

THE BEAMINSTER AREA TEAM MINISTRY
ANNUAL CLERGY REPORT TO THE PARISHES 2024

This is my fourteenth Annual Report to the Parishes of the Beaminster Area and I would wish to record my deep appreciation to all those who work tirelessly in all of our churches. Holding any office in the church is an onerous task and I thank all Church Wardens, Treasurers, PCC members, Deanery Synod and Team Council members for their tireless work throughout the past twelve months. I would also like to thank all those who have given their time as Lay Pastoral Assistants, Bereavement Visitors, Messy Church and Lay Worship Leaders. Further thanks go to the many often unseen yet heard people who do so much to keep our churches worshipping and functioning; musicians and singers, bell ringers, flower arrangers, sidespeople, cleaners, church yard keepers, office volunteers, caterers, fundraisers, - the list is endless so please accept my apologies if I have missed you off the list.

Over the past nine years I have been trying to encourage the parishes of the team to work more cooperatively as one church of God and giving the Team Council a greater role. Needless to say, whilst some could see the benefit of this way forward, others have doggedly refused to give such discussions any countenance. However, as church attendance declines and time in years catches up with all of us and fewer church members are willing or able to take on roles and responsibilities, the inevitable is beginning to happen and PCCs cannot be upheld and are having to look at different ways for parish churches to survive and flourish in the future.

I feel that the Beaminster Area Team has reached a point of imbalance. Year after year we fail to elect an ever decreasing number of church officers. Last year six parishes had no elected

Churchwardens; this is likely to rise to seven this year and four parishes only had one Churchwarden. For a twelve month trial I will be inviting these parishes to join together for joint PCC business meetings. Finances will still be held at a local level as will the upkeep of their buildings and social activities. Should other parishes wish to be part of this trial I would be very happy to encourage this.

The Church Representation Rules 2020 allows for PCCs to form Joint Councils within teams and contains the rules and legal agreements that can be made between PCCs and I genuinely believe that this will help to give longer term security to all of our parishes, not just those that are struggling to keep going

Finally I would like to say a huge thank you to Jo and Barbara and all of our Partner Priests for their help and support over the year and to Harry for all of his support with our media and communication platforms. I can't end without saying a special thank you to two people who have given so much to the team. Firstly to David Shearlock who took the very difficult decision to stand down as an active partner priest during the past year. David has been a constant support to the staff team for many years and his wisdom and counsel have been greatly appreciated by all who have had the privilege to work alongside him. Thank You David and Jean for being there to support him. Secondly to Anne who retired at Easter after nearly six years as Team Office Administrator and gave so much support to the parishes and to Jo and myself.

Revd Canon David Baldwin

Revd Jo Neary writes: 2023 in the Beaminster Team involved baptisms, weddings and funerals. We read a Lent book on failure. We hosted new Lent activities for the first time including a music reflection, theological discussion, and spiritual walk.

We continued our ministry in schools with collective worship, Ofsted support, foundation governors and support for RE lessons, school visits and school services. Messy Church ran both inside and outside the building, with our Good Friday Messy Church telling the Easter story to a hundred people.

We said goodbye to Fiona our curate and sent her with love and best wishes to the Church in Wales. We engaged in our communities with eco activities, litter picks, community events, fundraising, coffee mornings, fetes, barbeques, quizzes, walks, concerts, creams teas, the list goes on.

We celebrated the agricultural festivals of Plough Sunday, Rogation, Lammas and Harvest. We were up hills, in barns, round fields. We hosted the community for a summer swap event of toys and books and supported families with a uniform bank.

We fed the hungry by supporting the Foodbank, nurtured preschoolers with our toddler group and provided community connection with drop ins, Walk in Wednesday, coffee mornings and the regular pattern of worship. We knitted prayer shawls to comfort the lost, the bereaved, the ill. The summer holidays offered Pop up toddler groups and summer play days in the villages. Band on the Green began in the rain, but our songs of praise remained undampened.

A monthly bereavement café began, complementing our busy funeral ministry. We hosted our first baby loss service alongside our annual memorial service. We worked with our local communities to facilitate Remembrance Sunday events.

And to end the year and begin Advent we hosted over fifty different Nativity sets displayed for our first ever Nativity festival, engaging the communities of the team in different ways as we made Jesus known.

Every single community engagement, every act of worship, every school visit, every conversation, every book studied, every prayer, every meeting, every fundraising event, every social moment helped make Jesus known. We told his story, shared his life, lived out his love, demonstrated his forgiveness and showed his welcome and hospitality.

There is always good news to share, even in a year where some felt fragile or tired or overstretched. I have found it difficult dropping down to part time, despite being energised by the way my Sarum college job supports my parish role, and visa versa. One treasurer congratulated me on my new job in Salisbury. Well done, he said, you cost us less now. And he is right.

We have so much: beautiful churches, good relationships in our parishes, talented and gifted people, lively activities, holy worship, community connections. How might we work more effectively together to make Jesus known, how might we pray more and seek God's activity in the world, how might we share our abundance and bring hope into even the fragile places. That is the challenge of next year perhaps. But for now, thank you for all you do. You are amazing.