

Let's talk about Friends Groups

3rd August 2021

What are Friends groups for?

Here are just some of the benefits of having a Friends group:

- Chance to involve those who don't go to church
- Involving more people into church life
- Relieving the PCC of major worries about finding money for repairs
- Keeping the church central to the parish life and opening it to all in the community
- Reaching people beyond the local area
- Promoting the church building as valuable heritage and witness to local history

Types of Friends Groups

- Two different ways these can be run
 - A scheme set up under the PCC's authority

 - An independent organisation with its own charitable status and its own constitution

Types of Friends Groups

A scheme set up under the PCC's authority

– Pros

- Subcommittee of PCC and benefits from existing structure (e.g. charity status, gift aid, no AGM required)
- Events and personnel will be covered under existing PCC insurance

– Cons

- May not attract a wider membership, particularly leadership, if perceived as a subcommittee
- Organised by existing church members
- Officers must be on the electoral roll

Types of Friends Groups

An independent organisation with its own charitable status and its own constitution

– Pros

- May attract wider community support as seen as separate from the religious activity of the church, it may be easier to appoint a patron
- Organisation does not fall to existing church members

– Cons

- More complex to establish (requires own constitution, bank account and officers)
- Would need to be registered with the Charity Commission and ensure accounts are prepared in compliance with the Charities S.O.R.P
- Separate insurance would be required for activities
- May fall out of the control of the PCC
- Is divorced from the core purpose of the meeting

If under the PCC's authority

- PCC treasurer should have oversight of the finances
 - May be a signatory on the bank account and be the recipient for bank statements
 - They would either prepare the accounts for the friends group or oversee any accounts produced. The friends of would be consolidated within the PCC accounts as a restricted fund

If an independent charity

- PCC should have representation as part of the constitution (ex-officio appointments)

Other Considerations

If under the PCC's authority

- What delegated powers does the committee have when raising funds and issuing grants?

If not under the PCC's authority

- The Friends of would not have the power to commission any work on the church themselves as it is the PCC which has responsibility for the building
- Ensure that it is clear when work is undertaken how much of this will be funded by the Friends and agree the timescale for any grant to be issued (e.g. on receipt of invoice)

How to do it!

How do we tackle the job of setting up a Friends group?

- Find the key people
- Hold the first committee meeting
- Organise a public meeting

It is very important to consider the relationship between the Friends Group and the PCC!

The constitution and transparency in communication play critical roles.

Practical considerations

Setting up a bank account

Writing a constitution

- Name
- Objects and powers
- Membership
- Honorary officers
- Executive committee
- Meetings
- Nomination of honorary officers and committee members
- Rules of procedure at meetings
- Finance
- Alterations to constitution
- Dissolution
- Notices

Fundraising and activities

Ideas for activities are only limited by what your imagination and organisational skills can stretch to!



Degrees of ambition

- A Friends group can be set up to look after the building (maintenance, cleaning parties, looking after the churchyard) rather than necessarily raise funds
- Income from Friends' subscriptions, legacies and sale of booklets and other items
- In addition to/instead of regular contributions by the Friends: coffee mornings, community lunches, sales, BBQs, concerts, lectures, walks, quizzes, garden parties, wine evenings, carols/hymns in a local pub, bat nights, birdwatching
- Large events that require quite a bit of work and coordination: open gardens, festivals, car shows, Christmas markets
- You don't have to stay local: Friends groups can organise trips to other churches, cathedrals or theatres for its members

Case studies -Ludham

- Established in 1993 and has been going strongly since
- Set up specifically to look after the church building and the churchyard
- Membership subscription is low cost because members are asked to help with fundraising events too
- Once in two years, the Friends organise the Ludham Open Gardens Day, which, in addition to the gardens themselves, also includes multiple refreshment stations, boats taking the visitors across the river and a major classic car display
- The open gardens alone make over £10,000; it was over £15,000 in 2019
- This church relies on efficient parking (over 700 cars) to run these events

Case studies –Forncett St Peter

- The Friends were launched in October 2019 in preparation for an NLHF bid
- Despite most of the time since then being spent under constraints of Covid the Friends have raised over £13,000
- More events are planned now, including a BBQ, a lecture, art days, open tower days and lunch parties
- The number of Friends is now over 100
- There is no subscription; instead, the Friends are asked for their time and skills to help save the church and are invited to events
- A JustGiving page has been set up and a Facebook page created

Case studies – Christ Church Eaton

- Major fundraising was needed in 2012 to pay for organ repairs, south aisle reordering and west window restoration
- All projects are now complete but the congregation suffered from the fundraising fatigue, so the Friends were established in January 2018
- The group follows this principle: 'Your friends are those for whom your church building and churchyard have some meaning. A Friends scheme is designed to provide activities and communications that sustain and develop that meaning for them. '
- The Friends exist as a sub-committee of the PCC
- There are annual or lifetime subscriptions
- Regular newsletters are produced
- The profit from the Open Gardens is shared with St Martin's Housing Trust
- The Festival of Angels in 2018 raised over £,1000

Case Studies - Hemblington

- The group was launched in April 2016 to help protect and preserve the church building, to promote it as a place of interest and tranquillity, to foster public interest in history and to support the local community
- Subscriptions are £10 p/a for individuals, £20 for households, £100 for life members
- The Friends include life members and have attracted corporate sponsorship
- Transparency and communication within the committee and with the local community are incredibly important
- Organise annual lectures by prominent academics, the annual Big Churchyard Birdwatch, tours of local sites of interest, as well as music events and quizzes
- Have an active Facebook group

Thanks and Q&A