

FUNDING THE VISION

Extracts of the Vicar's and Emeritus Churchwarden's presentation at the Stewardship service on June 13th 2010

From the Vicar:

The stewardship packs we have sent out, and the type of information we have shared with you is very much along the lines of what is used in most Anglican churches, and although they don't make comfortable reading, the PCC would be failing in its duty if it didn't share these matters with the wider church family.

Soon after I came to Sonning, the world went into recession. I don't think the two are related however! Stock markets plunged, savings investments shrivelled and things became pretty gloomy on the financial front. Once the dust settled, we began to realise that the parish's financial position was not as comfortable as had been previously thought. Historic endowments, which had been propping our parish up, were returning a very poor yield and giving was down, an inevitable consequence of a recession. As was presented in the pack, this left us with a £16000 shortfall in our accounts last year. However, I am happy to report that spending has not been increasing significantly; rather income has simply been dropping.

Of course, we also spoke in the packs of our vision for the parish in terms of beginning a new ministry to young families and children. Even if we had no such vision, I would still be standing here at a stewardship service, as the simple fact is that we can't even continue with the status quo in both churches if we carry on with such low levels of giving across the 442 on the ER. Clearly there would be serious consequences for both churches and therefore both villages if we continued ambling along the road we are on at the moment. The Friends of St. Andrew's provide a most helpful support for maintaining the fabric of one of our churches, and the superb condition of this building is testament to that. But this service today is not about buildings or heritage, it is about our commitment to supporting the mission and future of the church family, not its bricks and mortar. We are here to evaluate where God is placed in the priority list of our lives, and part of this is where he is placed in our budgets.

When I was appointed, it was made clear to me that a big priority for this parish was to begin to seriously reach out to families and young people. The PCC then reaffirmed this in the PCC vision process that took place. If I just had to stand here and say that we need more money simply to pay the bills and keep going on exactly as we are, I would have a heavy

heart indeed. Whilst we do need to increase our income, we are actually being called to do this in the context of some exciting plans for the future.

“Where there is no vision the people perish.” Wise words from scripture, and a lesson for any congregation. There is so much that is good about our churches. So much to be grateful for and to value. However, there is an area where the PCC believe that we do fall short. It was highlighted before I came here, and it is a weakness that is shared by sadly too many other churches. It is this weakness that we are seeking to address, and we believe that God has given us a vision to do just that.

We in no way wish to sideline those who can't be referred to as young, not in the slightest, but we do need to realise that we have largely failed to reach out to those who are from younger generations. There will be a heavy price to pay for this, nationally and locally, if we leave it unchecked. We clergy do our best, with able and willing help from Sunday school teachers and others, but it is not enough. Across the parish we believe that we are called to bring in a new ministry, most probably from someone who is ordained, and who therefore can give good service in the usual priestly tasks in both churches, but who is trained specifically to engage in this targeted mission. That will be their primary purpose, unencumbered by the management of churches, and all the admin that comes my way. It is a big step, but one that has been discussed and prayed about for many months. It is envisaged that this new ministry can begin in either late 2012 or 2013, but much will depend on how we now respond to this call to greater commitment, and the PCC has not made any final decisions.

It needs to be stressed that the excellent traditions of decent music and worship will be maintained. This is certainly no bid to sideline the choir, silence the organ and bring in the tambourines. We could do all these things of course, but I fear you'd be looking for a new Vicar in the process! In short, this new ministry will not threaten in any way the essential character of our parish church. Worship at St. Patrick's will be reviewed on a separate basis as we move forward.

I believe that this parish is at an important stage in its life. There really is so much to give thanks for, but, and I don't say this flippantly, if we carry on just as we are, without seriously trying to engage with younger generations, where will we be in 15 or 20 years, and who will be left? The world has changed so much in the last few generations, and the church has become more and more marginalised. Teenagers and indeed twenty somethings, today often have no clue about what we stand for, and about who we worship. Soon enough, they will be parents, and another new generation will come along that we are largely failing to reach. If we fail to counter this, I predict we will sleep walk into obscurity, still here, but an ever dwindling band, and a shadow of what we are today.

I have no intention of sleep walking anywhere, and I know the wardens and PCC are equally reluctant. Whilst we accept that no individual church has a guarantee of success and

growth, if a church is open to the Holy Spirit's leading, and if the congregations are made up of Christians who are living out their faith in obedience, then great things can happen. We know the affection we feel for our buildings and our shared life together. We know what our faith means to us. We know what a tremendous gift a life walked hand in hand with Jesus is. We believe that the church of Jesus Christ offers a better way, and that we really can make a positive difference in people's troubled lives. The call this morning is to prayerfully consider how you can help us share this gift with those who have yet to hear of it, and who may never, if we fail to respond.

So, in summary, the deficit, the ever increasing essential costs of resourcing the parish and our buildings, and the requirement to build for the future, have highlighted the need for us to significantly increase our income. If even half the people on our Electoral roll could regularly commit to supporting the parish through standing orders, along with the benefit of gift aid, we would be well on our way.

Secondly, we need to expand. A church that rests on its laurels, without planning for the future, and drawing in others to be the church of the future will, sooner or later, pay a heavy price. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to safeguard the Christian heritage of this parish.

Thirdly and finally, this stewardship campaign is not primarily a means for telling you all to pay more money. Whilst only the treasurer knows what individuals give, I am told that there are some very generous givers in this church, equally there are some who give sacrificially, and are on modest incomes who couldn't possibly give more. Rather this is an opportunity for us all to review what we give, and to prayerfully consider where we place God in the priority list of our lives.

From Prof Malcolm Stansfield's presentation

Having worshiped in the Parish for nearly 50 years, involved with 6 Vicars, warden for 18 years & now Emeritus, I have always been interested in the finances & am therefore pleased this morning to help explain the current situation – which seriously affects us all.

We keep our buildings looking great & in good repair – which is highly appreciated by the congregations, as well as the visitors.

Sunday attendance across the parish is very healthy. As well as the contemporary Parish Eucharists & Communion at St Patricks, we also offer Book of Common Prayer Communion at 8.00 am & Evensong at 6.30 pm & these are greatly valued, not least by the Vicar & Wardens (especially the Emeritus!!)

Anyone with finance & accountancy skills could look at our balance sheet & wish too that they were involved with such a strong business. We have numerous investments – which over the years have generated considerable income – but much less so recently! Many are specific/restricted funds for

use such as the churchyard or purchase of flowers. Some recent legacies, left to the PCC have been used to undertake major projects – the Glass doors & renovation of the stained glass windows. We own The Bull & have it let at a good rent.

BUT – our Parish Share is linked to our income & so the real benefit to us in the parish is much reduced. The Parish Share, as many will know, is paid by each Parish to the Oxford Diocese to help pay clergy stipends/housing & pensions as well as training for clergy & lay ministers. The level of payment is also linked to the numbers on the Electoral Role. In business terms, we are “capital rich but cash poor”

Until last year we have usually had excess of income over expenditure or broken even. Collections, tax reclaim & fees covering our running expenses & I am confident we will soon get back to that situation. However it is financial support for our future plans that we are here to think & pray about this morning. I agree fully with Jamie that we need to **grow our church**. – attract & keep young families & children.

When Jamie was appointed 2 years ago, he was challenged to help us develop our youth & family ministry. He & the PCC are now well on with planning to make that a reality, but it will obviously add to our operating cost of staff & support. So our income needs to increase substantially.

Regular giving by we the members on the Electoral role is really the only way we can budget & have the confidence to proceed with this vital work. Of the 442 members on the ER only 93 of us are involved in planned giving. I find it difficult to believe, but my colleagues have checked and on average we give per member far less than any other neighbouring parishes.

As a trustee & former Chairman of “The Friends of St Andrews”, I know that many of you also donate on a regular basis to the Friends funds. This too is important if we are to keep the building in first class condition. But our regular giving to the PCC has to come first. Experience has shown that if we have a major capital cost – e.g. the organ or the roof, we can appeal to a much wider audience in the village & get good support.

Many of those donors only use the church for special occasions. Vibrant churches are so much more important to us, we want the pews to be occupied in the future as they are this morning. That future depends on today’s young. We therefore have a real responsibility to provide the resources for the vicar & his team to attract the young & keep them in the fold.

I guess I am here today because of a young curate who organised a church youth group when I was a teenager - & fun it was too! I was also a choir boy & am therefore so pleased that we now have a Junior choir here in St Andrews. A fine example of the projects being planned.

The aim is to double our total giving in 2 years, some may find that a challenge others will agree with me that it is realistic, but more importantly it needs to be achieved. Our running costs go up each year, the Parish share last year by 3.5%.

Regular planned giving helps us to give as we want – not just the change we have when the plate comes around. If you are not part of the Planned Giving Scheme please join it. If you are already involved, please consider a possible increase. The ideal way is with a standing order. If you like to put something on the plate during the collection, just add a little extra.

Some may feel they were bombarded with paper about the Stewardship. I read it all, but the best quote for me was one from St Paul "We shall not all be rich, but rich enough to be able to be generous".

Let us all give serious thought to our level of commitment. We have so much to be thankful for. The opportunity to respond is now. Please give it serious consideration.

More information on how to support our parish through planned giving is available at the stewardship stand at the back of St. Andrew's.