

# First to the Lord

## - An Introduction to Christian Giving



Diocese of  
NORWICH

### *Why is this important?*

The starting point for any discussion on Christian Giving is generosity; not our generosity but God's - God's generosity to us. The good news of the gospel is that God is generous; extraordinarily, extravagantly and sacrificially generous. And perhaps the most amazing thing of all is that we are on the receiving end of the total generosity of God's love and goodness. Indeed, all that we have comes from God.

*Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours.... Riches and Honour come from you... For all things come from you.*  
1 Chronicles 29: 11,12,14

The challenge for us as Christians is in the way in which we respond to God's generosity. How should we be using our time, energy, skills, money and possessions? Everything that we have should be offered back to God to be used in his service; devoted to the work of his kingdom, and to living and sharing the gospel. And 'everything' includes our money. The apostle Paul explains how the Macedonian Church responded to the same challenge:

*They voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints - and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us..*  
2 Corinthians 8: 3-5

Another key aspect of God's love and generosity is that he has given us, his church, all that we need to do the work that he has set before us. This means, in fact, that we already have all the money that we need. The problem is that we would rather keep it to ourselves; we are reluctant to give a proportion back to him, for the work of His Kingdom and for the ministry and mission of our church.

The aim of the 'First to the Lord' Christian Giving Programme is to overcome this reluctance and to encourage all members of our church in the Norwich Diocese to treat their giving seriously; to acknowledge it as an integral part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ; and **to give to God what is right and not what is left.**

### *Why is it so important now?*

This is a time when the dioceses of the Church of England face severe financial challenges. At the end of 2002 our Diocese was nearly £650,000 in the red; and this was just the latest of several years of operating deficits. Clearly, this is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue. It is also a situation that challenges our attitudes to giving.

There are a number of factors that have tended to suppress our giving levels and which have discouraged a generous response to God's love. These include:

- an over reliance over many years on financial subsidies from the Church Commissioners; subsidies that are now diminishing rapidly
- false assumptions about the wealth of the Church of England

- a lack of understanding of the real costs of mission and ministry
- little teaching about giving as a regular part of a church's nurture programme. Giving is usually only referred to when there is a crisis
- an attitude of 'giving to the church' rather than 'we are the Church – this is the money that we need to do the work to which we are called'.
- giving which is tokenism – the loose change, the bit left over

It could be argued that the financial challenges that we face are really spiritual challenges. We find ways of financing the things that we really want. Do we really have a vision for the mission of the church in the Diocese? Do we really believe in what we are doing? Do we give, not grudgingly because we're asked to, but generously because we know and love the God who has given so generously to us?

### ***What are the characteristics of Christian Giving?***

The New Testament provides us with some clear guidance. Our giving should be:

**proportional** – (2 Cor. 8: 1-5) - a thought about, prayed about proportion of what we have. Scripture urges us to tithe; to give back to God a tenth of all that we earn. Our Diocese recommends that we aim at giving 5% of our net income to and through the church.

**planned and regular** – (1 Cor. 16:1-2) - set aside and given weekly or monthly

**generous** - (Romans 12:8) – a real response to the God who gives and loves to give

**cheerful** - (2 Cor. 9: 7) – given simply, openly and willingly; delighting in being able to support the Mission and Ministry of the church.

From time to time we all need to consider how our giving measures up to these benchmarks. This should be done thoughtfully and prayerfully before God, in the knowledge that no one is going to tell us how much to give. It is for each one of us, guided by the Holy Spirit, to set a level of giving to God and His church that is appropriate for us.

*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.*  
2 Corinthians 9: 7,8

### **The 'First to the Lord' Christian Giving Programme**

The 'First to the Lord' Programme aims to promote the understanding and practice of Christian Giving in a number of ways – by:

- providing individual and group study materials
- identifying worship and liturgical resources
- supporting Christian Giving Reviews with advice, guidance and materials
- publicising the successes and learning that occur as churches meet the challenge.

***If you would like any more information on the programme, or if you wish to make use of any of its services then contact Alan Muff, Parish Finance Assistant at Diocesan House, 109 Dereham Road, Easton, NR9 5ES (tel: 01603 880853. E-mail: [alanmuff@norwich.anglican.org](mailto:alanmuff@norwich.anglican.org)). You can also find a range of materials in the Parish Finance Section of the Diocesan Website ([www.norwich.anglican.org](http://www.norwich.anglican.org))***