

St Nicolas Outward Giving: A few suggested principles

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to address three questions:

1. To give or not to give?
2. To whom should we give?
3. How much should we give?

However, at our November PCC meeting it is only the third question that need concern us. (The first two were addressed and agreed at our meeting in March 2008.)

2. To give or not to give?

If people give to St Nicolas, some may say, surely they intend for the money they give to be used for the work at St Nicolas, not for the work at, say, *CMS*?

I confess to having some sympathy with this view. After all, if there are mission organisations and causes that I personally deem important I can give to them myself (which I do). However, I think I would want to argue that despite the legitimacy of that view there is still a case for the local church giving away a certain proportion of its income. In particular I'm mindful of three reasons:

1. By *Outward Giving*, the church corporately models good practice for the individual Christian;
2. By *Outward Giving*, the church is able to forge a meaningful link in ways that the individual often cannot, not least by inviting representatives from those organisations to come and present/speak/inform. This can be mutually enriching.
3. By *Outward Giving*, the church can utilise the increasingly rich resources for worship made available by a good many mission organisations. Often these might be provided at no charge, but the expectation is of some level of support as a result.

3. To whom should we give?

Here are the principles which we have used to guide our Outward Giving decisions since 2008:

Not simply giving financially but also supporting in other ways

We should really be seeking to know about the work of the organisations concerned. As the church corporate we have the possibility of inviting representatives, and support can include prayer and regular information distribution.

A combination of planned giving and spontaneity, but with a balance on planned

In other words, while it may sometimes be good to respond to a Tsunami or an earthquake (for example), in the main our *Outward Giving* will be planned. Indeed, a spontaneous response might be made in other ways, for example a *freewill offering* at the door on the way out of church.

A combination of both large and small support, but with a balance on large

There will always be far more good causes around than we can possibly support so we will always have to draw the line somewhere. Our intention in recent years has been to support a few organisations/causes well than support too many organisations in a token way.

A combination of ongoing support and one-off support, but with a balance on ongoing

As a church we should be seeking to build meaningful relationships, rather than having lots of one-off contacts. In practice this has meant committing to organisations for four years and then reviewing, rather than reviewing every year.

The benefit of making use of personal contacts where these are available to us

As a church we are likely to be far more motivated to support organisations and causes if one or more of us have a personal contact with representatives of those organisations.

A spread of support throughout the year rather than bunched

This is not about our financial giving but about when in the year we invite representatives, focus on prayer etc. Clearly it is better that we do not have a burst of mission interest in one part of the year and then a dearth in the rest.

A combination of evangelism and social concern, but usually organisations which are Christian in ethos

In our support it is good to have a mix between causes that are more overtly evangelistic in their focus and those with more of a social concern (although we will not necessarily want to make too much of a distinction between these two things). However, as a church we should generally be supporting initiatives led by Christians. After all, if we don't do that, who will?

4. How much should we give?

This (as discussion at many PCCs has proved) is a difficult question on which to reach agreement because there is a diversity of opinion among us. However, what we don't want to keep on doing is having a discussion every year. Rather, we need to agree the principle that will guide our practice. To this end I should like to recommend the following: **an aspirational target of ten percent of the previous year's actual regular giving including tax recovery.**

The following points of clarification/explanation need to be noted:

1. By 'regular giving' we intend to include standing orders, the regular giving envelopes, cash placed in the plate each week, and cash given through the orange gift aid envelopes available in church. Income from the letting of rooms, one-off collections for special causes, etc would therefore be excluded.
2. This is stated as an 'aspirational target' rather than a fixed amount in recognition of the fact that our financial obligations must come before outward giving. After payment of the

Outward Giving we should always be left with a General Fund balance greater than our Reserves Requirement (of three months General Fund expenditure). This will be according to the best forecast available of the year end situation as at the end of October (assuming we make our Outward Giving decision at the November PCC).

3. Many argue that ten percent is biblical. Whether, though, this Old Testament command exactly applies to us today is another matter! That said, many Christians are content to work with this as a guideline.
4. We refer to the previous year because this means decisions can be based on actual known amounts rather than guestimates of what the amounts might be available at the end of the year in which a decision is taken.
5. If, during the year, the PCC wishes to support a cause/person with a one-off gift, and this support is not to come from a special collection but rather from the PCC's income, this one-off gift should be included within the aspirational target of ten percent (in which case the money available to be distributed later in the year to our nominated main charities would be reduced).
6. As we do now, we would continue to confirm in November the amount that the recipients of our planned giving are each to receive. Doing this in November will enable the PCC to take account of other outward giving that may have happened during year as per previous paragraph. (Hopefully, with a principle established, the PCC's responsibility in November will be more akin to *confirmation* than *decision*!)
7. Neil, Peter and I are of the opinion that each year we should aspire to transfer five percent of regular giving (same definition as above) to our Designated Fabric Fund to build up the balance on that fund to cover significant future fabric repairs and maintenance (e.g. periodically painting the church buildings). This, after all, is also part of our stewardship of the church's resources. As we are suggesting ought to be the case for Outward Giving, after making the transfer we should always be left with a General Fund balance greater than our Reserves Requirement (of three months General Fund expenditure). Although this is not an Outward Giving matter, this proposal if adopted could reduce our Outward Giving as our recommendation would be that this five percent is set aside prior to decisions about Outward Giving.

5. Conclusion

The PCC is asked to agree:

1. The principle to guide our practice when it comes to Outward Giving is an aspirational target of ten percent of the previous year's actual giving including tax recovery.
2. We aspire to transfer five percent of regular giving to our Designated Fabric Fund prior to determining our outward giving figure.

The above policy was presented to, and agreed by, the PCC in November 2014

3. The PCC enhanced the above policy at their meeting on 11 March 2019 as follows:

From 2020 an agreed percentage of regular giving income shall be transferred to a designated outward giving fund, in monthly instalments, subject to the Treasurer alerting the PCC if our three months reserves policy is at risk.

Alan Jenkins in consultation with Neil McDonald, Peter Lomax and Chris Holloway (November 2014 and March 2019)