

Mike's message

Straight Talking

I'm going to talk to you about money.

Right then, for those of you who are still reading . . .

It's easy to be uncomfortable thinking of churches talking about money. After all we teach about God's grace, an unconditional love as being, as John Wesley once said, "free in all, free for all". So why do churches need to talk about money?

Firstly, the churches need to carry out Christ's ministry. They need to speak about God's love and put that into practice. Like it or not the churches have been entrusted with large buildings handed down through the generations in which their ministry is located and from which their mission can be carried out. The maintenance of those buildings, and their mission, carries with it a financial burden. We can open doors, but the buildings need to be watertight, lit and heated. It costs money.

Secondly, the church has developed a specific ministry of clergy. Like us or loath us we are there to help run the churches alongside dedicated lay people who give their time voluntarily. The clergy are trained to help run the churches, to develop the skills of lay people, and preside at the sacraments of baptism and communion. The clergy, whether Methodist or Church of England, are paid a stipend. It is not a wage or a salary but a sum paid to set us free to serve. Whether we work 40 hours a week or 80 hours - and some do - it's the same pay.

So what this cost? In the case of St Andrew's it's around **£850 per week** to keep the church going! By far the biggest call are our payments to the Diocese of Lichfield (£14,000 per annum) and the Methodist Circuit (£5,500 per annum). Those add up to only about half the cost of employing one clergy person. Although the C of E stipend is currently about £24,000 (Methodist stipends are lower) with housing, pension, training and Diocesan etc services added the cost of ministry is around £44,000 per clergy post. Add to that the expenses of running, maintaining, heating and lighting the building, admin costs, sanctuary supplies (yes, we have to buy wine and candles), printing, photocopier hire, rubbish collection, copyright licences etc it's a costly business. We're helped in some of this by grants from, for example, The Stanley Trust and fees from funerals and weddings, but the biggest financial contribution has to come from the church's members.

Why should we give? Because it is in response to God's love, which is given to all, without reservation. We want churches ministry to tell others about that love

How should we give? Regularly! This can be by the 'envelope scheme' which is efficient. But what about when you aren't there? Will you remember to give? Why not have a Standing Order through you bank? You'll never be searching for cash on a Sunday morning again!

What should we give? That really is a matter between you and God. But how much do you spend each week or month on for example: petrol, a satellite subscription, meals out, newspapers, mobile phones, internet. How does your response to God's love compare to those?

Contact me at mjclaridge@tiscali.co.uk or 0121 553 1871 if you would like to discuss how you can give to the ministry of St Andrew's. There's no time better than now. Don't put it off.

