

# Vicar's Pastoral Letter

**Date :** April 2008  
**Author :** Rev. Peter Holzapfel, St. Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcester.  
**Subject :** The future of our Church.

Dear Friends,

This month's Pastoral Letter is a copy of a sermon I preached on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at 10.30am at St Mary's Church and it concerns finance and in particular our individual giving to the work of the church. It was a sermon largely directed at those who regularly attend and worship at St Mary's but it does have broader implications for the whole of our communities throughout our united benefice including Kempsey and Severn Stoke.

The fact is that St. Mary's and St. Denys' churches are not able to pay their way with all the financial pressures that are put upon them in terms of general running costs, upkeep of ancient buildings and payment of our annual Parish Share to the Diocese of Worcester. This is a scenario that is being repeated across the nation and throughout the Church of England and ultimately it does threaten the life of the church and the parish system. It is no exaggeration to say that the next 10-20 years could see the end of the parish system and the demise of the Church of England as we have known it for centuries. This means that we shall see the closure of thousands of churches and the ministry of an "ordained minister", such as myself, will no longer exist.

Some people might ask "well, what difference would it make?" whilst others may well applaud. Yet I believe that for those who are professed Christians and those who are not it will have a significant effect and will severely weaken the social support system of this country. The fact is that I and others like me are here for everyone whoever and whatever you are. Everyone in this country lives within a parish and has a parish priest / minister who is available to them in times of joy and celebration and times of trouble and sadness. I personally minister to and support many people who have nothing or very little to do with the churches and I do this with complete willingness and good grace because I am here for everyone including you. The question to ask is "**if people like me no longer existed or became so over-stretched that they were not effective then who would fulfil the pastoral and spiritual role in our society?**" The conclusion that I reach is no one and this would be a huge blow to the morale and social and spiritual fabric of our society.

The next question is "**are you prepared to do something about this rapidly deteriorating situation?**" There are two major ways in which you can play a vital role in maintaining the life and ministry of our churches. The first is by making regular financial contributions and the best way to do this is by standing order and covenant (which means that we also gain the tax relief from the Government) and, if this is something that you would like to do or find out more about, please ring either Sally Linsey (St Denys' Treasurer on 820476) or Trevor Lloyd-Adams (820611) or David Hassell (828096) for St Mary's Kempsey.

The second is by actually attending church yourself on a regular basis whether it be St. Denys' or St. Mary's and becoming a part of the church's life. The Church in this country doesn't just need money because it needs you and your personal involvement. St. Denys', for example, has a regular congregation of under 20 largely elderly people who, whilst each one of them is loved and valued, will not be able to sustain the life of St Denys' into the future. Where will St. Denys' Church, its life and ministry, be in five years time? Quite possibly non existent unless you're prepared and willing to actively attend and support it. The same is true of all our churches.

They say that you value something that you're willing to support and pay for: the question is "are you, is this nation, prepared to support and pay for a church that has rendered it such invaluable service?" This question will only be answered in time but there isn't much time left.

Please read the following prayerfully and carefully.....thankyou.

# Peter

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## **Copy of Sermon from Sunday 09/03/2008**

**Date :** Sun 09/03/2008  
**Title :** Church Finances – the constant struggle.  
**Author :** Rev. Peter Holtzapfel, St. Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcester.  
**Subject :** Giving to the Church to help ensure its future.

"We love because God first loved us" This could be re-translated to read "We GIVE because God first GAVE to us." "All things come from you, O God, and of your own do we give You."

There are three things that are not generally spoken of: political preferences, sex lives and money. But, I'm afraid that this morning I have to break that rule and the one I'm going to address is money and specifically the amount that you give to the work of God here at St Mary's Church. Because both politics and sex will not directly impinge on the future of this church but money, or the lack of it, most certainly will.

I don't know and have never known what any individual gives to this church nor do I ever need to know and so in no way is this address aimed at any particular person. Nor do I speak on this subject very often and, therefore, I like to think that I have the right to be heard when I do.

Firstly, why do we need to look at it? The fact is that St Mary's is in considerable debt and is not paying its way. Each year, as hopefully you know, we are obliged to pay a Parish Share to the Diocese of Worcester which is currently set at £46,000. This money is largely passed on to central Church funds to cover the costs of clergy wages, pensions and provision of clergy housing. It is the duty of each church to pay this share because you're effectively paying for your minister and without a minister the life and witness of any church would be severely jeopardised.

At this time our church owes the Diocese £14,000 from 2005: £4,000 from last year 2007 and we have yet to start paying anything towards the £46,000 that we owe for this year (2008). This totals £64,000 at present.

In addition to this are the day to day running costs of St Mary's including repairs, lighting and heating and insurance. This excludes the extensive work that needs to be done on the Lady Chapel side of the church for which estimates are in excess of £200,000. We hope to be able to gain a grant from English Heritage to cover the cost of these works because there is no other way that they can be contemplated.

We are in significant debt and the Diocese of Worcester are inevitably and understandably putting pressure on myself and the PCC to come up with the money because they themselves are under an obligation to pass it on.

This is currently the situation and without a substantial increase in congregational giving not only will we fail to meet our obligations but year by year the debt will increase and the situation become worse to the point that eventually this church's right to have a minister will be questioned. I emphasise that there is no financial help whatsoever coming from the National Church or from any other body. We stand alone with our debt but if it isn't paid then we will not stand forever.

Secondly, what is the current state of our giving and what remedy is necessary? On an average Sunday the collection amounts to between £350 and £450 and although this may seem a large amount most of it comes through the envelope and covenant scheme which give good rates of interest and tax relief. **I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for our regular givers to covenant their giving so that we gain additional financial benefits. All you have to do is to seek the advice of the Church Treasurer (Trevor Lloyd-Adams or David Hassell) and they will point you in the right direction. OUR COVENANT GIVERS MUST INCREASE and this will be at no cost to anyone except the government who will give us increased relief.**

The remainder is loose cash on the collection plate and this, I'm afraid, at all services, is often in one or two pound coins. I am reluctant to speak like this because we are genuinely grateful for every penny that is donated towards this church but to put £1 on the plate each week is simply not enough and is, in fact, derisory. It is interesting to see what you can buy for £1 in Tesco's....hardly anything! And the church will not survive on the cost of a bar of chocolate each week!

The fact and the truth is that we need at least £5 from each person per week if St Mary's is going to pay its way and survive. Nothing less will be sufficient to keep it going and that is a minimum. And so whether you covenant, use the envelope scheme or give on the plate this is what everyone needs to consider. Some people will give more than this already and some will give less but all of you need to prayerfully consider the amount you give for the work of God here in this parish considering and comparing what you give to the church with what you give to other aspects of your life.

This is the situation and this is the only solution for nothing less will ensure our future.

And so, finally, why give? The reason seems fairly obvious: to secure our church finances, to pay our debts and meet our obligations, and to safeguard the future life and ministry of this church. But, of course, there is an even better reason and that is because of what God, in Jesus, has done for you and so, prayerfully considering financial giving, is a real test of our faith. Is this something that we really believe in and appreciate enough to pay for? I know that some of you have compared yourself with the new Baptist Church on St Peter's and wondered why their giving is in the thousands each week: could it not be that God has so profoundly touched their hearts with gratitude for His love and sacrifice that they willingly sacrifice what they have to Him? So much so that many of them will adhere to the old Biblical principle of tithing: that is, giving a tenth of all that they earn to the work of God. It's always been different in the Church of England but I'm afraid that it can't afford to be different any longer and time is running out.

God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son. God's giving knew no limits: He gave until it hurt: should that not inspire us to give in return? If the lights of Christendom go finally out in this country I would not like to think that it was because we failed to give at the time when it was most necessary. That time is now and the decision is yours remembering that all things come from You, O Lord, and of your own do we give you.

Amen.