



The Joys and Challenges of Church Treasurers



Introduction

The responsibility of being church treasurer can be significant. This booklet aims to help Congregational Federation churches to fill this vital role as it sets out what is required and breaks the role into sections which can be shared or managed in different ways.

This booklet has been asked for by you and created by you so a big thank you to all the church treasurers who contributed their knowledge and experience.



At the heart of the church treasurer role is a love for accuracy and money management.

Thank you for all you do in your church.

Serving God and the Church

As Christians and members of local Congregational churches, it is important to acknowledge that everything we have is provided to us by God, and that we are called to offer ourselves and our gifts to God in his service. We thank God for everyone who gives in different ways to the ministry and mission of our churches through providing flowers, leading in Sunday Schools, caretaking, cleaning and the many other services they give.

But we must not be embarrassed to acknowledge that giving *financially* to support our church and its services is a part of our Christian stewardship. We acknowledge that many give sacrificially, and we thank them and thank God for them.

In his introductory guide to the role of church treasurer, commenting on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:28 about callings and giftings in the church, one of which is administration, Robert Scott-Biggs affirms that this means that church administration is to be regarded as a spiritual calling. As he writes:

‘Paul clearly sees administration not only as an essential part of the early Church but also as a spiritual calling. Administration, which incorporates oversight of church finance, is rooted firmly in New Testament authority and those possessing the necessary skills to undertake the required responsibilities have their “gifting” from God’.¹

The church treasurer plays a vital role in the life and witness of the local church, and far from being simply an administrative role – an important role in its own right – this is a role for a prayerful person, someone who knows their dependence on God for strength, discernment and humility.

The responsibilities of church treasurers vary from church to church, but this booklet sets out to indicate the typical responsibilities, joys and challenges of the role. It is, however, important to clarify the particular responsibilities in your own church before agreeing to accept the role.



General Overview

a) Congregational church polity as our context for church treasurers

It is important to help all the church members to appreciate that they have a responsibility for the church finances.

It is also important to ensure that the Deacons and Trustees (often one and the same people) have overall responsibility for the church finances. They need to realise and own their legal responsibilities, not leaving everything to the church treasurer (and church secretary).

Relationship of local churches to the Congregational Federation as an organisation.

Need to comply in your particular church with that church's constitution and deeds.

¹ Robert Scott-Biggs: *Introductory Guide for New Church Treasurers*. (2017, Association of Church Accountants and Treasurers, p.4).

Top Tip

It is always useful to have a copy of the church constitution with you for reference.

Having noted that our Congregational polity is our basic context and framework for how we administer our finances, there are also Congregational churches which are part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership or some other form of shared identity and ministry (e.g., with a Methodist or Baptist church). Where this is the case, it will be important to manage the financial and budgetary aspects of the church's life in accordance with the agreed protocols for that particular situation.



b) General requirements for happy and effective service

- Having general financial and budgetary competence
- Able and willing to cope with the range of responsibilities
- Able and willing to address a range of issues when they arise
- Able and willing to delegate particular responsibilities to others
- Able and willing to keep on top of your responsibilities, looking at different aspects of your responsibilities every few days.
- Building a good working relationship with the church secretary.

c) Taking care of yourself

- Wrap every day, with whatever responsibilities may come up that day, in prayer
- Invite a few trusted friends to pray regularly for you in this role
- If possible, create a small team to work with you, perhaps including a couple of people to oversee the administration, counting and security of the weekly offerings at services.
- Be kind to yourself, patient and flexible

Top Tip

Try and set a time each week to keep on top of the responsibilities.

Church Accounts and Annual Report

For all that follows in this booklet we recommend that the church registers with the Association of Church Accountants and Treasurers (ACAT) via the Congregational Federation (<https://www.acat.uk.com/>). They have a wealth of guidance documents, training and templates for use in your role and the annual fee is minimal.

Also, with regard to what follows, it may be advisable to find a clear and simple guide to those aspects of Charity Law and Company Law that may relate to church life and service.

There are many aspects of your responsibility in regard to accounting for the finances of the church. But before we outline the major aspects, it is important to mention the value of financial and budget planning.

Financial and Budget Planning

It can be all too easy to get so caught up in the day-to-day affairs of the church that taking time to make financial plans gets forgotten or crowded out. It may be that this is addressed in one meeting of the Church Meeting in your church, and this is altogether right and appropriate, but keeping reviews of the church's financial and budgetary planning on your agenda and that of the Deacons is important in good stewardship.

It is also important to consider creating a church policy, if one does not already exist, on accruals, expenses and depreciation. These are part of the strategic overview of any organisation, including churches, but can be missed.

It is helpful to take time to discuss the predicted budget with those responsible for the discrete aspects of the overall church budget. This will serve to facilitate a realistic and achievable budget. It can also be useful to discuss with them any wish list of projects that they may have and their likely expenditure.

A regular, more formal review of the forecasts in your church budget will prove valuable and will help to encourage interest from the membership if there are regular updates presented to them, even in broad outline, perhaps three or four times a year.

This can also help members to reflect on the financial contribution that they give to the church on a regular basis. For example, it is not uncommon for people to be giving the same weekly amount that they have been giving for several years, not pausing to consider that the church is no longer able to provide the support that it once did, given the rise in costs over that period. Perhaps at a Church Meeting or the AGM you could encourage members to consider an annual increase in their personal giving?



Churches – Charity Status

Churches affiliated to the Congregational Federation are considered “excepted” charities under their own right. This is a specially recognised category unique for CF affiliated churches. Where their income exceeds £100k they should formally register with the Charity Commission where they will then be given a charity number. Churches may choose to register voluntarily where their income is below £100k but there is no actual requirement to do so. In any case, churches can never use The Congregational Federation’s unique charity number.

What excepted charities are:

Some charities, such as CF churches, are 'excepted' from charity registration. This just means they don't have to register or submit annual returns to the Charity Commission. Apart from that, the Charity Commission regulates them just like registered charities and can use any of its powers if it needs to.

Although there is no requirement to file their accounts with the Charity Commission, they are still required to produce annual accounts with trustee reports and these are public documents and should be provided to anyone on request.

Charities have to prepare accounts in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) also known as the charity SORP. Their guide for charities can be found on the website below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-sorp-2005>

Top Tip

The Charities Commission also provides excellent guidance on preparing accounts as well as a number of suggested templates. These are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/prepare-charitys-annual-accounts>

Typical Responsibilities for the Church Accounts

The major aspects of the role of church treasurer as regards ongoing accounting responsibility are the following.

- Keeping the church accounts accurately and up to date
- Getting the end of year books to balance.
- Preparing an annual budget, in agreement with the Deacons
- Preparing monthly update reports for the Deacons and a more detailed annual report for the Church Meeting
- Ensuring an audit takes place every year
- Submitting end of year accounts to the Congregational Federation
- If in Scotland sending end of year accounts to OSCR



In order to do this effectively, church treasurers need to keep in regular touch with the websites and publications of the bodies responsible for the legal requirements of church accounting.

In England and Wales this is the Charity Commission (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>).

In Scotland this is OSCR (<https://www.oscr.org.uk/>).

((<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-online-system-for-central-accounting-and-reporting-oscar-tool> ?)

You will also need to be in liaison with accountants and auditors if the church's annual income is over £25,000. For official guidance on this, visit this Government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-examination-of-charity-accounts-trustees-cc31/independent-examination-of-charity-accounts-trustees>.

Online Banking

It is worth considering using online banking as much as possible, as this is likely to save a great deal of time and effort.

In the same way, it is likely to be a good support to use a web-based accounts package, if possible.

With regard to the budgeting aspect of the work, it is worth keeping the document format as simple as possible. The easier it is to read and understand the more likely it is that members will take an interest.



Top Tip

Make sure the passwords for any banking files or details are kept somewhere safe just in case of emergency.

Preparing Reports

Preparing regular financial reports will be a part of every church treasurer's responsibility.

Church Meeting

The Church Meeting is the most important distinctive in the church polity of Congregational churches, and the role of the church treasurer in relation to this is crucial for the effective life and ministry of a church. As the church treasurer you will be responsible for presenting at least an annual report.

Deacons' Meetings

In most church constitutions, church treasurers are part of the decision-making process when they attend Deacons' meetings, although they may be ex officio attendees with no say in the decision-making. However, it is common for church treasurers also to be Deacons.

In some churches, the Deacons are also the Trustees of the church, whereas in other churches it may simply be the case that some Deacons happen to be Trustees. In some churches, church treasurers are Trustees, whether or not they are also Deacons.

Whichever of these scenarios is the case in your church, you will be relied on to provide input on the items on the agenda of Deacons' meetings.

Free Will Offerings and Regular Church Giving

The weekly giving of the members of the church includes the offerings at the Sunday services and arrangements that members may have made to contribute by Direct Debit. Oversight of this is part of the responsibility of the church treasurer, though you may delegate the actual management of the former to others in the church, often the Deacons.



The weekly offering can be the main source of income for some churches. Encourage those who can to set up a Direct Debit so the income remains constant. For those who give cash and cheque each week set up and encourage them to use a weekly envelope scheme and ask them to sign up to the gift aid. Envelopes can be ordered from Christian stationary websites.

Top Tip

Create a card for people who give by direct debit to pick up and place on the collection plate when it is passed round. It might say something simple like I give electronically each week with a picture of the church on. This symbolic act of giving is an important part of stewardship and worship and makes people feel included.

Always count the money with someone else. In many churches it is done straight after the service during refreshments.



Top Tip

Make sure you have money bags from the bank for counting the cash after a Sunday Service

Within this aspect of your role you will also be responsible for managing the Gift Aid scheme, should your church use this. Many treasurers say this can be onerous as it is done once a year and means refreshing yourself each time with the process but it is certainly an incredible way of increasing income.

You may wish to consider working with the Christian Aid Foundation (CAF) as well as, or instead of, Gift Aid. For information about CAF see their website: www.cafonline.org

Recording and Paying Invoices



The responsibilities of a church treasurer involve that of checking and managing the payment of invoices and bills on behalf of the church.

This aspect of the financial administration of the church's affairs will also involve keeping both a formal record of all receipts and payments and a record of the renewal dates for relevant policies and contracts.

These payments will include accounts such as the following.

- Building and other insurance policies
- Utility bills
- Work done by third party contractors

- Ministry and Mission contributions, etc, paid to the Congregational Federation
- Payments for pulpit supply
- Weddings and Funerals

Top Tip

Use the Congregational Federation Yearbook for suggested charges.

Lettings

Although any lettings of church property will likely be overseen by the church secretary, the church treasurer will be fully involved in the creation and review of contracts with lessees.



Payroll

Although many churches have non-stipendiary Ministers / Pastors, if churches have a payroll in place, it most typically relates to their Minister / Pastor, who may be contracted on a full time or part time basis. However, many churches employ other people, again on full time or part time contracts.

In each case, the church treasurer will be responsible for the financial and budgetary aspects of these paid roles. The five key aspects of this are:

- Maintaining an updated payroll system
- Employment payments for all relevant people
- Car allowance and expenses for relevant people
- Any pension provision for relevant people
- Any National Insurance payments for relevant people

An example of a Payroll system, in this case for NHS workers, can be found at: <https://hub.nes.digital/help-me-with/expenses-payroll-and-pension/payroll-and-expenses/>.

If your church has a CF accredited minister, category M, then the church would be eligible to join the CF Group Pension Scheme which includes a payroll service.

Top Tip

It is very important to have a clear agreement on who pays for what and what can be claimed for, and budgets allowed.

Grant Applications

From time to time, it may be necessary, or simply important for the sake of hoped for new projects, for a church to apply for external funding. This is a skill in itself and many organisations employ fund raisers to do this very thing on their behalf. However, for most churches the typical project in mind will be of a small to medium size.

Major Building Projects

Occasionally, churches discover the need for significant building interventions, repairs or renovations and huge sums of money may be required to enable the work to be undertaken. The Congregational Federation is able to offer advice relating to potential grant-making bodies who will fund or part-fund such work.



It is also worth considering the Government's Listed Places of Worship (LPW) Grant Scheme for grants that cover the VAT incurred in making repairs to listed buildings in use as places of worship. The scheme covers repairs to the fabric of the building, along with associated professional fees, plus repairs to turret clocks, pews, bells and pipe organs. The Government has confirmed that funding is available for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme until 31st March 2025. You can visit the website at: <http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk/>.

Smaller Projects

There may well be quite a few occasions in a period of years when a church may want to undertake a development or initiate a community involvement project, whether as a long term or a one-off venture. The help needed with funding such a project or development may not be huge, but it may well be beyond the resources of the church itself.

Therefore, it is often an important role for church treasurers to be able, working closely with the church secretary and the Deacons, to manage a fund-raising campaign. This will often involve approaching Trusts and other organisations for grants. Managing this process of application typically includes four phases:

- Seeking out likely grant-making bodies for the project in mind
- Identifying one or more potential funding bodies
- Completing the particular application process and documentation of the funding body
- Accounting to the funding body for the use of any grant given after the project is complete



There is guidance available from a number of sources for learning how to undertake this task effectively, and it is recommended that church treasurers take time to learn this.

The Congregational Federation itself is a good first port of call for grants for small to medium size projects, or for a seed grant that will give a measure of confidence to grant-making bodies that an application to them has the backing of at least one other organisation, and indeed an

organisation that is in a position to endorse the church making the application.

There are three discrete types of grant provided by the Congregational Federation, and information about them can be accessed at this address: <https://www.congregational.org.uk/grants/grants-for-growth>.

Top Tip

Mini grants and starter grants can be applied for every year.

Grants may also be available from your area or the national body to which you are located.

Open and Consistent Communication

With respect to all the communication responsibilities outlined below, it is good practice to create a separate church email address from your personal email address for church business.



Also, with the help of someone, if required, set up a sharing platform like Dropbox to facilitate the storing and sharing of church documents of different kinds. This will help not only to preserve documents and other material for everyone, especially useful in succession planning for new church treasurers and other church officers and Ministers / Pastors, but also to enable ease of access to working documents that the Deacons or others may be working on.

Within the church

It is important to build up a good and trusting working relationship, with easy communication, with the church secretary, as you will work together in a number of contexts.

Church treasurers need to have tact, patience and integrity, and to be known to be trustworthy. It is absolutely vital that your work on behalf of the church is transparent to all and that you are able and willing to discuss any aspect of the financial and budgetary aspects of the church's life and service with anyone who asks.

Outside the church

As church treasurer, you will be a key person, along with the church secretary, for correspondence with external bodies relating to the financial management of the church and the legal aspects of this.

The Congregational Federation

The Finance and Support Services Committee of the Congregational Federation meet twice a year to consider Financial matters at national, area and local level. There are area funds which maybe available for churches and general issues or advice is discussed. The minutes of these meetings are available online or from your area representative.

Every October there is also a national treasurers training day which you will be invited to. This is a chance to meet others, share fellowship and gain some new skills.

Top Tip

Find out who is your area treasurer and keep in touch for support and advice.

Twice a year, the Church Support Committee of the Congregational Federation also meets in full to consider, among other matters, brief reports from the various Area Pastoral Care Coordinators about the joys and challenges facing the churches in their Areas. The members would love to be hearing from you to inform their prayers and to help them to consider ways to support you, as appropriate.

These meetings of the Church Support Committee are also where members discuss and approve grants to local churches, so, again, letting us know of any financial needs or plans for new projects will make possible the giving of a grant.



Looking out beyond ourselves

It is of the essence of being Christians and local churches that we follow the example of Jesus by always thinking of others. It is important that church treasurers are open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to be supporting those outside the church. It can be tempting for a church, especially one with low reserves, to hold onto financial resources and reserves in case funds are needed in the future. While this is understandable, and indeed a mark of good stewardship, it can also lead to an attitude that does not look to spend money on mission, however appropriate in each context.

It is commendable when church treasurers keep this principle on their agenda, as it were, reminding the Deacons and members from time to time of this responsibility before God.

If your church, by the grace of God, is in a reasonably healthy financial situation, you could consider supporting some other Congregational church which may be struggling to stay open and active. We see references in the New Testament to this kind of support being shared among churches in the life of the first generation of Christians (Acts 11:27-30).



Building Up Your Confidence and Competence

This setting out of typical responsibilities can seem daunting if you are considering becoming a church treasurer. However, if you speak to church treasurers, you will hear stories of the joy and satisfaction of the role as well as the challenges and occasional frustrations. It is important to build up our level of confidence in God and in his grace for us as we serve him in this way, and it is also important to build up our confidence that we can indeed serve him in this role.

As is usually the case, our sense of confidence and our sense of competence are closely interconnected.

The Congregational Federation are also able to provide learning sessions (in person and online) for various aspects of this role. If you would like some particular support with any of the responsibilities listed below, then get in touch with us.

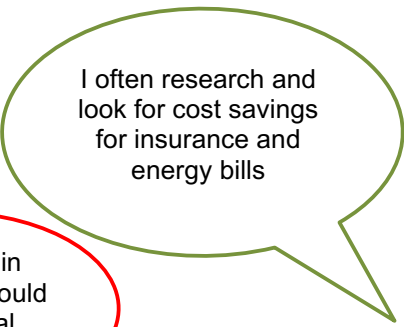
- Basic computing – especially Excel
- Basic online competence
- Basic bookkeeping
- Preparing annual budgets
- Writing reports
- Basics of Charity Law – keeping abreast of changes
- Basics of Company Law – keeping abreast of changes
- Identifying grant making bodies and managing the application process



What treasurers have shared:



I enjoy the role
as I feel I am
doing something
practical for my
church.



I often research and
look for cost savings
for insurance and
energy bills



An interest in
fundraising would
be beneficial.

Summary of skills needed:

- Bookkeeping skills
- Communication and organisation skills
- Interest in investment
- Interest in Fundraising
- Patience
- Trustworthy
- Positive and prayerful attitude

For further information contact the General Secretary, Congregational Federation, 8 Castle Gate, Nottingham, NG1 7AS, 0115 9111460

www.congregational.org.uk



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