

CHELMSFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **STEWARDSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY**
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I. INTRODUCTION

“In our transformation to become more like Christ, and as we seek to serve Him, we need to consider how we will use the time, skills, money and resources at our disposal. There is no shortage of biblical material. Over 2,300 verses relate to money, wealth and possessions and one third of Jesus’ parables relate to these topics.” (Parish Resources Website)

At the March Synod the Bishop of Chelmsford spoke about stewardship with reference to his experiences of our partner dioceses in Kenya. Today’s Synod is set in the context of the [re]source conference – an event intended to encourage and equip members of our Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) in their duties.

This item draws these two themes together by inviting Synod to note some of the innovative tools to assist stewardship and encourage our PCCs to explore the opportunities available.

The internet age has opened up many different ways for people and organisations to interact, to shop, to donate, etc. Some of these opportunities are now being opened up to churches, and arguably, to respond to the needs and preferences of the communities we serve, churches should at least be exploring whether these opportunities can help local mission and ministry.

The following sections highlight some examples under the headings of information, buying and giving. This is not intended to be comprehensive, but seeks to encourage discussion.

2. SIMPLE, ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

The Parish Resources website (www.parishresources.org.uk) offers practical guidance for incumbents and PCC members on a variety of topics as illustrated by the home page screenshot below. It is a really useful one-stop shop for PCC members on governance, finance, stewardship and other matters. It either offers resources directly or signposts to other reputable sources. Parish Resources also offers a monthly e-bulletin with hints and tips.

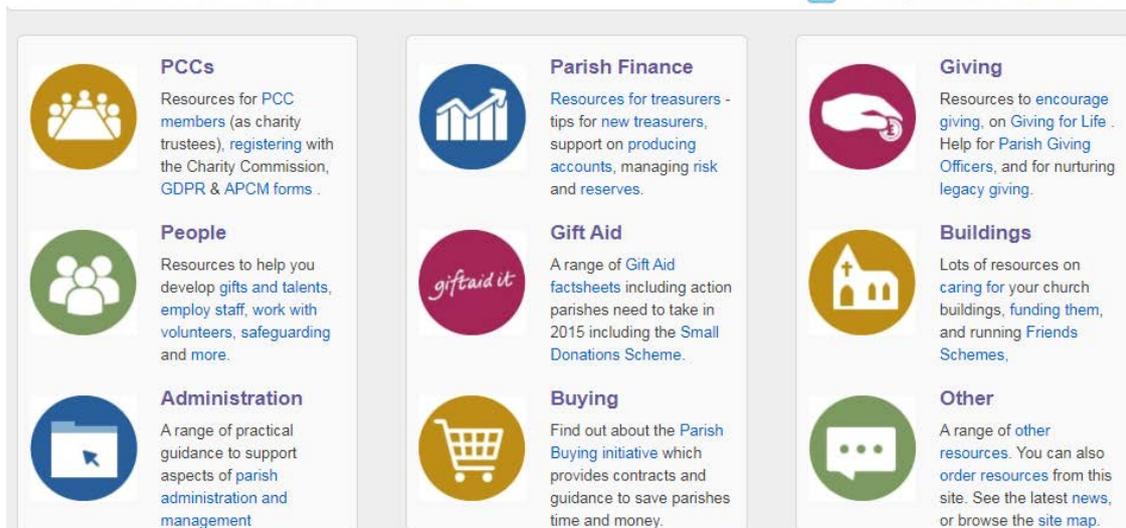


The banner features the 'Parish Resources' logo on the left, a navigation menu with links for Home, News, PCC / APCMs, Finance, Giving, Buying, People, Administration, Buildings, Other, and Order Resources. Below the menu is a photograph of a group of people in blue t-shirts. On the right side of the banner, there is a red call-to-action box that says 'Encouraging generous giving' with a 'Read more' button.

This site is provided by the Church of England's National Stewardship & Resources team and offers over 400 pages of resources (web & pdf) to support all aspects of stewardship, administration and management in the local church, as well as links to other sites and pages of interest.

If you have any questions or feedback, please [contact us](#).

 Follow [@ParishResources](#) on Twitter.



The grid contains nine resource categories, each with an icon and a brief description:

- PCCs**: Resources for PCC members (as charity trustees), registering with the Charity Commission, GDPR & APCM forms.
- Parish Finance**: Resources for treasurers - tips for new treasurers, support on producing accounts, managing risk and reserves.
- Giving**: Resources to encourage giving, on Giving for Life, Help for Parish Giving Officers, and for nurturing legacy giving.
- People**: Resources to help you develop gifts and talents, employ staff, work with volunteers, safeguarding and more.
- Gift Aid**: A range of Gift Aid factsheets including action parishes need to take in 2015 including the Small Donations Scheme.
- Buildings**: Lots of resources on caring for your church buildings, funding them, and running Friends Schemes.
- Administration**: A range of practical guidance to support aspects of parish administration and management.
- Buying**: Find out about the Parish Buying initiative which provides contracts and guidance to save parishes time and money.
- Other**: A range of other resources. You can also order resources from this site. See the latest news, or browse the site map.

3. BUYING AND SAVING TOGETHER

The Parish Buying service (www.parishbuying.org.uk) was set up by the Church of England to enable parishes to buy with confidence, to leverage the collective purchasing power of churches working together, while respecting the sovereign status of every Parochial Church Council. It seeks to help PCCs save money and save volunteer time.

Parish Buying doesn't claim to deliver the very best price all of the time, but it does seek to offer a fair price on fair terms. For example, photocopier contracts are notoriously complicated – those available through Parish Buying are pre-checked to ensure parishes are not trapped by the small print. There is a dedicated customer service team used to working with church volunteers able to support the resolution of issues if they do arise.

There are approximately 350 registered Parish Buying users in the Diocese of Chelmsford which is equivalent to 75% of PCCs (though in practice there are probably some parishes with multiple registered users). This is a comparatively low level of take up for a diocese of our size.

The most significant contract offered through Parish Buying is the Energy Basket for gas and electricity supplies. The price of energy is fixed for a year, at the end of which parishes are able to leave the basket – though in practice not many do and there are currently over 4,600 meters in the basket. From 2018 the **electricity in the basket is**

100% green, from renewable sources in the UK and this has been achieved without a premium. It is therefore a really good way for churches to contribute to *Shrinking the Footprint* with relatively little effort.

Synod members may also recall that in this diocese parishes have access to a utility benchmarking/brokerage service via CFS. This predates Parish Buying but remains available. CFS can assist parishes in benchmarking their current utility costs and finding the best spot deals available. More details are available from the diocesan finance office.

4. NEW WAYS TO GIVE TO YOUR CHURCH

In addition to traditional forms of giving such as the collection plate, weekly envelopes and standing orders there are now new methods of giving which may better suit some people, for example those who prefer not to carry cash or are unable to attend worship on a weekly basis.

Parish Giving Scheme (PGS)

The Parish Giving Scheme (www.parishgivingscheme.org.uk/) is a great innovation allowing giving to parishes via direct debit. PGS handles the gift aid recovery on a monthly basis so that the gift and any associated gift aid is paid to the church regularly and automatically. Over half those donors signed up to PGS choose to allow the value of their gift to increase by inflation annually. PGS also enables donors to remain anonymous. Average giving through PGS is typically higher than that outside the scheme.

Around 60 parishes in this diocese are signed up to the scheme, but there are ten deaneries with none or just one parish signed up. A small number of parishes have moved almost all their donors onto PGS and this has been transformative for their finances.

Experience shows that PGS is most effective when introduced alongside an active stewardship and giving campaign, and indeed introducing the new *method* of giving can provide an opportunity to discuss the *nature* and *theology* of giving.

The Mission & Ministry Advisers and Director of Finance can support parishes in stewardship and exploring PGS.

Card Readers

Following a national trial, debit/credit card readers are now available to churches through the Parish Buying service (www.parishbuying.org.uk/categories/card-readers). There is a small up-front cost for the reader but crucially, and unlike deals available through banks in the past, there is *no monthly cost*. This makes card readers viable for many more churches.

Churches in the trial typically used them to support sales, events or one-off giving – for example as an alternative to the collection plate at weddings.

5. CONCLUSION

The world is changing: the innovations described in this paper and others open up new possibilities for parishes to help them in their stewardship of resources. A number of these innovations also seek to make it easier for volunteers, for example by providing templates, handling gift aid directly through PGS, or using the energy basket.

6. MOTION

'This Synod welcome innovations such as the Parish Giving Scheme and encourage Parochial Church Councils and Bishop's Mission Orders to explore how these opportunities can support them in their mission and ministry.'