

Sunday 24 January 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Church Giving at St Mary's: Time and Talents
2021 Campaign: *What can I give him?***

I have been struck in the past weeks of Christmas and Epiphany by the words, *What can I give Him* which come from the hymn, *In the bleak mid-winter*. The response to these words is, as we will well know, *give my heart* and I have considered these words in light of the decision of the UCC that this year's Church Giving Sunday should focus on how we each give of our Time and Talents, our gifts and skills, in the service of God and God's church. What does *give my heart* mean? We sing it each year, but where does it take us?

For some, *give my heart* will mean greater dedication to prayer and worship, for others it will mean greater dedication to service. As you ponder what *give my heart* might mean for you, I invite you to consider some practical examples of how you might use your God-given gifts and skills, your Time and Talents, to deepen your commitment to God through life at St Mary's and, through this, your discipleship and faith. Enclosed with this letter is a leaflet giving a whole host of activities with which we can be involved. I have followed the three themes we use for our Mission Action Plan to hang these on so that there is a wide spread of actions available to us all. God calls each one of us: you, me, everyone. There really is an activity for everyone.

The current financial situation

Having initially decided that this year's Church Giving should concentrate on Time and Talents, the reality of the current financial situation means that no-one at St Mary's can ignore the fact that the income from church members has not covered our expenditure for some years means we also need to reflect on our finances in this letter too.

The United Church Council (UCC) has continued to make very difficult decisions to try to 'balance the books'. For a second year,

St Mary's is carrying forward a substantial deficit - this year of £35,000. There is no doubt people not being able to attend on a Sunday has affected our income, alongside the Church Centre income plummeting. On the other side of these losses was the remarkable generosity of individuals who gave a total of £6,635 in one-off donations.

Sadly, we have had to again reduce the amount given to Charities from our Planned Giving. For 2021, only 10% will be given away. Should the response to this year's Church Giving Campaign be as successful as we hope, the proposal is that we will give away what has been our norm, 20% of our Planned Giving income. This is wholly dependant on the bottom-line figures at the end of the year though.

We need our overall income to increase by at least 10% in order to return to where we were a few years ago. The only place this increase in income is going to come from is from each of us at St Mary's.

Looking forward

Giving of our Time and Talents, working together as the body of Christ, increases our sense of belonging. Getting to knowing others who make up our worshipping community is key to being a disciple of Christ. Getting to know one another, seeing what is good in one another and celebrating these things, as well as learning from them and sharing more deeply, is a great gift we are given by being part of the body of Christ. The list of things in the accompanying leaflet is given for each of us to reflect on and pray with and respond to. Please do reflect, pray and respond - especially to some of the practical things. Use this letter as a rallying call to greater commitment, fuller discipleship, new possibilities for us all - personally and as a household of faith.

Also, reflect, pray and respond with regard to the amount of money you give to St Mary's. As we have seen this past year, we cannot rely on unpredictable income streams such as rental income or bequests to pay our regular bills.

How much should you give?

Of your life, as a child of God... everything! This does *not* mean you have to become a Nun/Monk/Priest, worry not! What it does mean though is that the choices you make as to how you live your life of faith *are* important. How much of your time is given to the life of the church? Fully, wholly, unselfishly. The Covenant Service Prayer is a wonderful reminder of all that we have been given and all that we are asked to give. Look at the enclosed activities, and ask for God's guidance as to how you should respond.

Remember where I began... *What can I give him?* What would giving your heart look like - in Time and Talents, as well as financially?

If our Income through Planned Giving equalled our Expenditure, any additional money through rental etc. would be a bonus and thus allow us to return to being able to do the things we have for so long taken as read. In addition, new things could happen - such as employing a Children's and Family Worker.

Our Income through giving needs to increase by at least 10% for us to even attempt to balance our books. 'Money is the muscle of mission' was something I heard recently. Our money makes mission possible: bringing people into the household of faith.

What next?

Reflect: *On your own Time and Talents, gifts and skills, financial resources.*

Pray: *Ask God to show you how to respond with a generous heart.*

Respond: *Give of your time, give of your talents, give of your money. Give of and from your heart.*

With thanks for all that you are and all that you do.

Deborah

If all who give through Planned Giving
(the Church Giving Scheme and Envelope Scheme)
increased their 2020 levels of giving by...

5% - the overall increase would be £5,500 per annum

*Please don't forget to Gift Aid your Giving!
Gift Aid forms are at the back of church for
those who have never completed one
and can be emailed too.*

Some passages for reflection and prayer

Words from the Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure... Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.

From, In the bleak mid-winter

What can I give him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man
I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him -
give my heart.

If you are not already a part of the Church Giving Scheme please join it. Further information is available in the Pew Sheet. If you wish to give by other means, please speak to David Gilbert, our Church Giving Officer: 01923 332572. If you are already a member of the Scheme, please increase your giving - particularly if you did not tick to be reminded each year. The address is: info@parishgivingscheme.org.uk.

If you can't give now, give later by remembering St Mary's in your Will. Over the years St Mary's has benefited enormously from some substantial legacies. As a well known ad says, *Every little helps*. It really does! Large or small.

Church Giving at St Mary's: Time and Talents 2021 Campaign: *What can I give him?*

In the following pages you'll find a wide variety of suggestions of ways to serve God and God's church.

Please don't be modest! Think creatively and pray deeply to discover how you might be drawn to serve God in new ways. No-one has to do everything, but everyone has to do something... this is how God works - through us all, through God's church - which is all the people of God.

Some of the ideas will deepen personal discipleship, some will deepen personal engagement with our church community. Both of these will spread out to deepen the engagement of St Mary's with the wider community.

We need you. St Mary's needs each member to respond. *Serving the whole community* is our strapline - and the whole community needs us to respond. The whole community of faith at St Mary's, the whole community beyond our church walls.

Look at the list. See what appeals. See what makes you heart sing, what provokes you to respond... even what might be missing to which we need to attend. We need people to lead, people to help, people to pray, people to serve. We hope that it will be you.

Deborah

If there is no particular name given beside an activity, speak to Deborah or one of the Churchwardens if you would like to know more. I am looking forward to being deluged with your responses!

Making New Disciples

Join our Mission Action Planning Team to help us plan for the future

Witnessing

- Wear a cross or other visible symbol of faith *It doesn't have to be big, just visible!*
- Look for ways in which you can gently give witness. *Say Bless you as well as Thank you, perhaps*
- Invite people to things happening at St Mary's. *Come along to them too - even if they are 'not your thing'!*
- Help to develop a Baptism Preparation Group
- Help Deborah in welcoming, greeting and following-up our Baptism families
- Social Media
- Tweet and mention on Facebook activities taking place at St Mary's

Serving

- Look at our existing initiatives for different ages and groups *Where do we need to be now?*
- Speak to a member of the Church Council to share your thoughts
- Walk around our town to see where people gather
- Ask God to guide you as how you/we can 'meet' them.
- Speak to a member of the Church Council to share your thoughts
- Pray about how you are called to serve
- Licensed Ministry: Reader/Lay Preacher, Priest, Missionary work?
- Speak to a Deborah to find out more

Discipling

- Think about why your faith makes a difference to you. *Write your faith story. What can you learn? What can you share?*
- Join the next Enquirers Course comes up, bringing someone with you
- Pray and think now about who you will invite to the next one
- Lead the next Enquirer's Course
- Speak to Deborah if you'd like to help with this
- Read this year's Lent Book, *Living His Story*
- What practical ways of 'sharing the Gospel afresh' are a fit for you?
- Join some of our ongoing social activities and bring others along... *Tuesday@2, Lad's Lunch, Quiz Evening's (real and virtual!)*
- Suggest other activities you have seen that we could offer *Knit & natter, Bread Church, Bedtime Story Reading recordings*

Transforming Communities

Join our Mission Action Planning Team to help us plan for the future

Noticing

- Visit the named road in our town we are praying for each week
Pray for those who live/work there. How might we reach out to them?
- Look around our town to see where people gather
Ask God how you/we can serve them
- Visit our church buildings, look at what work needs doing
Speak to a Churchwarden with ideas of how you can help
- Walk through the churchyard and see what work needs doing
Speak to a Churchwarden with ideas of how you can help
- We need to reduce our Carbon Footprint
Could you help undertake a Carbon Audit for us?
- We want to extend our Eco 'credentials'
If you are an 'eco warrior' - big or small - flex your muscles with/for us!
- Visit a source of news - paper or online - noticing something new
Ask God to lead you in prayer for those who names are noted there

Serving

- Become a School Governor for St Mary's CE Primary School
Supporting children and parents and staff connected to our school
- Help out with Monday Morning TLC
Making tea, chatting to people
- Join the Church Council and/or Deanery Synod
Help with determining how St Mary's serves and inspires
- Cleaning the church building ourselves would save £1,000 a year.
Join/oversee the Rota.
- Operating our technology on a Sunday morning
Linking the lap-top, running the Zoom call, managing the Rooms

Inspiring

- We desperately need people to join/lead our work with children
You don't have to be an expert - you just need a committed, willing heart.
- We need people to support our Young People
Conversation, X Team leading
- Help out with our Toddler Group, Little Angels, when it begins again
Making coffee, welcoming people, leading a craft activity.
- Help out at St Mary's School
Listening to readers, helping with the Gardening Club, baking with the pupils
- Join our Charitable Giving Committee
Help us to decide how to give our money away and champion our charities

Going deeper into God

Join our Mission Action Planning Team to help us plan for the future

Study

- Join a House / Bible Study group: for study, fellowship and prayer
We have one at present, could you join it?
- Offer to host/lead a House / Bible Study group
We only have one and it would be great if St Mary's had at least 3 or 4
- If you have a particular area theological interest - set up a Course!
We can ask all sorts of people in to teach/share...
- Join Songs for the Journey
Join the monthly conversation about a Psalm and a hymn or song
- Take the daily Bible Study notes: from Bible Reading Fellowship
Contact Sue Hillier for more information
- Use books from our Church Library
And maybe write a Book Review/recommendation for others to read

Prayer

- Make a commitment to pray each day
Use the Intercessions listed on our Pew Sheet prayers
- Visit the church building regularly to pray
Help our church to be a place of continued prayer each and every day.
Pray the requests on our Prayer Board
- Create a holy space in your home and spend time in/with it each day
Let God find you where you are... invite God in
- Find out about the ministry of Spiritual Direction
Leaflets for this are available at the back of church or speak to Deborah
- Take a Spiritual MOT
A space to both be affirmed and discover new ways of following Jesus Christ

Worship

- Commit to attending Sunday worship from wherever you are
Whether at home or away - in person or on-line
- Join Night Prayer online
Make the closing of the day one that you spend with God
- Become a Service Steward/Sidesperson/Welcomer
Join the Team who welcome people to worship.
- Become a Lesson Reader, Intercessor, Server at our Services
Help to lead our worship
- Join the Choir or play a musical instrument in worship
'Make a joyful noise to the Lord'. You know you want to!