

Giving thanks: why appreciation matters

The important 2009 Church of England report *Giving for Life* identified thanking givers as a key stewardship task each year. Appreciation is a warm courtesy serving a strategic purpose. This document describes the importance and practicalities of thank you.

Thank you is more than simple courtesy expressing gratitude, although it must be that. Paul's letters frequently express thanksgiving for his readers as prayer and worship (Eph. 1:15-16, Phil. 1:3, Col. 1:3, 12 I Cor. 1:4). Our letters of thanks express gratitude for a gift but do more as well. Appreciation is important to Giving in Grace and to stewardship best practice.

Prompt and meaningful acknowledgement

Returning their response form for most people has a right and proper emotional element to it. People *feel* they want to support their church. But at some point reality and rational reflection kick in: *Can I afford this? How will I do it? Will my giving make any difference? Is anyone else responding?* The thank you letter addresses these important questions.

Here's an interesting starter for ten from Penelope Burk, author of *Donor-Centered Fundraising*: 'The majority of donors [Ed: 87%] we studied said that indefinite loyalty was the product of receiving *prompt and meaningful acknowledgement* whenever they gave and getting meaningful and measurable results on their last gift at work before being asked for another one.'

The gift and the giver

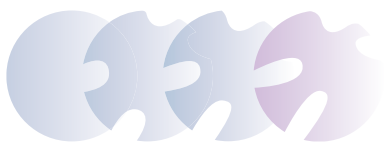
The thank you letter communicates both prompt thanks for the *gift* and appreciation of the *giver*. There is a subtle difference between thanks and appreciation. The balance here is important and seems to be Paul's approach in Philippians 4:17-18. The gift certainly matters; it more than meets Paul's need and he is thankful. But beyond the gift Paul appreciates the givers, the spiritual credit to their account, the God-centered nature of their actions and their partnership with him, unique among the gentile churches (4:15) Those who supported Paul and those who respond to Giving in Grace are not passive givers but partners in mission and advocates of something that matters and makes a difference.

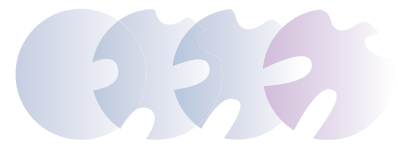
Feeling and thinking

Second, the personal nature of a thank you letter affirms the emotional part of each person's response, the desire to help the church, to play a part. But the letter also underlines the *rational* basis of the response. The Giving in Grace challenge is being met and financial security, ministry and mission are being established by the giving of our congregation. In short, the individual's response is making a real difference.

Pauline Burk indicates that 'meaningful and measurable results' help givers stay loyal and give again. Now the thank you letters function as the first, personal, update on the progress of Giving in Grace in the church. Respondents discover they are not the only ones giving: this initiative has momentum and they are partners in a cause with other people. Practically speaking, the update part of thank you letters will need to be tweaked as time goes by to reflect the responses coming in.

THANK YOU





Intending and acting

Finally, the thank you letter helps to bridge the natural gap between our best intentions (what we say in our response form) and actually *doing* what we said we would do. We have all been there! Just by saying thank you we encourage people to do what they said they would do and put their intention into action. Also, the letter is just one of the ways in which we express our appreciation. The pulpit, notice sheet, magazine, website, Twitter and Facebook are all other ways in which we say thank you.

Top tips for thanking

The thank you letter should be prompt and personal so send it **within one week** of receiving the response form. A prompt letter says your response is noticed and valued. An editable template letter of thanks can be found under *Preparing to Follow Up* at the *Thank You Letters* tab:

- Thank *everyone* for their response. Someone who says they cannot give any more is making a personal response, so we say thank you.
- Keep it personal: handwrite the greeting and the sign off in blue ink; print each letter, never sign photocopies; write 'I' not 'We' letters; handwrite the envelope – avoid impersonal mailing labels.
- Thank you means thank you. Don't clutter this simple but important message. Don't shortcut your admin or delay thank you letters by adding in information such as Gift Aid forms. Responding to information requests is an entirely different thing.
- Never, ever, let your thank you read like a veiled request to give more. In fundraising circles this is a debated issue but not here. We are not seeking a second gift from someone we don't know. We have that personal relationship and a response so we want to thank and build on that.
- Update the thank you letter as responses come in so that the person knows that their gift is part of something positive. Keep the language real, avoid clichés, churchy jargon or overstated promises.
- Emphasise the ministry and mission made possible by giving pledges. This is not about bills being paid. Tell people what you are now able to achieve

And remember: having thanked your givers once, make sure you thank them every year – the good practice that *Giving for Life* commends.

Pauline Burk's top tips

At the risk of some repetition, here are Pauline Burk's top 20 tips for thank you letters from her book:

1. The letter is a real letter, not a pre-printed card.
2. It is personally addressed.
3. It has a personal salutation (no 'Dear Friend').
4. It is personally signed.
5. It is personally signed by someone from the highest ranks of the organisation.
6. It makes specific reference to the intended use of the funds.
7. It indicates approximately when the donor will receive an update.
8. It includes the name and phone number of a staff person whom the donor can contact at any time or an invitation to contact the letter writer directly.



9. It does not ask for another gift.
10. It does not ask the donor to do anything (like complete an enclosed survey, for example).
11. It acknowledges the donor's past giving, where applicable.
12. It contains no spelling or grammatical errors.
13. It has an overall 'can do', positive tone as opposed to a handwringing one.
14. It communicates the excitement, gratitude, and inner warmth of the writer.
15. It grabs the reader's attention in the opening sentence.
16. It speaks directly to the donor.
17. It does not continue to 'sell'.
18. It is concise – no more than two short paragraphs.
19. It is received by the donor promptly.
20. Plus, in some circumstances, the letter is handwritten.

Notes and Resources

i See www.parishresources.org.uk/giving for the Giving for Life resources