

Fr Rob – thank you for inviting me on behalf of the Finance Committee to speak at today's Masses to update parishioners on our finances. I say our finances quite deliberately. They are our finances as a parish – we each have a responsibility for the stewardship of our parish's finances a point I will return to later.

Today, I want to update you on the results for the first quarter of our financial year – September to November 2021 and then say a little about our future. When we reported in July last year, our parish had an overdraft of £5,000, at the end of November that had fallen to £1,700. We have made more progress in recent months and at the end of January we had £1,300 in the bank.

The stabilisation of our finances is a consequence of first collection income increasing as more people returned to Mass, more people giving through standing orders and restarting fundraising events, but also due to tight cost control. Fr Rob only spends the minimum necessary on the liturgy, the Church and the fabric of its buildings. Until our income improves, we will need to minimise our spending on building maintenance and cannot invest in the faith and fabric of our parish. The finance fact sheet gives you an overview of the income and expenditure for the first quarter of our financial year as well as a breakdown of the principal costs we incur. In the three months to 30 November we broke even, but both costs and income were below budget.

To be able to invest in the development of the parish, we have budgeted for a surplus of about £14,000 this year. This requires us to raise £10,000 through the work of the fundraising committee and raise another £10,000 from other sources.

This prompts me to return to the theme of stewardship. The church speaks of the stewardship of our gifts from God: time, talents and treasure. With our gift of time, we pray.

With our gift from God of our talents, we serve God, the Church and our parish. With God's gift to us of treasure, we support the work of the church through planned, generous and cheerful giving.

To help Fr Rob plan for our future, it is important that we think carefully about our giving – our stewardship of the treasure God has given us. There are three ways to help.

The first costs you nothing. Gift Aid enables us to reclaim tax on your offerings – assuming you pay tax. Other than completing a simple form with your name and address and confirming that you are a taxpayer, there is nothing else you need to do. And we need to know nothing else. Milton claims the tax back every quarter and Rishi Sunak sends us a cheque. This is worth 25% of our collection income. More people have committed to regular giving than have gift aid forms so we are losing out on free money from the Treasury. So please check on the list at the back of Church to see if you have a Gift Aid declaration in place. If you don't, we can help you complete one.

The second is to move to regular giving if you don't already do so. It would help us plan work to the Church or invest in catechetical programmes if we could predict with greater certainty how much money we will get every month. Just think how much harder it would be for you to plan your finances, if you didn't know how much salary or pension you will get every week or month. We know that finances change, so completing a standing order form doesn't lock you into paying the same amount every month for ever. But certainty and predictability will help our parish.

As I mentioned finances change. This leads me to the third way to help. For those who already give by standing order, when was the last time you looked at how much you give? Could I invite you to reflect on whether you can give more?

If you are anything like me, you will want to pray and reflect on these requests. You will want to go home, think about your household finances and check your bank statement to see how much you already contribute before thinking about your giving. That's no problem because members of the Finance Committee will be around after Mass each Sunday for the rest of this month to help you with forms.

One last thought. In the newsletter and the fact sheet, we make the point that we shouldn't be giving God our leftovers – ie what's left after all our other household expenditure whether it's paying our bills to going to the pub. There is a theme in both the Old Testament and the New Testament of giving God and the Church our first fruits – the first fruits of the harvest – wheat, barley, bread, oil and wine. It speaks to generosity, to giving back to God and his Church the treasure he has given us. When we decide how much we give to the Church – let us ask ourselves are we giving God the first fruits or our leftovers?