

THE LANGUAGE OF
GIVING:
COMMUNICATING
ABOUT
GENEROSITY



“It’s nice to have empirical evidence that reminds us all that even minuscule amounts of day-to-day generosity can trigger neurobiological changes in your brain that are clinically proven to increase happiness and contentment.”

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY



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INTRODUCTION

Most if not all that we do in the life of our churches orientates around good communication. From church rotas to inviting people to mission events, we rely on the way we talk to people to both inform and encourage participation. The same is true of encouraging generosity – without communication, we have no means of sharing efficient ways to give, or of embedding a sound theology of giving and deepening discipleship within our church communities. Communication – digital, written and in person – is vital to building generous churches.

In this workbook, we'll explore some of the principles when communicating about generosity, aiming to build confidence in the way we shape our messages and use language. Choosing our words carefully is important here because they help to embed a particular culture and attitude towards giving. With the many forms of communication we use, let us move to a place where the message we communicate is one of celebration, joy and gratitude.

“Everyone can experience the joy and blessing of generosity; because everyone has something to give.”

JAN GRACE

COMMUNICATION AND THEOLOGY

We begin by grounding ourselves in the basic principles of communication and a theology of giving.

Communication

According to the Dictionary, communication is “the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium; the successful conveying or sharing ideas and feelings.”

Have a think about how you communicate within your church. Not just formal forms of communication – think outside the box.

A Theology of Giving

What comes to mind when you think about a theology of giving? You might want to spend a lot more time reflecting on the theology of giving, and there are lots of books and resources which can help with this. At a very basic level though, here are some pointers to get you started:

- *We begin with understanding God’s generosity to us – you can read the whole Bible as a narrative of generosity*
- *Giving is grounded in love and sacrifice, from God and to God*
- *As Christian people, we are called to model the self-giving nature at the heart of the Trinity*
- *Generosity is in the nature of God – as beings made in God’s image, generosity is therefore in our nature as well*
- *We are blessed by God in order for us to be a blessing to others*
- *We give to enable mission and grow God’s kingdom on earth*

Communicating a Theology of Giving

Bringing these two ideas together, have a think about how you might communicate a theology of giving in your church communities. You might already have some good practices in place to draw wisdom from.

Communicating about generosity is not about reinventing the wheel – it's about using the communication channels already at hand to share and encourage.

In short, communicating a theology of giving helps us to move from a practical message of increasing income, to one of sharing in a story of faith and mission. It helps to embed a culture of generosity grounded in grow, where those who participate are motivated by their own discipleship and the missional outcomes we see as a result.

“Our humanity comes to its fullest bloom in giving. We become beautiful people when we give whatever we can give: a smile, a handshake, a kiss, an embrace, a word of love, a present, a part of our life...all of our life.”

HENRI NOUWEN

SHAPING YOUR GIVING MESSAGE

In order to build confidence in what we are communicating, we need to be secure in the message we have shaped. Creating a good message will look different in every parish, depending on what your vision is and how you connect with your community. At its core, though, your message should always look beyond the immediate goal of increasing income or resource, to the missional outcomes and how the church will use that resource to make a difference.



The end point of all our giving is mission – directly or indirectly – and this becomes the focus of our own narrative as we explain the impact our giving makes collectively. As church leaders, our confidence in communicating about giving can be built when we remember that it’s not about us – it’s about the mission that is resourced the glory given to God, and the growth in discipleship as our communities learn to live generous lives.

Missional Giving

Encouraging individuals to give within our churches is best done through a combined approach of personal discipleship and collective mission – we call this ‘missional giving’.

Communicating about missional giving is most effective when it is localised – articulating the specific ways which you serve your community, and the particular ways which resources are used in your church.

The more specific you’re able to be, the more tangible it is in people’s minds to link their giving to something they can see and experience week by week – for example,, it is good to say, ‘our giving enables mission’, but better if you say, ‘our giving enables our Equip Youth Group’, or ‘our monthly Messy Church’. Givers are inspired by what they see.

Need and Impact

This links closely to the importance of communicating the needs of your church, and the impact giving has on realising your mission. There are numerous worthy and deserving causes that need people’s support, so if we are to encourage people to give to us, as churches we must explain why we need people’s support, and how vital it is to our ministry and mission. We must do this primarily to people within our church community, but also within our wider communities too.

We also need to explain what will change when people do give – showing what people’s giving achieves, which it is far more motivating to those who give than simply taking about about costs.

Building Relationships

Communicating with people is the grounding point of building relationships. As churches, we communicate with those within our worshipping communities and our wider communities on a wide variety of subjects. When we communicate about giving, we are inviting those people into deeper relationship with us, and not just enable mission at a distance, but become a part of that story. Generosity is a community building ministry.

Gratitude

The practice of gratitude is invaluable – both for the church and the giver – communicating this intentionally and regularly.

- *All Christian giving begins with gratitude, as we respond to God's generosity to us*
- *People give more generously when thanked or acknowledged*
- *Thank everyone, for all forms of generosity, on a regular basis – build it into your culture of church life*
- *At least annually, communicate an intentional message of gratitude, explaining the difference giving makes*

Think about how gratitude is practiced in your church. Who thanks people? How often is gratitude articulated? What ideas do you have to help embed this more deeply into the life of your church?

‘You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.’

2 CORINTHIANS 9.11-12



THE LANGUAGE OF GIVING

The way we use language when communicating about giving and generosity is invaluable, because it shapes our message and communicates culture. The choice of words we use influences how your message is interpreted by givers, and how those people then respond. Essentially, our language is best when moving away from transactional language to words more associated with gift.

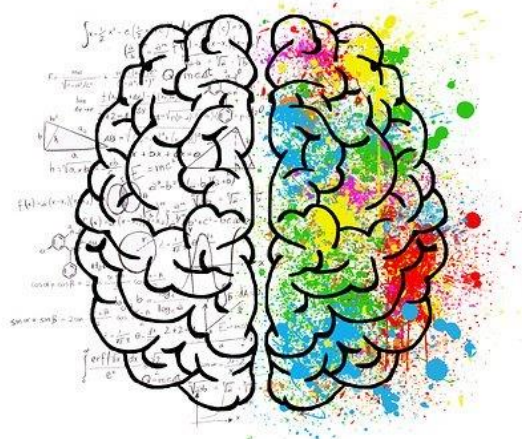
Using Psychology

"It's nice to have empirical evidence that reminds us all that even minuscule amounts of day-to-day generosity can trigger neurobiological changes in your brain that are clinically proven to increase happiness and contentment."

Psychology Today

Psychological research helps us here. Whilst this is secular research, it applies to the way we live generous lives, and so as churches we can adopt the outcomes of this research in the way we build confidence in articulating our giving message.

- *Altruistic acts of charitable giving light up a part of the brain, which is associated with happiness and contentment*
- *Put simply: giving makes us happy, and so in encouraging generosity within our churches we are effectively giving the gift of giving*
- *People are more likely to give generously when language influences this response, and so our messages need to be less transactional*



Reshaping our Language

What examples can you think of which will help shape our language away from transactional towards gift and generosity? Think of words and phrases you might have heard used in churches you have been a part of – how might you change them?

Here is a table of ideas and examples – think about how you might start to embed them into communication within your church.

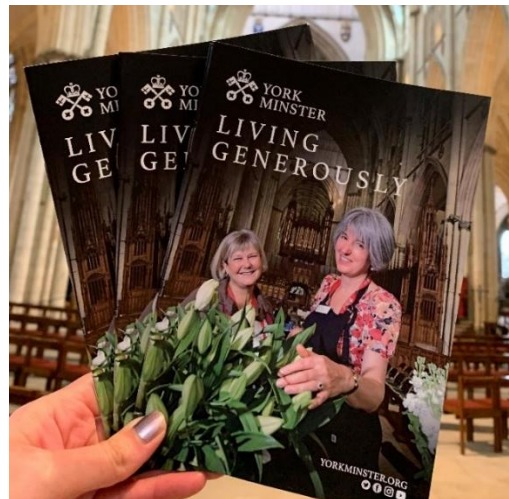
FROM	TO
Take the collection	Receiving an offering
Pay	Give / Gift
Your church	Our church
Dig further into your pockets	Become more generous
Pay the heating bill	Enable our church to be a warm, hospitable environment
Save our church	Help us resource our mission
I'm not a vicar who often talks about money	Experience the joy of giving, together reflecting God's generosity in our community
We need to pay for our vicar	It's a privilege to contribute in giving towards resourcing ministry across our diocesan family of churches
Duty to give	Invited to / encouraged to give

FROM TO

APPLICATION: TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

It is quite natural that, when thinking about communicating about giving, our minds find themselves itching towards writing a letter. This is good practice, but if we think outside the box of inherited giving practice, communication becomes so much broader. Here are some ideas:

- *Written communication usually points to a requested outcome and a call to action. Beyond the usual letter, think about making this colourful and eye-catching, and use images from your local church.*
- *Verbal communication applies to everyone in your church community, especially to church leaders, This could be through notices and talks, or natural conversation. This all influences attitudes towards giving. You could even create video messages about giving to put a voice to written materials.*
- *Newsletters and Notice Sheets are a great form of regular communication for you to tap into. It's really easy to put a QR code in these to direct people to online giving pages, as well as introducing the offering to visitors. Newsletters tend to offer more space for you to share stories to celebrate local generosity, or writing articles about giving in the context of discipleship.*



- *Website and social media pages are a really good outward facing form of communication. It's good practice to have a page on your website about giving, including information about why and how to give. Social media pages are great for little and often messaging, often best when paired with something about worship or mission, and with a nice picture!*

- *Worship is a really good opportunity to communicate the theology of giving – we learn so much of our theology within our worship, with our liturgies shaped almost entirely biblically. There are lots of resources available, including The Generosity Weekⁱⁱ, which provides service outlines for Morning Prayer, Eucharists and Services of the Word.*
- *Preaching is also a form of communication, as we unpack the Word and apply it to living out our faith in the world today. Preaching about generosity takes on board all we have covered in this booklet, as well as embedding the principles of joy and expressing the love of God.*

Are there any other forms of communication in your local church which you could make use of?

When should we Communicate?

Put simply: all the time! Building a culture of generosity is grounded in communicating about living a generous life in all we do as churches. It is common that giving is only talked about in churches when there's a financial challenge – but as giving is a ministry in itself, we should be encouraged to communicate about it regularly through the lens of joy.

We can take confidence that money and possessions is the second most mentioned topic in the Bible, second only to love, which of course is the foundation of Christian giving – giving is, ultimately, an expression of love.

Thanks be to you,
our joy and our glory,
our hope and our God.

Thanks be to you for all your gifts to us;
preserve them in us,
as you preserve us day by day,
and the things you have given us
will increase and be made perfect;
and we shall be with you:
because even that we exist
is a gift from you.

Amen.

ADAPTED FROM ST AUGUSTINE



FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- *National Giving Team's Building a Generous Church website:*
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/building-generous-church>
- *A Spirituality of Fundraising.* Henri Nouwen.
- *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose.* Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson. Published 25 September 2014.

ⁱ Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201707/small-acts-generous-behavior-can-make-your-brain-happier>

ⁱⁱ The Generosity Week, published by the National Giving Team:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/building-generous-church/encouraging-generosity/ideas-activating-generosity/generosity>

