



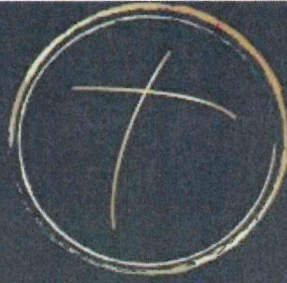
THE BEACON CHURCHES

ACHIEVING OUR VISION

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matt 5:14)

We are beacon churches, called to share the light of Jesus in our parish and beyond.

In this booklet, we want to tell you about some of the things happening in our churches and the plans we are putting into place for the future, which includes plans for mission, outreach and growth.



THE BEACON CHURCHES



**St Thomas the Martyr Church
Up Holland**



**Christ The Servant Church
Digmoor**



**St Michael & All Angels Church
Dalton**

From: *The Revd. Paul Lock, Parish Priest in the Parish of Up Holland and Dalton
The Rectory, 1a College Road, Up Holland, Skelmersdale, West Lancashire, WN8 0PY.
01695 622936 07813 019863 paull.uph.dal@outlook.com*

June 2021

Dear Friend,

Achieving Our Vision

Having been through one of the most challenging times human beings have faced, we as church communities, as well as individuals, have much to reflect on and a great deal to plan for.

This Booklet called 'Achieving Our Vision' has been produced to be read alongside 5 short videos Jack and I have put together (with the help and guidance of Ian Cleverdon and Stuart Cleverdon). We are asking you to give time to watch each video (one a day and then 2 videos on day 4) after watching the video we would then like you to read the section in the booklet which links to that day.

We are trying to share with you the Vision we have for our Parish, its three churches and all the new worshipping communities we want to establish. This is a challenging task, but it is our response to the challenging times in which we live.

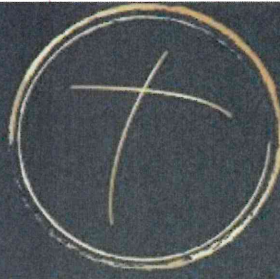
As well as watching the videos and reading the booklet, we are also asking you to prayerfully consider what God is calling you to do in response to all that we are saying. Please open yourself to God's prompting.....he will have a great plan for you because you are a key part to building his kingdom in the hearts and lives of those who live in the areas we are called to serve and witness in.

You will notice that as part of this Vision, we are now calling ourselves 'The Beacon Churches' – this reminds us that our church communities are placed around the Beacon Country Park. But, more importantly, it helps us to see ourselves as 'Beacons' of love, hope, peace, joy, service.....and so much more, throughout this area. The Gospel message of Jesus is a 'Beacon' to the world. We believe that we are called to be those who point others towards Christ who is the real Beacon for all.

Thank you for taking the time to join us in this time of listening, praying and responding.

Yours sincerely,

*The Revd. Paul Lock,
Parish Priest in the Parish of Up Holland and Dalton*



THE BEACON CHURCHES

Achieving Our Vision

How to use these resources:

The videos which accompany this programme will be made available for 4 days in the week beginning Monday 28th June 2021.

You can watch them by using the YouTube links shown here:

Day 1 (Mon 28th June)	https://youtu.be/C3eoL6xT1t0
Day 2 (Tues 29 th June)	https://youtu.be/MtRb3gmUO0g
Day 3 (Weds 30th June)	https://youtu.be/Pvw IXfGI74
Day 4 (Thurs 1st July)	https://youtu.be/VaStSU7pr_4
Epilogue (Thurs 1st July)	https://youtu.be/C3eoL6xT1t0

The videos will then remain available to you, so if you miss a day, you can always catch up!

The videos, booklet and other documents, will all be available on the parish website under 'Community Projects' then 'Our Beacon Churches' you can go direct to that page at:

<https://www.uphollandalton.org.uk/copy-of-community-projects>

As well as considering carefully what response you can make, we would also ask you to tell other people about our project called 'Achieving Our Vision' – we hope this may encourage some people to come along and join us in our adventure. We also hope it will encourage them in whatever they believe God is calling and asking them to do.

We cannot do the things we want to achieve without **EVERYONE'S** involvement and **COMMITMENT**.

Our journey has already started with the amazing things we have been doing as churches during the pandemic. Now we have the opportunity to share the **GOOD NEWS** with everyone which says that God is with us in all that we are now doing to make our world a better place for everyone.

This is how we are playing our part as Christians in our Diocese of Liverpool where we are asking God to make us a '**BIGGER CHURCH** to make a **BIGGER DIFFERENCE**, **MORE PEOPLE KNOWING JESUS, MORE JUSTICE IN THE WORLD.**'

Key to doing all of this is having the financial resources we need. Part of this programme is asking you to consider your level of financial support for our work and witness. In this we are asking you to consider how you might help us recover from the pandemic and also move forward. This is all contained in the videos and booklet, with forms to complete, if that is something you are able to do.

DAY 1

What did you do during lockdown?

This will be a question many of us ask about ourselves and others over the coming weeks and months! There can be little doubt that all of us as individuals, families and communities have been changed by the experience of the pandemic. Likewise, many businesses, towns, villages, churches and charities will never be quite the same. Sadly, there are many people, organisations and other things that have not made it through a time of challenge, upheaval and change!

So what did we do as churches and people seeking to live as Christians?

Here are just a few of the things we have been doing:

Food Bank at CTS has been open every day and hundreds of people have been welcomed and fed

STM Church was re-ordered and made ready for its new Hub which includes a Post Office, Café, Cinema and place for many groups and activities

Our two separate parishes became one united parish

We appointed a new missional priest and welcomed our new curate

We have been providing online services and when permitted services in our churches

We have been providing care for the bereaved and pastoral care to many across the communities we serve

We have been supporting our schools and the children and staff within them

We have been preparing ourselves to be ready for the time when Covid restrictions are lifted

When asked recently 'What are we about and what is our vision as churches?' this is what members of the PCC said:

What are we about?

Growing our church and increasing the number of disciples. Teaching people about God's love for everyone. Reaching people and touching their lives in lots of good ways. Spreading the Good News of Jesus. Building the kingdom in the areas where we live. Serving the needs of the communities around us. Sending out an invitation so all know and feel welcome. Providing learning about our faith now and for the next generation

Where are we going?

Well, we are going *forward!* We are reaching out to the 42,000 who live our parish! We are moving from survival to revival. To become fully inclusive communities/churches. Serving the needs of all those around us, who ever they are.

Developing/changing how we do things – making ourselves relevant and purposeful. Thinking outside the box – being different in order to make a difference. We don't have to rely on the church buildings to do all of these things

What do we want to achieve as a whole parish?

To become a beacon of hope for everyone. Work effectively together as 3 churches and with other church communities. Ensure each church becomes a positive presence in the communities they serve. Be fully inclusive churches – 'a place for everyone' / 'come as you are'. To raise up and open many new worshipping communities. Reaching out effectively to the 42,000 (and beyond). Develop a clear commitment in each worshipping community to be generous to others, which includes: Parish commitment to support to other charities (10%), Parishioners joyfully giving their time to help others, Becoming outward looking churches who seek to love and serve others, whoever they are.

DAY 1 (CONTD.)

Prayer and Reflection

Lord, a year ago your house was not a fold in which we could meet.

Confined to our homes,
we prayed as a silent wolf prowled the world,
a pandemic that threatened us all.



We thank you for watching over us,
and for those of us who were safely delivered.

It has been a testing time, Lord,
but yet there was community.



We thank you for helping us and others to see
that your Church has no walls,
as we learned to reach out to one another
and still to worship – but in different ways.



We thank you for those in our communities who had
been taken for granted,
overlooked, not considered of great importance,
but on whom we came to rely to save lives.



We see now that our values were tested,
and many have come to see what really matters.

Good Shepherd, who knows suffering and sacrifice
beyond our imagining,
we thank you that we are here today, enfolded in your
love. Amen.



Time to think and reflect.....

As you think back over the pandemic and the impact it has had on your life and the life of others, consider what you have learned about yourself, the world, the things we have taken for granted. How has Coronavirus and its impact affected your faith? What do you hope to see happen in our churches and with the Christian faith in this area and across our country?

How can you help the parish and its communities grow and move forward?



DAY 2

Becoming a Beacon

We believe that all we have been doing during the pandemic and in the last few years is effectively laying the foundation stones to enable us to move forward in faith and hope, trusting that God will encourage us to see the vision and plan he has for us.

We believe that we are now in a strong place for moving forward in faith and trust because there are so many important factors in place: We now have people in place to help plan and bring into being some of our mission and outreach plans. Many of these will be ready to go into action as soon as lockdown eases. We also believe that there are many in our communities and across the country who are seriously asking about God and faith and what they believe. We need to place ourselves so that we can help people look at those questions and perhaps begin their journey of faith with us.

We have a huge vision and one that can only be achieved if we are all committed to it and willing to pray, work and give all that we can to make the vision a reality.

We've heard it all before..... You may be thinking as you listen to us and read through our booklet that you have heard this before. You may also think that planning and dreaming is where many ideas seem to remain. You may also have embraced the idea that the Church is in decline, that we are in a hopeless situation and there is nothing that can be done! You are right if all our hopes and ideas are about ourselves and if our plans to grow our churches are limited to growing them just as they are.

To be successful our vision and our hopes must be focused on God and we must seek to know and to do his will.

When God called the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, they could so easily have decided that staying where they were was the best option. In fact, Exodus says that some did not want to follow Moses and many of them spent the journey complaining bitterly about their hardships, there were many times they felt God had abandoned them, especially when they faced challenges like crossing the Red Sea or when they had no clean water to drink or food to eat. But time and again God was faithful, led them and brought them as his Chosen People to the Land he promised.



For many of us, being a Christian and living within the Church community can make us feel that we are part of something established and set in stone. We can also end up thinking that somehow the role of the Church is to help keep the order of things as it is, to confirm us and our country, as we like them to be. But Jesus, did not come to confirm people where they are, or in the things that we like. He came to proclaim salvation for EVERYONE. He was opposed and executed by the religious leaders of the day and the political leaders because he taught what they believed were new, and for some, revolutionary ideas. Today, we believe that Jesus came to say that this world is not as God planned it to be. We as humans do not fully reflect the image and likeness of God by the way we live our lives. Where there is poverty and where people do not have access to clean water, healthy food, good homes, peaceful communities, good education and health care. Where people are held in the darkness of tyranny, slavery, poverty and inhumanity God's will is not being done. Jesus taught us to pray: 'Your kingdom, Lord, on earth as it is in heaven.' These are words that demand change.

DAY 2 (CONTD.)

As your clergy, and with many in our three churches, we are now opening saying: Things have to change, if we are to become the Church God wants us to be in this area – for that is a Christian community which is always looking to the needs of those around us, rather than our own preferences and choices.

Our experience as the Christian Church and local Christian communities during the pandemic has caused many of us to ask: 'So what does God want us to learn from this?' and also 'What have we learned about ourselves as communities of faith?' If we think that the end of the pandemic means we can go back to things as they were, then firstly we are mistaken and secondly we are missing a great opportunity. We hope that our vision as churches will encourage and enable us to move forward and to grow in faith, love, commitment and numbers.

So what else might we want to achieve?

We certainly want our three church communities to thrive and grow, but we also want lots of new Christian communities to become part of the life of our Beacon Parish.

We would like to see lots of new ways for people of all ages to come to faith and join a worshipping community suitable for them, including: Café Church, Woodland Church, Messy Church, Church for Young Adults (teens and twenties), Church for Young Parents/Carers and their families, Worshipping communities in our schools and also in pubs, shops, cafes, homes.....and lots more. In short, we want the Christian faith and the Christian Church to be able to POP UP anywhere!

We would like to see members of our Christian communities growing in faith, knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, more confident in praying for and with others and sharing their faith with others.

We want our worship to be broad and inclusive – so we need to be generous communities that respect and cherish the breadth and depth of the Christian Faith. Rather than holding on to human created traditions we want to be Churches that are free to live, worship and serve in the love and freedom of the Holy Spirit. We also want our church communities to be more Christ-like. That means being communities that look out to the wider community and seek ways to engage with those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus. Being able to put down 'what I want' and be more ready to say 'what do you need?' We want to be people who care less about 'what we like or prefer' and be more willing to be like our Servant King, and like him to kneel and humbly and lovingly serve those around us. So we need to:

Run more Food Banks

Offer food and meals to the hungry

Stand firmly with the poor and marginalised

Demonstrate in word and deed God's unconditional love for all his people

Speak out against injustice and wrong

Support all who seek to bring peace and to love others



DAY 2 (CONTD.)

We believe that our three Church buildings need to change and develop:

Christ the Servant as a building faces some huge challenges and we have to accept that the building itself is coming to the end of its life. But this is also a great opportunity for us to ask and to discover exactly what it is that the people of the communities it serves really need. That means asking and listening, watching and praying. God will open our eyes, ears and hearts and through him we will discover what we are being called to do and to be. Change can be frightening for some, but if we can ask and look to the future in faith, all will be well. In recent years there has been a much needed Open Table and Food Bank – there is a lot more needed in the community. A new vision and understanding of what we are being called to do will set us out and exciting and life changing journey.

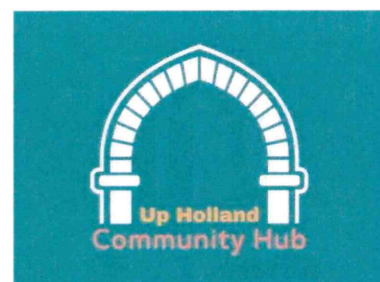


St Michael & All Angels as a building occupies a beautiful position and the grounds are tranquil with the ability to help many feel close to God. This location and the growing population in the area means the building is ideally placed to be developed as a centre for Christian healing, spirituality and meditation.

This could involve helping people connect with God in nature through Woodland Worship, outdoor services and meditation. This means having to reorder the church into a flexible space which can be changed and adapted as required. The reordering would need to include: a new access ramp for those with limited mobility, a new disabled toilet and additional toilet, removal of all the pews and levelling the floor in the nave (by removing the pews and their plinths), replacing the pews with chairs, converting the Clergy Vestry into a meeting/counselling room, installing a new kitchen/servery at the back of the church, upgrading the sound system, installing a new audio/visual system and upgrading the heating system. This would give the building the flexibility and the equipment to be able to welcome and host a large variety of events and activities.



St Thomas the Martyr has just started the journey of becoming a Community Hub – so there is now a clear commitment to be a place where all feel welcome. By stopping ourselves talking about the ‘ancient church’ only and being proud of its past, we now see ourselves increasingly as working out how this beautiful, old church can, in fresh and exciting ways, be a place of welcome, love and safety for all. In many ways, we are re-visioning its original purpose as a Benedictine Abbey of being a place of worship, spiritual renewal, healing, education hospitality.



DAY 2 (CONTD.)

An impossible challenge?

Having heard our plans outlined here, and we realise that for some this will be the first time you have heard anything like this, you may be feeling a little overwhelmed. You might even be convinced that such hopes and dreams are impossible to achieve! If we lack faith and the commitment to work with God, they are. Nothing will be achieved if we think cautiously or enter the conspiracy which makes us believe that the Christian Church and faith is no longer needed or accepted in this country. The fact is that only when God choses is his Church finished and only if we fail to present the life-transforming good news of Jesus Christ afresh to a world which is in great need, will people continue to believe that Christ has nothing to offer them.

When we set off on a journey to an unfamiliar location, it is essential to get the GPS settings right. For the journey that we are on as a parish, we need three things, which could be described as our GPS settings. We are all needed. Just like geese when they embark on a long journey, flying in a V formation so they can all work together, supporting and encouraging each other. Please do not just 'leave this to others' or be tempted to 'opt out' because the result will be a poorer church, a declining church, an empty and cold church, nothing like the Church Jesus called into being and empowered with the Holy Spirit.



Generosity - the God we know and love is generous - this amazing world and universe we inhabit testifies to his love, power and generosity. All of this was created and given into our hands, that we might have life and live it in all fullness. As Christians, we need to ensure that all we do and all that we are reflects the generosity of God through the generous ways we worship, speak, act and order our lives.

Prayer - We have faith that God is calling and directing us to new and better ways to be his people. We believe he wants us to move away from the attitudes which focus on the 'survival' of the Church as we know it to 'revival' where the transforming love and grace of God in Jesus Christ is made readily available to all through the generosity of all Christians. Historically, when revival takes place it is always precipitated by passionate and persistent prayer.

Stewardship - God always calls people into a committed relationship with him and with each other. This means seeing that our whole lives as Christians are committed to being effective disciples of the Lord. In our diocese we are encouraged to grow in faith through adopting our Rule of Life. We do this by taking what we call the inner journey in which we are called by God to pray, and to read scripture, and to learn from one another, and by taking the outer journey in which we are sent by God to tell people about Jesus, and to serve those in need, and to give generously.



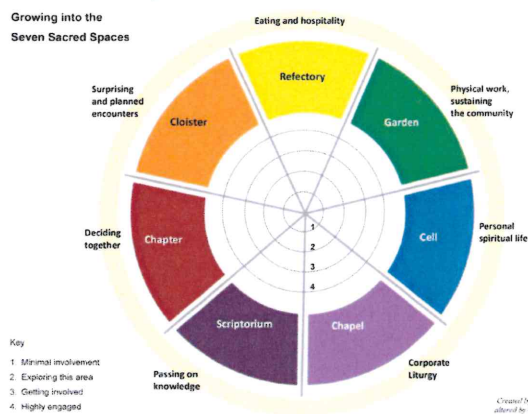
Being released
We are now asking you and all members of our churches to prayerfully consider where you are on your Christian journey and then to ask God to speak to you about the needs and challenges of our parish, and then by working through the following sections to decide what it is that God is laying on your heart and asking you to do.

The work ahead is going to be demanding and challenging, but it is also exciting. We, with the rest of the Christian Church are on a journey, and we are not really sure where we are going. But we are all needed.

DAY 3

Seven Sacred Spaces

We believe that a powerful and effective way to help us all grow deeper in faith and to work more effectively together as disciples is by using a tool called 'The Seven Sacred Spaces'. This links in beautifully with our diocesan prayer, asking God for a Bigger Church to make a Bigger difference and the commitment to grow deeper in faith through the Rule for Life.



Many of us are familiar with the Rules of Monastic Houses (Monasteries and Convents) – generally these are separated into seven 'sacred spaces' as shown in this diagram: Refectory, Garden, Cell, Chapel, Scriptorium, Chapter, Cloister. In each space the monk or nun are asked to ensure that what they do is helping them to grow as a Christian by deepening their faith and love for God as well as strengthening their love and service to people. By doing this they are completing Christ's teaching that the two greatest commandments are: 'Firstly: Love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, worship only him. Secondly: love your neighbour as yourself.' As a parish and churches, we are committing ourselves to using this model to help each one of us grow as disciples in faith, love and service.

1. **Refectory:** Here we are asked to think about our eating and hospitality.

a. Do I always remember to thank God by saying a prayer before I eat?

b. Do I try to arrange times to eat with family/friends and see/enjoy these as blessings for love, family and friendship?

c. Do I pause when eating and look at the food on my plate, perhaps considering where it was grown, reflecting on the colours and beauty of plants, vegetables, fruits etc?

2. **Garden:** As humans we are both physical and spiritual beings. In the Book of Genesis we are told by God that we are to care for the world by tending to it.

a. How does my physical activity or work make a difference in the world and bless other people?

b. How much time do I give to helping at church with practical jobs such as cleaning, and setting up?

c. How many times do I make excuses and leave things to others?

3. **Cell:** In monastic life the rules about the Cell recognise that each one of us is in a personal relationship with God. Like all relationships, this needs time and effort from us to allow it to grow deeper.

a. Do I ever sit/kneel quietly in God's company and just enjoying being still and quiet with him?

4. **Chapel:** Those in religious communities commit to spending time in prayer several times through organised prayer such as Morning & Evening Prayer, Compline and the Eucharist.

a. How regularly do I worship with other people?

DAY 3 (CONTD.)

5. Scriptorium: This element of the rule of life of monastic communities represents the commitment to 'passing on' and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. In times past this could be done by monks and nuns who copied the scriptures and other holy writings and prayers.

- a. Do I regularly read things to help strengthen and deepen my faith?
- b. Do I think my faith has grown and deepened in the last 1/2/5/10 years?
- c. How do I pass on what I have learnt to other people?

6. Chapter: This is the place where religious communities make all their important decisions. These decisions have impact on the whole community as well as on individuals.

- a. Am I interested in the decisions made by the Church locally at parish level? Or at deanery, diocesan, or national level? Why?
- b. What would I do if I strongly disagreed with a decision made?
- c. What is my understanding about obedience within the Church?
- d. Who do I see as being in authority in the Church?

7. Cloister: This is where unplanned, spontaneous moments of encounter and conversation took place as monks and nuns passed each other on their ways from place to place.

- a. Would I ever be willing to say something when I heard someone being racist, sexist or bullying?
- b. Do I try to ensure that what I say is honest, kind, and true?
- c. Do I ever think that when I am speaking to or meeting with someone (family, friend or stranger) that this might be a 'God given opportunity' to listen to the person and to serve them as Christ would?

Working in a committed way together

To make all of these things happen and to grow as disciples of Jesus together need to be clear about what we are prepared to do as individuals to resource and enable the Church to witness and serve effectively. Crucial to this are:

- Generous giving of our time and gifts

We are all called to be effective disciples, then we must be willing to give our time and energy to serving the Lord through the time we offer to his Church. All the groups and activities we plan to start need people who will help to organise them. We all have different abilities and there will be something all of us can offer to help with. Please consider what event or activity you would like to offer your time and skills to and also how much time each week you can give.

- Generous giving from resources entrusted to us

Like all charities and organisations which depend on the generosity of others, our churches have suffered massively from the pandemic. We need to use the opportunities given to help us move forward to a better and more secure way of operating. Before we consider what options each of us have, we need to address some common misconceptions and errors.

Popular misconceptions & errors:

The Church of England receives money from the government or council – not true!

Clergy are paid by the government or through government money – not true!

The Council or others will ensure our church(es) stay open because we are C of E – not true!

The C of E is very rich and has lots of money to spend, so everything will be ok – not true!

We will get the money we need from somewhere – not true!

All of these (and many other) misconceptions can help us to believe that no matter what happens, our churches will always be fine – because someone else will deal with the problem of money.

DAY 3 (CONTD.)

Looking at the number of churches which are now warehouses, factories, converted into homes, demolished, or standing empty tells us clearly that the 'heavenly rescue plan' does not guarantee the survival of ministry in our parish.

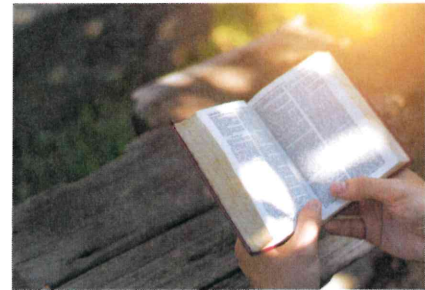


Each church community must meet its costs in full and this is the responsibility of the local worshipping community. For too long we have been lulled into an understanding that says we should rely heavily on the money we can raise from those outside the Church through our fetes and fund-raising events. This kind of thinking makes the Church weaker and presents the Gospel in very negative terms. It not what we are called to do.



If every time you invited your neighbours round to your house, you asked for a donation, and this was the main way in which you tried to provide for your family, you would be seen as irresponsible and you probably wouldn't have any friends! Why do we think it is any different with the church?

Let's reflect on what the Bible says about generosity and giving. These quotes might help us think about the following questions: How should we give? When should we give? Why do we give?



Luke 21:1-4

As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work... Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Proverbs 11:25

A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

We invite you to ask God to speak to you through these passages of Scripture. What is God saying to you? How do you feel? What is your response?

DAY 4

Stewardship

At this time we are calling on all those members of our three church communities to think and review seriously their commitment and giving to the Church. To help you do this we are asking you to consider carefully each of the sections below.

The coronavirus caused our churches to close, but the work and witness of the Church continued through the country and the world. Many of the costs of maintaining the Church and its work and presence remained. Our ability to collect donations and offerings was severely hindered and as a result our income was reduced massively. Our three churches have no reserves to draw on and as a result we find ourselves in a very challenging situation.

As a result of the fall in income and continuation of costs, each of our churches ended the year 2020 as follows:

St Thomas the Martyr	
Income	£65995.27
Expenditure	£80250.12
Overspend	£14254.85

St Michael & All Angels	
Income	£27418.72
Expenditure	£39108.98
Overspend	£11690.26

Christ the Servant	
Income	£18951.97
Expenditure	£17947.65
Underspend	£1004.32

What would you have given in 2020?

Firstly, we'd like to say a huge thank you to those of you who continued to give regularly, and in some cases gave more, during the pandemic lockdowns.



However, we are asking you to look at what you would normally have given each week or each month and calculate how much you would have given to your church during the whole of 2020. Then we would ask you work out what you actually gave. Having done that, we are asking you to consider making a single payment of the difference, to ensure that you reduce the impact of the pandemic on our budget and resources.

If churches had not closed, how much would you have given to your church in 2020?
How much did you actually give?
What is the difference?
Are you willing to give that to your church to reduce the impact of Covid19?



DAY 4 (CONTD.)

Making a 'pandemic gift'

We are told that the government believes there are many in our communities who have managed to save money during the pandemic. Not being able to go on holiday, or go out for meals or coffee/tea with friends and family. Many of us have been unable to go shopping for things that were not essential.

If you have saved money on something you were unable to do during the pandemic, we are asking you to consider making a gift of what you did not spend to your church. You might want to call this a 'pandemic gift' because the time for that meal or holiday or day out is no longer available, but gifting some or all of what you would have spent will help your church enormously.

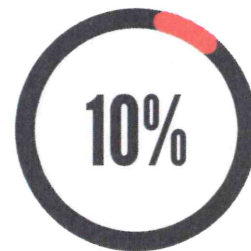


·Will you make a 'pandemic gift' to your church?

Reviewing personal stewardship and commitment

We are also asking every member in our churches to consider seriously their on-going stewardship commitment. This is something we have not looked at and considered for a long time. It is something we should do regularly and also something that should be considered through prayer and reflection.

Let's start with the most challenging teaching the Bible gives about how much we should give to support our faith. The Bible is clear and unapologetic, it says that God's people should tithe. Tithing is the practice of setting apart one-tenth of our income as an offering to God. The Israelites, after they had left Egypt and were being established as a new nation led by Moses and Aaron, were instructed by God to tithe all of their produce, whether grain, fruit or livestock.



Deuteronomy 26.12-13 says that the tithe should be given not only to the Levites (priests) but also to orphans, widows and resident foreigners in the land. So the practice of tithing ensured that the priesthood and other members of the community who might otherwise have been without support did not go hungry.

Later in Israel's history, when the temple had been built and was the centre of the nation's worship, tithes were brought to the temple and stored there. Nehemiah 12.44 and 13.5 mention at least one large store room in the temple where such offerings were kept.

DAY 4 (CONTD.)

By the time of the prophet Malachi (possibly the mid-400s BC), it seems that the people of Israel had become lax in giving the tithe, as Malachi had to give them a reminder from the Lord about the matter. He commands them to 'bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house' (3.10). God promises that if they obey him in this, they will be rewarded with 'an overflowing blessing'.

However, when we get to the New Testament, we find a different perspective. Jesus' only mention of the practice is a rebuke to the Pharisees for carefully measuring out a tenth of their tiniest herbs while failing to recognise the really big moral imperatives: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others' (Matthew 23.23).

Jesus (as far as we know from his recorded words) did not command his disciples to tithe. He was financially supported in his ministry by some of his followers (see Luke 8.3), but there is no mention of an amount or proportion of money given. And in his challenge to the rich ruler in Luke 18.22, he tells the man to sell all that he owns, not just a tenth, and give it to the poor.

In Acts, we have a picture of the new-born church community sharing everything rather than giving a proportion: 'No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common' (Acts 4.32). And in 2 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about financial support and gifts for needy communities but, again, does not set down an amount that believers are expected to contribute.

The key seems to be generosity and personal integrity: 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work' (verses 7-8).



So the Bible seems to suggest that tithing is an Old Testament principle that is continued in the New Testament. The amount we give is not now the most important thing, but as followers of Christ, we are encouraged to share all we have as generously as we can, to support those in our communities who need extra help, and to support the work of God through his Church.

We have included this information in this stewardship booklet because this is the Biblical standard and is taught consistently in the Old and New Testaments. It is something Jesus taught as being important in more than just money terms.





THE BEACON CHURCHES

Deciding what we are going to give to God by giving to the Church is something each one of us must consider prayerfully. We are therefore asking you to consider the following:

Look honestly at what you give each week/month to the Church

Is this a generous/planned gift, or is it a small amount from what is left over as change in my purse/pocket?

Does my giving reflect my faith and 'where my heart is'?

If a stranger was to look at your bank statement where would they say your heart is?

How close to the Biblical standard of tithing are you?

Have you considered giving to the Church through the Parish Giving Scheme? (This provides a regular income to the Church and helps with financial planning)

Have you considered making provision for a gift to the Church in your Will? Is this an appropriate point to achieve the Biblical goal of tithing?

If you would like to ask more about the Parish Giving Scheme or other methods of giving, and also how the Gift Aid scheme works in which we can claim tax paid back from HMRC, please contact our Parish Recorder and Gift Aid Secretary, Ian Cleverdon - his contact details can be found in the booklet. The Parish Giving Scheme form is available to download from our website, and Ian has also produced a short video on how the schemes work.