

# A Friends Group

for Your Church

A toolkit for action,  
from the National Churches Trust

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## Friends: are people like you...

Churches, chapels and meeting houses are at the heart of our nation's heritage and landscape. An unparalleled mix of history, architecture, art and spirituality, they form the centrepiece of cities, towns and villages across the United Kingdom.

Historic buildings need an enormous amount of care and maintenance. They also need champions, people to encourage their use, and promote their existence. Churches, chapels and meeting houses are the keepers of community heritage, a shared symbol of continuity and pride, and a place where people can come together in the same way as generations before them. As well as for worship, many are used for a variety of other activities, and an increasing number are opening their doors for local people and visitors to explore and use.

Of course, not all churches, chapels and meeting houses are ancient, or even historic. However, they are often still significant buildings, and play a central role in local life.

Churches, chapels and meeting houses are generally cared for and managed by volunteers (with input from clergy, where they are in office). They receive no government funding (unless they receive project specific grant funding), and rely heavily on voluntary donations.

There are so many skills that exist in the communities around our churches. Whether it is making tea or filling in funding applications, cutting the grass or organising an event such as a concert - these are all important if churches are to remain vibrant part of the future of a community, and a symbol of its heritage.

*All churches need friends,  
and they are out there ready to be made...*

A Friends group is just that, a group of friends of your church.

They may be worshippers, volunteers, members of the local community or people who have moved away.

They may be called a Friends group, heritage group, or anything you and your church decide.

They may range in number from very few to thousands. Members may or may not pay a subscription, and sometimes receive membership benefits. The Friends group may be independent, but even so needs to maintain a close working relationship with those who manage the church.



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## WHY: for the love of churches...

People love your church.

It may be where they worship. But, it is also a symbol of the local community, past and present, , where they catch up with friends at regular coffee mornings, a beautiful building they walk past on the way to school or a place for a moment of peace and reflection in a busy world. It is also a reminder of home for those who have moved away.

It could be one, or all of these things.

In all likelihood, you do not know all the people have an interest and care for your church (especially in larger villages, towns or cities). But they are out there, and many would lend a hand or share their skills with you to help secure and protect what they see as their church.

## why: for your church

A Friends group gives your church a way of engaging with the world around you, of inviting interested and likeminded people to be a caring and practical part of your church life. The enthusiasm, commitment and local knowledge within your community is invaluable. It is also way of saying that the church building is not just for the congregation, it is there for the community (as medieval churches were originally).

The advantages to the church are many, but a Friends group can:

- help to involve new people with a range of useful skills and experience (which may be lacking within the congregation)
- help with practical tasks (by volunteering time and labour)
- help secure grant funding (by being able to access types of funding not available to the church, and by showing engagement with the community)
- help with local fundraising (by reaching more local people)
- bring new energy and thinking (which cannot be underestimated when a small and perhaps ageing congregation is struggling to maintain and enhance an ancient and beautiful church)

## why: for your community

Historic buildings are an important part of local identity. People associate with buildings, they give structure to our environment.. Large historic buildings give a community an iconic structure, a symbol in which great pride can be invested and can provide a space where people can come together.

A Friends group provides a means for local people, who may not be part of the worshipping community, to be involved in supporting what is an important building for them. There is a great passion and energy for buildings and this should be encouraged wherever possible. There is plenty that can be done and the possibilities are only limited by the energy and imagination of those involved.

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## WHEN: the time is right...

Start your Friends group at a time appropriate and beneficial for you and your church, and when you have the time and energy to follow it through.

You may form a group for a specific time-limited task (perhaps to organise a campaign or to get grant funding for a new roof). Or, you may want to carry out ongoing tasks, (perhaps to arrange regular concerts or do churchyard maintenance).

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## HOW: starting off on the right foot...

Many groups grow organically, usually from a group of people who know each other already. You can achieve a lot as a group of enthusiastic friends, but when it comes to attracting more members or applying for funding it's well worth formalising your arrangements.

## how: planning, preparation and organisation...

There are a few simple steps to follow to set up your group properly: with a workable structure and close relationship with church management. If you already have a large group of people interested, it is worth doing the planning with a smaller group who will become the management committee.

- give your group a name
- identify the aims, objectives and methods for achieving them; also the responsibilities of the group and the decision making process, terms of office, procedure for dissolving the group if necessary; and, very importantly, the group's relationship with the church
- identify the potential for membership, and decide whether there will be subscription fees to cover costs / benefits (this can change)
- agree and sign a constitution (please see the draft constitution and separate

- guidance notes attached), and identify a chairperson and secretary
- set up a bank account (with at least two signatories), and identify a treasurer
  - plan regular meetings and a means of communicating progress to members
  - encourage membership

You may also need to consider:

- insurance: if you are going to organise public events or do maintenance you must check if you are covered by the church policy, or if you need your own
- charity registration: if you are planning to have an income of over £5000 per year you need to register with the charity commission

Remember: you can always change things as you go along if they are not working as you had hoped for your Friends group or your church (although you will need to call a special meeting to make changes to the constitution).

## how: getting & keeping members...

Friends are people like you. So, find like-minded people who want to get involved. This can be a very rewarding task as it lets you to talk about why the church is important to you and your community.

Try and approach all the various communities of the church (congregations, friends, family, surrounding houses, special interest groups).

- send out flyers and put up posters
- speak to people you know, and encourage members to do the same
- have an informal gathering or event to attract potential friends
- contact organisations who may know interested people (include local Councillors, members of local amenity societies or the local school)
- persuade local press and radio to do an article
- speak to other Friends groups, they have all recruited members



To keep members engaged and supportive, you could use a number of ways to keep in touch:

- consider a website, blog, facebook page or twitter feed where you can share news, events, photos and much more. This can also replace the need for newsletters and other costly activities (and may bring in new members)
- set up a secure database of members email addresses as a quick and free way of disseminating information and newsletters (when you send an email use the blind carbon copy (Bcc) facility so that individual email addresses are hidden from the other people receiving the message)

### how: next steps...

Once you get going, and attract new members you will start to get a picture of what is needed, what is wanted and the extent of skills and enthusiasm within your membership. Opportunities for activities and events will present themselves.

A Friends group should not provide financial contributions to the general running costs such as heating and lighting bills and cost of religious services, this should be done by the worshipping community. But, the group can provide an opportunity for all those interested in the building to contribute and provide for the increasing costs required to maintain it.

If you want to apply for funding, most funding bodies will want you to demonstrate that your project/s reflect the wishes of the stakeholders, so it is important to listen to them. If you are not sure what members and stakeholders want, ask them.

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## WHAT: ideas to fire the imagination...

There are many Friends (or similar) groups already working with churches, chapels and meeting houses around the country. Have a look on the internet, or speak to local churches. You can learn a lot from their experience.

## what: funding

There are two ways for Friends groups to raise funds; through grants and large donations, and through local fundraising. There are also two main reasons for raising funds; for one off projects, and for ongoing maintenance or development.

Community groups have many opportunities open to them when it comes to finding money, some of which may not be available to the church itself.

Grants & large donations:

- usually for one off projects, either small or large
- grants are available from national bodies and small or local trusts
- discover sources of funding by searching online and using funding databases
- planning and preparation is key, gather all the information together and use it to apply for a variety of funding options at the same time – but remember that each one needs to be prepared with the particular funder in mind (don't waste time by send round robin letters or general applications)

Fundraising:

- can be for one off projects or for ongoing core funding
- could include subscription fees
- can include everything from filling smartie tubes with 20p's to dedicating the floodlighting to a person or event for a night
- discover innovative ideas for local fundraising by talking to other groups and searching online



## what: events

Friends events include: flower festivals, architectural talks, craft fairs, barn dances, quiz nights, children's events, golf days, theatrical productions and concerts. Remember, although the focus of the Friends group is the church, events themselves do not need to be confined to the building which is being supported.

Things to consider when organising an event:

- **Aims:** what is the purpose of the event, ensure everything helps meet your aims, measure success against aims after the event
- **Publicity:** there is no point in putting in the time and effort to organise an event if you don't publicise it widely and in a way which makes people want to visit / attend (putting a poster on the church notice-board is not enough)
- **Management:** appoint an event coordinator as contact for volunteers and visitors on the day, identify a first aider (first aid courses are often available from your local CVS if you don't know anyone trained) and make sure all volunteers are clear about their roles and responsibilities
- **Health & Safety:** carry out a risk assessment and put measures in place to help prevent accidents prior to your event (carrying out a risk assessment does not have to be complicated, there is lots of advice online)

Also, take care to protect the building that you are there to support. Don't organise any events or do anything that may adversely affect the heritage, funding opportunities or relationship with the community.



## what: maintenance

Friends' groups can carry out basic ongoing maintenance to the church building or churchyard. You should ensure that, particularly when dealing with a heritage building, Friends have the skills needed to carry out maintenance correctly and sympathetically, and that you carry out a risk assessment. If in doubt, check.

Friends could also raise funds to pay for professional regular maintenance (including activities like clearing high level gutters using a cherry picker).



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## HELP: just one more question...

This toolkit has been prepared by our National Support Officer.

If you would like further advice on any of the topics included (including funding and caring for a historic building), or for specific advice relating to your church or Friends' group please contact:

[support@nationalchurchestrust.org](mailto:support@nationalchurchestrust.org)

There is also a lot of advice available online. Here are a few places to try:

## help: Church Buildings

### **National Churches Trust**

Support & advice for those who care for all churches, chapels and meeting houses across the UK – including grants for repairs and community facilities, specific advice about caring for your building and/or extending use (including funding advice), technical guidance and signposting to other expert advice through our website.

<http://nationalchurchestrust.org/home.php>

## **Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings**

Practical and positive advice and support to those who care for old buildings.

<http://www.spab.org.uk/>

## **Churchcare**

Supporting all those in Church of England parishes, dioceses and cathedrals caring for their buildings.

<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/>

## HELP: Friends Groups

### **Charity Commission**

Advice on starting a new charity.

[http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Start\\_up\\_a\\_charity/default.aspx](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Start_up_a_charity/default.aspx)

### **Churches Trust for Cumbria**

A variation on a model constitution for an unincorporated group

<http://www.ctfc.org.uk/friends-groups.html>

### **Parish Resources**

Downloadable guidance on how to set up a Friends group.

<http://www.parishresources.org.uk/friends-schemes/>

### **Community Website Builder**

Build and maintain a website free of charge.

<http://www.btck.co.uk/>

## HELP: Funding

### **National Churches Trust**

Grant funding for repairs and development works to churches, chapels and meeting houses of all ages and denominations across the UK. Also, comprehensive advice on other sources of funding.

<http://nationalchurchestrust.org/home.php>

### **Funds for Historic Buildings**

A comprehensive guide to funding for anyone seeking to repair, restore or convert for a new use any historic building in the United Kingdom.

<http://www.fundsforhistoricbuildings.org.uk/>

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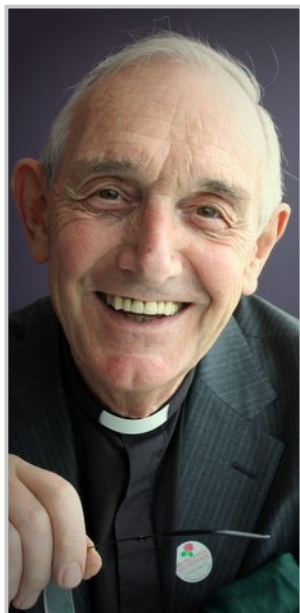
If it's true people need friends,  
so do buildings.

Unloved buildings are a sad sight; nothing looks worse than boarded up shops in a high street. Heaven defend us if the same should happen to our churches and chapels.

In the United Kingdom we have a proud tradition of our churches and chapels standing at the centre of our communities. They have been, and still are, pointers to the fact that life has another dimension. Things spiritual matter as much as things material. But, although we live in a changing society I firmly believe that there is no point in being so full of heavenly thoughts that you are of no earthly use.

*Canon Roger Royle,  
Friends of the National Churches Trust*

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The National Churches Trust is the only independent national charity dedicated to preserving, promoting and supporting all churches, chapels and meeting houses of historic, architectural and community value across the UK.

**To become a Friend of the National Churches Trust:**

please join via our website at [www.nationalchurchestrust.org](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org)  
or contact us on 020 7222 0605  
or at 7 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QB

For more information about our work:

visit [www.nationalchurchestrust.org](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org)

find us on facebook (National Churches Trust) & twitter (NatChurchTrust)

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