

## Celebrating Generosity in Probus

Generosity is an important part of how we see ourselves as a Church at Probus. Our full title is the Church of St Probus and St Grace and this has inspired our vision to not just celebrate the goodness (Probus means goodness in Latin) and grace of our God, but to pass on that goodness and grace to those around us. The church relies on the generosity of our members to keep it going in terms of regular giving, however, as a relatively small congregation in a large, ancient and slightly crumbling building we can struggle to be as financially generous as we would like to be to the rest of the world. But a recent appeal we've been involved with has highlighted to me just how much generosity there is within our community that we as a church can celebrate and partner in.

For the last two years the church has been hosting a community larder providing free food, four days a week to those in need whilst combatting the problem of food waste. The larder is supported by the church, however, most of those who volunteer to keep it running are not regular members of the local congregation but members of our village who have responded to requests for help on Facebook. This has hugely increased our connections as a church with our village and means that many regularly come into our building who would not otherwise do so. But the regular weekly tasks of collecting the food from supermarkets, setting up tables and welcoming customers which would occupy our normal volunteers are dwarfed by the scale of what happens in the run up to Christmas. The aim is to supply local families in need with a hamper containing everything they would need to celebrate Christmas with a slap up meal with all the trimmings. This year 55 families (a total of 250 people) received a hamper containing a bird in a basting tray (or veggie alternative), an array of vegetables, stuffing, gravy, sauces, Christmas pudding, custard, chocolates, yule logs and even crackers. After an appeal for help, over 35 people from the local community volunteered their time to come into the church on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December (which had been transformed to a cross between a food market and Santa's workshop) to make up and beautifully gift wrap the hampers and even deliver them where necessary. The food was bought locally and paid for from donations of over £1000 from individuals and £200 from our neighbouring churches. We were staggered by the generous response of the community as were some of the recipients of the hampers. One sent a message in response "We wanted to thank you so much for the lovely hamper and bits, We had the most amazing day thanks to you and your generosity 😊, We can't thank you enough xxx" and another said "I really appreciate my hamper and all the work u have put in to help alot of families out there like myself.. have a brilliant Xmas..".

As a church leader it would be very easy to bask in the glow of the feeling of pride for what was achieved in the days before Christmas, and there are a number of church members who coordinated things for whom I am exceedingly thankful, but the truth is that most of the money and personpower that we relied on for the project came from outside the church. But that is I suppose what it is to be a church that celebrates generosity – it's not necessarily our generosity that we celebrate as this would be a rather vain thing. It is primarily the generosity of our loving and exuberantly gracious God that we rejoice in and at the same time it can also be the generosity of those who we partner with and witness to and maybe even learn from.

**Rev. Paul Salaman**

