



SUPPORTING OUR CHURCH COMMUNITIES

**STEWARDSHIP IN THE
WEST DOWNLAND BENEFICE**

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Introduction: The Heart of Christian Stewardship

As members of our six-parish benefice, we are blessed to be part of a vibrant community of faith that spans multiple villages and touches countless lives. Our churches are not merely beautiful buildings, but living centres of worship, pastoral care, community support, and spiritual growth. To sustain and develop this mission, we rely on the generous stewardship of our congregation.

Our Benefice Structure

In May 2025, each of our six parishes—Brightwalton with Catmore, Chaddleworth, Fawley, Leckhampstead, Great Shefford and Shefford Woodlands with East Shefford, and Welford & Wickham—voted to establish a Joint Council for the West Downland Benefice. This scheme, approved by the Diocese in July 2025, represents a new chapter in our collaborative ministry.

The Joint Council enables us to work together more effectively by streamlining governance and coordination across the benefice. Functions such as Parish Share payment, clergy expenses, insurance arrangements, and employment responsibilities are now managed jointly, releasing time and energy for mission and ministry. Importantly, each individual Parochial Church Council (PCC) continues to exist with responsibility for its own church buildings, assets, and local mission priorities.

This collaborative approach reflects our discerned mission to serve 'People' in each unique 'Place' where we gather to worship, with a renewed 'Purpose' of living out our faith in care and support, encouragement and hope. By working together while honouring the distinctive character of each parish, we can achieve far more than we could alone.

About This Paper

This paper explains how planned, regular giving enables us to plan confidently for the future, maintain our ministry, and care for our historic buildings. More importantly, it invites each of us to reflect on what we can offer in time, talents, and treasure to support God's work in our communities.

Christian Stewardship: Time, Talents, and Treasure

What is Stewardship?

Generosity and giving have been part of lived Christian faith since the church was founded. The Diocese of Oxford encourages us to think of generous giving as part of our personal discipleship. The act of giving locates us within a tradition of generous faith that goes right back to the foundation of the church. It is an act of personal discipleship because it is an attempt to live an active Christian faith and, through that, to develop and grow our own spiritual response to Christ.

As the Letter of James reminds us: "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17a). As stewards, we recognise that everything we have comes from God, and we are called to use these gifts wisely and generously in response to his goodness.

A Biblical Foundation for Generosity

The early Christian community modelled generous giving from the very beginning. In Acts 2:44 we read that the new Christians held all their resources in common. But as St John Chrysostom reminded his fourth-century congregation, our generosity must extend beyond the church to those in need in the world around us:

"God does not want gold vessels but gold hearts. I am not trying to prevent you from using gorgeous vestments but only asking you also, and first, to give alms. The Lord accepts the ornaments, but he is much more eager for the alms. Only the offerer profits by the adornments; both the giver and the receiver profit by the alms."

The Church of England continues this tradition, recommending that we divide our financial giving between the church and charitable causes. If you are able to tithe (which means to give 10% of your post-tax income), the Diocese of Oxford suggests 5% to charity and 5% to church. This two-fold generosity reflects the biblical call to support both worship and those in need.





Giving of Our Time

Our churches thrive because of people who give their time freely:

- Leading worship and serving at services
- Welcoming newcomers and visitors
- Maintaining churchyards and buildings
- Organising events and pastoral visits
- Serving on PCCs and committees
- Teaching children and young people
- Praying for our mission, ministry and those in need

Every hour given in service is an act of worship and an investment in our community.

Sharing Our Talents

God has equipped each of us with unique gifts and abilities:

- Musical talents for worship
- Practical skills for maintenance and repairs
- Administrative abilities for church management
- Creative gifts for outreach and communication
- Teaching and pastoral care skills
- Hospitality and catering

When we share these talents, we strengthen the whole body of Christ.

Financial Giving

Regular financial giving enables us to plan effectively, pay our staff, maintain our buildings, and respond to opportunities for mission and outreach. Planned giving through standing orders or the Parish Giving Scheme provides the reliable income we need to budget responsibly and sustain our ministry throughout the year. The Parish Giving Scheme also offers the benefit of automatically increasing your gift annually in line with inflation, ensuring that your giving maintains its real value over time.



Give monthly,
quarterly or annually
by Direct Debit



Make a single
one-off gift



Give
anonymously



Give
securely



Increase your gift
annually in line
with inflation



Opt in to Gift Aid to
increase your gift by
25% (if applicable)

Visit this unique URL

westdownland.co.uk/join-in#Stewardship

Or scan this QR code to access our
dedicated PGS landing page and set up
your one-off gift or regular giving online.

SCAN ME



Discerning Your Giving Through Prayer

Before we consider what we can give, we are called to pray. Prayer is essential to discerning how God is calling us to respond to his generosity. It is in prayer that we open our hearts to God's voice, recognise our blessings, and discern how we might use our time, talents, and treasure in his service.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection

As we pray about our stewardship, we might ask ourselves:

About our time:

- Where is God calling me to serve in our church community?
- What gifts of time can I offer regularly and sustainably?
- How might giving my time draw me closer to God and to others?

About our talents:

- What skills and abilities has God given me that could benefit our church?
- How might I use my gifts to build up the body of Christ?
- What new talents might God be inviting me to develop or discover?

About our treasure:

- What proportion of my income reflects a thankful response to God's generosity?
- Am I giving sacrificially, or merely giving from my surplus?
- How does my financial giving express my priorities and values as a Christian?

From Obligation to Joy

Prayer helps us move from obligation to joy, from duty to delight. When our giving flows from a prayerful heart, it becomes an act of worship rather than simply a practical necessity. We encourage you to spend time in prayer before making decisions about your stewardship, asking God to guide you and to cultivate in you a generous heart.

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)





Sharing God's gifts with generosity: A guide to Parish Share

What is Parish Share?

The Parish Share (also known as Common Fund in some dioceses) is our contribution to the wider mission and ministry of the Diocese of Oxford. It is the single largest expense for our parishes, but it is also the foundation of our ministry.

How Parish Share is Spent

Your Parish Share contributions support:

Ministry Costs (approximately 70-75%)

- Clergy stipends and housing
- Training for clergy and lay ministers
- Pension contributions for retired clergy
- Safeguarding training and support

Diocesan Services (approximately 15-20%)

- Mission and ministry development
- Archdeaconry and episcopal oversight
- Education services and school support
- Retreat houses and spirituality resources
- Legal and property advisory services

National Church Contribution (approximately 10%)

- Training new clergy at theological colleges
- National church oversight and governance
- Pension obligations for retired clergy

Other Costs (approximately 5%)

- Diocesan office administration
- Communications and support services

Every pound we pay in Parish Share is an investment in the gospel being preached, sacraments being celebrated, and pastoral care being provided across our Benefice.

From diocese to deanery, working together

The diocesan Parish Share allocation to each deanery is governed by core and operating principles which aim to keep decision-making fair and transparent. At its heart is the gospel message that we are generous and gracious, for God's mission.

The allocation is subject to thorough review and forms part of the annual budget process for the diocese. The budget and allocation are discussed and approved by the Finance Committee, Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod. Each autumn our deanery synod will meet to discuss its own Parish Share allocation and how that will be distributed among its parishes. This allows deaneries to have the flexibility to take local circumstances into account and encourage locally agreed mutual support.

A rebate of Parish Share is given to those deaneries which contribute 100% of their allocation and a discount is given to those parishes who use direct debit.

Within the Newbury Deanery, the Share allocation for the West Downland Benefice is approximately £55,000 which may seem like a large number but is the third smallest in the Deanery (of 11 Benefices). This means we asked to contribute roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ of that from our neighbours in the East Downland Benefice. For reference, the largest share ask in the Deanery is over £210,000.

What has changed with how we pay our Parish Share?

Before we implemented the Benefice Council agreement, we used a legacy calculation to divide the Benefice Parish Share allocation between our six parishes. This made it difficult to work together and set the different parishes in competition with one another.

Now, we have agreed that we will pay our Parish Share (and other shared costs) centrally from the benefice. Our Mission and Ministry is supported by all of us through our stewardship and each parish is free to fundraise to support the preservation of their churches and churchyards.





Our Shared Benefice Costs

If the Parish Share is the single biggest cost we have as a benefice, the next largest expense is the contributions that the parishes make to support our shared costs. As a six-parish benefice, we share as much as possible to enable us to work together effectively:

Shared Ministry Team

- Clergy stipends and housing
- Curate training and development
- Future Licensed lay ministers, children and families workers, youth workers or worship leaders
- Administrative support for the benefice
- Financial support across the benefice

Shared Resources

- Service preparation and planning
- Safeguarding coordination across parishes
- Joint training events and study groups
- Communication platforms and website
- Insurance policies with group discounts

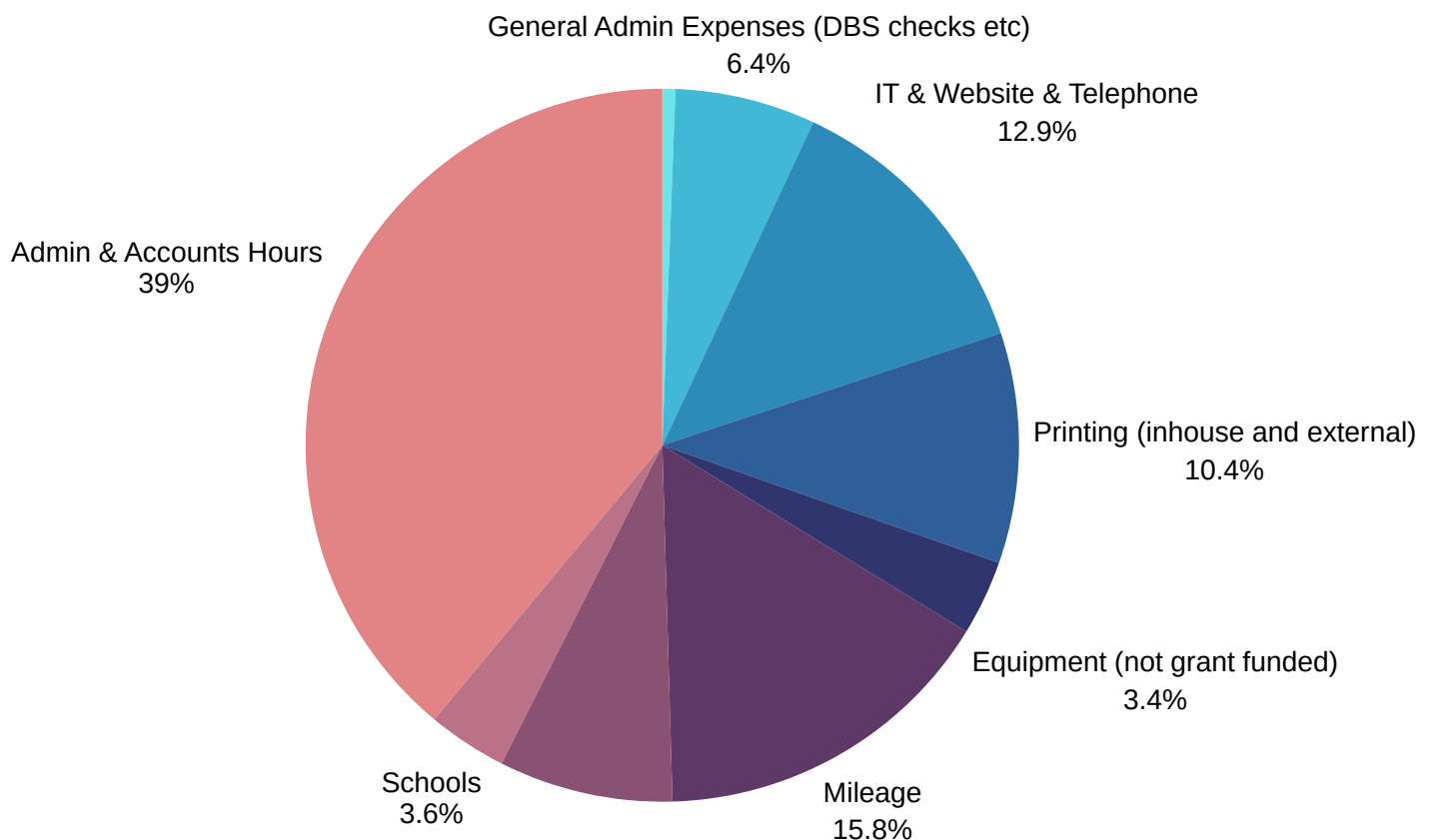
Collaborative Ministry

- Benefice-wide services and events
- Shared pastoral care resources
- Joint mission initiatives
- Combined children and youth work

The table and chart on the next page detail the benefice costs for the first eight months of 2025. It is expected that the costs to the end of the year would be proportionate to these costs (approximately £5,000). It is worth noting that under the old model, the benefice contributions from the parishes totalled £9,000. This is only 60% of the expected costs.

By pooling resources across six parishes, we achieve far more together than any single parish could accomplish alone. This collaboration requires fair and committed giving from each parish community.

Expense	Amount	%
Bank Fees	£57.96	1%
General Admin Expenses (DBS checks etc)	£626.75	6%
IT & Website & Telephone	£1,274.48	13%
Printing (inhouse and external)	£1,028.11	10%
Equipment (not grant funded)	£335.00	3%
Mileage	£1,553.85	16%
Service Consumables (candles, baptism	£777.27	8%
Schools	£353.30	4%
Admin & Accounts Hours	£3,835.00	39%





Fundraising and Building Care

Our church buildings are not museums, but places of active worship and community gathering. They are also Grade I and II listed structures that require specialist care and significant investment.

The Challenge of Historic Buildings

- Regular maintenance is essential to prevent costly repairs
- Listed building status means work must meet heritage standards
- Energy costs are high in old, large buildings
- Professional expertise is often required

Our Fundraising Approach

While regular planned giving covers our day-to-day ministry costs and Parish Share, fundraising events help us to:

- Address major building repairs
- Fund capital projects and improvements
- Support specific community initiatives
- Engage the wider community in the life of the church

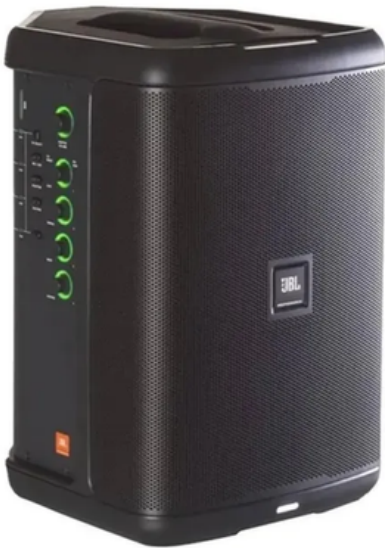
Supporting Our Buildings

We encourage a balanced approach:

- Regular giving for ministry and mission
- Fundraising events for building projects
- Grant applications for major works
- Community engagement to share the value of these spaces

Case Studies: Your Giving at Work

There are many exciting projects that are planned or have recently completed across the benefice. The following case studies are included as examples of what might be possible in other churches, parishes or across the benefice in the future if we can increase our planned giving to support our operating costs.



Project 1: Sound System Improvements

The Need:

With the breadth of services on offer across the benefice, and the discovery of the musicians available to help lead our sung worship, we had a need to enhance our sound reinforcement in each service. There was also a need to support the music and speech requirements for the occasional offices (Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals) and ensure that we could support the requirements of the families at these significant life events. We also wanted to enable those who are hard of hearing to fully participate in our worship.

Funding Sources:

- Specific giving from Parishioners
- Fundraising events (such as events in the Ibex)
- Grants from the Diocesan Development Fund
- Major gifts: from Occasional Offices

The Work:

Initially working with the Diocesan Parish Support Advisor to utilise a Diocesan Development Grant, a battery powered, portable PA system was purchased and commissioned. This has subsequently been augmented by other generous donations of time, talents and treasures to provide additional PA capabilities in other churches to support our worship.. This has been particularly noticeable at special services and events such as Remembrance Sunday, Christmas and Easter, School services, Weddings and Funerals.

Completion Date: Ongoing



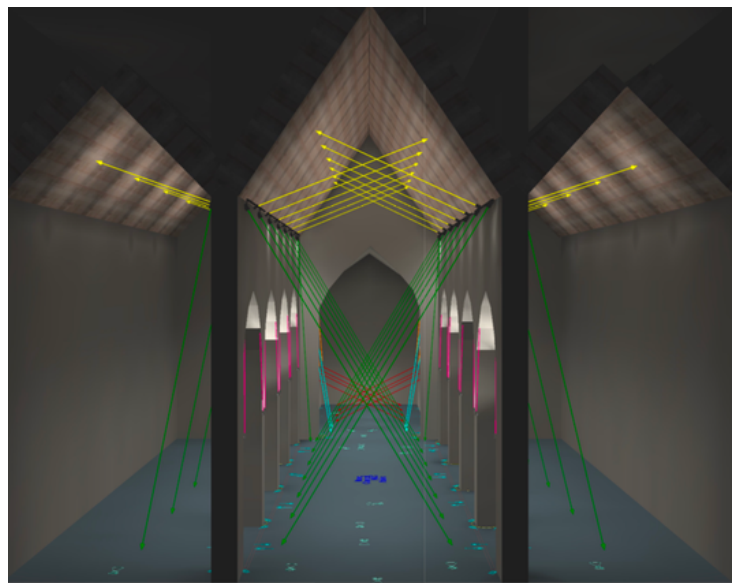
Project 2: Lighting and Electrics in St Gregorys, Welford

The Need:

St Gregorys Church has been in desperate need of improvements to the lighting and electrics for some time. This has limited the use of the church by the community for both worship and community events.

By making the building more accessible and usable, it is hoped that the community will be better engaged in the life and liveliness of the benefice.

An external contractor was engaged to design and implement a contemporary, energy - efficient lighting solution and rewiring



Funding Sources:

- The Friends of St Gregorys, Welford
- A generous loan from a parishioner to ensure the work could commence
- Grant applications (Outstanding)
- Future Fundraising events in the church once the work is complete
- Other Funding is sought to cover the costs. Please get in touch if you can help

The Work:

Following a successful Faculty application, All of the old lighting and electrics (some of which had burned out) have been removed and the following has been fitted:

- 44x LED Dimmable Lumaparc Fixtures
- 58x LED Dimmable Grid Spot Fixture
- Circa 80m of Lighting Track
- 8 Zone Smart Dimming Module with 2 control switches for the zones to be placed at the main entrance.
- New wiring for all lighting throughout the church as the old cabling is no longer suitable.
- New consumer unit allowing for 3 Phase Future Upgrade with additional protection and allowance for multiple new circuits.
- Multiple Double Sockets throughout the church

Completion Date: October 2025

How You Can Help: Taking Action

Pray

Pray for our benefice, its ministry, and its financial sustainability. Pray for generosity in giving and wisdom in using what we receive. You might wish to pray this Ignatian Prayer for Generosity.

**Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will.
Amen.**

St Ignatius of Loyola

Review Your Regular Giving

If you already give regularly, thank you. Please consider whether you can increase your giving to reflect changes in your circumstances and the rising costs we face. If you don't yet give regularly, please consider setting up a standing order or joining the Parish Giving Scheme, which also increases your gift annually in line with inflation.

Gift Aid

If you are a UK taxpayer, please complete a Gift Aid declaration. This allows us to reclaim 25p for every £1 you give at no extra cost to you.

Legacies

Please consider remembering your church in your will. Legacies are free of inheritance tax and have funded many significant projects over the years.

Give Your Time and Talents

Speak to your clergy or churchwardens about how you can contribute your skills and time to support our shared mission.





For More Information

To discuss your giving or to learn more about planned giving options, please contact the Benefice Stewardship team: stewardship@westdownland.co.uk

Parish Giving Scheme:

www.parishgiving.org.uk

Diocesan Generous Giving Adviser:

Joshua Townson

Email: joshua.townson@oxford.anglican.org

Telephone: 01865 208 757

Diocesan Stewardship Resources:

www.oxford.anglican.org/parish-support/parish-finance/giving-and-fundraising

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Thank you for your faithful stewardship and for being part of our benefice community.