# The theology of parish shareby Bishop Jonathan

# Parish Share – a response to grace

The Biblical roots of our approach to parish share derive from teachings in both the Old and New Testaments. Throughout Scripture there are over 2,000 verses about giving, money, and stewardship of the abundant resources that God gives us. Everything belongs to God, our Creator.[[1]](#footnote-1) God loves us limitlessly and gives to us in abundance. Everything we have is a gift from God, and we are stewards – not owners – of the world’s resources. In the Old Testament the Law describes giving as part of our communal response to God’s liberating love and states it should be proportional to what we have.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The New Testament tells of God’s wonderful gift to us in Jesus.[[3]](#footnote-3) Our Saviour gives all that he has for us and for our salvation. Jesus embodies us about the generosity of God - who knows our needs and, in his grace, provides abundantly for us. In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that individuals and congregations shared their resources to support those in need, and to fund the early Church leaders in their mission to spread the gospel.[[4]](#footnote-4)

As Christians we, too, are called willingly to give a proportionate amount of what God has given to us. As a diocesan community, we are called to work together, as the Body of Christ, and to share our resources for ministry and local mission.[[5]](#footnote-5) Those parishes which are blessed with more financial resource are called to support those with less. This way, the gospel may be shared across our whole diocese.

As we look again at our parish share system to ensure it is fair, effective, and fit for purpose, let us do so as those who desire to respond with our whole selves to the abundant love of God for us in Christ and the Holy Spirit. We live in the midst of a society, nation, and world brim-full of promise, yet torn apart by sin, brokenness and confusion – a world sorely in need of an encounter with the transforming love of God in Christ.

We are beckoned by the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Lord to participate in His ministry and mission. We are commanded to love one another and to share the love we have first received. We are sent, as disciples of Jesus, to make more disciples of Jesus. Until that day when, what has been inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus arrives in all its fulness, as all created things find their true completion in Him. It is a wonderful calling, which begins, continues and ends as a response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Understood within this framework or context, is a crucial part of our response to Jesus Christ as his disciples. By it the ministry of the Church, the Body of Christ, is sustained and grown. It’s a way of offering our responsive ‘Yes’ to God’s *prior* ‘Yes!’ to us and to all the world in Christ. Those who have more give more, and those with less give less.[[6]](#footnote-6) In proportion to our means, we are called to give generously and willingly, following God’s own self-giving in Jesus. Through this giving we offer thanksgiving to God for all his goodness to us.[[7]](#footnote-7)

A parish share scheme (of whatever shape or type) is a means of sustaining and growing the ministry of the Church, the Body of Christ, in and for the world. Or to put it another way, it is an expression of our love and thanks to God for his inestimable gift of life and our pledge to share that gift of life with others.

The ‘General Thanksgiving’ from the Book of Common Prayer captures the pattern of Christian life as a response to God’s grace beautifully; I commend it for learning by heart and pondering at length.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,

we thine unworthy servants

do give thee most humble and hearty thanks

for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all people;

We bless thee for our creation, preservation,

and all the blessings of this life;

but above all for thine inestimable love

in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,

for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies,

that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,

and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips,

but in our lives;

by giving up ourselves to thy service,

and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness

all our days;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost

be all honour and glory, world without end.

*The Rt Rev Jonathan Frost*

*Bishop of Portsmouth*

 *Lent 2024*

1. Deuteronomy 10:14-17 ERV “Everything belongs to the LORD your God. The heavens, even the highest heavens, belong to him. The earth and everything on it belong to him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Deuteronomy 14:22-29; 26:1-11 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Acts 2:44-5 “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 2 Corinthians 8:12 “If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 2 Corinthians 9:11 “You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)