

Dear Friends

I don't know about you, but I am extremely proud of our lovely old church. It is a beautiful, peaceful and historic place that has diligently served the people of Headcorn for the best part of 900 years.

However, the reality is that maintaining and running a Church like ours doesn't come cheap – in addition to the general repairs and maintenance of our large grade 1 listed building, we have heating, lighting and insurance to pay (insurance alone is £4500 pa), there are also major repairs that crop up from time to time and then there's the dreaded "Parish Share" which not only pays my stipend but also goes towards central and diocesan expenses. Indeed to keep St Peter & St Pauls properly maintained and staffed costs over £1500 per week. And that's before we start thinking of making any improvements.

Many people assume that much of this is financed from some form of central fund, sadly this is not the case. We receive no help from local or central government or the Church of England whose own assets have dwindled over recent decades. In short churches like our have to pay their own way entirely – and it is quite an expensive way at that.

We at St Peter & St Paul's do have some limited reserves. However, they are declining rapidly and at the rate we are going these will be exhausted within the next 3 years. Despite cutting our spending to the bone and benefitting from regular well supported fundraising events, we are eating into these reserves at a rate of nearly £10,000 per year. In addition, we know that we have some expensive repairs bills coming up as our organ needs some major work to keep it functioning and our 5 yearly buildings inspection is due this Autumn, this will undoubtedly throw up the need for more repairs to the fabric.

Now I know that some people will wonder if it's worth all the fuss – after all, what has the church ever done for us? You may even be thinking "here she goes – we knew it wouldn't be long before Fiona started asking for money – isn't that all the church ever does". To be honest I hate doing it – I would far rather be doing something else. However, I care about our church and I also care about you – that's all of you, and I want to make sure that I or someone like me will always be available to you if ever you need us, whether you've ever had anything to do with us in the past or not.

In case you're still not sure, imagine what the village would be like without the church. Imagine Christmas, Easter or Harvest without the special services. Imagine not being able to celebrate here together at Baptisms and weddings, or weep here together at funerals. Imagine not being able to come in and spend time in peace and quiet whenever you want. Would you really like to live in a place like that?

If every single household in the village gave just £10 per year more than they do now, or one in every 6 households made a regular donation of £5 per month more than they already do we probably wouldn't have a problem and I for one could concentrate on doing the things I'm sure most of you would like me to, rather than worrying about finances and struggling to write letters like this.

We know that it is highly unlikely that the whole village will respond to this call but if you feel able to help us in any way we would really appreciate it. You could either make a regular standing order, a one off donation (which you could gift aid if you are a UK taxpayer), leave a bequest in your will or join the "Friends". Please do feel free to contact me, one of the churchwardens or our Treasurer if you would like to talk about this or feel able to help in any way.

With many thanks and best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fiona". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the name.