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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩ September 2024

Inspiring generosity

September is Harvest season, a time during which we can all give thanks for God's generosity to us. It is also Generosity Week (29 September – 6 October), an opportunity to reflect on all the good gifts that we have received within our churches and consider how our church family and wider community might explore together what it means to live generously throughout the rest of the year.

Natalie Wainwright, Lead Giving and Funding Adviser for Bath and Wells says, "Whilst Generosity Week lends itself to Harvest time, there is never a bad time to celebrate God's goodness to us and, in turn, consider how this might shape our own lives as we



Harvest generosity at St Paul's, Weston seek to live out our Christian faith as generous disciples.

"There is a huge range of resources available to help individuals and church leadership teams do just that - from sermon starters to daily prayers, resources for young people, podcasts and more!"

'Living Generously', is one such resource. A series of films for small groups, the Church of England's

Director of Giving, Jonathan de Bernhardt Wood, explores one of his favourite gospel stories, John 12:3 NSVA, when 'Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.' Each of the short films explores a different way of being generous – such as with our time, attention and wealth.

Reflecting on the passage Jonathan says, "There is so much to learn, and so much to be inspired by." What might inspire you this Generosity Week?

Find the films, and all the other Generosity Week resources, at churchofengland.org/generosity-week.

News in brief

Digital giving on a roll

Churches across Bath and Wells are already benefiting from the Church of England's Digital Giving Roll-out, having raised over £51,000 between them since November 2023, when 79 parishes were supported to access a discounted contactless unit. Holy Trinity Church, Binegar, overcame its uncertainty about going contactless and have raised nearly £500 on their device, while the rural parish of Lyng has raised over £800 it might not otherwise have received.



Lottery boost for Porlock

St Dubricius Church in Porlock has been awarded a £179,335 grant by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to conserve its spire and roof. Reverend Ann said: "The church has been at the centre of village life for centuries and is a beacon for both visitors to the village and residents. The last re-shingling was done by village craftsmen using timber from just up the combe. We intend to replicate that as far as is practical, and also to use the project to promote the local heritage, not only of our church building, but of the wider community." **Does your church need help identifying funders? Contact the Giving & Funding team.**

Are you joining the Wave of Prayer?

Join in from 7pm on Friday, 6 September, as we pray for the growth of our churches and the transformation of our communities. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, will be joining Bishop Michael at a number of prayer events over the 24 hours. You can join in as individuals or communities. St Mary's, Timsbury has volunteers reading all 150 psalms while Wrington benefice is holding a prayer breakfast. Find out how you can join in at bathwells.org.uk/diocesan-wave-prayer.

Find out more on these and other news stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

Reimagining generosity

By Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells

In John's Gospel, the first of the signs that Jesus offers to show who he is happens at a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee (John 2: 1-11). Jesus saves the whole event from being a social disaster. The presenting issue is that the wine runs out. This exposes the families that have organised the event to the possibility of severe embarrassment. Rather than modelling lavish hospitality, they are in danger of showing themselves to be stingy and disorganised. Thankfully Jesus's mum is alerted to the situation and gets Jesus on the case. He comes up with a solution and all is well.

What gets me every time about this story is the scale and the quality of the solution that Jesus presents. If my calculations are right, Jesus saves

the day by creating the equivalent of six wheelie bins full of wine. And not just your supermarket bottom shelf stuff. The wine he provides is of the very best quality – stuff that would delight sommeliers and wine snobs the world over.

In his first action, Jesus could have chosen to show any number of things about himself – his wisdom, his power, his goodness or so on. What's striking is that he begins by revealing that he is someone of astonishing and abundant generosity. This is at heart who Jesus is.

If this is who Jesus is, then that means that this is who God is too. For 'in God there is no

unChristlikeness'. In his first action, Jesus is showing us that at heart, God is abundantly and astonishingly generous.

If we're all made in God's image, might that be at heart who we're called to be too? Often, the call to be generous can be portrayed as hard and difficult, about self-sacrifice and denial, of the costly call to put others first. But what if we reimagined what being generous means? If we understood being generous as in fact the way to reveal and enjoy our true selves – lavishly, abundantly, joyfully... merrily?

A wheelie bin of wine anyone?

Bishop Michael

Modelling who God is

The Revd Jonathan Philpott, has swapped parish ministry in Berrow and Brean for a role with the diocesan Giving and Funding team, support both Taunton and Wells archdeaconries.

What do you feel you bring to this new role?

I've got my own lived experience of being an incumbent so I know what the challenges are and how initiatives might be received by someone working in the parish. I hope I can help make sure that we produce resources that can make a difference to people on the ground.

What excites you about the role?

Giving and generosity is not generally high on the list of priorities for churches, and I am excited about helping encourage move how we resource our churches up the agenda and see it as an integral part of enabling the church to fulfil its calling.

What are your priorities?

They are the same as when I was in parish ministry: for the church



Jonathan Philpott, Giving and Funding Adviser for Taunton and Wells archdeaconries

to be at the heart of the local community and for the church to be resourced so that it can carry out the mission God has called it to, uniquely where it is placed.

What's the biggest challenge to growing a generous culture?

The moment you start talking about money people switch off. But if we talk about generosity in terms of how we are modelling

who God is, seeing that as a way of enabling the church to be alive, that changes the emphasis of the conversation. And I think it's better that way.

Any advice for those who find talking generosity difficult?

Acknowledging that you don't like talking about money is a good place to start. But there are many good resources available to help, including the Generosity Week resources, and tools like Ways to Give, as well as training. The more we can normalise talking about money and the way in which it resources what we long to do in churches, the easier it gets.

Read Jonathan's interview in full at bathwells.org.uk/jonathan-interview

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