

Dear Friends

This Sunday is the last of the church year. We have set it as an opportunity to think about generosity and our giving to church. The 10am service will draw on the helpful resources provided by our diocese from what was called “generosity week” – a week in September to focus on giving. We were focussing on Creation at the time, so have delayed our involvement until now.

When we talk of giving, my mind usually springs straight to money, so let us start there...

Yes, we need more of it. Over the last year and a half our ability to pay our way has been severely hit. I've been trying to work out why.

Part of it is because we have, in the past, been very successful in hiring out and receiving revenue from our premises (Big thanks need to go to Sandy for coordinating the bookings). During the Covid crisis, our rooms have obviously been empty or only used sparingly. Groups are gradually coming back but it is slow to recover, and money is slow to return. To give a feel of how painful to our bank balance that has been, pre-covid we were receiving over £25,000 from rental, this year we will just about make £9,000.

This skimming away of the top part of our revenue has revealed that without that income we cannot pay our way. In fact, even with it we are not fulfilling our Christian responsibility to generously contribute to the ministry of the whole diocese - our giving of money to church is not as high as it could be and as a result the ministry of the whole diocese has suffered. We are not alone in this, but it is sad that we are missing out on the joy of being able to support others in a way that we could and would like to.

This has caused me to wonder whether we have relied too much on the revenue from the hall and rooms. I know it would be costly, but wouldn't it be wonderful to be in a position where our monthly giving alone enabled the ministry of our church to run smoothly and well, and all the money from hall hire then was available for extra, special projects – what could we then achieve I wonder?

I know it would be costly to us, and perhaps I am being unrealistic and naïve, but still... it would be so good if it were possible. Here is a quote from the “generosity week” material.

“It's often said that we should give sacrificially. That our generosity should be so great that we notice it. This is true, but what is also true is that the more often you give generously it stops being so sacrificial because it starts becoming who we are, what our culture is. Something is sacrificial when it hurts or impacts us. But by the 10th time of giving, the impact is dissipated. It may still be as generous as the first time, it may still in real terms affect our life or bank balance in the same way, however now it is commonplace and it's a signifier of our faith in the love and provision of God. It is evidence of are holding it lightly.”

What that says to me is that generosity is habit forming. It may be hard to start with but gradually it becomes normality. You can't shortcut your way to generosity, but the more you do it, the easier it becomes.

But generosity is not just about money, it is a way of life. A generous person is generous in many ways, and there are and will be many ways that we can offer our time and energy generously into the work of the church. This also may mean some sacrifice. I know that many of you give generously of your time and resources to other good and worthy causes, but if we want to grow our impact and our numbers as a living church – as the body of Christ here – then we will all need to look again at how we use our time, which might mean giving other things up. Actually, and truthfully, if we want to even retain some of the things we have been doing, then we will all need to be more generous with our time to church.

I want to say more in the new year about what we feel called to do in this new time ahead of us, but a good example of present need is our ministry with children and families. We are struggling to keep our Sunday school going, and to relaunch our Messy Church ministry. The good news is that we have children wanting to

come to church (Alleluia!!) and that we have families wanting to come to messy church (two totally new families came to our first event last Sunday – Praise the Lord!). The potential for growth is there - perhaps you could help out in some way to help that happen?

That is not to say that we should be doing silly hours of work for the church. If we have all learned one thing from the covid time it is that we should try and live a bit more simply, and it is important that we do not take the generosity of our people for granted or wear people out by doing too much.

So here are 3 simple ideas to consider.

BUY THE CHURCH A COFFEE . This is a suggestion I made a few years back. It is a simple way to convince yourself to give a bit extra to church. We have about 100 households attached to the St John's, possibly more. If each gave *extra* to church £3.25 per week, the price of a Cafe Nero large Cappuccino, then we have immediately gained nearly £17,000 extra per year - it doesn't take much to get a lot. You might even like to add a piece of cake – not literally of course, although if there is cake going I am always happy to receive - a Nero brownie, for instance is £2.25. With £5.50 a week extra from every household that would give us around £28,000 extra a year!

THE PARISH GIVING SCHEME. Again, mentioned before, this is a simple and efficient way to give to the church keeping you control of what you give with a built in opportunity to review your giving yearly. Here is a quote from their website:

“The Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) is an established service for managing Direct Debit donations, designed to support churches to fund their mission and ministry. It reduces the burden of work on church volunteers and provides a simple and secure service to donors. It makes it possible for donors to:

Donate monthly, quarterly or annually by Direct Debit

Sign up to inflation-linked giving annually

Enhance your gift to your church by having Gift Aid at 25% added to your giving

Give securely and donate anonymously, if you prefer”

I am signed up, as are another 24 households. It would be great to have all of us on board – it would really help. Please consider it.

TWO HOURS A WEEK. One of the things I mentioned when we were looking for warden's this year was the need to “spread the load”. If everyone who was able, and I know that some people cannot physically do this, would give two hours a week to the work of the church, other than coming to Sunday worship, then we could achieve much for the Kingdom... and I believe we would start to grow, thus enabling us to spread the load more. It could be a couple of hours on a morning, afternoon or evening. It could be a half hour here or there. It could be to help with the toddler groups midweek, or as mentioned already supporting the children's work or messy church. It could be helping at the ARK, or visiting the sick. It could be helping to set up a Place of Welcome (see the video during the service or on the service sheet) or get involved in the wellbeing café if that restarts. You might even want to get involved in the new nurture course “Being with” that I have mentioned before and will explain further nearer Christmas. Just two hours.

So, 3 simple ways to help us become more generous.

Finally, I want to say thank you to all you who have continued to give to St. John's during this last 18 months or so. Without your contributions St John's could not function.

Peace and blessings to all who love and care for

Peter