

# Archdeacons' Papers

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## Establishing a Friend's Scheme for your church.

### WHAT IS A *FRIENDS* SCHEME ?

The *Friends* of a local parish church usually comprise people who are basically sympathetic to the church, but who for one reason or another do not attend regular worship. Sometimes, however, others who are regularly involved in the church belong as well. In a few cases where a church is visited by the public in substantial numbers, the *Friends* may also be supported by those from outside the parish who, having seen the church, wish to offer support.

The *Friends* work alongside the PCC and help finance specific projects, or routine maintenance, through special fundraising activities as agreed with the PCC. *Friends* are like buttresses in an ancient church, supporting the building from the outside while the inside is held firm by pillars which are the congregation. In many small communities, both pillars and buttresses are required to hold the church building together.

### HOW TO START A *FRIENDS* SCHEME

You may have already decided that your church does not require buttresses, only pillars, and that is fine. Many churches, however, do think that they need as much goodwill and support as possible from those who wish the local church to prosper, but who are not regular members. In thinking about a *Friends* scheme for your church, it is important to avoid some common difficulties, while tailoring a scheme that really works for you.

#### Good relations between pillars and buttresses

One of the features of church life sometimes is that people can volunteer to help with specific things, but only on their terms. There is after all a wide range of individual opinion about what is best for the church. It may seem rather ungracious if the PCC wants to manage

volunteers on its terms, but this is essential if effective work on projects for the common good is to be possible. It's vital, therefore, that the *Friends* do not take on a life of their own; they must not become a group dedicated simply to being buttresses ! Their work for the local church must be seen as part of its wider purpose which has been agreed by the priest and PCC.

#### Some pitfalls and some good practice

- from the start, the objects and aims of the *Friends* , and their relationship to the structures of the PCC should be agreed and set out clearly.
- the *Friends* Committee should include some PCC members (and possibly the priest) as well as people from the wider community. In terms of responsibility it should essentially be a sub-committee of the PCC. In this way, the PCC will be glad of the *Friends*' support, but will retain the right to plan the way in which any money they raised is spent.
- that isn't to say that the *Friends* can't suggest possible projects, but they will not be able to dictate to the PCC what they are prepared to fund. and the order in which work should be done. In larger churches *Friends* may have a specific responsibility for supporting music, furnishings, artwork, etc.
- the PCC should receive regular reports from the *Friends* about their activities.
- proper accounts should be presented by the *Friends* to the PCC treasurer, and incorporated into the Annual Accounts. Again, it is important, for reasons already stated, to avoid a situation where the *Friends*' finances are dealt with, and accounted for, separately from those of the PCC.
- Remember the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure states that the church buildings

are primarily there to be “a centre for worship and mission” and the PCC must safeguard that.

- **The difference between preservation and conservation.** This must be explained from the outset if misunderstandings are to be avoided. **Preservation** is about keeping church buildings “in aspic”. Such a desire is often based on the mistaken idea that every church has stayed exactly the same until now. But in reality parish churches, like private homes, have always been changing in every generation. The notion of preservation must be strongly resisted. **Conservation**, however, accepts that church buildings evolve as they adapt for a variety of uses down the centuries, whilst remaining what they are, ancient structures, given to us by the past, in very particular need of care and respect.
- Those involved with a *Friends* scheme must therefore be concerned for conservation rather than preservation. They must not become a pressure group against the local worshipping community’s natural desire to respond to present need. A living church community will always want to move on, and possibly adapt the building when the time is right, as local congregations have always done down the centuries.
- The issue of subscriptions needs to be handled sensitively. It’s good if both annual, and lifetime, membership can be offered, with suitable concessions to certain groups. The sums agreed need to be adjusted annually. It is important to speak openly about legacies
- It may in some cases be a good idea to persuade one or two local well-known individuals to act as Patrons of the *Friends* This can help to boost the profile of the scheme.
- It is worth considering a *Newsletter* to all members of the *Friends*, especially if there are some members who live outside the parish, and an annual summer gathering or party, with a suitable service if appropriate, often works well.
- Where *Friends* fund-raising events take place, it is essential that at least some regular members of the church attend.
- Inevitably, there will be differences of opinion about how money is to be best

spent, but if there are suitable structures in place, the issue of ‘control’ should be minimised.

### What can *Friends* do?

They can contribute towards the repairs, and even the insurance, of the church building. They may offer to provide help with community facilities – toilets, kitchen equipment, meeting rooms, etc. - which will enhance the church building’s ability to serve the whole parish, and not just on Sundays.

They may also contribute with their labour. They may be the ones who help to complete grant application forms, or who assist with all kinds of minor projects or repairs. They may offer to run churchyard working parties during the summer. .

### How should *Friends* operate?

- They must be businesslike and properly organised.
- In spite of the caveats expressed above, if it is decided that they won’t act under the auspices of the PCC, they can be registered as a charity. This is a relatively straightforward process, though it brings with it the need for public financial scrutiny and control. Guidance on establishing a new charity can be found on the Charity Commissioners website. [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)
- They must have their own constitution, with mechanisms for electing officers. The links between the PCC and *Friends* must be made clear in this document. Where a separate body from the PCC is envisaged, a specimen constitution can be found in the appendix for this paper, or on the Diocesan website [www.ely.anglican.org](http://www.ely.anglican.org).

Is a *Friends* scheme right for your Church? There are plenty of parishes in the diocese with experience to share. Please contact the archdeacons for information, or ask in your deanery.

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