

Have you read the e-newsletter or the stewardship leaflet this week? When Nigel told us at PCC that the amount of money it takes to run our parish was over £800 per day, I was shocked. I had no idea. Are you? And I've been reflecting on this all week.

When I first arrived in the Bourne, I knew I had to start giving, but it was so easy to put off. I would put some cash into the plate between services— remember when we all had cash? —, but I wouldn't address the issue. I wouldn't even think about how much I should be giving or even planning it and it niggled me.

Like you I give to other people and organisations, but the church and now our church is the most important one to me and I think to this world. It is the place where my giving is going to have the greatest impact, it is the place where I am going to see the most transformation for good in my lifetime and yet I wasn't showing that by my own giving. It took me a year, a whole year, to give it the reflection and action that it warranted.

Unlike your previous vicars and really unlike most of you, my Christian walk began late in life.

I didn't grow up with an appreciation of Stewardship; my faith only began to mature in my late 40s. In the beginning of my journey discussions of stewardship made me uncomfortable, like I was being cornered into doing something I didn't want to do, like money

was something that Jesus never talked about, but he did...loads. But then I began to understand the link between belonging and giving, about how our action of grateful giving in response to God's generosity simply draws us deeper in faith and helps us grow. How where my money is, so is my heart and it works both ways, Where my money is shows what is important to me, but where my money goes actually changes me. As I grow in generosity, the space in my heart for God, for church, for you grows too. I now recognised giving as a difficult, but integral part of my own journey with God.

What Jesus said about the lillies and birds is true. They are beautiful and unconcerned. The most important things in my life are like that too; the beauty of the Kings Ridgeway in frensham, the joy of being with my mother, the exuberance of my daughter, the love of my son...the knowledge of God's love for me, of Jesus gentle teaching that can be hard and a joy all at once, being here with you this morning and for so much longer. I can't toil for these things, they are gifts, I am grateful and I want to live my gratitude. One strong way is by giving generously.

We all do this differently, but this is how I do it. I have to keep it simple or I will shy away from it. I calculate 10% of my income after tax and deductions, the amount on my payslip that goes into my

bank account. Remember my house and council tax are paid for already, but for the rest I am like you, I pay bills. I give half of this 10% paycheck amount to our parish and the other half to three different charities or people in need on a monthly basis. If I receive any additional money during the year like dividends or annuities, I give 10% away to a special project that tugs at my heart.

Sometimes it is to our general fund, or DEC, sometimes it is to a specific person who I know is struggling. I then work out what I can afford. And then after this, if I hear of a crisis of some sort and it moves me, I will give something on an adhoc basis, as a lump sum. It's extra.

I think we all recognise that sometimes a review of what we are giving may mean that we need to decrease. This exercise of reviewing where we are financially with God, with our church isn't about beating ourselves up, it is simply an opportunity to be intentional about what we do so we can continue during this financial year without being distracted by worry.

Nigel Lewis shared some church history with me. He said that when he first came our bills were paid largely by rental of property and now they are mostly paid by regular giving. It makes me so proud of us. This parish costs £880 per day to run...and we pay for it, out of love, out of generosity.

The organ needs refurbishment, and we've saved enough money for it, some from a legacy, a gift of love to us, but more than half through your generosity and the work of our fundraising team.

Our flat roof in the new build here needs replacing. That is our next capital project

February is also a time when the vicar and stewardship team write to thank you for regular giving. If you don't receive a letter and are a regular giver, could you let the office know. We may have your details stored incorrectly.

And as for our expenditure as a church this year, our church household is being hit with inflation just like our individual households. I'm grateful that I chose the Parish Giving Scheme to give. I ticked the box that said increase my giving in line with inflation and so when I listen to the state of our economy I feel confident in my giving. It is enough. I also know that the parish Giving Scheme is the one way of giving that automatically calculates and pays gift aid without waiting for us to claim it. This makes a big difference in our cash flow. Even if I don't increase my giving, the way that I give helps more. Finally, the Parish Giving Scheme is more reliable than what I used to do with putting money in the plate when I could...I actually still do that when I feel particularly grateful or called, but now the finance team have more security in the money I give and can better plan for the future. Of

course all ways of giving are good and we must all decide what works best for us.

Jesus asks us to trust in God and not to worry, but he also trusts us. He left it all to us to continue his love in this world. I want to finish with the message I put in the enewsletter this week...

I have a hope for a parish, a parish whose children and young people grow in faith and wisdom finding their way by following Jesus, of adults who grow in generosity and grace welcoming all in love through the peace of Christ and a parish which reaches out into the community to bless, and comfort all who are weary.

We are that parish, planting seeds of hope and life through our generous giving which makes this possible. Let's all take time this month to consider what we give regularly and how we give. Let's grow together in God's love through the fruits of our generosity.

- First things first. John and Gillian have made it safely to Barbados and they look amazing. This adventure which sounds terrifying to some of us is doing them a world of good. I want to take a few photographs and a short video clip to send our love and wish them well. So can everyone move together and face the camera? Choir, can we gather behind me?
- Three cheers for John and Gillian: We are sending you our love What an amazing trip. I think Yvonne and all of us would like you at Eat and Speak....
- Welcome to Stewardship Sunday, the day that we focus on our financial giving in thankfulness to God and to each other. Nigel Cuthbert and ???? will be available after church to answer questions or to get you signed up to the Parish Giving Scheme if you have been wanting to do that. We will have representatives to help on hand after our services for the rest of this month.
- Today there is also an opportunity to give to DEC if you haven't given already, to send aid to those suffering from the terrible earthquakes in Turkey last week. The collection is a retiring collection on your way out this morning.
- I will be away from Monday - Fri
- And now let's take a moment of silence to still our hearts as we prepare to worship our lord.