



18th May 2017

Dear Church Member,

Stewardship at St Thomas

Stewardship

Stewardship is not only about our money but also what we give to our church in time and of our talents; to be a healthy church we should be both aware of where we are and also supportive of each other in our pastoral care and mission. Every so often it is worth re-evaluating just where we are as individuals and as a church as our own personal situations change as does the life of our church. So, Stewardship Sunday, the 21st May, is a good time to do this.

St. Thomas'

The church is people who are engaged in mission; but in the Church of England we have the additional legacy of our buildings that also speak out of the glory of God for all to see. Keeping our building maintained and funding mission does have its costs. It is true that we live in difficult financial times but we must still aim to 'balance our books' at the end of every financial year and ensure that the future of our church is secure for later generations. We are in effect stewards of our church and stewards of our faith rather than merely users.

Because St Thomas is a relatively small church, our finances are also relatively small, which means that when some unplanned expense arrives it can cause us greater worry that some of the larger churches. We are fortunate to have the support of the St Thomas Preservation Society that is able to contribute towards maintaining the fabric of the church building and running costs such as heating, through various fundraising events but it may come as a surprise that over recent years the church has used its reserves, money which will may be difficult to raise again.

Money and Mission

It should not be my role as parish priest to be raising funds, but it is my role to be a leader of mission. What is clear is that a lot of our expenditure at St Thomas, like other churches, goes into mission: mission to enable you to have me as your priest; my mission to the local church schools; our mission to the community; the housebound, our residential homes and so on. I hope you feel that St Thomas is moving in the right direction both with its spiritual outlook and in its mission to develop a deeper understanding of God to church members and the wider community. Do have a chat with me about this.

But what to do?

So when we come to mission, the church and money, it can be all too easy to say that this is just 'the church' asking for more money; but in reality 'the church' is actually people, of which all are included. Therefore we remember that St. Thomas is **our** church, both your church and my church, and I do ask you to prayerfully consider the information in the leaflet, to read scripture and pray, to listen to God and hear if he is challenging you afresh in your personal relationship with the church. The following may help:

Scripture

The bible contains many examples of how money is perceived by Jesus and the early church, but there are some underlying principles which speak about what it means to be a mature disciple of Christ. It may be that you are already giving your all, or that your donation is only small, what is important is that it is in proportion to that which you have been given: remember the Poor Widow's mite (Mark 12.41-44). It may be that you feel you need to be cautious in your financial dealings: remember the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12.13-21). It is worth reflecting on how you came to have the money and possessions you currently have, and how much you value them in your life with God as part of it: remember Jesus words about not worrying (Luke 12.22-34). At the heart of the Gospel is the Good News of the generosity of God unlocked through our attitude: the 'Gospel Principle'. This is something that once it is grasped can be spotted on almost every page. It is not the attitude 'Make yourself rich, and then give out of your bounty' but rather the principle that 'long before we feel we have enough: long before we have satisfied our needs, we are invited to give freely and generously.' This is the starving widow who gave her last drops of oil to Elijah (1 Kings 17.8-16) which seems a ridiculous thing to do. It is the little boy at the feeding of the 5000 (John 6.1-14) who gave away his packed lunch to Jesus, and look what happened. The 'Gospel Principle' tells us that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit (John 12.20-26). It talks about us being 'The Good Soil' for God with the grain that we have been given (Luke 8.4-15) and not to be choked by the cares and riches of life, or to shoot up but have no root, but be Good Soil and 'bear fruit with patient endurance.'

What next?

I ask that you consider the church's financial situation carefully and respond in faith on the attached sheet. Complete the blue boxes and if you want us to set up a standing order mandate fill in the green section (if you use on-line banking, you can of course set up your own regular giving instruction to St Thomas). Even if your response is that you would like to remain the same in your giving, your response to the PCC shows you have thought about it. We will contact you in the following weeks to see if you need any clarification on any issues about stewardship There is also a gift aid declaration which we would be grateful if you are able to complete - this ensures that for any money you give we can reclaim an extra 25% from HMRC -

so, for example your £40 pledge per month turns into £50 when we have recovered the tax. Again, it can't be stressed enough that a standing order, which is fully under your control, is easier for us to process and it enables us to plan securely into the future. When you give by standing order you can take and place into the weekly collection one of the cards which say you are contributing

Please do not send any paperwork or financial information to myself as I would prefer not to know how much anyone gives, but I trust we will all be giving in proportion to that which we have received. Instead send to our stewardship officer Alan Kirkham at the address given.

So I do earnestly pray that we can be a healthy church again, and I trust God that together giving in stewardship of our time, our abilities, our possessions, our money and our lives, He will transform them beyond our imagining, and, that we will be blessed by the abundance of his Grace.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Chambers', written in a cursive style.

Revd Dr. Simon Chambers
Team Vicar, Shaftesbury Dorset