



## STORIES OF GENEROSITY

Rev Capt Paul Allinson from **Ponteland** recently held a primary school assembly about ‘helping each other.’ On his way home from Morning Prayer (and to a Zoom session to celebrate generous giving!), an 8 year old boy approached him and handed over an envelope full of 5p pieces. He had been saving them from his pocket money, and wanted to give them to support the church. Paul told us that the 5p pieces added up to about £7!

Rev Tom Birch, Vicar of the united benefice of **Ovingham and Wylam** tells how the scale and speed of generosity in their communities funded the purchase of 17 laptops in just 36 hours for children of Ovingham Middle School who were home-schooling during lockdown. It began when the school approached the chair of Ovingham Parish Council for help to fund a single laptop. She in turn approached St Mary the Virgin, Ovingham for support and the initiative snowballed. Funds were donated by the Parish Councils of both Wylam and Ovington, from charitable church funds, from generous donations by community groups and from 10 individual parishioners!



Rev Rachel Hudson from the benefice of **Scremerston, Spittal and Tweedmouth** told us of an idea their church had to offer gifts to some of the most in need families just before Christmas last year. Rachel was overwhelmed by the number of cash donations dropping through her letterbox and in fact received £1,200 in total which enabled 30 families to receive £40 in Tesco vouchers. With the help of local Head Teachers they were able to identify families and enable the gifts to be given anonymously, simply with a card from the church.



Rachel also told how her **“Open the Book” Team** ordered cakes from a local cafe which was struggling through lockdown, to show schools that they were still cared for, even though the team couldn’t be with them. The cafe owner was so touched that she made a significant contribution in terms of extra cake at her own cost, a true win-win story of generosity begat generosity!



Rev John Vilaseca in **Whitley Bay** told us about a homeless man who had joined his church. To begin with, this man stayed for about ten minutes of the service. Then, maybe as his confidence grew, he began to stay for the whole service.

The homeless man had been a window cleaner in a past life, and now offered to wash the parish centre windows. The windows washed, the homeless man then asked if he could be baptised.

Rev Sarah Lunn shared a story about her church in **rural Northumberland**. For Valentine's Day, members of Sarah's church delivered heart-shaped chocolates to every door in the parish. The chocolate hearts were accompanied by a simple message about being loved by God. The team then volunteered their time again to deliver Easter eggs to the same homes. On Easter Day Sarah was delighted that 36 people were moved to attend an open air service!

Fr David Twomey ministers in **Ashington**, home to a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers. Since 2018, St Andrew's church has been involved in a number of support groups including the Learn English Together (LET project), which teaches English to those newly arrived. LET is a church led group with volunteers from St Andrews and neighbouring church Holy Sepulchre, Ashington. Members of the two congregations lend support to families in practical ways, such as organising furniture and clothing when needed as well as offering a place of welcome for worship.



Fr David tells how the response from their refugee congregation has also been one of abundant generosity, not least by contributing to the life of the church by offering up time for maintenance projects around the church and surrounding community. Earlier this year, St Andrew's were blessed to welcome Bishop Glyn Webster who baptised and confirmed five refugee candidates in a wonderfully joyful service!

Rev Tim Mayfield's story was about his churchwarden who had picked up that St John's in **Backworth** didn't have its own ciborium (a silver cup with a lid to protect the communion wafers inside). Tim's churchwarden noticed him carrying the ciborium from his other church St Alban's to and fro, and offered to help. He kindly researched the piece of church kit online, and then generously offered to buy it. When the church family heard hear about it, they wanted to contribute too! So the churchwarden organised a collection and offered to fund any difference between the proceeds and the actual price. St John's now has its own ciborium, duly dedicated and feeding the faith of the good people there.

Rev Allison Harding from **Newburn Parish** tells how the generosity of her church and local community has meant they have been able to set up a brand new food bank in response to food poverty. It began with an amazingly generous cheque for £5,000 from a donor who wished to remain anonymous. Since then Allison has seen an overflowing of generosity, be it from those who donate food, those who pack it or those who deliver it. They also now receive generous support from the Hope Centre in Cramlington, the Methodist Church in Lemington, and the local school in Newburn who refer families who are most in need.



Rev Canon John Sinclair in **Upper Coquetdale** told us about a parishioner in his benefice who observed that the chairs in one of the churches were looking very tired. Without being asked, he generously offered to pay for a whole new set – a church full of chairs! The donor said that he had been financially blessed in his career and wanted to share his good fortune with the life of the church. A cheque was presented the very next day.

Carol at **Church Of The Ascension, Kenton** told us about two people who generously give their time and attention to the care of the church. At 80 years of age, Carol describes Kay as worth her weight and age in gold! When Kay heard that the church needed a cleaner, she volunteered to do it herself but would not hear of being paid! Carol said that she is the most fantastic, meticulous cleaner who tells everyone she is simply doing God's work. The church is also blessed by Billy, a schoolteacher, and their brilliant grass and hedge cutter who has recently taken on the very large vicarage garden too!



Pamela from the parish of **Christ the King, Newcastle** told us a lovely story of her late husband Mervin, who generously donated his overseas pension to a church he got to know during his time in Africa. He did this from the day he first received the pension until the day he died. The church had very little income and in fact when Mervin first got to know Gershum, the leader of the church, he was wrestling with the idea of giving up his ministry, being unable to pay his own children's school fees. Unbeknown, to Gershum, Mervin and his friends paid the school fees and also sent money for the church workers to buy bicycles to help them get around the Diocese. Gershum's ministry continued and he became a Bishop of high regard in Tanzania. Pamela explains that Mervin saw the financial need of the church and believed he was in a position to help. She said that he understood well that sharing resources is simply something God teaches us to do.

Rev Ian Hennebry told us how earlier this year all twenty one of the upper clerestory windows of St. John's Church, **Sleekburn**, were smashed by vandals. Although much of the cost of replacing the windows was covered by insurance, there was still a shortfall of at least £5,000 which would take a number of years to fundraise.

St John's is situated in an area of social deprivation, however once the local community found out about the damage to their church the money began to pour in! A lady on the neighbouring council estate set up a crowdfunding page on Facebook which raised over £1,000. St Johns' sister church held a fundraising quiz which brought in £500 and members of the public and local congregations gifted £1,000. Two significant donations from the local community totalled £9,000 and within a few months they had £11,500!

This was more than enough not only to repair and protect the windows but also to install external lighting, CCTV and fencing. Ian told us they are so grateful for the generosity of their neighbours and to God who will provide abundantly more than we can ever imagine!



Chris, a Reader in Tweedmouth parish, has generously volunteered his time to lead free guided storytelling tours on **Holy Island** to help raise much needed funds for St Mary's Church which has struggled desperately during the pandemic. The church on Holy Island relies so much on donations from pilgrims who haven't been coming over the last 12 months, so Chris has offered his time and gift of storytelling as one way to fill that gap. In the first couple of weeks Chris has raised over £500. He plans to give his time to this over the whole summer period, when weather and tides permit!