CHALMERS
CHURCH EDINBURGH

Review of giving

February 2025

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REACH - BUILD - TRAIN - SEND

Timing for a review of giving

Recognising the various sensitivities which often apply (financial climate, very wide range of financial circumstances across the church family, and others) we always consider carefully and prayerfully the timing of major reviews of giving, and timing for this exercise is no exception.

Because of God's goodness to us over a good number of years now (for which we are hugely grateful, and do not take for granted) we are in something of a routine of undertaking giving reviews only every two years or so, which seems to be appropriate and usually necessary considering our changing financial circumstances, need and the changing size/composition of the church family. At this time we have financial need to get us back-on-track with ongoing running costs, and also additional gospel partner ministry we'd like to be able to support (continuing to push-forward with ministry as much as we reasonably and sensibly can).

While we are encouraged that this timing for a giving review is God's and we trust Him entirely for a good outcome as we go forward with it together, it is incumbent on us all to be thoughtful, measured and sensitive in what we say, and what we are heard to say, recognising the diversity of people and circumstances in our congregation (perhaps more diverse than ever before, a wonderful thing for which we are very thankful). We therefore listen primarily to what God says in His Word about giving, and each of us responds to that in respect of our own individual circumstances as God through His Spirit leads and guides us.

And in all things, including in our financial giving, our primary motivation is that in what we do God would be glorified, and His kingdom extended.

Current financial situation, needs and (God-willing) increased gospel ministry support

Looking at our General Fund, through which income and expenditure for our main activities are run, we finished our last Financial Year in a very satisfactory financial position, with particular items worthy of note being:

1. income of £595,000, being £50k ahead of budget;
2. expenditure modestly (£20k) more than budget;
3. a net surplus for the year of £30,000 against a break-even target; and
4. year-end reserves of £88,000 against a minimum target of £50k.

We give thanks to the Lord for this outcome, and continue to marvel at His goodness to us (financially and otherwise).

And as Elders we give thanks to the church family for sacrificial and generous giving, very widely; important and hugely encouraging.

The cost of running Chalmers and its ministries each year is significant, approximately £525k before repayment of mortgage capital. Our main costs are:

1. staffing--£222k
2. property--£168k
3. general running costs--£90k
4. mission--£45k

On top of mortgage capital repayments of £40k per annum we also pay interest of £60k pa to "service" the mortgage, a lot of money we would love to spend on other ministry efforts and in the longer-term God-willing we will; a necessary cost that reminds us of the history of Chalmers and the efforts/sacrifices of many to get us to where we are today.

Costs are kept constantly under review and the view of the Elders/Finance Team is that we run a pretty "tight ship" considering the extent and nature of the ministry activities in which we're engaged.

A significant amount of the money given to Chalmers is given through Chalmers to the wider church, including for example training and sending out gospel workers through the MAP and LIT programmes as well as supporting (national and global) mission partners, all of which we're privileged and delighted to be able to do.

The annual costs of Chalmers are met almost entirely by giving from the church family. For the year ended August 2024, which we refer to as Financial Year 23/24, income of £595k was made up of:

1. donation income of £502k; and

2. gift aid of £93k.

These figures highlight the importance of tax recovered through gift aid. Anyone giving to Chalmers who is a tax-payer needs to complete a gift aid form so we can recover the tax; without a gift aid form we can't do that.

Our aim each year is that income covers costs, a basic and necessary requirement.

As a charity we are required to hold an appropriate level of cash reserves "for a rainy day". At the end of August 2024 our cash reserves were £88k, a very satisfactory level and quite a bit higher than the minimum reserves of £50k which we have resolved not to go below (something in-between those figures would be ideal).

The full year-end accounts for 23/24 have been audited and will be approved by the Elders at the end of February. Please contact the Church Office if you would like a copy of these. As they have done in previous years, our auditors express themselves happy with our systems and processes, which is important and encouraging.

It is worth noting at this time we are now finished with the financial aspects of the building refurbishment project on which we were engaged a few years ago. God's goodness to us in and through that (including by way of financial provision) was nothing short of extraordinary, for which we continue to be hugely thankful.

So that's the history bit, now for the present and future....

At the start of the current Financial Year, for 24/25, we projected a deficit of £17k; a position with which we were entirely comfortable, as a one-off, with us holding reserves of £88k. Having now finished Q1/the first 3 months of the year and having recently undertaken a re-forecast exercise, being aware of certain "unbudgeted" costs, we are now projecting a deficit for the full year of £44-47k, an unsustainable position, and year-end reserves of £41-44k, an unacceptably low level of reserves for us to be carrying. The increased deficit (at the lower end estimates) of £27k arises from:

1. personal support (by way of contribution to mortgage costs) for Andy/Caireen Robertson of £4k, to replace support by an individual member of Chalmers which had come to an end.

2. the farewell celebration event for Robin/Sally Sydserff of £8k.

3. certain necessary Property Fund costs, of £10-13k being (at the lower end of that range):

a) irrecoverable VAT on stained glass window repairs—£5k

b) stonemasonry costs for the office window—£2k (estimate)

c) scaffolding costs to undertake the stained glass window repairs—£1.5k (estimate)

d) transfer to the Property Fund to settle/square-off remaining costs associated with our refurbishment project—£1.5k.

4. relocation costs for our new senior minister—£5k (estimate).

The projected deficit for the year as above is subject to a crucial assumption, namely that income and expenditure are at budgeted levels. If this doesn't happen , the projected deficit will be greater and cash reserves even lower.

But for the first quarter:

income is £750 per month (£2,250 in total) behind budget (a budget that requires £40.5k per month rather than £38.5k from last year).

expenditure is £10k higher than we expected it to be, which includes the cost of the celebration event above.

There have of course been significant salary savings with us having no senior minister for most of this financial year but the general fund will not see benefit as Elders have agreed the full extent of these will be used for necessary refurbishment works at the manse.

Being a little behind on income is perhaps not surprising with a number of people having moved on for good ministry reasons, work relocations etc and recognising it always takes time for new people (and there have been a lot of new people around Chalmers over the last while, a huge blessing) to get organised in terms of giving to replace them, particularly without the "prompt" of a giving review such as this (which would have happened Sept/Oct last year were it not for other things happening at that time!).

Are there cost savings we can make? Our view as a Finance Team and Elders is that, if we are to maintain current levels of ministry output, the scope to save money through cost-cutting is extremely limited.

As Elders, trusting in God, we don't want to cut-back on Chalmers' ministry output, a huge blessing to all of us, and sense this is a view you continue to share.

So there is definite financial need to be addressed at this time (for this financial year and for 25/26, assuming we don't have another major review of giving until early 2027, two years from now).

And we would also like to increase the levels of mission support to meet particular longer-term needs that have been highlighted to us:

1. continue our contribution to mortgage costs for Andy & Caireen Robertson to the extent of £4k per annum (for the next number of years, and certainly for as long as required). Andy & Caireen have been key, long-standing mission partners of Chalmers, well-loved by many in the church family, and we are committed to being the very best gospel partners to them that we can be as they continue ministry to the needy situation that is Charleston, Dundee.

2. to start supporting financially another of our long-standing global mission partners, H, living and serving in a creative access country.

3. to extend financial support to J&R and their children in East Asia who are long-standing mission partners of Chalmers and will have increasing costs going forwards.

We would need an additional £3.2k per annum on top of the budgeted £40.5k pm, that is £43.7k per month, to meet ongoing running costs for this year, next year and to increase gospel partner support as above.

We would need one-offs of £20k, in addition to the increases in regular month giving, to ensure cash reserves are restored above the minimum levels required.

Is all this achievable? We have confidence it is, based on (a) the outcome of previous giving reviews, (b) giving capacity of a good number of new people around Chalmers who have still to start giving and (c) increased giving capacity from others of us whose financial circumstances have changed over recent years. But ultimately we have confidence in our God who will work out his purposes in accordance with his perfect will, and whose will we seek to discern and follow as Elders.

What the Bible says about giving

By far and away the most important thing all of us need to do is listen to what God says in His Word about giving and respond prayerfully and obediently.

Big Bible principles

Asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus said:
“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” *(Matthew 22:37-38)* All-consuming devotion to the Lord is the heart beat of the Christian, embracing every aspect of discipleship, including giving.

Related to this is how the New Testament speaks about worship. Romans 12:1 – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” All life is worship. We live to glorify God. And, so, our giving is part of our worship.

Another big principle is that all we have is God’s. Listen to King David’s words after he has gathered the money to build the temple. 1 Chronicles 29:14-16 – “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you… O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.” Similarly, in James, ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above…’ (James 1:17). Everything we have belongs to the Lord. What we give to Him is out of what He has given to us.

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2 Corinthians 8 and 9

Authentic ministry and discipleship

Paul's letter is about authentic ministry. Chapters 8 and 9 teach us what authenticity in the area of giving looks like.

Specific situation

The specific situation Paul is referring to is 'the relief of the saints' in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:4) (see also Rom. 15:26, 1 Cor. 16:1). The church in Jerusalem was in real need. About a year earlier the Corinthians had promised Paul that they would give generously to meet this need. That commitment had inspired other churches, including the Macedonian churches, Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea to give. A year on, the Corinthians are yet to make good on their promise. This is the reason Paul writes to them.

Three applications:

- As a local church we have a responsibility to give to gospel work outside Chalmers.
- For the most part that means supporting other local churches.
- Our support needs to be mindful of where there is acute financial need.

General principles on giving

As well as the specific situation, these chapters have a great deal to teach us about giving in general.

The overarching theme is the grace of giving, the supernatural outworking of the grace of God in the life of a church. Grace is the first and last word (8:1-2; 9:13b-14).

Inspiring examples of giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Paul commends the example of the Macedonian churches, and, supremely, the example and inspiration of the Lord Jesus. In this light, he encourages the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving and follow through on their promise to give.

Key principles:

- Giving is the outworking of the grace of God, supernaturally enabled.
- God's grace enables us to give joyfully and generously even when our circumstances are difficult.
- We are to give according to our means.
- Sometimes we give beyond our means.
- Only give if you are eager and want to.
- Our primary motivation is to give to the Lord.
- We are to excel in the grace of giving.
- When it comes to giving Jesus is our primary example and inspiration. He became poor so that we might become rich.
- If you have promised to give, follow through on what you promised.
- If you have an abundance, give proportionately more.

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Managing church finances in a godly way

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

When it comes to church finance, everything is to be done in a way that is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of people, both in the church and outside the church. Paul repeats his encouragement to the Corinthians to follow through on their promise to give.

Key principles:

- Gospel vision and church finances are closely linked.
- Transparency is very important, so that everyone in the church knows what the financial situation is.
- What an individual gives is strictly confidential.
- Protocols and procedures are very important.
- Godly people are to be appointed and set-apart with responsibility for church finances and handling giving. This group is a mix of elders and deacons.
- Attending to finance and giving in this thorough way is loving.
- If we have made a promise to give it matters a great deal that we honour that promise, for the sake of our own discipleship before God, and for the sake of others. This principle applies to us as individuals and as a church.

Christian giving is like a harvest that brings glory to God

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Paul describes Christian giving as like a harvest that brings glory to God.

Key principles:

- Don’t give sparingly; give bountifully.
- Each one of us is to give what we have carefully and prayerfully decided in our heart.
- We are not to give reluctantly or under compulsion, but cheerfully. That’s what God loves.
- God gives us the grace and means to give generously.
- As we give in response to need, this produces / overflows in many thanksgivings to God.
- Giving is an act of submission flowing from our confession of the gospel of Christ. This glorifies God.
- Giving according to the Word of God is because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.
- Giving is an inexpressible (joy giving) gift from God.

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Teaching on giving elsewhere in the New Testament

Paul's teaching on giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is comprehensive. The principles in these chapters are amplified throughout the New Testament.

There are, however, some principles not specifically identified in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

- A number of New Testament passages point to the dangers of money. Money can become an idol (e.g. 1 Timothy 6:10; Matthew 6:24).

- Living with an eternal perspective has implications for what we do with our money on earth. Luke 16:1-14 is a helpful passage. We can't take our money with us when we go to heaven, but we can use it in our earthly lives to save people for eternity. In the words of Jim Elliot: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.' Other Bible passages along similar lines include Matthew 6:19-24 about storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

- The Sermon on the Mount speaks about the right attitude and way of giving (Matthew 6:1-4).

- While giving is an outworking of grace for every believer, in Romans 12 Paul lists giving as a particular spiritual gift: "the one who contributes, in generosity…" (Romans 12:8, ESV).

- Because everything we have is the Lord's, He may ask us to give our material things for Him. That can come about in lots of ways. And it's costly. Christians often talk about sacrificial giving as a principle. It is perhaps better to think about sacrifice as a *consequence* of what the Bible teaches about giving. As we feel the cost or pinch of giving, the Lord's promises are wonderfully encouraging (Mark 10:28-31).

Would it not be much simpler to give a figure for how much to give?

It can be helpful, say to give an average figure, or to illustrate what biblical giving looks like with some examples (like going on one holiday rather than two), but we need to be careful. The best thing we can do is take time to study what the Bible teaches and discern what that means for each of us individually. We do so prayerfully and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

What about the Old Testament teaching about tithing or giving our firstfruits to God?

Many Christians certainly find that teaching helpful, but all of this, we believe, is fulfilled in the New Testament's teaching on giving, which is what we have tried to set out here.

Next steps

By far and away the most important thing is to prayerfully reflect on what God says in His Word about giving and respond appropriately.

We are asking everyone in the congregation to participate in the review. As a congregation, everyone's contribution is important and valued.

We are asking everyone to give regularly to Chalmers (for most of us that will be monthly).

For those of us currently giving, this will mean reviewing our giving.

For those of us not giving, this will mean starting to give.

In addition to giving regularly, we are asking everyone to consider making a one-off gift.

Please complete and return the **Giving Review Response Form** by **28 February 2025**. It would be great if everyone in the congregation could do this.

Some of us might find it really helpful to talk this through with someone. Any of the members of the Finance Team would be really glad to help you. The team is: Norman Martin, Willie Stewart, Charles Lawrie, Lucy Marriott and Andrew Wright. Or, speak to your small group leaders, or anyone in the congregation. With giving, confidentiality is very important, for all the reasons we understand. Yet talking about money and giving as a normal part of Christian discipleship in the life of a local church is entirely appropriate and helpful.

There is a pack of literature for you to take away:

- A giving review response form
- A leaflet explaining how to give

All this information will also be sent electronically.