

October 2022 Edition 81

*The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 2 Corinthians 9:6*

### **Gift Day – 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

At the moment it is hard to escape the sense that money is at the forefront of all of our minds. News headlines resound with what has been dubbed the “cost of living crisis”. None of us will have escaped the impact of rising fuel prices. All of our bills are going up quite dramatically, and wages aren’t keeping up. The rate of inflation is something that has never been experienced by many of the younger generation. Those with responsibility for monetary policy are making difficult decisions regarding interest rates and price caps.

In these circumstances, some of the words of Jesus can really sting. In the middle of the sermon on the mount, that most powerful teaching in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus says: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” At a time when we all have an eye to our financial situation, are we actually neglecting God?

Perhaps the first thing to remember is that Jesus loved teaching using binary opposites. For those of you accustomed to trying to make convincing arguments, it’s a powerful tool. Setting two things in opposition has the power to shock and highlight a message. And so here we find Jesus suggesting that we either love something or we hate it; and setting wealth and God in opposition. In a society that was inclined to believe that wealth was a sign of God’s favour, this will have shaken people out of their comfort zones and encouraged them to think. And it should make us think, too.

Nevertheless, one thing that is apparent as we look ahead to what could be a particularly hard winter for many people, is that our very survival depends on money. Given that God cares very much about our lives, we might need to re-frame our thinking about how God and wealth are in opposition – and how they are connected.

### **The Church and the Cost of Living Crisis**

It probably goes without saying that the Church is not immune from the current financial situation. St Mary's faces steeply rising fuel bills – heating and lighting the Church and parish centre is costing more than ever, at a time when hall bookings still have not recovered from the pandemic.

The mission at St Mary's remains unchanged. The Church exists as a beacon of light and hope within the community, seeking to share God's love as widely as possible. There is little doubt that for many individuals, the coming winter will be a difficult one. The Church needs to reach out in every way possible, supporting the most vulnerable. It's impossible at this stage to know exactly what that will mean, but we already know that it will be important to ensure that those who are feeling the pinch continue to know that they are welcome and loved.

Every five years the church buildings are inspected to ensure that they continue to be safe and in good order. The latest Quinquennial took place at St Mary's in June, and we have now received a report detailing the work that needs to be done on the buildings over the coming years. This work will add to costs at a time when we are already under pressure.

The PCC is currently in the process of re-visiting the St Mary's Church Development Plan which identifies our priorities for the coming years and it strikes me that there is a close connection between the work that will need to be done on the buildings and our priorities. So often we remind ourselves that Church is about more than the building – and so it is. Church is really all about a body of people who seek connection with God's love and long to share that love with those they encounter. The

church building provides an environment in which we can gather to praise and worship God, meet one another, and engage with others from across the community. The PCC has identified four key priorities:

1. Developing the depth and breadth of our spiritual life
2. Enabling our children and families to grow in faith and a sense of belonging
3. Developing and growing our relationships with the wider community
4. We recognised that all of this needed to be underpinned by a secure financial situation.

Many aspects of these are enhanced and facilitated by well maintained church buildings.

### **What can I do?**

I began by recognising the financial strain many people are under at the moment, and it is perfectly possible that at the current time your own focus needs to be on making ends meet within your own household. Please be assured that this is a situation that we all understand and appreciate.

Some of you may feel able to make a contribution to St Mary's to support our ministry and mission, not least through the maintenance of our buildings. If you are in this position, there will be a Gift Day on 6<sup>th</sup> November. Alternatively, you might prefer to consider increasing your regular planned giving to reflect the level of inflation.

I believe wholeheartedly that this local community is enhanced by the presence of St Mary's. The ways in which individuals and groups reach out to one another in love is underpinned by a deep faith. Everything that we do to grow in faith, hope and love makes this community a better place to be. Please be assured that anything you are able to contribute will be thankfully received, and faithfully put towards everything that St Mary's stands for in this place.

## October Services and Events

<b>Sunday 2</b>	<b>08.00</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>09.30</b>	<b>Harvest Parade Service</b>
<b>Sunday 9</b>	<b>08.00</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>09.30</b>	<b>Sung Communion</b>
	<b>18:00</b>	<b>Choral Evensong</b>
<b>Monday 10</b>	<b>19.30</b>	<b>Knit &amp; Natter Group in the Leverton Room</b>
<b>Saturday 15</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>Women's Group in the Cuddington Hall</b>
<b>Sunday 16</b>	<b>08.00</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>09.30</b>	<b>Sung Communion and Children's Groups</b>
<b>Wednesday 19</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>PCC meeting in the Cuddington Hall</b>
<b>Thursday 20</b>	<b>14.00</b>	<b>Afternoon Group in the Cuddington Hall</b>
<b>Sunday 23</b>	<b>08.00</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>09.30</b>	<b>Sung Communion</b>
<b>Tuesday 25</b>	<b>14.30</b>	<b>Knit &amp; Natter Group in the Leverton Room</b>
<b>Sunday 30</b>	<b>08.00</b>	<b>Holy Communion</b>
	<b>09.30</b>	<b>Sung Communion</b>
	<b>15.00</b>	<b>Annual Commemoration Service</b>

**Morning Prayer is said in church every weekday morning at 9am**

**Everyone is very welcome**

