



CASE STUDY

St Peter's Church

How St Peter's Morley raised
£790,000 to build a new
community centre

Exceptional fundraising partnerships

A capital fundraising campaign helped St Peter's Church in Morley raise £790,000 in three years to redevelop its church hall into a new community centre. By combining secular trust and foundation grants, congregational giving and exceptional community fundraising, the campaign absorbed major cost escalations, planning delays and a National Lottery Community Fund rejection while still reaching its final fundraising goal. This approach is particularly valuable for churches and faith organisations facing ambitious capital projects with no statutory funding route.

What is the St Peter's Morley community centre project?

The project focused on the redevelopment of the church hall at St Peter's in Morley, West Yorkshire into a multi-use community facility serving both the church and the wider local community.

Back in 2023, we were appointed by St Peter's Church to run a small fundraising campaign for a new community centre. The goal was clear: a short, sharp seven-month sprint to raise £350,000 from major grant makers, individual givers and community fundraising. But rising costs, shifting project timescales, planning constraints and a highly competitive grants landscape called for greater flex in the fundraising strategy.

Three years later, the team at St Peter's have now raised a staggering £790,000, their church hall redevelopment is complete, and we couldn't be more delighted for everyone involved.

What happens when capital costs escalate during a fundraising campaign?

Soon after the fundraising campaign started, initial project costings had escalated from £350,000 to over £1 million. Based on our experience, we advised this new target would be too much of a stretch, even for a thriving and much-loved local church. The team at St Peter's carefully re-engineered the budget to £790,000 then took a 3-month break for prayer and reflection. As fundraising partners, we could see that the opportunity to pause and take stock was important. We were also keen to reassure them that if they decided to continue with the project, we would remain with them every step of the way.

Taking time to recalibrate when capital costs rise is essential. It can test your resolve and ask some very direct questions of campaign leaders: Do we have the resources to meet the new challenge? Are there more funders we can approach? And what will happen if we don't realise this vision? At St Peter's, there was a very strong sense that God was guiding the redevelopment plan and that the benefits to the wider community were too great to turn away from.

Patience, perseverance and grit were now on the prayer list, especially when the campaign team heard that their National Lottery Community Fund application had been declined due to huge oversubscription in the area.

They say that faith can move mountains and in Morley it provided the steely resolve to press on. It also fuelled a string of fundraising wins, including the 'Morley Everest' challenge by St Peter's 'Running Vicar', Phil Harris. He saw there was a mountain to climb and bravely conquered it with an endurance challenge of over 200 miles, equivalent to scaling Everest across four days. His efforts raised £75,000 from the local community towards the campaign and were followed by a series of major grants from Leeds City Council, Benefact Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Laing Family Trusts. Funders could see the immediate and wider benefits of the project and were particularly impressed by the level of community fundraising achieved.

Reaching the final fundraising goal

To satisfy grant stipulations, the project had to demonstrate progression. This required a bridging loan from the Diocese and, on top of £100,000 raised from the congregation at the start of the campaign, further major loan offers from church members. The additional step up in support was extraordinary. It showed just how much St Peter's believed in the project, not just for the benefit of worshippers, but for the rest of the community, as well.

Now, thanks to recent major grants from the Bernard Sunley Foundation and the FCC Communities Foundation, the incredible team at St Peter's have finally reached their fundraising goal and delivered the project. It's a brilliant moment to celebrate and shows that faith organisations can access major funding from secular grant givers, if the community benefit is clearly expressed.

It's also a reminder that challenges are rarely insurmountable and - whatever your 'Everest' looks like - we're here to provide the right fundraising support, for however long it takes.



"The almost £800,000 fundraising challenge seemed beyond our grasp, but we really believed creating this Centre for the community was God's mission for us. With some clear support and guidance, a lot of determination, wonderful volunteers and both church and community leadership we are thrilled to have made it happen. It will be such a blessing for the people of Morley!"

Revd Phil Harris,
St Peter's Morley

Top tips for church fundraising campaigns

What you need to know

Without a disciplined response to escalating capital costs, churches and faith organisations risk:

- Setting stretched targets that funders see as unrealistic
- Losing campaign momentum, team morale and congregation confidence
- Damaging credibility with major grant-makers and trusts
- Compounding cost increases through further project delays
- Stalling the project entirely or abandoning the original vision

How a capital fundraising campaign in a faith-based setting works

The St Peter's campaign was delivered through a structured process in partnership with Gifted Philanthropy:

1. Initial fundraising strategy and target setting against a defined project scope
2. Recalibration of the project budget when construction costs rose from £350,000 to over £1 million
3. Three-month reflection period before recommitting to a revised £790,000 target
4. Community fundraising and congregation engagement, including Reverend Phil Harris's £75,000 'Morley Everest' challenge
5. Major grant applications to secular trusts and foundations alongside Christian funders
6. Diocese bridging loan and individual church member loan offers to demonstrate project progression to funders
7. Final grant applications to close the funding gap

Why capital fundraising matters for churches

Capital projects sit at the heart of how a church grows its service to both congregation and community. They also tend to be the moments when faith organisations need the most external support, since Christian and statutory funding rarely covers the full cost of new or redeveloped facilities.

A well-planned capital fundraising campaign enables a faith organisation to:

- Expand its capacity to serve worshippers and the wider local community
- Access major grant funding from secular trusts and foundations alongside denominational and ecumenical funders
- Demonstrate community benefit clearly to public sector and lottery funders
- Strengthen long-term financial sustainability through investment in shared facilities
- Mobilise congregational and community giving in support of a unifying project
- Build wider community confidence in the church's leadership and mission

Done well, a capital campaign in a faith-based context is more than a fundraising exercise. It becomes a project that brings congregation, local community and external funders together around a shared vision for the future.

Key areas to consider when running a capital campaign as a faith-based organisation

Capital campaigns led by faith-based organisations tend to succeed or fail on the same set of underlying considerations. Getting these right before the campaign launches saves time, money and momentum down the line, and frankly can be vital to success. Fundamentals include:

- Clear articulation of community benefit beyond the worshipping congregation
- A defensible, robust budget that funders can trust
- Diversified funding mix across grants, individuals, congregational and community fundraising
- Strong leadership from the church leadership, trustees and project team
- Realistic and adaptable timescales
- A long-term fundraising partnership that can adapt as the project evolves
- Robust safeguarding and governance signals for secular funders
- Evidence of local need and demonstrable congregation buy-in

At St Peter's Morley, every one of these considerations was tested over the three-year campaign. Clear community benefit, an adaptable budget and a long-term fundraising partnership gave the team the confidence to push through cost escalations, planning delays and a major grant rejection.

If your organisation needs strategic fundraising support to help you achieve your goals, get in touch with one of our directors and find out more about how we can help.

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