

# St Mary's Christian Aid/ Macmillan Charity Day

## Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September

Christian Aid Week left us in something of a dilemma in that we were keen to support this Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty, working globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality.

Christian Aid Week is the single biggest act of Christian witness in Britain and Ireland and yet the logistics of a door to door collection and the diminishing returns from the residents of Long Newton meant that we needed to look at an alternative means of supporting this important charity.

Equally, Macmillan Cancer Support is a cause close to our hearts as St Mary's and as we have supported Macmillan coffee mornings both in church and at The Wilson Centre, Antonia is keen to organise another one in church this year. So our solution is to hold a combined Christian Aid/ Macmillan Coffee Morning on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September in Church from 10am to 2pm and this is being announced now to give people time to help plan and prepare a special fundraiser to support both of these wonderful charities.

The plan is to build on the success of the 2014 MacMillan Coffee Morning held in St Mary's so to do this we will be looking for help from everyone in the following areas:

- We need cakes – lots of them both to eat there and to sell on our cake stall. If you can make cakes, please let Antonia know.
- We are having a silent auction so we need items to auction, especially promises and special recipes. If you are able to provide an item or promise, please let Ian know.
- We will have a bric a brac stall so look out for nice unwanted items and save them for us.
- There will be a craft stall to sell homemade items, whether jams and chutneys or sewn items. If we can design and produce our own Christmas cards they will also be on this stall.
- Manpower will be in great demand to run the Coffee Morning, stalls and supervise activities for the children. We will be looking for volunteers nearer to 30<sup>th</sup> September.
- We hope to have a variety of music on the day to entertain visitors so if you have any special talent or contacts, now is the time to step forward.
- Please let everyone know about this event and keep reminding them. We will also need help in producing and distributing flyers and posters throughout the village.

A few people will be heavily involved, but this fund raising project requires that we are all actively supportive in whatever way we can manage.

This is the latest in the series on “Generous Giving” that has been prepared for us by Rachael Phillips of the Diocesan Team and is intended to stimulate thought and conversation about how we finance the operation of the church here in Long Newton, Stockton and Diocese of Durham. The piece is not intended to be instructional but rather an attempt to create a discussion on the financing of our church throughout Durham.

## Marks of a Generous Church

Am I generous? I think so. I hope so. I’m definitely getting better at this. It’s not always easy, and requires a LOT of chats with God, who I pray to for wisdom and sense. But the challenge to be generous is always *there* in the forefront of my mind. It’s one of the side-effects of doing this job that no-one warned me about!

The daily challenge of “Should I sell this expensive top I never wear, or give it to charity? Could I spend more time with the homeless man outside Sainsbury’s? Could I contribute more to the church? Could I volunteer more?” is ever present.

Mostly I’m satisfied that I’m doing alright, and that I’m open enough to the nudging of the Holy Spirit to give more (or less) if my situation changes. I now have a *generosity awareness* I’m glad of it, because obviously amazing things happen when we’re generous. Now my countable, measurable acts of generosity can’t be assessed by mere mortals. Not entirely at least. Only God knows the exact details of what I actually give, to whom and why. But, even if the details aren’t public, if I really am generous, surely people will be able to see this? And, extending this to a larger body like, say, a church, shouldn’t this also be true? In fact, isn’t it important for churches to be explicitly obvious about generosity?

Well in a word, yes! It’s very important.

**Understanding God’s limitless and never-ending generosity should be really obvious to everyone who comes into contact with the church.**

So too, should the response in each of us to live as generous people. Being generous in the way we serve God and contribute to the church’s mission (with our time, money and skills) should be really obvious to an outsider looking in. It’s part of being a Christian.

Generosity brings great joy, answers prayers, and enables our local churches to continue blessing our communities in Jesus’ name. So shouldn’t it be... noticeable? After all, isn’t it a mark of the generosity of God that churches and Christians are generous? It’s not easy trying to convince people that God is generous if their experience is that those who serve God aren’t!

Yet sometimes, it’s not obvious at all. In fact, even when we are a very generous church, it might not seem that way to the outsider, or even the insider.

To help churches to become *obviously* generous churches, I’ve suggested some “Marks of a Generous Church”, based in part on the work of [Rev. Dr. Michael Reeves](#), and in part on my observations in the many parishes I’m working with. Of course all of our churches show

at least some of these marks at least some of the time. These suggestions aren't a rod to beat ourselves with, but something to challenge us on and also to encourage us to new heights.

What you're about to read could transform how your local church approaches generous giving.

And why? Because just imagine what we could do if we put generosity at the heart of our lives. Just imagine what extra resources in time and money could achieve, and think about how this would help us to see God's Kingdom come.

The following "Marks of a Generous Church" can be used as a self-assessment tool, PCC topic, Home Group reflection, or the basis for a Parish Plan. Lay or ordained, we can't delay in addressing this important issue, and these "marks" will help you to begin.

### 1. Time, skills and money are all equally emphasised

Being generous with our time, skills and money is not about choosing *which*, but choosing *all*. We are invited to be generous with each, according to how we've been blessed with each. A Generous Church avoids the under-representation of time, skills or money, or the overburdening of any.

### 2. Giving generously is clearly woven into the church's culture and values

Clergy and lay leaders appear comfortable teaching and modelling biblical stewardship. Generosity-related information is easily found in various places around the church, including the website. The congregation understands the financial state of affairs of the church, and what activities their contributions enable. People know what Parish Share is and what it funds. It's easy to spot which charities the church supports and how people can contribute (with time, skills and money) to the mission of the church.

### 3. Giving generously is *celebrated* during the Offertory

It's a joy! There is no sense of embarrassment or reluctance to take part in this act of giving, or awkwardness for those who can't give much/at all. Everyone understands what the offertory is, and when it will happen so that everyone knows what to expect. Visitors are not pressured to take part, but may participate if they wish/are able. This can be clearly and sensitively explained using this guide, to supplement a verbal explanation from the front. And the most effective way your church can transform the offertory into an act of celebration, inclusion, prayerfulness and worship is by considering adopting *this* approach.

### 4. Giving generously is a regular theme in prayer and praise

It's hard to disagree that the visual and spiritual impact of personal testimony is massive. So in a Generous Church, stories of generosity with time, skills, and money are shared regularly at church and online. The prayer needs of the community within and outside the church are shared, so that these prayers might be answered by God through acts of generosity. And the celebration of how the church's generosity has touched lives is shared. *This shouldn't be confused with appeals for funding*. It's about opening up conversations about generous giving as an expression of faith.

## 5. Giving generously is part of a well-developed parish plan

Too often, generous giving/stewardship is an after-thought that comes up on the basis of need, or occasion. The generous church has a clear, well-articulated generosity vision that's fully aligned with the missional vision for the parish. Teaching, training, communication strategies, resources, etc. are part of the plan to move closer to the goals. Progress is monitored and discussed on a regular basis at PCC meetings and adapted when needed.

## 6. Generous lifestyles are lived throughout the congregation

Church leaders (clergy, PCC, children/youth leaders etc.) model biblical stewardship in the use of their time, skills and money. A significant number of the congregation contribute time within the church as well as volunteering outside the church. Parishioners regularly generate ideas for outreach ministries for the church and community. There's an overall attitude of cheerfulness in giving. Church leadership and the finance committee continue to initiate and fund new ministry ideas and opportunities, despite the challenging economy. **Discussions and casual conversation should be full of blessing and abundance, rather than limitation and scarcity.**

## 7. Biblical generosity/stewardship is taught

The church has a thoughtful strategy to ensure they are presenting good teaching and training on Biblical principles of generosity to the congregation. Leaders are clear about the message they want to convey; what they want people to understand, believe, and *do* about generous giving. Time is set aside each year to explain or highlight specific stewardship principles, or, for example, which parts of a service communicate generosity and how (the welcome, the offertory, Holy Communion). Stewardship teaching is available for all age groups in the church. But note, *educating* isn't confused with *asking* for contributions. **When the church only speaks of stewardship at the point of need, instead of consistently throughout Christian education, the church misses the mark of this attribute.**

## 8. The church has a generosity champion

A member of the church team – whether paid or unpaid – facilitates the church's approach to generous giving. This role is clearly defined and the leader has the full support of the church to do his/her job. This is not the treasurer, who is just too obviously the 'money person', or the vicar/rector/curate who has a distinct leadership role. This is a person with both gifts and commitment in the specific area of stewardship, and has credibility.