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**Stewardship and Generosity: Reflections from a Diocesan Officer**

I have worked for 28 years in two dioceses, mainly in finance, but for the last two years as Parish Resource Officer.

Derby Diocese recruited two Parish Resource Officers in 2015 and in my former role as Director of Finance I worked closely with David and Steve as they went about their task of raising the profile of stewardship in the Diocese. As Director of Finance, I often had contact with parish treasurers, encouraging them to be good stewards of their church’s finances, but no matter where we work in Church House - finance, property, administration, DAC, HR, mission & ministry, communications, safeguarding or education - we are reminded that all of who we are, and what we have, comes from God and is to be used for God's purposes.

I’m more than aware that over the past decade or so, we have seen a change in the way that the Church is financed, with a greater burden on our parishes. During my time as Parish Resource Officer the Diocese launched the Parish Giving Scheme, a new way of giving to the Church. This has been a great opportunity to engage with parishes and I have spent many evenings helping parishes to reflect on their own stewardship practice.

“All things come from you, O Lord, and of your own do we give you”

Stewardship is not just about money! Stewardship, as we know, means ‘to take care of something’ and helps us to understand that everything we have has been given to us by a generous God. The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 helps us to understand that as everything we have is a gift, we should use what we’ve been given and not be mean-spirited – protecting ‘*our*’ resources instead of using them wisely. There was a great opportunity for collaborative work across many departments in Church House, when the new Common Fund formula was introduced some years ago, and everyone was encouraged to reflect on living generously. Again, although we can immediately make a link between Common Fund and money, living and being generous means being generous with our time, our energy, our talents and our gifts as well. I have had the opportunity to volunteer my time and skills with a couple of charities overseas and I was overwhelmed by the generosity of my hosts on both occasions – people giving what little they had just to accommodate me.

As part of our own individual stewardship we should measure our giving, of time, skills and money, not solely by the needs of our own local church, but the needs of the whole of God’s mission. I was reminded of this when a colleague in another Diocese wrote:

*If I give nothing, I vote to close my church*

*If I give only to local support, I vote to stop missionary activity in the world*

*If I give proportionately, I give something even if out of necessity it is only small*

*If I give systematically, I allow my church to plan ahead*

*If I give sacrificially, I place a high value on Christian Ministry in the World*

(Hugo Cobham, Stewardship Adviser in the Diocese of Lincoln)

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