

JUNE 15, 2016 BY FRONTLINEFAITHFUL

What has the diocese ever done for us?



IT WAS WEDNESDAY EVENING AND THE PCC WERE GATHERED IN THE HALL WITH COPIES OF THE AGENDA ON THEIR KNEES.

Outside it was raining but nothing could spoil the mood inside. They were having a lively and uplifting discussion about their church's mission and what it does in the community. This was for their recently revamped parish magazine and website. The committee felt it was about time they started sharing just what good stuff the church was up to.

Mary had been quietly tutting to herself until she could take it no more and burst out, "It sounds to me like you lot are just blowing your own trumpets with all this 'we've done this, we've done that'. It's not right. It's not British."

"I don't think it's blowing our own trumpets Mary dear" said her husband David, quite tentatively. Mary had a temper and David was already in the dog house after the sherry-cream-carpet incident last night.

Richard said wisely, “I think it actually *is* blowing our own trumpets, and I think that’s a good thing,” which made everyone turn in their seats. They knew something else was coming. He never left it at one sentence.

“I think we *should* blow our own trumpets. Trumpets are used to get people’s attention. And the people whose attention we need to get are those out there”, he pointed at the window. It was still drizzling. It was England.

“They need to know there’s help here. Maybe the ones in need of help can also be the ones to offer help, like Jan who does the biscuits.” Everyone nodded approvingly. Richard continued, “People should know about what we do. Like the ‘crafternoon’ we hold. It’s doing really well! And I’ll be honest Mary, I will be, I had no idea about the music ministry that Barry set up. We *should* blow our own trumpets. This place is a bastion of the community.”

They’d already listed the coffee morning, Messy Church, the 24 baptisms that had already taken place this year, all the sick people visited, youth outreach, Rev John’s ‘flower and glory’ flora and bible classes, and countless other mission activities and community projects.

“It’s a lot of stuff isn’t it?” Rev John flicked through his notes. “I think it’s important that people see what their contributions are going towards, don’t you?”

“Not money again” groaned Tim. Tim had a pathological hatred of talking about money even on a good day, but tonight was worse. When parking outside the hall he’d mounted a bollard and couldn’t even bring himself to check the damage. A significant bill no doubt, not to mention incredibly embarrassing, though he was fairly confident no-one had seen or heard. Still, money was the last thing he wanted to be reminded about. He was feeling entirely wretched with hints of irritableness.

“Well Parish Share is next on the agenda” said Rev John a bit defensively, “and I’m just saying it’s great seeing what our contributions support.”

“But they don’t! All our money goes to the diocese!”

“We are the diocese,” corrected Mary, much to the delight of Richard.

Tim ignored her as she was spoiling his rant and he felt like he really needed to rant. He’d reflect later that he was a bit rude, but that was for future Tim to worry about. Present day Tim was mid-flow. “We never see a penny of it. Parish Share just goes to the big black hole that’s the diocese. What have the diocese ever done for us?”

There was a murmur of agreement and nodding of heads. All eyes were now on Rev John, waiting for his answer. He couldn’t see this, as his head was in his hands. He was sorrowfully thinking that the meeting had been going so well up until now.

His thoughts were interrupted by Richard asking him to explain to Tim what ‘the diocese’ (he did the inverted commas with his fingers which was quite annoying) actually did to support them.

Didn’t ANYONE know what parish share was for? Rev John wanted to shout but instead he composed himself and was about to answer when Anna piped up, “Well there’s Reverend John. Parish share pays his stipend.” Another murmur of agreement. Some nods.

Mary joined in, “There’s the legal advisor. When we had all that bother with the architects and the project over-running, we rang the diocesan office and were given expert legal advice.” Heads nodded.

David, normally so quiet, but desperate to impress his frightening wife Mary, added, “Yes and when Amy and Natalie were planning the youth summer camp they got all their resources and support and advice from the Diocesan Children’s Worker!” Rev John looked through his fingers at the PCC and a flicker of hope ignited. They were on a roll.



“You were here Tim, when the Mission and Ministry Support team came to talk about our church’s vision last year. That’s when we put all those new plans into place,” said Richard. “...and there’s the admin staff, the clergy housing team, the faculties advisor, the legal advisor, the secretary. They’re all there to help us. Part of the money we contribute keeps them in post. And there’s the training up of new clergy. That’s where your parish share goes Tim. When Rev John and vicars like him retire, we need someone to replace them. Future clergy need training.”

Rev John was relieved. He breathed deeply.

Tim knew he was being unreasonable but it was far too late for reason. Still fuming about his careless parking he couldn’t also cope with being contradicted over his opinions of the diocese. He had to go for it...

“Yes but apart from clergy stipends, pensions and housing, children and youth advisors, ministry resources, admin staff, training, legal advice, finance, Mission and Ministry support, faculties and the training up of new clergy, what has the diocese ever done for *us*?”

Suddenly the tension burst and everyone laughed. Everyone except Natalie who'd nipped out to the kitchen to prepare the coffees, and shouted around the door as a final volley "Media! Prayer support! Vocation support! Religious resources! The Bishop!"

Hurrah! The PCC was a buzz of excitement. Tim stroked his chin thinking it over, still looking unconvinced. Kevin turned to Rev John. Kevin was a pastry chef with bright red curly hair who used to be a county badminton champion but he'd filled out a bit over the years, on account of all the pastry. He felt utterly bewildered tonight and wondered if anyone else in the room felt lost like him. He put up his hand.

"Yes Kevin, please, you don't need to raise a hand." Said Rev John. "What is it?"

"I actually didn't know any of that John. I mean I didn't have a problem with our financial contributions going to Parish Share, and I hardly thought the diocesan office blew it all on week long retreats in Monaco, but I honestly didn't know parish share paid for all that stuff for us."

Rev John stared. Did some people really not know this? Richard made a suggestion, "Since we started off talking about our magazine and website, mightn't it be a good idea to include something about what Parish Share goes towards, so people know? I imagine Kevin isn't the only one." He was right. It should go in the magazine. Richard had hit the spot, again. He was such a know-it all.

<https://thegenerousgivingproject.wordpress.com/2016/06/06/im-the-diocese/>