



## **Christian Stewardship 2025**

**8.30 am and 11 am**

I really hate talking about money from the pulpit (or from the Choir Step, come to that). As a result, it has been five years since I talked about 'money', or 'Stewardship' - which is what priests call money when speaking to the faint-hearted or easily offended about the need for hard cash!

I would rather do just about almost anything else, than stand in this pulpit (or on the Choir Step) and talk 'money'. But, if we are to balance our books and stop running deficit budgets year of year, I have no choice but to do so.

I shall repeat the story, with which I began my Stewardship plea, five years ago: The Diocese of Peterborough, from which I came to the Diocese of London fifteen years ago, is twinned with a Kenyan diocese, in much the same way as this parish church is twinned with the cathedral church of the Diocese of Kagera in Tanzania. Kagera like Bungoma was founded as a missionary diocese.

Every few years, an exchange of clergy and lay people would take place between the Diocese of Bungoma and the Diocese of Peterborough to help establish and strengthen links and partnerships which would build bonds of trust and friendship and mutual support.

Shortly after becoming the Rural Dean of Rutland, I hosted a group of people visiting from Kenya and chaired a question-and-answer session for the deanery synod in a local village hall.

*"What is the main difference between Bungoma and Peterborough?"* asked one deanery synod representative.

Without hesitation, a visitor from Bungoma answered: *“In England, you are always asking God for things; in Kenya, we just thank God for what we have!”*

It was a humbling reply, an answer which could very easily have closed down the question-and-answer session, but instead, it opened up a mutually enriching conversation about prayer and trust and faith and God’s gracious, faithful goodness towards us; it raised the question: how do *we* show our gratitude and share what we have, how do we engage in “Stewardship” – how do we spend our “money” supporting the Church!

St Marylebone Parish Church is an extremely expensive enterprise. Despite the fact that we engaged in a hugely expensive restoration project just a few years ago, the bills keep on coming – just as they come to our homes.

To try reduce our costs and save money, we have engaged in a process of organisational restructuring and we have already outsourced our HR function, reduced three and a half full-time posts to 1.2; we have not replaced Dr Stuart Page, who was our Operations’ Director throughout the Changing Lives Project, and we will not be replacing our Finance Manager who has just resigned and will be leaving us at the end of this month.

We have reduced our utility bills by about 50%, through having new efficient - and environmentally friendlier boilers and all of our lighting now uses LEDs and most is automatically switched off if no one is in a room.

Over the coming weeks, you will all be given the opportunity to review your stewardship – there’s that word again – let me rephrase it, over the coming weeks, you will all be given the opportunity to reassess how much money you actually give to the parish church to support our work: our chaplaincy to schools and hospitals, the work of our psychotherapy centre, the chaplaincy to our two schools as well as our flourishing Young Church and Junior Choir, our choir and our musicians, and the

vital work we do with people living with mental illness, dementia, old age, homelessness – and the list goes on and on and on.

St Marylebone does what every parish church *should* do, but *don't* – usually because they simply can't afford to do what we do.

Sadly, we can no longer afford to do what we do, either, which is why I am asking you to consider how much you give towards the work of this place – *your* parish church, *your* Church community.

Christian Stewardship is about four things (and surprise, surprise, the four things are all about 'money'!

How we handle money, wealth and possessions, and what we do with our money, is a central part of *discipleship*.

What we do with our time and talents to equip the Church to be Christ's Body in the world, is part of our *mission*.

*Generosity* is one of the hallmarks of living out a Christian life.

And all our giving, our discipleship, our generosity has to come from what we have and not just from what is left over - the loose change we can find in our pockets or purses or wallets when we forget to carry a debit card.

Jane Bamber, our Community and Development Manager, is here today and she will be with us for the next three Sundays, helping us to get our income into a better shape than it is now.

As I have said, so many times through almost forty years of parish ministry, the only place a parish church's income can come from is from *you* – from *your* pocket, *your* wallet, *your* purse, *your* Debit Card.

St Marylebone Parish Church does not get any income from the Diocese of London, the Church Commissioners, the Church of England, the local authority or the government. The only place from which money comes is - from *you*.

*Some* of you already give very generously. Thank you! But we are a thriving, flourishing all-age, gloriously diverse community of faith, one

of the largest congregations in the Diocese of London and everyone must give – not just some.

It would be great if every adult member of our Church community would join the **Parish Giving Scheme**. It's a scheme which asks you to make regular weekly or monthly gifts by Direct Debit. If you are a UK taxpayer, the scheme will add 25% to your gift automatically at no charge to you and, what is more, it will send us your donation *and* the Gift Aid associated with it automatically every month. You can also make one off donations to the parish church via the Parish Giving Scheme too.

If you are already one of the 78 people who has a regular Stading Order with the parish church, I ask you, please, to transfer your giving to the new giving scheme as soon as you can. If you are not one those 78 regular givers – what are you waiting for?

You can join the Parish Giving Scheme: online; by filling in a bit of paper; over the telephone, or by talking with Jane, who will happily guide you through what is a very simple and straightforward process, and you can do this either today or at a time that is more convenient. Whichever method you choose, please choose to sign up.

Thank God, we live in peaceful and prosperous city, thank God that we are a place where and through which lives are changed for the better every single day, but each of us has to play our part; every one us has to share in paying for the work we do; each and every one of us has to engage in realistic Christian Stewardship; or, for the last time during this talk, each and every one of us has to give money to help St Marylebone flourish and thrive, serve the communities we are called to serve, and above all, worship Almighty God !

*“It is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places, to give thee thanks and praise, O God” for “all things come from thee and of our own do we give thee”* – preferably Gift Aided - and through the **Parish Giving Scheme!**

