

The Freemasons' Grand Charity - Gift Aid Envelope Scheme

Your Questions Answered

How does the scheme work?

When an alms' collection is taken during a Lodge or Chapter meeting, the Brethren/Companions put their donations into the Grand Charity envelope. There are two perforated slips: the top slip is a record for the person to keep (particularly relevant to higher rate tax payers); on the bottom slip, the Brother/Companion writes his name and address plus the amount of his donation. Don't forget to tick the Gift Aid box. The donation and the bottom slip are then sealed in the envelope. Afterwards, the Charity Steward of the Lodge/Chapter sends the slips to The Freemasons' Grand Charity, together with an Envelope/Donor Verification Schedule, where the information is read electronically. The donation is registered to the Lodge or Chapter which sent the form in, and is also registered against the individual Brother/Companion's name.

Do donations made through the envelopes count towards the 2014 Festival total, and honorifics?

Yes. When the amount donated is read electronically, it is automatically allocated to the 2014 Festival total for the Lodge/Chapter which sent it in. At the same time, the individual's name is read electronically, and the amount is allocated to his personal contributions to the 2014 Festival. All donations, from Lodges and individuals, receive interest.

Can the envelopes be used to collect money for benevolence purposes (such as our Almoner's fund)?

No. Contributions made in an envelope are specifically to The Freemasons' Grand Charity. Lodges and Chapters are strongly recommended to use this scheme because 28.2% is currently added to the contribution through Gift Aid. Many Lodges/Chapters therefore use the monies raised at raffles (monies from raffles cannot be gift-aided because a raffle offers a chance of reward to the participant) to top-up their benevolent and almoner's accounts, where historically such funds would have been given to charity. The Temple collection is now used for charity, where historically that would have been used to top-up the benevolent account. It is basically a simple matter of swapping around our traditional way of going about things, in order to take full advantage of the Gift Aid scheme. If a surplus occurs in a benevolent account it can always be sent to the charities.

If our Lodge/Chapter opened its own Relief Chest with The Freemasons' Grand Charity, would we then be able to draw money out for benevolent uses, such as our almoner's account?

No. Payments can only be made to Registered Charities. If the Grand Charity allowed such withdrawals from the Relief Chest, they would have to investigate every single withdrawal (a legal requirement, generally known in layman's terms as 'due diligence') and do not have the manpower resources to undertake such a massive commitment. It is therefore a policy decision not to do so.

If our Lodge/Chapter opened its own Relief Chest with The Freemasons' Grand Charity, would we be able to decide which charities benefit from our donations?

Yes, although during the period of the current Festival, which reaches fruition in 2014, Lodges/Chapters are greatly encouraged to focus their attention and efforts on the 2014 Festival, so there is little point opening an individual Relief Chest at this time. At the completion of the Festival, however, Lodges/Chapters will no doubt wish to take advantage of The Grand Charity's superior interest rates and open their own Relief Chest from which their donations and contributions can be paid out to Registered Charities of their own choice. With funds in excess of £30 million to invest, the Relief Chest scheme's professional fund managers are able to perform consistently well. Prudent Charity Stewards will also see a Relief Chest as a convenient place in which to put aside charity funds for a future Festival.

Where can I get more information on the envelope scheme?

The Provincial Grand Charity Steward has set up a Provincial Charity Committee, the members of which are available to talk to individuals or to Lodges/Chapters. Your own Lodge/Chapter Charity Steward will know how to contact the member who is responsible for your area. For further information, please contact your Area Charity Chairman.