLL** are new to us or need more attention. Each area has some specific questions to help with these first two steps.

STEP 3

Identify how we could grow and nurture what we already do. Consider what new things we might try or how the things we already do could be developed.

STEP 4

Work out together what to do first, what will need more time to accomplish, and what needs to be kept for the future. Consider when to run a Giving Campaign. Create a plan for the coming months. Try to ensure there is something from each of the five areas in the plan, although remember that these five areas are all closely related in practice.

STEP 5

After several months come back to the plan and review what has happened so far. Celebrate stories of growth in generosity and learn from things that haven't worked as expected. Check that the rest of the plan is still the best thing to do and make any changes needed. It may be helpful to come back to this resource after a year or two and go through the process again.



The five key areas

Rooted in discipleship

Understanding the Generosity of God and our call to respond with generosity as part of our Everyday Faith.

Engaging and valuing our givers

We need to invest in the relationship between our church and our givers, in the same way that we invest in our relationships with family, friends and colleagues.

Enabling all to give

Ensuring our church enables all to give financially when and how they want to, whilst recognising that generosity also encompasses time and talents.

Creative and always growing

Just as we seek to grow in other parts of our Christian lives, we seek to grow in generosity as individuals and as a church community, and do so in creative and new ways.

Embedded in who we are

Our identity as Christians is woven into the fabric of everything we do as a Church Community, and generosity is clearly part of this.

Rooted in discipleship

Understanding the Generosity of God and our call to respond with generosity as part of our Everyday Faith.

WAGOLL

Generosity is one of the regular topics that comes up in our preaching and teaching, there are opportunities to explore generosity as part of our church activities that deepen discipleship such as in small groups and bible studies. There are opportunities for individuals to attend day retreats such as the Journey of Generosity. Generosity is always included in our development of discipleship for new Christians.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- In the last 12 months, how often have we heard preaching or teaching on Generosity?
- In the last 12 months, have we considered the topic of Generosity in our small groups, bible study courses or other times of deepening discipleship?
- Have we ever offered an opportunity for individuals to attend a day retreat such as Journey of Generosity?
- Where does generosity feature in the discipleship of new Christians?

Ideas for growing generosity

- Themed sermon series on generosity
- Drawing out stories of generosity when preaching on the lectionary
- Encouraging small groups and individuals to use generosity themed resources
- Offering opportunities for generosity themed retreats eg Journey of Generosity
- Include generosity in discipleship courses for new Christians or those preparing for confirmation.

Enabling all to give

Ensuring our church enables all to give financially when and how they want to, whilst recognising that generosity also encompasses time and talents.

WAGOLL

Everyone is encouraged to give regularly to our church, with most people giving regularly from their bank account (eg using the Parish Giving Scheme). Information about why and how to give is easily available in church and on our website, and is easy for everyone to understand. As new people begin to belong to our congregations, they are invited to give. All of our regular congregation are comfortable and confident to have conversations about giving. People can give one off donations easily using our contactless card reader and we are keen to make use of new technology and best practice as it becomes available to us. We have a legacy policy and encourage people to consider leaving a gift in their will to the church, and provide information about doing this.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- How would a newcomer find out about giving to the church?
- How do we ensure that newcomers are invited to give regularly?
- Are we offering easy ways for people to give?

- Are the ways in which people are giving practically sustainable in the long term? (eg our capacity to handle cash, the ability to pay cheques and cash into the bank in an efficient and secure way, are we missing out on envelope giving because of irregular or declining attendance)
- Do we have a legacy policy and information available about legacy giving?
- Are we making the most of contactless card readers and other technology?
- Are there groups of people who are not currently invited to give? (eg children and young people, those who attend during the week instead of on Sundays, those who attend Fresh Expressions that meet outside the church building)

Ideas for growing generosity

- Use the Parish Giving Scheme to encourage regular giving
- Providing a contactless card reader as an alternative to cash
- Include information on how people can give on your church website or 'A Church Near You' web page
- Agree a legacy policy
- Make legacy literature available in church
- Include generosity and giving as a topic in teaching and discipleship development with children and young people
- Review giving information to ensure it is easily available, accessible and understandable
- Develop a clear process for how newcomers are invited to give eg during a newcomers lunch, with a one to one conversation or in a welcome pack.

Engaging and valuing our givers

We need to invest in the relationship between our church and our givers, in the same way that we invest in our relationships with family, friends and colleagues.

WAGOLL

We have a regular pattern of saying thank you to our givers and showing them the difference their giving has made. Our regular congregations have a good basic understanding of our church finances, know how to find out more or where to ask questions. There is a high level of trust between those who give and those who make decisions. We integrate messages about giving when we talk about our vision and plans for developing our ministry and mission.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- How regularly do we say thank you to the people who give to our church? Do we tell them what difference their giving has made?
- When we communicate about our vision and plans for developing our ministry and mission, do we link this clearly and appropriately with giving?
- Do we provide information to everyone about our church finances that is clear, accessible and engaging?
- Do we regularly tell stories that show the impact of giving and generosity?

Ideas for growing generosity

- Regularly and consistently say thank you for giving in all its forms
- Engage the wider church community with key moments of decision making and priority setting
- Inspire givers with our vision for future ministry and mission
- Communicate why our church needs people to give, both financially and in other ways
- Share information about our church finances in a clear, accessible and engaging way
- Share stories of where God has been working through our acts of giving and generosity.

Embedded in who we are

Our identity as Christians is woven into the fabric of everything we do as a Church Community, and generosity is clearly part of this.

WAGOLL

All aspects of our church life have the thread of generosity running through them, from how we do hospitality after services and at events, to the items on our PCC or other meeting agendas. Our church finances include regular planned giving to charitable causes within and beyond our local community. Generosity is integral to our vision and plans for mission. Our worship reflects our understanding and practice of generosity, including the choices we have made about the words, symbols and way in which we do the Offertory during services. We actively practice generosity as part of our church life in a way that is appropriate for our context and reflects our shared cultures.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Do we give regularly in a planned way to charitable causes within and beyond our local community? Are these decisions shared with the wider congregation?
- Do those who make decisions about our church's financial giving represent the breadth and diversity of our church community?

- In the last 12 months how often have our PCC or other meeting agendas included items related to our practice of generosity?
- Does the way in which we do the Offertory during our services reflect the understanding and culture of generosity we want to embody?
- What messages does our Offertory give to a newcomer who is unfamiliar with church?
- How do we learn from and share the stories and experiences of generosity from the different cultures represented in our church, and those further afield?

Ideas for growing generosity

- Review the way we do the Offertory/Collection to ensure the words and symbolism used reflect our understanding of generosity.
- Clearly identify where generosity is present in our church vision and plans for mission
- Consider how and when generosity in all its breadth is considered by the PCC / church leadership. Plan this into appropriate agendas.
- Enable the church leadership to reflect on how they embody generosity as part of Everyday Faith. This could be done individually or with peers.
- Review how much has been given away from core church finances over the last 3 years. Is it planned and committed, or “what’s left over, if we can afford it”? Review the amount of money given and where it is given.
- Create opportunities for the celebration and practice of generosity by people from the full breadth of cultures and backgrounds in the local context. Enable this breadth of experience to shape the local church’s culture and practice of generosity.

Creative and always growing

Just as we seek to grow in other parts of our Christian lives, we seek to grow in generosity as individuals and as a church community, and do so in creative and new ways.

WAGOLL

We often celebrate experiences and acts of generosity in our liturgy and worship, and have seen how this can inspire and encourage others. We regularly reflect on the place of generosity in our lives and intentionally seek to grow in generosity, both as individuals and as a church community. We engage in new and creative ways of being generous at least annually, such as holding a "Boomerang Offertory", or committing to a "21st Century Harvest" model for our church finance.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Do we celebrate generosity in our liturgy and worship?
- When was the last time our church congregation experienced generosity through a creative new idea?
- How do we enable people to reflect on the place of generosity in our lives?
- How do we seek to grow as a generous Christian community?

Ideas for growing generosity

- Planning creative celebrations of generosity at appropriate moments throughout the year
- Offer an opportunity at least annually for individuals to reflect on generosity as part of Everyday Faith
- Allowing generosity to be experienced creatively through new ideas
 - Boomerang Offertory: plan for one Sunday where you redistribute the usual giving received that week back out to each member of the congregation. They take this money and use it to provide blessing to the local community, then share the stories in the following weeks.
 - 21st Century Harvest: plan the church's annual expenditure based on 11 months of income and give away the income from the 12th month.
 - 1% more: Encourage individual givers to plan to give 1% more of their income each year.

Making a Plan

Work out together what to do first, what will need more time to accomplish, and what needs to be kept for the future. Consider when to run a Giving Campaign. Create a plan for the coming months. Try to ensure there is something from each of the five areas in the plan, although remember that these five areas are all closely related in practice.

Things to remember when making a plan

- Be both aspirational and realistic
- Check it doesn't clash with other plans for the church
- Agree who is going to take the lead for each item
- Be clear: What is the first thing to do for each item? When does it need to be done?

There is a suggested plan template available on the website or from the Generous Giving Team.

Running a Giving Campaign:

The basic process

STEP 1 DECIDE ON PRACTICALITIES

This includes dates, how many weeks the campaign will run for (most churches run over 3 Sundays), who will be included in the campaign and also who will help organise it.

STEP 2 WRITE YOUR RESOURCES

Normally this consists of a letter which focuses on the vision for the church and how any increase in giving will enable that vision. Some churches also choose to create a leaflet which tells more stories from the church community along with some pictures. Example letters can be found on the Diocesan website.

STEP 3 ENCOURAGE RESPONSE

Be clear how you would like people to respond to your campaign, for example by joining the Parish Giving Scheme. Some churches choose to differentiate this section of their letter depending on how their givers are currently giving. For example, asking envelope givers to give via their bank account and Parish Giving Scheme givers to increase their gift. Be sure to be clear on deadlines for responses and to make it as easy as possible for people to respond.

STEP 4 PLAN PREACHING

Plan out a series of teaching which connects giving with discipleship and will enable the church community to see generosity and giving as a part of their faith.

STEP 5 CELEBRATE RESPONSE

Celebrate in worship the results of the giving campaign and share what these results will enable to happen. Consider how you can thank those that responded to the campaign directly.

The Generous Giving Team are available for further advice and support.

Information, Resources and Support

Diocese of Leicester Generous Giving Team

www.leicester.anglican.org/info-for-parishes/generous-giving

generousgiving@leccofe.org

Phone: 0116 261 5339

Church of England Giving Information and Resources

www.parishresources.org.uk/giving

Parish Buying (e.g contactless card readers)

www.parishbuying.org.uk/categories/contactless-donations

Legacy Information

www.churchlegacy.org.uk

Legacy Resources

www.parishresources.org.uk/order-resources

Growing Generous Church Prayer

Generous God, you have given to each of us more than
we can ever imagine;
In the world you created,
In the gift of your Son,
And in the promise of eternal life.
Enable us to respond with generosity,
In our lives and in our church,
That we might share your love
And see your Kingdom grow.

Amen



www.leicester.anglican.org/info-for-parishes/generous-giving

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