



A STEWARDSHIP TOOLKIT for the Rural Church



Tool 7 : Setting Up a Friends Scheme

‘With the increasing costs of repairing and maintaining our historic churches many parishes are exploring the idea of setting up a Friends’ Scheme. Such a scheme can enable a wider group of people help share the burden of ensuring that their parish church building is in a reasonable state to hand on 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’
“A Friends’ Scheme” for A Parish Church - Canterbury Diocese 2003

Roughly one third of the expenditure of parish churches is on the repair and maintenance of their buildings. In 2004, over £100,000,000 was spent nationally on building repairs to Church of England churches. Our church buildings are tools for mission and places for worship, and it is in this context that raising funds for building maintenance should be seen.

Getting Started

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) together with the Incumbent and Churchwardens make a formal decision to establish a Friends’ Scheme. They will do this after making sure that they will be able to attract new people to it who have a real contribution to offer. It must not be the same people who already are responsible for most of the life of the Church - though some may wish to join. Events organised by the Friends’ should not be an additional burden on the church family, and care needs to be exercised that there is no expectation raised that the priest and his/her family are expected to attend absolutely everything that goes on.

Aims & Objects

These need to be made very clear at the outset and enshrined in the founding documents. The terms of reference must not fight shy of the fact that the Church exists for the practice and advancement of the Christian religion. There are some different options for setting up the Friends Scheme, but whichever route is chosen, the care, maintenance, repair and insurance of the church remains the responsibility of the PCC and all work done to the church is still subject to faculty jurisdiction.

The task of Friends is not to provide funds for general housekeeping as these remain the responsibility of the worshipping community. Members of the worshipping community may wish to join the Friends but their primary contribution to the work of the church should be through regular giving to general funds to contribute to the day to day costs of the parish. A wider role beyond funding should also be considered for a Friends’ Scheme, particularly where the church is a heritage site. This should include promoting knowledge and understanding of the church and its role in the Christian faith and the development of the community around it. Friends’ might become involved in guiding and interpretive work for visitors, and in publicity in attracting tourists to visit the church.

Whatever their precise role the Friends must be capable of drawing in additional people and support than might otherwise be the available. If they do not, or cannot, there is little reason for their existence.

Types of Schemes

Option 1 : A scheme set up under the PCC's authority, and in effect, a sub-committee of it. This is the simplest scheme to establish and operate, and as such is the recommended option for most parishes. The committee organises the events, its own membership list and it reports to the PCC.

<p>Advantages</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under full authority of the PCC 2. Charity status as part of the PCC 3. Tax efficient donations and subscriptions through Gift Aid. 4. No separate constitution, AGM etc. required. 5. Can use CBF Investment Fund 6. Some functions can be delegated by the PCC as it is a sub-committee. 7. Its events and personnel may be covered by the PCCs's insurance. 	<p>Disadvantages</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May not attract a wider membership, particularly leadership, if perceived as a subcommittee. 2. Organised by existing church members. 3. Officers must be on the electoral roll. 4. Has no executive powers.
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Option 2 : An independent organisation with its own charitable status and its own constitution.

<p>Advantages</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May attract wider community support. 2. Seen as distinct from the religious activity of the church. 3. Possibly easier to find a 'patron'. 4. Organisation does not fall on the church members. 5. Tax efficient donations through Gift Aid. 	<p>Disadvantages</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Length of time to establish. 2. Requires its own constitution, AGM, bank accounts and officers. 3. Not legal unless registered as a charity under the Charities Act 1993 which needs the formal documentation of the Charity Commissioners. 4. Requires all the reporting and accounting procedures dictated by the Charities S.O.R.P and the submission of accounts. 5. The committee are the trustees and must take on the responsibilities of trusteeship. 6. Will need to separately insure its activities. 7. May fall out of the control of the PCC in respect of its activities. 8. Is divorced from the core purpose of the building.
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NB

There have been situations in which a parish has considered an 'informal' scheme without charity registration. This may contravene Charity law if the turnover is in excess of threshold for registration.

Further Reading

A useful booklet : 'A Friends' Scheme' for a Parish Church by Susan Renison is available from the Diocese of Canterbury's Christian Stewardship Department price £4. Contact Liz Marsh on 01227 459401, or e-mail : emarsh@diocant.org