

## Generous giving as an investment

Last month the Salisbury Diocese launched its Generous Giving Campaign. The last 18 months has seen an unprecedented interruption to our church services and all the fund-raising activities that are such a part of community life, offering the opportunity to meet and chat in our otherwise rather busy lives. We, as church members, have been deprived of such cheerful events for all these months and can perhaps begin to look forward to normal life returning. But the effect on Diocesan finances will be much longer lasting.

It is fair to say that few members of the church and certainly even less the general public, have any real appreciation of how our churches exist financially. And apart from criticisms of the Church Commissioners and Bishops, little is reported on how the Church of England holds it together and the role of the dioceses in that.

So firstly, let me clarify what our Diocese of Salisbury does not pay for. It does not contribute to or receive income from Salisbury Cathedral, this being a separate charity and funded by the National Church. Nor does it pay for our Diocesan or Suffragan Bishops who are also funded by the National Church.

What the Diocese does pay for, amounted to £14.5 million in 2020. Of that, £9.4 million went to 'Direct Ministerial Costs'; the stipends, national insurance, housing, pensions and expenses of all our clergy, currently 193 posts. A further £3.4 million went to Ministerial support for on-going clergy, ordinand and lay training, church buildings, pastoral governance, legal services, overseas mission and work with children and young people. Together, therefore, what can be termed 'Parish Ministry', amounted to £12.8 million or 88% of total expenditure.

We do like to point at the assumed enormous costs of Salisbury. Other than 'Parish Ministry', the total administrative costs were £942k, a mere 6.5% of total expenditure. And yes, an amount goes to the National Church of £580k or 4%, but some of that comes back in the form of grants, costs of safeguarding, etc.

And its income? Well in 2020 it totalled £13 million, of which £9.6 million or 74% came from the parishes in payments of Parish Share – so only just covering the 'Direct Ministerial Costs'. A further £1.8 million came from parochial fees, the National Church and other grants and donations. Investment income and rental income amounted to a further £1.6 million. So 'Parish Ministry' was covered.

But with an expenditure of £14.5 million and an income of £13 million, a deficit of £1.5 million was the result. This is not sustainable. The Diocese froze and reduced its administrative and salary costs, it sold some investments and is having to review its most significant cost, the numbers of stipendiary clergy posts needed. It has the second highest ratio of Stipendiary clergy to population in the country – and I for one want to see that maintained as far as is possible.

So, the importance of Parish Share becomes apparent. It contributes hugely, although not entirely, to Parish Ministry. This is an amount that every parish is required to send to Salisbury based on the number of members of each church. It averages out at £440 per member per year, £8.50 a week. A shortfall in payment of Share will inevitably result in a reduction of Clergy posts. In 2020 due to the pandemic and the reduced income that so many parishes suffered, the collection of Share across the Diocese was under 90% of what was budgeted (although 96% in our Deanery!). Many dipped into reserves to do so, but at under 90% of what was budgeted that was a shortfall of over £1 million, two thirds of that deficit. Parish Share is not optional, nor is it a tax. It is an investment in people, the most important asset that this Diocese and the Church of England has. Our buildings without clergy are unimaginable, glorious and beautiful as they may be.

So may I suggest that when you are asked to consider your giving you look at it in this way – as an investment. And generously – and why not cheerfully? As the 2nd letter of Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter 9 reads: 'the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver'.

David Robinson  
Bradford Deanery Treasurer