

Vicar's Pastoral Letter

Date : October 2009
Author : Rev. Peter Holzapfel, St. Mary's Church, Kempsey, Worcester.
Subject : The future of our Churches

Dear Friends,

We recently conducted a mini survey of 150 households in Kempsey in order to discover how people felt about the Parish Church and whether or not they would miss it if it wasn't any longer there or ceased to function as a worshipping congregation. The vast majority of people said that they valued the Church and that they thought it was a very important part of village and community life. This is very reassuring for me to hear and I thank all those who participated in the survey.

Unfortunately, however, it is not an exaggeration to say that unless the Church has greater support both financially and in terms of people actively attending it then its ultimate future is by no means certain. In the case of St. Denys' Church, Severn Stoke I would give it no longer than 5 years and in the case of St. Mary's, Kempsey 10 to 15 years unless it has to be closed earlier because the building is unsafe. St. Denys' has undergone a great deal of restoration work in recent years and thanks to the hard work of a number of people the building is now as sound as it has ever been in its history. It is a beautiful Church and is beautifully maintained. The weekly congregation, however, is between 12 and 15 persons most of whom are over 70 years old. This year St. Denys' Church has to pay £15,000 to the Diocese of Worcester in addition to its normal running and maintenance costs. St. Denys', like all other Anglican Churches, receives no support from elsewhere and is completely dependent upon the generosity of those who attend. The sums simply do not add up and if the congregation continues to fall and costs continue to rise then something will have to give and, in the end, it will mean the closure of the Church.

We say that the future is in God's hands but in fact it's very much in your hands and whether you are prepared to support it both financially and with your attendance.

St. Mary's faces a different but equally challenging situation. The North Side of the Church is collapsing and in order to renovate it the current estimate is £110,000. The Church also requires a complete re-wiring of electricity as it is 60 years since the Church was last re-wired. The cost of this is £30,000. In addition St. Mary's has to pay the Diocese of Worcester £45,000 per year plus all of its running and maintenance costs. The congregation last Sunday (13th September) comprised 52 people of whom 3 were small children. The average age of the congregation is over 65 years old. I cannot over emphasise that we are not a wealthy Church and get no financial backing whatsoever from either the State or from The Church of England. We stand or fall completely on our own and if the congregation does not significantly grow and / or the building is not repaired then we shall most certainly fall.

The issue of whether we stand or fall is again in your hands and the value that you put on the Church in terms of both attending it and supporting it financially.

You could say "Well, it's one of those things. It's sad but, after all, it's the way of the world and modern society has very little time for Church going or involvement with the Church. We have less need for God in our modern world." If this is the case then why do the majority of people still value and want the Church and its ministry? Why did hundreds of people come to support St. Mary's Summer Fete?

This week I will have conducted a funeral, performed a baptism and a wedding, taken several services, helped create the Parish Magazine, supported bereaved families, made 10 visits to people in their homes and in hospital most of whom are seriously ill, helped run a successful club for over sixties, written two sermons and made dozens of phone calls as well as hosting a meeting of the Youth Club in my home. I am certainly not redundant but people like me will be redundant if the situation regarding support of our churches does not change. Does it matter? In order to answer this question ask yourself who would do the work that I and others currently do and see if you can come up with an answer. I cannot think of any other organisation except the Church that has such a

consistent or beneficial role within the community. I would even go so far as to say that without the presence of the Church there is not much community left.

Is this really something that is of such little value that we're prepared to see it go to the wall? If not, then please consider supporting our Churches in some way before it is too late.

On **SATURDAY 21st NOVEMBER** there is a Gift Day planned for St. Mary's Church, Kempsey. The Church will be open all day from 9:00am to 5:30pm and I shall be there to receive any gifts that you may wish to make to the urgent restoration of our Church. There will also be Gift Aid Envelopes available at Church so that we can gain the maximum benefit from any donation made.

There will be refreshments available and, as always, a very warm welcome. Our last Gift Day several years ago was a great success and we continue to be thankful for every penny and all those who gave so generously. The need, however, continues and I am asking you to help the Church if at all possible. Your gift will make a difference but it is not the only thing that will make a difference because it is your presence and involvement with the Church that is most needed. What would be the value of a solid beautiful building but with no one to fill it? The National Trust or English Heritage could take them over as museums and relics from the past but I would much rather see them as living, caring, vibrant centres of worship and community life.

The choices for St. Mary's and St. Denys' belong to all of us...

The choice belongs to you.

If you have any questions or need clarification about any matter concerning the life of our Churches then please contact Peter (the Vicar) on 820202 and leave a message for him to get back to you.

With every blessing for the future and in gratitude for all those who have supported us in the past.

Peter

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