

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

This is my fifteenth 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.

This year has been one of ups and downs for our parishes. At long last the work to update the kitchen and put a toilet into the church in Beaminster has come to fruition whilst the churchyard environmental project goes from strength to strength with the addition of a water feature and a beehive. Sadly, the ongoing need to replace the lighting in church has been fraught with difficulties. We are indebted to the Friends of St Mary's for their support in the project. Down the road at Netherbury work has been undertaken to clean and repaint the face of the clock. There have also been a number of small projects completed and again we are thankful to the Friends of St Mary's Netherbury for their help and support. Over to Stoke Abbott and at last the cleaned and restored Clock mechanism was returned and major work was done to repair the church roof. Visitors still enjoy seeing the sheep grazing the churchyard in due season. Back to Melplash who have had to have roof work and guttering repairs which was hindered when damage to some windows occurred during the winter storms and work is still ongoing to complete their repairs. At South Perrott their heating boilers broke down and thanks to CW Christine heating was maintained by the supply of hot water bottles and blankets whilst the new boilers were fitted. More roofing repairs have been undertaken at Salway Ash and excellent environmental care of the churchyard continues. At the united parishes of Broadwindsor with Blackdown and Burstock the scandal of the chiming church clock still rumbles on and an application to redecorate Blackdown church has been made. At Mosterton whilst no major repair work has taken place the wonderful support of the local community has helped with the annual churchyard clean ups. Hooke has also had ongoing window repairs and looming over Toller Porcorum is the major repairs to the Church roof whilst legalism collided with semantics over the new notice board. Meanwhile under the care of CW Steven, Seaborough remains a beautiful haven of peace and quiet. I have not forgotten Drimpton whose faithful few have kept the Spirit alive whilst all of the legal work on the future of the building grinds on.

Whilst I see the importance of maintaining our church buildings I do feel that they take most of our energies which prevent much needed outreach and mission in our parishes.....However, in her contribution to the report I am sure that Jo will share about all the wonderful things that have been going on in terms of mission.

Finally I would like to say a huge thank you to Jo, Barbara and Charlie and all our Partner Priests for their help and support over the year and to Harry and Amanda for all of their support with our media and communication platforms and Office Admin.
Revd Canon David Baldwin

In terms of mission and outreach 2024 was a year of carrying on and consolidating. I want to thank all our amazing volunteers and staff team who enable all this activity.

Messy Church continues to be well attended on Saturday mornings, monthly, both inside and outside the building. Highs included a hugely busy Good Friday session and the building of a bug hotel to go into the church yard at St Mary's Beaminster. Baby and Toddler group thrives on a Monday morning. In July we said goodbye to our second cohort to graduate from toddler group to primary school and we enjoy seeing them in our school collective worships week by week. We have had plenty of new babies join us and almost all our baptism enquiries now come from toddler group or end up at toddler group having been baptised. We have fewer baptisms in the team per year than pre Covid, but a much better ongoing connection with our baptism families.

We continue to offer collective worship in our primary schools each week, in the senior school termly and at festival times for Mountjoy School. Our relationships with schools continue to be close and fruitful and this is an area of work where we could do more if we increased our capacity. We secured funding to recruit for a Team Family and Community worker at the end of 2024 but have not yet been able to recruit.

Gin Church continues weekly on a Thursday online and we also offer a weekly online worship service on YouTube. Both are well received and well attended, providing good pastoral and discipleship support. We appointed a new Team administrator in 2024 and Amanda is integral to the revamp of the office space as it becomes a central hub for the team.

We continue to provide spaces across the team to build social relationships through regular coffee mornings and weekly café drop-in sessions in some parishes in team. More occasional social and fundraising events happen in every parish. The Bereavement Cafe offers a monthly space to support people in grief and this is welcomed. Our Anti-Slavery service at Melplash was one of the social justice highlights of the year.

We often talk about the Beaminster Team being fifteen churches. But that only refers to the buildings. I think we might be better to talk about congregations. We have more congregations than buildings. We have congregations in our schools, online, on weekdays and Saturdays alongside our Sunday congregations. Some congregations are flourishing, others are fragile or feeling vulnerable, some are declining. If we take the image of the body of Christ from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 seriously then we realise that each congregation has its part to play in the body. No one congregation is more important or more inferior. We celebrate with those who are doing well, and we suffer alongside those who are suffering.

It is my opinion that to become more resilient, to flourish, to encourage each other and to share in each other's challenges we need to work more closely together as the churches and congregations of the Beaminster Team. The time of isolationism must end so we can support each other more effectively. We need to know better what is going on across our team, we need to listen better to each other, we need to share our resources and expertise more generously. We must pray and worship together regularly. We were all rocked by the dreadful safeguarding revelations of the Church of England both nationally and locally. If we want our congregations to be safer, more welcoming, more open, more vibrant, more led by the Spirit of God then we must be better at working together, seeing ourselves as essential parts of the dynamic and living body of Christ here in the Beaminster Team.

Revd Canon Jo Neary April 2025