



Gift Sunday

Update on St Mary's Vision and Finance

During July three open sessions were held to enable people to hear more about the Vision for St Mary's over the next few years, and to learn about the financial challenges that are emerging. The sessions saw lively conversation about what happens next—and feedback on what was discussed and the questions asked is available on the Vision and Values page of the church website.

An immediate key issue is the process for developing children's and youth work following the decision not to extend Ryan's contract. A small group is exploring options at present and they will report back to the PCC in October. It is intended that a clear view on the way forward, including a timetable for any appointment, would be in place by the end of the calendar year.

So what now.....

Please take the opportunity to prayerfully consider the ways in which you may be able to support and help St Mary's in its life and activities. We rely on the gifts, talents and skills of so many, and there are always opportunities for more to join in.

One of the reasons for bringing forward Gift Sunday from its usual time in November is to help plan the budget for the next few years. Having a clearer picture of our income from planned giving is vital in setting a realistic budget. Every new or increased amount of giving, however small or large, is both vital and valuable for our vision to continue to be carried out. **If you are able please take a moment to review your giving using the enclosed response leaflet.**

If you would like more information, or an chance to talk through any questions or comments on the Vision please speak to the David, Dan or Michael, or the churchwardens and treasurer.

THANK YOU

Today is Gift Sunday—one of the times in the year when there is an opportunity to say Thank You to all who contribute to the life, worship and fellowship of St Mary's Church. We are truly blessed by the skills, experience, talent, time and resources that are given week in week out in so many different ways and in so many different areas of activity.

THANK YOU

Over the last two weeks we've been thinking about God's gifts and exploring the implications of living with the realisation that all things come from God. The challenge of stewardship—in terms of how we think about and use our money, our time and our possessions—lies at the heart of discipleship.

Today in the last of our series we look at giving as the real investment. The leaflets and talks from the previous two weeks are available on the website if you need to catch up.

23 rd September	Giving – the real investment	*2Cor.8:1-5,13-15; 9:12-15 Luke 18: 18-30	Explore the idea that giving is as central to Christian life as prayer. Giving is an act that helps dethrones money as 'god'.
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Giving—the real investment

Giving features throughout the bible:

Old Testament

- First recorded act of worship (Genesis 4) includes an offering to God.
- The Old Testament laws gave detailed instructions on the offerings to be made to God (eg Leviticus 22, Deuteronomy 12)
- Faithfulness in giving was seen as a mark of commitment to God (Malachi 3: 8-12).
- Giving to those in need is central in building and maintaining the community (Proverbs 19: 17)

Jesus continued this tradition in his teaching.

- In the Sermon on the Mount giving is placed as central to the Christian life (Matthew 6: 2,5,16) and is marked by discretion (Matthew 6: 1-4)
- Giving whilst sacrificial is always proportional (Mark 12: 41-44)
- Giving is an act that blesses both receiver and giver (Acts 20: 35)

The experience of the early church reinforces the central place of giving.

- Giving responds to the needs arising within the local congregation (Acts 2: 44-45, 4: 32-35 and 11: 27-30).
- Giving is regular, planned and proportionate (Acts 11: 29)
- Giving is universal, open handed, willing and cheerful (2 Corinthians 8)

A time to reflect:

Take a moment to read some of the passages shown here. What questions come to mind as you read the passages? Is the biblical picture of giving realistic—if not, why not? How does your giving—in terms of time, skills, resources—compare to the biblical picture?

God and Giving—a theological perspective

The very nature of God is one of gift giver—giving (and receiving) lies at the heart of our understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God's gifts - life, beauty, goodness, bounty—are marked by unconditional gift giving. God's gifts are not based on prior performance or conditional upon a return. God's giving is not 'I give so that you will give'. God does not give gifts because of what we have done to deserve them. (either in the past or the future) and we cannot pay God back for what God has given.

God does give to us in hope that our lives will reflect God's giving. But God's giving is not conditional on us doing so, and we do not lose God's gifts however fragile and transitory the exhibition of God's gifts are in our lives. God still gives, and is always willing to give more.

God's giving is universal in scope—everything and everyone benefits. There is nothing we need do or to be in order for God to give to us. All people, all creatures, receive God's gifts. If all have a right to the gifts of God, we are obliged to work for the good of all who are the object of God's favour. Our giving in response to God's gifts is not an obligation to God, it is an obligation to the world, ministering God's gifts to all.

All of our gifts to God take on the character of thanksgiving (or Eucharist) offerings. We offer to God the bread and wine that are already God's gifts to us. This way of life is not a contract. It is simply our effort to be what we already are in God. It is our act of thankfulness and praise for what God already is in relation to us—the giver of life.

United with Christ we are called to distribute the good gifts of the Father in the power of the Spirit.

A time to reflect:

Spend a moment to think about God's gifts to you. Make a list and use it as a means of giving thanks to God. Take time to be open to receiving God's gift anew—think about ways in which you can be open to receiving God's gifts.