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February 9th 2020

Dear friends,

On 23rd February at All Saints, we will be holding our Stewardship Sunday when we focus upon how we resource the ministry of Parish Church here in Minstead, especially in relation to the offering of our time, our gifts and financial support. As your Vicar, I am in full agreement with Liz Randall and Gray Kasamale, our Church Wardens, along with the PCC, that the ministry of All Saints' could not continue without the generosity of so many in the parish and further afield. Whether members of the regular congregation at All Saints' or not, we know that there is an abiding affection for our parish church and churchyard. We are especially delighted when we hear of those who consider All Saints' Parish Church a 'living treasure', not a 'museum of curiosities.

For many, it was here at All Saints' where precious family memories were made. For some, perhaps even yourself, it will have been the surprised joy of a baptism, the anticipated wonder of a wedding ceremony or the dignified tranquillity of a funeral service. It is clear therefore that for many, the parish church remains at the centre of our shared lives together, reflecting the heartbeat and sharing the heartache of our community.

It is also clear to us that many value the constancy of Christmas, Easter and Harvest Celebrations at All Saints', all of which bring the community together, just as they have for generations. In addition to these significant occasions, a regular congregation comes together on Sundays and at various times each week to worship God and work for the wellbeing of others in the parish and across the world.

We are conscious that so many in the parish contribute 'volunteer hours' ensuring that the church remains clean, in good order and provides a warm welcome to visitors every day. A cursory glance at the 'Visitors' Book' reminds us that people from near and far appreciate not only the stunning architecture of a church that is open, but the felt presence and peace of God they experience in our 'holy place.' Our Parish Church is both 'breath-taking' for those who are interested in 'church buildings' as well as a space where people can 'take a breath', pause and be renewed.

Given the history of generosity towards the church and its ministry, it is difficult, but necessary to report that the church is currently running at an estimated loss of £750 per month. Without the extraordinary generosity of many in the parish and others, we would not have been able to keep up our monthly payments of £2416 to the Diocese of Winchester this year, which represents our contribution to the Common Mission Fund (Parish Share) for 2020. In addition, as a parish, we contribute 25% of Benefice Office costs, the Vicar's expenses and other related benefice resources.

"Thankfully, our Church Fabric Fund is healthy and needing no further contribution at the moment, and I am pleased to confirm that the church building and churchyard are in good order. We are grateful to Peter Bennett who manages to pay day to day running expenses (Heat, light, grass cutting etc) from the annual interest we receive from our limited investments.

In addition to regular giving either through the banking system or during our Sunday services, we are grateful to those in the parish who have supported projects over the years, donating significant amounts

ensuring that vital repairs can be made, and scheduled maintenance can be completed. The Church Wardens, PCC and myself are especially grateful to Sylvia Dibben and her team who work hard to raise funds for the church by taking donated goods to auction or to Car Boot Sales. This is an amazing effort and the funds raised are the result of their dedication to the church and to its ministry in the parish.

It is therefore with great sensitivity to the personal circumstances of those in our parish that I write requesting that we all review our level of financial support to the ministry of the church. Costs are rising month on month for the church as they are for everyone else, but we cannot continue to maintain the current monthly deficit in our General Fund for more than a further 3 months (estimated) after which we will have to start selling shares to meet our running costs. Whilst we do have limited reserves, the monthly shortfall could soon begin to eat into our investments, which is the 'last resort' for any charity as this depletes the vital interest we receive each year.

We are of course grateful for donations to our Fabric fund which is used to maintain and repair the church and churchyard; however, our concern relates to the diminishing balance of our general fund. The bottom line is that if we do not have the funds to support the ministry of the parish through our Parish Share, the viability of our Parish Church comes into sharp focus. It is not impossible that without a significant increase to our monthly income into our general fund, the church would lose its Vicar and become a Chapel of Ease, which I am convinced that no-one, including me, wants to happen.

So, in response to our present financial situation, can I invite you to consider the following:

1. Are you able to increase your weekly/monthly giving to the church?
2. If you are a UK Taxpayer, do you gift aid your giving? If not, will you do so as the parish can claim an additional 25p for each pound donated.
3. If you do not do so already, could you donate a regular amount through the Parish Giving Scheme which is a great help as we can anticipate income through the year.
4. Could you give a one off 'unrestricted' gift to the General Fund to enable us to build some security into our finances?
5. Do you have anything you believe to be of value that could be auctioned to raise funds for the parish? If so, please contact Sylvia Dibben.
6. Do you have any ideas about possible fundraising events? If you would like to join a group which will explore and plan fundraising opportunities, please let me know asap.

The great news is that our church is growing with a worshipping community of 50+. The introduction of our 'Funday Sunday' Service is bringing children and young families into the church and initiatives such as the monthly 'Open Door Café' provides a welcome meeting place for those in our community who enjoy meeting with others over tea. It has my proven conviction over 30 years of ministry that when we attempt those things that God is calling us to do, he will provide us with the means to do it! So, the future holds no fear for us if we anticipate it with faith which when mixed with fun will achieve far more than us giving more to the church but with many more in our parish giving themselves to Christ! I am thrilled to be your parish priest and humbled that God has called us to serve him together here in Minstead.

If you have any questions about how you can might consider supporting the Churches General Fund, please speak with the Church Treasurer, Peter Bennett. You can of course speak with myself or the Church Wardens if this would be useful.

Kindly,
David Potterton (Vicar)

Liz Randall (Church Warden)
Gray Kasamale (Church Warden)

