

The Dialogue at Mass (slightly edited) on 13 October 2024 between Fr Jock and Donald Scott, Chairperson of the St John's Parish Pastoral Council, about the Mission of our Parishes – and the Finances we need to fund it.

Donald Scott: Could you give a little background as to why we're having this conversation?

Fr Jock: Yes, certainly, it's because in the last few months it's become clear that as a parish we're running at a loss of probably about £20,000 this year. The reasons are many and varied as Gary Zoltie, our treasurer, will outline in greater detail at the end of the mass. But among them are the fact that we've lost 25% of Massgoers since Covid, with people seeming to drift away; added to that, there is inflation everywhere, and there are more financial demands coming from the diocese, and that's just a start. In response to this, we could have just said, "We need more money" but we felt that in tough times we needed to explain the background – and also to be transparent about how the Church and our parish is funded, something that's not been done before, I think, and one of the weaknesses in our church.

And also, we want to try to offer a 'bigger picture', so that people are helped to recognise that how much we give is a spiritual matter, a matter of discipleship, what Pope Francis describes as 'missionary discipleship' because the money we were given and take in helps us in our mission. If you look at the document "*The Key Areas of Parish Life*" [provided as you came in this morning – *and available with this week's newsletter*] you can see how broad is the mission that has been given to us. And so, meeting with you, Donald, and with Gary a few months ago, we thought we'd look for a Sunday Gospel about money - there aren't many, thank goodness - but today's one about the rich man and how he uses his wealth was one that we thought we could use to link with the financial challenges facing us...and that's why you and I are standing here today.

Donald: Ok, just thinking back to the time a few years ago when we were preparing to spend a fair amount of money on renewing the lights in the church, you made the point at one of the Open Parish Meetings that we needed to be careful not to spend money just on our own assets and resources but also to invest in and support other people who were in need, and I think that was the beginning of our involvement with the STEKA Children's Home. You emphasised that was a Gospel commitment but there's also a commitment to the Church, so I'm wondering if you could say something about the basis of our faith and scripture in our commitment to the Church.

Fr Jock: Well, when Jesus chose his followers, his apostles, he seemed to want to form a community to carry on his message and his mission. In the early days of the Church, you could actually have called it the Jesus Movement, but if they are going to last more than

a few years, movements need to become institutions in order to survive. And so, obviously, there were resources that were needed - indeed at first, we were told, the early Church in Jerusalem held everything in common like monks still do.

And that increased after Constantine, the Roman Emperor who accepted Christianity in the 4th century, for the first time there were church buildings - previously people worshipped in people's houses. That meant paying for people and buildings and, eventually, a clerical class emerged that needed to be paid for because there were many more Christians and they needed people working full time. There is a foundation for this in the scriptures: in Luke's gospel, chapter 8, we hear about how as Jesus wanders around Galilee, there were women who followed him and provided for him and his followers out of their own resources. (Some might say that women have been the more generous sex ever since!). In addition we find in Luke, chapter 7 and in Paul's Letter to Timothy: *'the workman deserves his keep'*. And in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he tells them that when someone is under instruction in doctrine, he should give his teacher a share in all his possessions. (That would make the RCIA rather lucrative!)

If you look at the *"Key Areas of Parish Life"* document, you can see the breadth of the mission of our parish. It tends to surprise people when they see this written down on paper. In it the mission is divided into six areas. Firstly, there's the whole dimension of Worship, Liturgy, Celebration of the Sacraments, Prayer and all that goes into that. Then there's the area of Faith Formation, preparing people for sacraments, general Adult Faith Formation including house groups and retreats and formation for eucharistic ministers and continuing formation. The third section covers Governance and Administration. These days that's a growth industry – what with developments in safeguarding and health and safety and data protection – with so much more time and money required for each.

And then, if you turn over the page of the document, the last three 'Outreach' sections show that we don't exist for ourselves; we exist to reach out and our outreach goes in three different directions: within the parish like with Communion visits to the housebound, the livestreaming of Masses and services, the work of the Legion of Mary, the Bereavement Group, the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Thursday Club etc, etc. School Involvement: Youth Outreach that we need to develop, and the Communication and Evangelisation side with the newsletter and the website, the Facebook page, and Instagram etc, etc.

Then there's the wider outreach that links with our sister parish of St Mary Magdalene's (who, incidentally and importantly, contribute 25 per cent towards all our shared expenses), the surrounding parishes of our Cluster, the Deanery of Edinburgh and the Archdiocese. Also, Ecumenism, and it's so good that we are about to welcome the congregation of the Episcopal Church of St Mark's who are renovating their building - they are going to be worshipping at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning here for several months. That might mean you get slightly shorter 9.30am Masses! Interfaith links, too,

are part of this second section. Finally there's the widest possible outreach in the community: our links with Legho in Tanzania and STEKA in Malawi and the other charities we tend to support. A post-Vatican II parish is juggling lots of balls and we have to pay for most of them as almost everything we do costs money in one form or another. (For example, we want to give our First Communicants a little children's Gospel book as part of their preparation).

Please do study the "Key Areas of Parish Life" document to see what we are trying to be as a parish. Many people are generous in giving time and of themselves in ministry and as volunteers in certain areas, but we also have to have people who are paid: Enrico, our parish administrator and myself (though, sadly, no salary for Deacon Eddie).

Donald: That's a lot of outgoings - perhaps we don't understand enough about the way the parish - and the diocese - is financed?

Fr Jock: It's important we're willing to ask questions like where does the money come from? Where does it go? What is our financial arrangement with the Diocese? How are priests paid? As a rule, we haven't been an adult Church, encouraging everyone to be co-responsible, and willing to share information about how our Church is financed.

I remember in one of my previous parishes, in Leslie in Fife, a parishioner, John, who was in his thirties and had two young sons, gave a talk about finance and mentioned the 'magic duck' that his boys believed lived on top of the cupboard. They believed that whenever they needed new shoes or the family needed anything, Mummy and Daddy would go to the magic duck and get the money they needed. He then said that sometimes people think that the Church has a magic duck and all we need to do is to go to it whenever there's something that needs to be paid for in a parish.....but that actually magic ducks are in rather short supply - and the Church doesn't have one!

What many people don't know is that the parishes of the Diocese fund the Curia at Gillis, the administration that runs the Diocese. It has 22 employees which it needs for health and safety, Property, Finance etc etc - for what used to be 110 parishes and is now about 55. It's a big operation there and although as a Church we are 'asset rich' in terms of buildings, we're not in terms of cash.

Up until 2 years ago, like other parishes, just under 20% of our Offertory Collection went to fund the Diocese. So, a fifth of the money given to us went to 'central office' and to pay for the Bishop's expenses. However, in the past 2 years, that's gone up to 32% because of a major shortfall in the funding of the Aged and Infirm Clergy Fund, with more retired priests who have to be paid for because, as Gary Zoltie will highlight in his report, salaries for clergy don't allow for us to save; we get board and lodging and are supplemented by stipends but there's a need to set retired priests up with a home (when they retire at 75): the amount given, incidentally, is, not enough, in fact, to enable them to settle in Edinburgh, if that was what they wished to do.

That means that 67% of all the money that comes in through the Offertory is what's left to run our parish, and to cover all our building costs – of which, as we know, there's been a lot of recently, not least with the need to replace our boilers when they suddenly broke down last December.

And then, there's the costs incurred by our 'Mission' as outlined in "Key Areas of Parish Life" - as you can see, we depend on and are very grateful for people's contributions because that's our only income - along with some very generous legacies that we've received. In all this, perhaps we need to stress the biblical word 'stewardship' - so that we can keep the mission of our parish – and this beautiful building - going for the generation that comes after us.

Donald: During a conversation at a recent Parish Council there was concern that it might not be ok to ask for more money during a cost-of-living crisis and I know you share that concern. So, what are we asking for if not for everyone to stump up more money?

Fr Jock: Well, we Catholics haven't really embraced this concept of shared stewardship and probably as a result in this country it seems to be a fact that Catholics are the *most* generous group among Christians in giving to charity and the *least* generous in giving to their own church - perhaps because the Church has never explained what it needs for its mission, and how that money is spent.

Keeping in mind Pope Francis' idea of missionary discipleship, what we are asking people to do is to think, reflect and pray: given the responsibilities I have in my life and given my financial situation (and it's very different for different people), what's a realistic amount for me to give regularly? Unlike golf clubs here, we don't charge a membership fee!

As well as the 'magic duck', in Leslie, John spoke of the 'Aunty Mary syndrome': and how his Aunty Mary used to give him £5 at Christmas when he was a 7 year old lad; that was wonderful, very generous. When he was 18, Aunty Mary still gave him £5 and it was still very generous but it didn't go quite as far. Now that he was in his mid-thirties, Aunty Mary was giving him... £5, probably because she couldn't afford more, but the reality was that the £5 didn't go nearly as far as it had 30 years earlier.

Now, many people are very generous and we are very grateful for that; many people can't afford more than they already give and we totally understand that; we also realise - as Fr Luke pointed out to me yesterday - that we've got to try to find a way to reach the people who aren't often in our pews on a Sunday but who come along every so often and consider themselves part of our wider community – but seldom fund us and give them a chance to help us...But I suppose today's two presentations are about trying to encourage people to think, given how much things cost, given what we have to fund, and given our mission and our desire to reach outwards and not just to be looking after ourselves, what might be an affordable and realistic sum to be giving each week.

Ultimately, all this is about helping to make present God's kingdom that Jesus was talking about when he said in the Our Father, 'thy kingdom come'...