

Generous giving as an investment

I have been Deanery Treasurer of the Bradford Deanery since the adoption of Fairer Share some 17 years ago. I have always insisted on being very transparent with the way that system works so that all PCCs know what they and all other PCCs are paying in the Deanery – and why. And in recent years I've been hugely supported in this by Revd Canon Andrew Evans, our rural Dean, who makes sure that our incumbents get the Share message. I have no doubt that our combined efforts have enormously improved our record of Share payment to pretty well 100% - even 96% last year.

But over this time I've been struck by just how little members of the church and certainly even less the general public, as indeed the media, have any appreciation of how our churches exist financially. 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. In this day and age, when one is asking people to give to any cause, you have to be prepared to explain where the money goes and why. Transparency again. So, Revd Canon Joanna Abecassis asked me to write about it – and address the congregation at Holy Trinity, Bradford on Avon - to set out how our Salisbury Diocese works financially - based on the 2020 audited accounts. And that is what you have in front of you.

This was made possible because of the information brought together for the debate on the finances of last year, the Generous Giving campaign and next year's budget.

However, it seems to me that much work still needs to be done across the diocese on informing, perhaps educating, our membership on the Diocesan Finances - what it pays for and what it does not. That it does not contribute to or receive income from Salisbury Cathedral, or pay for our Diocesan or Suffragan Bishops, is the biggest surprise for many that I have spoken to.

So I set out what the Diocese does pay for and made that necessary explanation of Direct Ministerial Costs*, Ministerial support**, together, Parish Ministry, amounting to 88% of total expenditure in 2020 as in this 2022 budget.

But as we know, PCCs like everyone else, like to point elsewhere and in their case to the assumed enormous costs of Salisbury. So to be able to be transparent on that issue is important. I note that the budget for 2022 reduces

further the total administrative costs to just 5% of total expenditure. The savings and efficiencies in Diocesan Admin that have been mentioned are important and make good press, but the reality is that those costs are dwarfed by the cost of Parish Ministry, and there simply is not enough fat in those admin costs to influence the Share request in any significant way.

Similarly, the income from Share dwarfs all other income sources. In 2020 it contributed £9.6 million or 74% of expenditure, just covering the Direct Ministerial Costs – and this was only 90% of what was requested that year.

We should be proud to see that the Salisbury Diocese has the second highest ratio of Stipendiary clergy to population in the country – and we want to see that maintained as far as is possible and for parish ministry to continue as we know it, and to flourish – but the membership has to wake up to the basic costs of parish ministry in the 21st century, and who has to meet that cost - it is our problem, no one else's.

That cost is presently £442 per member per year, that is £8.50 a week; the proposed budget increase of 5% would increase that by 42p. We all know that further reductions in membership will increase that cost per member, already high for many. But the reverse is also true.

We do need to have an open and transparent discussion across the membership - money is not a dirty word, it is what we do with money that matters. Although somewhat steeped in the detail of Fairer Share I think that a focus on what Share pays for is perhaps more relevant as at today than how it is calculated. And this is where some communication - education - is required.

Some suggest that the payment of Parish Share is optional, or PCCs' main responsibility is the maintenance of their church buildings. Some even consider that Parish Share is a tax. The message is that Parish Share pays for Parish Ministry; it 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, we do need to encourage (from the top down, at all levels) a change in mindset towards our giving and support of Parish Ministry. When talking to our congregations about giving may I suggest that we describe it in this way – as an investment. Be confident, invest wisely, invest generously – and why not cheerfully?

May I repeat therefore, from the letter of Paul to the Corinthians: *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.*

* the stipends, national insurance, housing costs, pensions and expenses of all our clergy, currently 193 posts.

** for on-going ministerial, ordinand and lay training, church buildings, pastoral governance, legal services, overseas mission and work with children and young people