

# CLERGY LETTER

Dear Friends

By the time you read this letter you may well have seen the latest edition of the Downs Mail – and noticed that there is a very unflattering photo of yours truly on the front cover. For those who haven't seen it, I was asked to comment about the ways in which we finance our churches and in particular the amount that we have to pay to the Diocese in "Parish Share".

I know that many of you who read the article will have been shocked to learn that our Benefice of four Churches pays a total of nearly £75,000 in share per year. You will probably also be wondering how this amount can be justified. So I thought this would be a good opportunity to try and explain.

The vast majority of our parish Share goes on Ministry costs, these are made up of Vicars Stipends, Housing and Pension contributions along with a contribution towards those of the Archdeacons and other senior clergy who support and advise us, the ongoing training of both lay and ordained people who already exercise a ministry within the Church and also the training of our future vicars and ministers. I know it sounds a lot, but in total these costs amount to well over £60,000 per Benefice. Then we also have to factor in various other support costs emanating



from Diocesan Office such as Safeguarding and Education (which are both legal requirements) the finance dept, personnel, communications, Youth and Families advisors and Mission & Ministry advisors. I have to say that our Diocesan office is run extremely efficiently and

costs are kept as low as possible, but this still amounts to several thousand pounds per Benefice. Then finally, because some areas are more affluent than others, those of us who are deemed to be able to pay a bit more are asked to do so in order to ensure that the more deprived areas of the Diocese are able to continue to have their own vicar.

However, as you should be aware, the Parish Share is not the only cost our churches incur. Heating, lighting, general maintenance, insurance and other general running costs can almost double our expenditure, and that is providing we don't find ourselves having to deal with a major buildings issue.

So where do we find the money to pay our bills? The first thing to highlight is that we do not receive any funding from external sources for the day to day running of our churches. Although we do receive some income from fees for certain services, the vast majority comes from the very generous donations that

are made by our regular worshipping communities or those attending special services such as weddings and Baptisms, we also rely very heavily on fundraising events and the activities of our Friends and centuries clubs. However, in most cases we still find ourselves in deficit each year which means that

we are constantly eating into our reserves and compromising our ability to invest in our churches and make them more fitting for use in the 21st century.

Which is where all of you come in. As I hope you are all aware, our village Churches are genuinely YOUR village Churches. As wonderful old buildings they are real assets to their communities, each one regularly draws tourists from far and wide who then spend time and money enjoying the delights of the rest of the area. In addition, whether you are a regular worshipper or not, St Mary's is pleased to be able to open our doors to anyone who just wants to spend some time in peace and quiet, soaking up the atmosphere and handing their problems over to God. While we are always happy to arrange for St Michaels and St Peter & St Paul's to be opened on request. Needless to say, we are always here to help you celebrate the major milestones in life



"...and then, as the organist hits us with a cool hip-hop riff, you kick off the wedding vows in a smokin' rap style..."

as well, both happy and of a more sombre nature. We are also here for major civic occasions, Sutton Valence Prep School regularly uses St Michaels for their services, while, of course, I and the other ministers associated with the Church are always happy to help with any other issue that you may have – you only need to ask.

So, I wonder, would you be willing to help to support us as we seek to continue to serve our communities? As you will see from the adverts further on in the magazine we are now running a "Buy your church a drink" campaign – all we ask is for you to consider donating £5 more than you usually do – roughly the cost of a pint and a packet of crisps in the pub or a coffee and muffin in a coffee shop. We don't mind if this is a one off payment – although won't complain if you decide to make it a regular occurrence. The bottom line is that if every household in our villages gave us the price of just one extra drink a year, we would be well on the way to balancing our books and putting a little aside for improvements for a rainy day. As the advert says "every little helps"

With best wishes for the coming month.

*Handwritten signature: Iona*