

Charitable Giving and Mission Partnerships

Discussion paper for PCC

1. Why this matters

As a church, we do not exist simply to sustain our own ministry, staffing and buildings. The gospel gives us a much wider horizon.

We have received generously from God in Christ, and part of faithful Christian stewardship is therefore to use what he has entrusted to us for the spread of the gospel, the strengthening of Christ's church and the practical care of people in need.

Charitable giving and mission partnership can help St Peter's to share in ministry we could never undertake ourselves. They can also help keep us outward-looking, deepen our prayer for the wider church and world, and give the church family real relationships with Christians serving in other places and contexts.

Our giving beyond St Peter's should therefore be more than a collection of worthy donations. Ideally, it should express something of our gospel priorities, our Christian responsibilities and the kind of church we want to be.

2. What we have been doing

St Peter's has continued to give to a range of Christian and charitable causes, locally, nationally and internationally.

In recent years this has included organisations such as Compassion UK, Simeon's Trustees, Clergy Support Trust, Beacon House, Bridgeway, Samaritan's Purse and GAFCON, alongside occasional responses to particular relief appeals.

There is much that is positive here. We have continued to give money away rather than allowing all our resources to be absorbed by our own needs, and the causes supported reflect a genuine range of gospel ministry and practical care.

The PCC also began to address this more deliberately in 2022, when it agreed in principle that mission partnership should involve not only financial support but also prayer and communication. That was a helpful starting point, but in practice we did not take the process much further or establish a clear framework for how partnerships should be chosen, supported or reviewed.

There has also been a desire to consider supporting individuals, couples or families engaged directly in Christian mission, rather than thinking only in terms of organisations. Such relationships may offer particular opportunities for prayer, encouragement, communication and a genuine sense of partnership.

Overall, however, our approach has remained somewhat haphazard. Some support has arisen from longstanding custom, some from particular relationships or opportunities, and some in response to immediate needs or appeals. We have not always been clear about why we support one cause rather than another, or what distinguishes a genuine mission partnership from a one-off donation.

3. Charitable giving and our stewardship culture

A further consideration is how this fits within the stewardship culture we are trying to build at St Peter's.

We have increasingly encouraged members of the church family to see regular planned giving as the normal way of supporting Christian ministry. Frequent additional one-off appeals can work against that message by creating uncertainty about what people are being asked to support and by making giving feel reactive rather than intentional.

That does not mean we should never respond to an emergency or an exceptional opportunity. There will be occasions when doing so is entirely right. But it suggests that one-off appeals should be used thoughtfully and relatively sparingly, and that most of our charitable giving should sit within a more coherent and planned approach.

4. How might we improve this?

One possibility would be to distinguish more clearly between different kinds of giving. For example:

- Core mission partnerships – sustained relationships with organisations, individuals, couples or families involved in gospel ministry, normally involving regular financial support, prayer, communication and some meaningful relationship with St Peter's.
- Local charitable partnerships – organisations doing important work in Colchester or nearby which we particularly want to support.
- Occasional or emergency giving – responses to disasters, crises or exceptional opportunities, used carefully so that they complement rather than undermine our wider stewardship approach.

This would not mean that every relationship has to look the same. It might, however, help us to be clearer about what we are trying to achieve and why.

5. Things we might want to consider

As we think about this, some useful questions might include:

- What do we want our charitable giving to achieve?
- What should distinguish a genuine mission partnership from simply making a donation?
- How closely does a particular cause connect with St Peter's gospel priorities and Christian convictions?
- Is there a particular reason why we should support this work rather than another equally worthwhile cause?
- How important should prayer, communication and personal relationship be alongside financial support?
- Should we deliberately seek opportunities to support missionaries, couples or families with whom the church family can build a relationship?
- What balance should there be between local, national and international work?
- What balance should there be between explicitly evangelistic or church-based ministry and practical care for people in need?
- Would it be better to support a smaller number of partners more substantially and intentionally?
- How should we honour longstanding relationships while leaving room for new opportunities?
- How should charitable giving reinforce the wider stewardship culture of St Peter's?
- How often should our partnerships and giving arrangements be reviewed?

6. How much should we give?

At some later stage, the PCC may want to consider whether our charitable giving should be guided by a broad percentage of church income rather than simply by whatever absolute sum happens to be available in a particular year.

For example, churches sometimes work with principles such as 5% or 10% of income being given beyond their own immediate ministry.

Those figures are mentioned only as illustrations of the kind of approach we might eventually consider. This paper is not asking the PCC to discuss or agree an absolute amount of money, or indeed a particular percentage. That conversation would be much more useful once we have first agreed what we are trying to achieve and what principles should guide our giving.

7. A possible process

The purpose of this paper is therefore not to make decisions at this meeting, but to begin the conversation.

A sensible next process might be to:

1. review what we currently give and the reasons behind it;
2. agree some broad principles for charitable giving and mission partnership;
3. consider our existing relationships against those principles;
4. identify any important gaps or new opportunities;
5. consider how giving beyond St Peter's should fit within our wider stewardship approach;
6. bring a more developed proposal back to the PCC at a later meeting.

The aim would not be to create a complicated new policy. It would be to build on the beginnings made in 2022 and make our giving more intentional, more relational, more generous and more clearly shaped by the gospel.