

## Talk for Planned Giving Appeal at all Masses on 24/25 June 2006

Good evening/good morning ladies and gentlemen. The Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee are grateful to Father Jeff for giving up his homily slot this weekend to make the second week appeal of three for Planned Giving. For those of you who have not recognised me or do not know me, my name is Mike Smallwood. I am chairman of the Parish Pastoral Council and also attend the Parish Finance Committee.

Last week Father Jeff spoke about stewardship and its place in Christian society.

As members of this parish, we, the parishioners, have a responsibility to ensure that enough funds are available to run the parish, care for our Priest, maintain the buildings and attend to essential and immediate repairs and improvements to comply with legal requirements and minimise the risk of accidents. We have recently had two inspections - the 5 yearly buildings inspection and a health and safety report. Both have highlighted some immediate actions. The actions from the buildings inspection have been taken for the most part, but there are still a number of longer term actions which will need to be tackled by the time the next review is due in about 4 years time. The Health & Safety review contains a number of immediate actions, such as improving the fire exit, the drawing up of an evacuation plan in case of fire, re-setting the steps leading up to the boiler room and to the Presbytery, emergency lighting showing where the exits are, especially in the case of an electricity cut. The list goes on - the sacristy has not been painted for years, Father Jeff's house also needs maintenance in many areas. It should have been done before he arrived nearly a year ago.

New legislation is also creating burdens on the Parish. For example, nobody is allowed to stand on a ladder or steps with their feet more than 2 metres off the ground unless they are trained in working at height, have the appropriate equipment and carry personal insurance. It may be necessary to employ a qualified professional to change a light bulb in the church or to cut the hedges. We cannot turn a blind eye because people are not covered by our insurance and there is also a moral responsibility. You are no longer allowed to risk breaking an arm or a leg or a rib even if it is during the course of voluntary work done for the service of the Lord.

You will have seen from the leaflets produced and distributed last week that while we seem to have a reasonable income, the Diocese takes nearly £11,000 a year, or roughly a quarter of our income, before we can start to do anything. At our very first Parish AGM in May 2005 Father Richard said that our survival as a parish depended on our remaining solvent. That is even truer today. There are changes happening in the Diocese from 2010 when the number of priests available will reduce to 86. At present there are 112 parishes, so some will have to shut down, amalgamate or be taken over. The changes in the Diocese have already started to happen. I am sure that you would not wish this parish to suffer such a fate just because we are unable to keep our financial heads above water. If we pray continually for help, it will be given, but we must also remember that God helps those who help themselves.

That way is by adopting a Planned Giving scheme. By knowing what is likely to come in, plans can be made in advance and work started and completed as it falls due - a much cheaper option than waiting for a disaster to happen and then hoping that some kind soul will provide the wherewithal to put it right.

In the Planned Giving scheme we are asked to reflect on the fact that our forebears developed the Parish as we know it today. They passed it to us and it is our responsibility

to hand it on to our successors fit for purpose, in good condition and free of debt. To achieve this ambition, we are asked to contribute our share of the cost and to consider what that might be according to our means.

Each of us will need to consider this in the terms of our own personal circumstances. If you contribute to the Offertory by Standing Order, consider when you last reviewed your contribution; even if that was just last year, please remember that this is now worth some 3% less than when you made the decision.

If you normally contribute to the Offertory by cash in the collection plate or Gift Aid envelope, please consider what you can afford to donate on a weekly basis, plan and budget for it and maintain your weekly contributions, making good the shortfall if you miss any weeks through holidays, sickness or other absence. Even when we go away on holiday our church has to be maintained ready for our return

Once Planned Giving is up and running we would aim to build up a reserve of some 18 months income over time to tackle emergencies. Those of us who have reached retirement (and, indeed, those of us who haven't) are advised to have a "slush fund" to cover such contingencies as burst boilers, relaying a flat roof, replacement car, machinery and so on. Our Church and the Priest's house need the same. Last year we had to call on our emergency fund - having committed to build the toilet with wheelchair access in the Hall, we were told that all the heaters had to be replaced. This cost nearly £10,000. Without our emergency fund, we would have had to close the Hall until we had- raised the necessary funds. Our reserves are now depleted - indeed, we have no emergency fund left.

Over the next week I should like you to consider carefully what I have said today. I hope your reaction will be positive and that you will decide to give more under the Planned Giving scheme than you do now so that we can, as a parish, continue to enjoy what we now have and can build on that to make it even better. Next week we will ask you to make written pledges confirming how much you would be willing to give on a weekly or monthly basis. Your pledge will of course be kept confidential, but, with the more certain knowledge of what the total income is likely to be, the Finance Committee and the PPC will be better able to plan and prioritise the maintenance and development of the church by knowing what our future income will be. I must stress that we are NOT asking anyone to give more than they can comfortably afford.

You are always very generous when we have special appeals and second collections. Last year we collected over £9000 for others. The priority now has to be to demonstrate our passion for our Parish by being more generous to ourselves so that we can pass it on to our successors in good order, fit for purpose and free of debt.

Members of the Parish Finance Committee and the PPC will be available after Mass, as will I, to answer any questions you may have or to clarify any points about planned giving.

Thank you