

Dear Parishioner,

In June our new Treasurer, Mike Beazley, who has written this letter on our behalf, spoke to the congregation about the church's financial position. In his introduction, he emphasised the need for us all, both as a church and as individual parishioners, to base our giving on the Biblical principle of generosity and on the Anglican Church's advice on stewardship (5% of our net income to the local church and 5% to other charitable causes).

Following on from that, the PCCs Finance and Standing Committee, when it met in September, asked that the question of planned giving be flagged up on the 9.30 Parish Eucharist on Sundays October 16 and 23. This was reported to the PCC when it also met in September

The Rector will preach on this theme next Sunday, October 23. This letter is intended to set the scene for his sermon.

As a church we are trying to practice what we preach by donating 10% of what you have told us you plan to give to St. Laurence's to international, national and local good causes. This is overseen by our Outward Concern Group, chaired by Claire Wilcox. We estimate that, this year, the 253 people on the electoral roll will through their generosity give a total of over £46,000 (our 'planned giving'). We are very grateful for this generosity. The Government will add over £9,000 in Gift Aid. This means that, in accordance with the agreed policy, we are able to give away nearly £6,000 to deserving causes.

This is a first call on our resources; but it is of course not the only fixed expense which we face. We contribute both our Parish Share to the Diocese and our membership fees to the Ludlow Team Ministry. Our payment of Parish Share represents our share of the salary, pension costs and living expenses of the clergy who serve St. Laurence's. There seems to be a common misconception in the Church of England that salaries and pensions are somehow paid out of some central 'pot of gold'. Although it is true that what we pay in Parish Share does not yet meet the full cost of paying and housing the clergy who serve our parish, the Church no longer has such a pot, nor would having one remove our corporate responsibility for providing the resources needed out of our own pockets. Our payment to the Ludlow Team Ministry covers the parish's share of the cost of administering the team. Together these amount to £79,000 this year.

The recommendation which came to the PCC at its meeting in September is that, in accordance with both biblical principle and Church of England policy, we should expect to cover both the church's external giving and Parish Share from within the donations of the members of the congregation. This mirrors standard practice in nonconformist churches, which generally pay the whole of their ministers' salaries and ministry costs directly.

The present level of giving by members of the congregation, both planned and unplanned, is likely to reach £89,000 this year. This is a very large sum, for which we are very grateful, but it is only just enough to cover what we give externally and what we provide for the parish's ministry costs (£85,000 in total), leaving just £4,000 to go towards the day-to-day running costs of the church and the parish. These amount to another £159,000. The vast majority of this sum is provided for by visitors to the church, as also is much of the unplanned giving. That means that the majority of the cost of the work that we do in witness, mission and outreach is funded by those who do not belong to our church rather than by the people of St. Laurence's

What we are asking is that each member of the congregation review his or her giving in the light of the principle of generosity and the Church's 5% of net income guideline. If we are to set ourselves the target of meeting our charitable and ministry costs entirely from planned giving, then we need to set ourselves the target of increasing our planned giving from the current level of £46,000 to a new target of £87,000. By 'planned giving' we mean giving by standing order or by numbered envelope, preferably by monthly standing order. We also ask you to authorise Gift Aid if you are a tax payer. If you would like to start a

standing order or increase an existing standing order, please complete one of the forms at the back of the church. Please also complete a Gift Aid form, if you can.

If we are to meet this target, the average annual planned giving per person would increase from £184 to £348 (£29 per month). To talk of average figures implies that some will give less than this and some more. There are some who read this letter who genuinely will not be able to offer a marked increase in their giving for the work of St. Laurence's. That places a charge on those who are able to do that to be even more generous in their giving so as to stand alongside those who genuinely cannot. To put this in context, If anyone is giving at a rate of 5% of net income, a contribution of £29 per month would equate to a post-tax annual income of £6,960. This as it happens is close to the level of the basic state retirement pension. Many of you will be better placed than this – we ask everyone to be generous in proportion.

The Rector will speak on this theme next Sunday, but we hope that the facts presented in this letter will help provide the context for what he will say. Here finally are some words from Scripture on which to reflect From Malachi 'Test me in this matter to see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until there is no room for it all'. And from St, Paul in his second letter to the Church in Corinth: 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver'

*St.Laurence's PCC*