

## Faith in fundraising

In an age of increasingly diverse fundraising methods, Christian organisations are looking to values-based platforms to raise funds.



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Daniel joined Stewardship in 2007 and is responsible for marketing, communications, new product development and our generosity campaigns. Daniel also serves as an independent member of the National Stewardship Committee for the Church of England, particularly advising on digital and content strategies.

### Daniel Jones introduces Stewardship's online fundraising platform, give.net

Recently a humanist charity launched a fundraising appeal on a popular crowdfunding platform to fund the salary for a campaigner to campaign and lobby against faith schools.

What caught my attention more than the appeal itself was the online reaction to it from a number of Christian leaders. Naturally, the usual lines between those of faith and those opposed to faith were drawn; but now the crowdfunding platform was implicated – how could they allow 'religious intolerance' to be funded? Wasn't that against their guidelines?

It was a timely reminder that, in an emerging culture focused more and more on values-driven decision-making, transparency and authenticity, donors are increasingly asking not just what to give, but how to give it too.

Affordability, usability and security still have their place, but as faith-based organisations we should also expect to be quizzed by donors on our supply chains, including crowdfunding and donations platforms.

For Christian organisations, churches and charities, there is give.net, a Christian fundraising platform that Stewardship launched in 2012. Since then, we have helped thousands of Christian organisations raise more than £10 million safely and securely, with comparable functionality to Justgiving, VirginMoneyGiving and a viable alternative to BT MyDonate, when it closes in June.

As a faith-based fundraising platform we reflect our values in our approach to fundraising. For example, from the start of give.net we covered the debit card charges on donations, but not charges for credit cards – to incentivise giving from 'real' money rather than from credit.

Some commercial crowdfunding platforms have attracted criticism recently for the high fees they have charged (particularly in relation to appeals to support victims of terror attacks and high-profile disasters). They can also be inefficient in allowing substantial

sums to be raised by individuals. Sometimes individual fundraisers have unwittingly created a charitable trust by the terms of their appeal, with the obligation of ensuring the funds are used for charitable purposes. Crowdfunding platforms have restricted pay outs until the individual fundraisers make arrangements for suitable charities to benefit, but they have missed out on being able to claim Gift Aid because the appeal pages were created by individuals rather than charities.

We have measures in place to avoid these pitfalls and maintain donors' confidence. We've always been transparent and clear on fees, as well as what happens to any surplus we generate each year (when not reinvested in technology and security, it is often used to support other Christian organisations). We're also proactive in monitoring what the site is being used for, even down to a 'naughty word report', which allows the team to quickly spot and review messages posted by fundraisers and by donors if there are concerns about whether an appeal is properly structured and entitled to benefit from Gift Aid. Charities have to be registered with the platform with their eligibility for funding confirmed before they can create appeals.

So, when it comes to choosing a platform, consider the following:

- Are the platforms you use an extension of your brand, your values, even your charitable purposes?
- Who else is fundraising on the platform – are you comfortable with their message or mission?
- Who profits from your use of the site? Where does the surplus go?

Give.net is the go-to place for any Christian organisation wishing to fundraise or accept online donations. User feedback tells us that the functionality we offer is comparable if not better than some of the other bigger, for-profit, platforms. Other faith communities are building their own too, with a growing number of fundraising platforms emerging for the Jewish and Muslim communities too. Faith options need no longer be second best!