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Riding out the recession

With the credit crunch hitting every community, our church will face difficult decisions over the next two years. There are still bills to pay: making sure the church is warm, that worship and outreach are resourced. How are we placed as a church to meet our costs, as well as continuing to offer mutual support to other churches by paying our Parish Share contribution?

Church finance has three pillars

Church finance has three pillars, each one works to support and fund a whole range of items for our church and for the diocese as a whole, now and for the future. The pillars are:

1. Church Finances

This is the most obvious to us in our church. We have to pay for costs and bills connected with our church and our outreach work.

2. Mutual Support

The first aspect of mutual support is meeting the costs of the 700 ministers working in the diocese. There are 126 voluntary clergy, 226 Readers, 55 Chaplains and over 50 people in training. In addition, about 300 clergy also have housing, pensions and an income called a stipend. The training of new ministers costs £178,500 a year. The 2009 budget, to meet all the training needs including support staff costs, is £447,000. This figure includes £52,000 available to clergy in the form of grants for Continuing Ministerial Education.

The second aspect of mutual support is Parish Share. Parish Share is a system that calculates how much money wealthier churches should donate or how much subsidy a church receive. This sharing of wealth is a key feature of Church of England finances where giving and spirituality meet.

The third aspect of Mutual Support is the help given by Church House Officers. Help is on offer for every thing to completing grant applications, planning community projects to general financial issues. The support needed by parishes in this Diocese is considerable.

The final element of mutual support is that given by the Cathedral, with its unique encouragement of our choral tradition, its hosting of large events and offering a flagship presence of the Diocese to the city, media and surrounding districts.

3. Grants and Investments

The final pillar of church finance is the investments and grants managed by Church House. The diocese needs about £12 million a year to operate mutual support. This consists of £7.2 million from Parish Share and £4.1 million from investments and grants administered by Church House. These grants, on average, subsidise each congregation by over £12,000 a year. The diocese is working hard to reduce costs, to secure more grants, and to make sure our investments produce as much money as possible, to subsidise parishes even more.

Message from the Bishop

As the recession bites, the Bishop of Manchester is writing to every member of our congregation to thank us for our financial giving, explain how our money is spent, and encourage us to continue giving both in time and money if we are to maintain our ministry across the diocese. You will have received a letter from the bishop in which he says:

“In these difficult economic times it is a tribute to each congregation in this diocese that, in faith, you manage to fund the activities of your local church.

It is my prayer that you will be able to continue to support your church in whatever way you can, that churches in this diocese will see their congregations grow, serve their community and see an increase in their giving.

It may be that as a result of a change in your circumstances you need to review your giving. Perhaps you are able to offer your church more support through the gift of your time and talents in addition to your financial contribution.

In whatever circumstances you presently find yourself please be assured of my prayers.”

A prayer for our church

Lord God,
creator and giver of all good things,
bless your church.
Strengthen our faith,
renew our hope
inspire our love,
so that, enabled by your Spirit
and following the way of your Son,
we may serve our communities
grow your church,
and give wholly of ourselves,
for your glory and the sake of your Kingdom.
Amen.

Let those of us who can, prayerfully consider increasing our giving to maintain the mission of our church. Remember that your financial giving does make a difference to our community and beyond.