

# The Parish Church of St Mark, Mansfield

## Some Thoughts on Stewardship

*As some members of the congregation were away when we held our Stewardship Sunday, I have been asked to share some thoughts about Stewardship with you.*

**Fr. James. September 2018**

Many of you will know Richard Gillard's hymn 'Brother, sister, let me serve you,' which includes these words:

*'We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.'*

I believe that *this* attitude lies at the heart of what it means to be members of the Church and involves using all that God gives to us generously and to help one another. \***Our** responsibility is then to find ways of expressing this *as appropriate for each of us as individuals and as part of a Christian community.*

So – how might we do this? Well, one practical way that springs to mind for St Mark's is in relation to serving one another. Now, I *am* aware, and profoundly grateful, for the differing ways that members of St Mark's are already serving each other, and it is wonderful and inspiring to see this. So let me now say a big thank you to you all for the many ways that you generously give of yourselves for the benefit of St Mark's. But if I may, can I particularly mention those who are involved in our Coffee Mornings – a comparatively new venture, but one which I believe will become an increasingly important example of our ministry as a parish church in this part of Mansfield. And can I also mention that as a church we need particular help in relation to our weekly services. We need more people to volunteer to **read the Bible lessons**, to **write and lead the Intercessions**, and to **serve at the altar**. These *are* important aspects of our life together, so let me encourage you all to think and pray about this very carefully, and if you do feel

able to help in any of these ways to have a word with me or the churchwardens. We will gladly point you in the right direction!

There are, of course, other issues that St Mark's needs to face, a key one of which is the fact that we are encouraged to try to pay what is referred to as our **Parish Share**. Forgive me if you are already aware of this, but essentially, the Parish Share contributes towards things like each priest's monthly stipend as well as pensions and housing costs, and also the training of future clergy and the Diocesan support services that we can draw upon for help and advice if we need it, about issues like safeguarding, care of buildings, and so on. Currently, our particular Parish Share is about **£37,000** a year. Now clearly, it *can* be difficult for a parish to find the money for their contribution, and if there were to be an increase in our level of contribution, this might well be an issue for St Mark's in the future.

Now, I *have* heard it said that there is no *legal* obligation to pay the Parish Share – but *actually*, I would suggest that it's far *more* important than that! *I* believe there is a *moral* obligation to try to raise as much of our contribution as we can, and that as Christian people this *has* to be a priority in our life together. So let me try to offer some reasons why we should do this:

1) *Firstly*, it allows the Church to work across the Diocese, with richer and poorer parishes working together and sharing our resources to help one another, and so to express the crucial and biblical conviction that we *are* 'One Body in Christ' and can do more together than we could ever do apart.

2) It is also a sign of our commitment to being a Christian presence in each community and to proclaiming the Christian message there. It *is* sadly the case that some denominations have entirely moved away from some local communities – and surely, it would be a tragedy if the Church of England were to do the same.

3) Alongside this, it helps us to recognise the importance of the Church's mission for the future, by continuing to be present and to serve our community here in Mansfield in the ways that are needed and welcome. This is important work that we are *all* involved in, and we are involved in it – I *hope!* – because we wholeheartedly believe our Christian faith *is* worth celebrating and sharing with others.

4) And a final reason is that contributing in this way helps us to express our thanks for all God's generosity to us, in so many different ways, by sharing what we have been given for the good of our church and community.

So really, our Parish Share contribution is about every parish seeing itself as part of the 'Bigger Picture,' and then giving as generously as possible and *practical*, so that not just *our* congregation but *every* parish, locally and further afield, can carry on the Church's mission within their particular setting, *as* members of the 'One Body.'

But of course, in addition to this we have the responsibility for the maintenance and repair of our buildings. At present, the running costs for St Mark's are around **£930 a week**, and we are just about covering this – but there is little 'surplus' for any extras that we might wish to, and perhaps *should* be, involved in.. So for all of us who love St Mark's, I believe that we need to think carefully about the subject of *giving*.

Let me say first of all that I think that there is something to be said for all of us to consider what we might call the '**Three R's of Giving.**'

*Firstly*, our giving should be **regular**. *Please* – if you possibly can, do ensure that you make your gift by standing order and if possible through **Gift Aid**, so that our church receives this on a regular basis, even if for some reason people can't be at church one week, which will allow us to have a more dependable source of income and to make plans for the future. \*God generously gives to us *all the time*. Let's ensure that our own giving reflects this.

*Secondly*, our giving should be **realistic**. We are *all* aware just how much things cost, and how necessary expenses increase all the time; but if we can see this, then we must also see that our own giving must reflect this, so that we *can* realistically meet our commitments. Clearly, this *is* an incredibly important point, and I urge you to take this matter seriously.

And *thirdly* – and perhaps this is something we may all tend to forget – our giving should be **reviewable**. We have to recognise that everyone's financial *and* time commitments change over time. But if we give in proportion to our income, then when our disposable income goes up – *and*, of course, if it also goes *down* – then shouldn't our giving do so as well?

As what I hope is a *fun* way of making this point, I want to talk for a moment about **COFFEE!** I *really* enjoy a decent cup of coffee from one of the famous outlets, but in general Alice and I tend to keep this as a holiday treat! Yet I have been told that there are people who regularly buy two or three cups of takeaway coffee **a day** - and this must surely cost them a small fortune each year! But let's consider this in a way that I hope is easy for all of us to think about. In this last week, I did a small survey of some of the shops in Mansfield serving coffee and found that on average a cup of coffee costs **£3.00** a time. Now supposing each of us buys perhaps two cups of coffee each week. \*That would cost **£6.00**, and if you times that by the number of weeks in a year that comes to **£312**. As an ardent coffee fan, I would not completely deprive *anyone* of their favourite bean – but *half* of this would be **£156**; and if 45 people were to give an extra £3 a week to St Mark's, this would add up to **£7,020** – and if **60** people did this, this would rise to **£9,360**, and so it goes on – *just through going without one cup of coffee each week!* I hope that by seeing things in these terms, it helps us all to consider how even a small increase can make a difference, if we are all able to do this. As few things in life stay the same, then reviewing our giving might be something that we could do on a regular basis, and then to respond as generously as we can.

So as we think about Stewardship, let me encourage us all to be as generous as we are able to be, so that the work of this church and the life of our community at St Mark's can continue. Let me end with a prayer for us from the Diocese of Coventry:

‘Living God, our Church is made up of people like us.

We make of it what it is.

It will be filled with inspiring worship

- if we are there and ready to meet with you, Lord.

It will be a community where disciples are made

- if we are willing to grow in love for you and for our neighbours.

It will bring about a transformation of the community

- if our vision is a growing church that makes a real difference to people's lives.

Therefore with your help,

let us dedicate ourselves to the task of being all the things you want us to be.

In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.