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Dear Sisters and Brothers

St Helen's Gift Day: 1st November 2020

At our APCM on 27th October, we will have an opportunity to look back, not only over 2019, but also over these last ten months when we have lived with the Covid-19 pandemic and with the restrictions that have been placed upon us. At that meeting, whilst acknowledging the losses we have felt, we will also be able to give thanks for our continuing life together through online and in-building worship and for the deepening of our discipleship in these days which have reminded us, once again, of our reliance on God.

I am writing to you in advance of that meeting to ask you to prayerfully consider whether you are able to make a one-off contribution to the mission and ministry of St Helen's Church through a Gift Day on Sunday 1st November; All Saints Day.

The PCC have agreed that we should hold the Gift Day to help us compensate for the financial losses we have incurred due to the pandemic. We have lost income this year from several sources:

- weddings and funerals (these could not take place in church for over 12 weeks)
- cash donations at services
- hiring of the Community Heritage Centre
- heritage activities
- fund-raising events such as the autumn fayre

In the meantime, our running costs (such as insurance) and our contribution to the work of the Diocese have not reduced. This means that, despite generous one-off donations and the regular giving we receive each month via Standing Order or Direct Debit, we are forecasting a deficit of as much as £2,500 by the end of the year.

This is a picture replicated in churches across our Diocese, such that the Diocese itself is facing a £1.2 million deficit this year and is forecasting a £1.4 - 2 million deficit next year. This will impact upon the Diocese's ability to increase salaries and stipends next year, and to make grants towards development projects.

We are in a grave situation but, of course, we are not alone in this. Local businesses are struggling and may not survive the newest restrictions placed upon them. Market Street may look very different in a year's time. The charitable sector has been hit hard too, with many charities having to make redundancies.

In recognition of this, the PCC would like our Gift Day to support one of these charities; the Children's Society which usually benefits from our Christingle Service. The PCC have asked that 10% of the gifts that we receive will be given to the Children's Society for their important work in supporting children and young people. Of course, if you would like to opt out of this and give 100% of your gift to St Helen's please simply indicate that as you make a gift.

We understand that some of us have been hit hard financially by Covid-19. Some people have lost jobs, and others are struggling because furlough doesn't cover basic costs. This means that, whilst some of us may be in a position to be generous, especially as our expenditure on treats and holidays has lessened during the pandemic, others of us will not. No-one is to feel any pressure to do more than they are able. All of us are asked to pray.

Usually on a Gift Day, I would want to be in church to receive your gifts and to thank you for them. Due to the pandemic such a personal receipt of gifts will not be possible. Instead, I invite you to make donations through the giving facility on our website, or to post a cheque, made payable to 'St Helen's PCC', through my letterbox at the above address. All gifts, however small, will be most gratefully received.

Thank you for reading this letter, and for your prayerful consideration.

With love in Christ

The Revd Mary Gregory
Team Rector of the Flagstaff Family of Churches