

News from the Boiler Room



22 January 2023

Dear friends,

I know that the temperatures in church this winter have been of concern to many of you - and I wanted therefore to write to explain the situation as it stands in respect of heating our building.

It is important to point out, first, that the heating in church has not (technically!) been “turned down”. The new thermostat is in fact set at **18** degrees - but *never*, since turning the heating back on in the autumn, has the temperature in church risen to this level. This is because, unlike in our houses - where each room to be heated is typically a relatively small, enclosed space - the church is one large, open space, many times the size of an average house. Furthermore, there is no insulation in the roof, and most of the windows are single-glazed. Thus, heat not only escapes above the space in which we are praying, but is also lost through the roof and through the doors and windows.



Running the heating more sparingly (*as described below*) can only

raise the temperature to around **13-14** degrees, when the outside temperatures can be as low as freezing. The drafts in church can also cause a sort of “wind-chill factor”, which makes the building seem colder than it actually is.

It seems that the only way a higher temperature was previously maintained in the church was by running the heating continuously (“24/7”) during the winter months - and beyond! In common with households and businesses across the country, our energy bills have recently risen sharply:

- on our previous utilities contract, the parish paid **£12,000** per year:
- on the new contract, to run our heating 24/7 during the colder months would cost **£30,000** per year - and this cost is far beyond our financial resources.

In the first quarter of the new energy contract (Sept-Dec), we have reduced our energy consumption by **66%** in comparison with the previous year: however, the increase in costs means this will still likely involve expenditure of **£20,000** on energy in 2023.

We also look set to have incurred a real-terms loss of more than **£8,000** of total expenditure over income in 2022, and the projected deficit for 2023 is more than **£22,000**, even with the dramatic reduction in our energy usage (*as detailed above*). To add a further **£10,000** to this deficit - by running the heating for longer - would be financially reckless, and deplete our remaining reserves to the point where this parish would, quite simply, face bankruptcy in a little over two years.

What is the parish doing to address this situation?



As well as reducing our energy usage (which is also an important action environmentally, as good stewards of God's creation) and investing in a thermostatic timer, we are also exploring ways to increase the energy efficiency of our church building. St Mary's buys our energy via a bulk-purchasing scheme run by the Church of England, which means that our *unit prices* are competitive: however, our *standing charges* are calculated on historic usage - and, because the heating was run 24/7 in previous years, our standing charges are now very high: were we to use no gas whatsoever, we would still pay £8 each day for the connection to the gas supply. But, by reducing our usage (as outlined above), at our next contract review this figure should be revised downwards.



More broadly, we have been reviewing all income and expenditure, to identify possible savings: this has already resulted in around £7,000 of savings over the coming year. Although necessary, this has taken time and energy away from the vital work of mission and ministry, which is regrettable.



We will also be embarking on a major stewardship campaign during Lent, to encourage all members of our church family to review their financial contribution to St Mary's: our stewardship offerings are a crucial part of the funds we need to resource the life of our parish; however, whereas in 2019 congregational giving funded 25% of parish costs, in 2022 - as Mass attendance continues to recover after the pandemic - this giving only funded 20% of these costs.

What can I do to help?

St Mary's is our spiritual home - but we cannot keep it as warm as our own houses! Please dress for the cold during the winter months, wearing gloves and a scarf to Mass (and a hat for the ladies), as well as plenty of layers. You might also consider bringing a blanket with you. Likewise, get to know your fellow parishioners by sitting closer to one another - to share body heat! We have, by my reckoning, already passed through half the coldest time of the year - with perhaps just another six weeks to go before temperatures begin to rise again. By enduring cooler temperatures, we are saving money for mission and ministry - to grow our congregation and draw more people closer to Christ.



As suggested above, please also consider reviewing your financial contribution to the church, in order for us in future to heat the church for longer, as also to finance any energy efficiency projects which may help in future to keep the building warmer for longer.



As your parish priest and father, it grieves me to observe that we cannot make St Mary's as comfortable an environment physically as we would like: however, I hope that understanding the situation a little better will help all of us to realise why change is necessary - and that this knowledge will underpin a renewed determination to face our challenges firm in faith, sure in hope and rooted in love, by God's grace.

With the assurance of my prayers,

Fr Richard

