



Diocese of Liverpool

# archdeacons' visitation news

## Cultivating Gratitude

**The Venerable Jennifer McKenzie, Archdeacon of Wigan and West Lancashire, outlines the need for cultivating gratitude.**



In his book, *Freedom of Simplicity*, the Quaker pastor and theologian, Richard J. Foster, writes the following:

*[After] the apostolic age there was an exuberant caring and sharing on the part of Christians that was unique in antiquity. Julian the apostate, an enemy of Christianity, admitted that "the godless Galileans fed not only their [poor] but ours also." Tertullian wrote that*

*the Christians' deeds of love were so noble that the pagan world confessed in astonishment, "See how they love one another." Exactly what is it that these Christians did which elicited such a response from their enemies?*

The answer is simple: they were generous. Foster adds, "These repeated and sustained Christian acts of charity... grew out of a deep commitment to Christ and his call to care for the needy. These Christians genuinely believed that God was the owner and giver of all good gifts."

Today's world is not so different from that of the early church. God is still God, we are still human and great need still exists. Finding ways to share our abundance confronts us on every street corner, on every doorstep. The question is – will what we say we believe and who we say we are be translated into tangible action, or will we just pay lip service to our faith?

Ask around and you will find that generous givers are deeply grateful. Generosity stems from gratitude. Gratitude is a feeling we experience – often deeply, often in proportion to the substance of the gift we have received. And our own generosity is affected by the depth of gratitude we feel. When we feel grateful for the love, mercy and the grace of God; the example and sacrifice Jesus has given us; the comfort, guidance and gifts of the Holy Spirit, then

we, like those early Christians, can "with truly thankful hearts show forth [God's] praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives."

In the Diocese of Liverpool, we have much for which to be grateful. In these desperate times, you have been generous both within and outside of the church. Thank you to all who have stepped out in faith and given generously. In this issue of *Visitation News* we share some stories and some information which we hope will further cultivate gratitude and inspire generosity.

God is generous, merciful, and the giver of all good gifts. We are made by God in God's image. We are made for gratitude and we are made for generosity. Our generosity is cultivated through a disciplined practice of giving. In these challenging times, it is more urgent than ever to put our faith into practice and to cultivate gratitude.

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### A thank you from Bishop Paul

*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.*

Philippians 1:3–5

Churchwardens, sidespeople, church councillors, lay ministers and leaders – here in Bishop's Lodge I thank God every time I remember you. I thank God because you have offered your time, energy and talents to support and guide God's people, sharing that leadership with your ordained colleagues. I thank God for your prayerfulness, your care and your sheer hard work.

Please be sure that I offer these prayers of thanksgiving each day, praying too that our loving God will sustain and strengthen you by the Spirit, as you fulfil the ministries to which He has called you in Christ. May God fill your own hearts with gratitude, and may God bless you!

**Bishop Paul**



## Gratitude Stories: Church Wigan feeds 5,000

### “How do we do something together that we can’t do alone?”

In 2017, Wigan Hub Leadership Team members Alison Brown (Poolstock) and Revd Philip Anderson (Pemberton) were asking themselves this question. Alison had a vision of feeding the 5,000. Philip wanted to enact the Kingdom of God with a cheery banquet-style meal. Thus the “Christmas Eve Feast” was born. That year, they hosted 100 guests at St John’s; the following year, 200. By 2019 they had to hold feasts at both churches.

In 2020 a robust food ministry had emerged across Church Wigan, but Covid hit and social distancing meant the food ministry was compartmentalised back into local areas. Still, on Mondays the team prayed together; on Thursdays they hammered out plans. By October the food ministry team began asking what to do about the Christmas Feast. Providing hampers was the answer – but how many?

In mid-November, team member Revd Rachel Sheehan offered to email colleagues to help form the plan, encouraging them to spread the word and to ask for rough numbers of recipient households. She knew this was becoming a bigger endeavour – something Church Wigan could again do all together.

They made calculations and deduced they could provide about 300 hampers filled with turkey, veg and fruit. As word continued to spread, generosity grew. A quick recalculation and the numbers doubled to 700 hampers. Now schools joined the churches, and scores of people wanted to give more.

Coming up to 1,000 referrals, some leaders expressed angst, but not Ann Fairhurst. Ann, formerly LML and currently support for the food ministry, stated unequivocally, “We can’t put limits on God.”

Doors were now open to places they’d tried reaching for years. The idea grew to include “treat hampers” for those who didn’t need food but did need cheering, and non-perishable hampers to give out via schools. That unfettered desire to serve God’s people led to every Church Wigan new parish contributing food, money and volunteers.

The result of this faithful endeavour? They calculate 5,000 people were fed from the 1,236 hampers distributed. Yes, let’s not put limits on God!

## Gratitude Stories: In Another Place

**In Another Place (IAP) is a Christian theatre company aiming to “take Good News outside church walls”. You may have seen their Narnia or Alice Experience in St George’s Hall, Liverpool, in recent years. You don’t have to have a Christian faith to be involved and there is great diversity among the large group of volunteers. Everyone is welcome and they will always find people a role that makes the most of their gifts and abilities.**

In December 2018, IAP moved into a large shopping unit in Bootle Strand shopping centre. During the first lockdown last year they adapted their activities in order to allow their volunteers to keep active and to not feel isolated.

They began by organising the making of PPE for NHS workers. On Facebook Live they broadcast craft and gardening demonstrations twice a week. And they also encouraged people to make crosses using household items and to post pictures of them on social media.



The “stay at home” message brought IAP’s plans for a sponsored walk in May 2020 to an end. Instead, the company took part in a virtual “pilgrim walk” and encouraged others to complete and then send in the distance walked during their daily exercise. The IAP team then calculated how far the pilgrims had walked in total as a group, and each

week they met on Zoom with someone who lived at the place they had “virtually” reached along the route. In total 65 people have walked 19,000 miles through 75 countries to New Zealand, and are now returning home via the United States and Canada!

Other activities IAP organised include their schools’ assembly team recording their weekly Bible story online and sending them to local schools, and their choir and new music zone instrument lessons also moved online. And in six locations across Bootle and Crosby they organised a “snail trail” treasure hunt.

For Advent IAP created two online calendars: one in partnership with Sefton Performers Network and one based on the Nativity. In the run-up to Christmas 70 team members organised a grotto in Bootle Strand, at which children met Father Christmas (socially distanced and behind a perspex screen) who then invited them to meet an innkeeper who told them the story of the first Christmas.

IAP hope to stage a nativity play on Crosby beach in December 2021, and on Good Friday 2022 there are hopes for them to stage the Liverpool Passion.

**To find out more about In Another Place, visit <https://inanotherplace.com/>**





# Gratitude in Adversity: The Story of Parish Finances in 2020

**In 2020, parishes in the Diocese of Liverpool lost around £3.2 million in income because of the pandemic: £3.2 million is about a quarter of parishes' income – a major impact.**

With churches closed for public worship for large parts of last year, and with many worshippers vulnerable and shielding, giving fell sharply – although many parishes found inventive ways to collect stewardship envelopes. Those whose own finances were affected by the pandemic also had to reduce their giving. Fundraising events and rentals dried up almost entirely. Wedding fees fell and all sorts of other parish income streams fell away.

## Gratitude for generosity

But there were signs of real hope. Many of those who could gave sacrificially to sustain God's church through this difficult time. Some of your parishes saw very generous one-off gifts.

More and more givers joined the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) as you encouraged them to find regular online ways of giving to their church. In 2020 giving to parishes in this Diocese through PGS rose by 21% – our highest increase ever – and in 2021 parishes will receive more than £3 million in giving through the scheme for the first time.

As archdeacons we would also like to thank all those parishes who have shared and discussed their financial information with us and with their deaneries so that we have a full picture of the financial situation of our parishes in our Diocese.

## Gratitude for help

Ours is a diocese with historically low assets, and in a part of the country with low land values. Like most parishes, the Diocesan Board of Finance has only a few months' worth of reserves available.

From the beginning of the pandemic we knew that getting through the financial crisis would need a partnership between parishes, the diocese and the national church.

We were grateful last spring that dioceses could draw down 2020's Lower Income Communities' Funding (regular national church money targeted at poorer dioceses) early to help our cash flow; just as we were grateful to parishes who volunteered to pay 2020's parish share in advance. Our diocese was able to keep meeting its obligations (mainly the payment of clergy stipends) even when we didn't know what was going to happen next.

As the picture became clearer, we were able to use the information your parishes supplied to plan for the year as a whole. We estimated that of the £3.2 million in lost parish income, £1.6 million would result in unpaid parish share – the rest coming out of your parish reserves.

From diocesan savings, including the furloughing of staff, some sale of land and some other temporary savings, we could afford £600,000 of unpaid parish share within the diocese.

The national church allocated £35 million to dioceses to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. We applied for and received £1 million, so that in the Diocese of Liverpool we could afford a one-off impact of £1.6 million in 2020.

In this way we made £1.6 million available in Parish Share Credit to cancel 2020 non-payment for many parishes, and to offer credit against 2021 payments to help rebuild some parish reserves. Overall four out of five parishes have received some Parish Share Credit, in every deanery across the Diocese.

## Hope in 2021

The pandemic has made a major impact on parish financial sustainability. Even after receiving Parish Share Credit, 1/3 of parishes in the diocese have less than the equivalent of three months' parish share in reserve and 2/3 of parishes have less than six months' worth.



The financial impact of the pandemic on our parishes is not over. On top of last year's £3.2 million we estimate this year will see around another £1.5 million in lost parish income compared to 2019.

The impact of these losses will still have to be shared between

parishes, diocese and the national church, but with reduced reserves we know that parishes will have less capacity than you did last year. We know that we can rely on your continued generosity, and on your commitment to parish share to make as great a contribution as you can.

We will continue to work throughout 2021 to find local savings, and to ask for further help from the national church's relief funds. Please keep your archdeacon and your deanery leaders in touch with what your parish is facing as we work together for a good recovery and a sustainable future.



# Talking money is about generous giving in gratitude



## Rule of Life

This past year churches in our Diocese have relied on the very generous and sustained giving by many and we extend our gratitude towards them. Giving of our “time, talents and treasures” are key areas of what it means to be a disciple of Christ as outlined in our Diocesan Rule of Life.

The Bible teaches us that “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). All we have belongs to God; we are not “owners” but “tenants”. As Christians we recognise that God has given us everything we own and as part of our discipleship we believe in giving financially to the church.

Perhaps Paul’s words in the New Testament give a good summary of a healthy attitude towards giving:

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each one should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

2 Corinthians 9:6–8

Our generosity reflects our understanding of the generosity God has extended to us: “For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son...” (John 3:16). When we see how lavishly God has provided for us, then why would we not act the same way towards the church and others by giving in grace? “Just as you excel in everything else – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness... see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

## Join the diocesan challenge to become carbon net-zero by 2030

In February 2020 General Synod set a new goal for the whole Church of England to become carbon net-zero by 2030.

The Bishop of Salisbury, lead bishop on Environmental Affairs, said:

*Synod has set an ambitious target for the whole Church of England to respond to the urgency of the Climate Crisis. To reach Synod’s target of 2030 will not be easy, and requires each of us to hear this as an urgent call to action. But this is a clear statement of intent about our determination to safeguard God’s creation. We will now need to work out a plan to ensure we do everything possible to meet this target.*

If you haven’t already done so, please use the Energy Footprint Tool to measure your parish’s carbon use. You can find this in your online Statistics for Mission return, or find more information here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment/energy-footprint-tool>

## We encourage you to follow the Rule of Life

We are asking God for a bigger church to make a bigger difference with more people knowing Jesus and more justice in the world. We want everyone to think seriously about becoming disciples of Jesus and you can do this by adopting our Rule of Life. It is based on six simple words: Pray, Read, Learn, Tell, Serve, Give.

We are called by God to be close to Jesus in our hearts by prayer, reading the Bible and learning from one another. We are sent by God to be close to Jesus in the world by telling our friends about Jesus, serving those in need and giving our lives, our time and talents and money back to the God who has given us everything.

If the traditional, ancient term “rule” concerns you because it sounds legalistic... think of “rule” as a “Curriculum in Christlikeness” (Dallas Willard).

For more information, go to [www.ruleoflife.org](http://www.ruleoflife.org)



### For more information

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