

WYLYE CHURCH AND VILLAGE HALL

AUCTION OF PROMISES

Wylie Church LCC (Local Church Council) decided that we needed to raise general funds and we wanted to have a joint venture with the Village Hall to promote a village wide community spirit. The Village Hall Committee were in favour so we started by agreeing a format for the event.

The idea was that we would have an evening event in the Village Hall at which the Hall Committee would provide a simple two-course meal. We charged £15 a head for the meal. On reflection we should have charged £10 a head or less; it would have attracted more people to come to the event and maybe increased the value of the bids, but who knows? Everyone would bring their own refreshments (there are a number of benefits in this: it keeps the cost down, there are no problems with licensing laws, it's one thing less to organise, everyone gets to drink their own preference of wine, beer or soft drinks and that generates a 'party' atmosphere - vital when trying to persuade people to part with their money!). We agreed a date for the event. We chose mid-December, though in hindsight a quieter period might have been better. The income would be shared equally by the Church and the Hall after all expenses. Sharing the event with the Hall meant that people who don't normally give to the Church were happy that their money was going to the Hall!

It was agreed that the Church would organise the Auction and both organisations would obtain Promises, advertise the event and sell tickets. We took advice from St. Thomas' Church in Salisbury who held an Auction of Promises in the Guildhall a few years before the shutdown. (My sister Diana Durnford was a churchwarden there at the time). They were very helpful especially when working out how to run the auction itself.

We secured the services of a professional auctioneer who had lived in the village several years previously and knew quite a few of the villagers. He gave his services for free and was brilliant. You need someone with expertise and a good sense of humour to make it run like a party.

We started collecting Promises 6 months before the event. We could have got away with 4 months, but it gave the process momentum early on. After a flurry of expensive Promises - a tour of the House of Lords with lunch given by a peer of the realm, a 20 mile chauffeured drive in a 1929 4½ litre vintage Bentley, a 3 course set meal for two with wine in the Botanical Room at the Newt in Somerset with free access to the Gardens, a Sampler Gliding Experience, half a frozen lamb and so on - there followed a period of intense searching to get 'artisan' Promises - things which utilise people's skills, such as dog walking, baby-sitting, silver cleaning, a champagne afternoon tea, tuition in school subjects, cake making and decorating, a three-course meal with wine, celebration bell-ringing, a fishing fly-tying course, hedge-trimming, housework, a man with a van, etc. There were two other categories of Promise - physical items for auction and collection on the night such as a vintage bottle of port, a crate of wine, a hand-built dolls house, baskets of fruit, a winter garden planter - and vouchers - for money off various local shops and stalls. The local pub gave lots of 20% off meal and wine vouchers which we sold for £5 each. The pub benefitted because it got people back into the habit of eating out after the pandemic. It's good to have as wide range of Promises and prices as possible - to attract a wide range of bidders. And don't be afraid of approaching the more affluent members of your community and telling them what other well-off people have promised!

Each donor completed a Donor Form which listed their details (so buyers could contact them to redeem their purchases), the exact details of their Promise (so there could be no arguments), a suggested value and starting price, and whether they were happy for their name to go in a Catalogue. We ended up with 45 Promises; we could easily have coped with 60.

We kept an updated Catalogue of Promises which we published periodically in our local Village Magazine, on noticeboards and websites. It kept the momentum going and made people think about what they could promise. We had to keep chivvying, but it was worth it.

The sale of tickets started about a month before the event. Each ticket had a large bidding number on the back, for use at the auction. It's a good idea to try to get tickets sold in complete tables. We ended up with a party atmosphere with tables bidding against each other for some of the Promises. A lot of the vouchers we sold went for far more than their actual value - such was the rivalry between tables!

We decided not to have on line or telephone bidding (too complicated), but encouraged postal bids before the event and got people not attending to get others who were to bid on their behalf.

On the night the Auctioneer needed a PA system. He was given a breakdown of the Catalogue divided into 8 lots at a time. Against each Promise he wrote down who had won the bids (bidding numbers) and how much it had sold for. After 8 items he passed these forms to an assistant who put them in bidding number order, combining them into individual purchasers' totals. At the end of the auction everyone wanted to pay for their bids, collect the Donor Sheets giving details of each Promise they had won and get home. It was a mad 20 minutes. We allowed payment by cash, cheque (there were none) or credit/debit card. Card readers were essential - we needed at least two. We'd split the Bidding Numbers into two groups and had two payment points so those between 100 and 199 should have gone to one payment point, those with 200 to 299 should have gone to the other. It didn't work; we were just swamped! But we still managed to collect all the money.

We raised over £3,000 from the auction and the tickets after all expenses, but one of the donors had a Charitable Trust set up for the benefit of the village. She promised us £1 for every £1 we raised up to a maximum of £1,000, which was easily achieved, so overall we raised £4,000.

The main message we can offer anyone wanting to raise funds is: do something different, involve your whole community and make sure it's FUN!

Roger Liddiard
Wylve Churchwrden