



The Ham Hill Villages Benefice

The Parishes of
Chiselborough, Middle Chinnock,
Montacute, Norton sub Hamdon, Odcombe,
Stoke sub Hamdon and West Chinnock



‘To know God and to make Him known’



Who We Are

We are seven parishes clustered around Ham Hill, a popular country park and Iron Age hill fort in South Somerset. The Benefice has a population of 5000 with around 120 regular worshippers. The seven villages range in size and character but all have a strong sense of community with many residents commenting in a recent survey on the friendliness and support which they receive from the community.

Most parishes have their own service at the same time each Sunday but we worship together at a joint communion every fifth Sunday and monthly Family and Café Church services, all of which rotate around the villages. There is also a Benefice choir which has members from all parishes and sings on special occasions.

Services are led by members of our ministry team on a rota so that congregations hear a variety of voices. The ministry team meet regularly for mutual support and to plan worship and outreach.

Church members across the Benefice have a lively and current interest in developing discipleship and are engaged in learning and growing their faith through regular house groups and discipleship courses and private bible study and prayer. We run an Alpha course every year in the pub on Ham Hill.

There are five schools in the Benefice; a primary and secondary in Stoke and church primary schools in Montacute, Norton and West Chinnock. The church has a weekly presence in the schools with Open the Book alternating with collective worship led by the rector or one of the ministry team.

Stoke and Montacute are the largest villages with a good range of facilities, including a doctors' surgery, a range of shops and transport links; Norton has a community shop and the villages have a range of pubs and village organisations between them. The area is popular with tourists and Montacute in particular sees many visitors who come to Montacute House and also visit the church, which has probably the oldest working clock in the country. Although rural in character, our parishes are outward looking, many being actively involved in supporting Christians across the world and in environmental and sustainability issues.



Easter Sunrise Service

Our Vision

Since coming together as a Benefice in 2017, we have developed a deeper appreciation of each other's strengths and are increasingly looking for ways to grow together in faith and love, whilst maintaining our individual characters. We would like to become more outward focussed by being the people that Jesus calls us to be; people who are loved and who love in response.

Our vision as a benefice is to continue to grow in the love of Christ so that we can more effectively share His love with those around us. We seek to do this guided and strengthened by His Spirit, Word, Prayer and Sacrament.



I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

John 13:34–35

Further details on the parishes can be found through the Ham Hill Villages website at:
www.hamhillchurches.org



Our Priorities

Last year we held a Benefice Vision Day, led by Bishop John Lomas, to help us renew our sense of what God is doing in this place. This gave rise to new Mission Action Plans for each parish and a mission prayer used in all seven churches (see below). We also held a benefice meeting in March to discern our priorities, challenges and who we need to lead us. As a Benefice we are developing a shared vision, but there is much still to do to enable us to fulfil our calling as the Body of Christ in this place.

Children and Young People

- ◆ Build on the well established links with the five schools, through Open the Book, collective worship, school services in Church, Christian Union and governors, so that children and young people have a stronger knowledge of the Bible and God's love.



"Open the Book is a really good way of telling people about the bible and teaching us about Jesus. By acting it out it makes it more interesting. It brings the story to life. You can imagine it in your head later" (Year 5 child).

- ◆ The monthly Benefice "Family T@4" service started in 2022 now attracts parents and children from around 30 families as well as many supporters. We would like to help these families grow in faith and commitment to Christ and His church and to welcome more families into this growing community.

Outreach and Mission

- ◆ Benefice Café Church services started in 2024 and attract people who don't otherwise come to church as well as regulars and some families, but more could be done to promote these.

- ◆ Increase the opportunities outside of church services to learn about the Christian faith.
- ◆ Raise the profile of the church by being more involved in community life and visible at village events.
- ◆ Do more outside of church buildings such as pub ministry, outdoor services, fetes, lighthouse cafe etc

'God of Mission, who alone brings growth to his Church, send your Holy Spirit to give Vision to our planning, Wisdom to our actions, and Power to our Witness. Help our church to grow in numbers, in spiritual commitment to you, and in service to our local community; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.'

Worship

- ◆ Rebalance the range of services to cater for more people, while using fewer resources.
- ◆ Become more inclusive of those unfamiliar with church, especially those in the 40-60 age group.
- ◆ Encourage more musicians to participate in leading worship.

Discipleship

- ◆ Encourage and enable lay involvement at every level.
- ◆ Improve church members' knowledge and understanding of the Bible.
- ◆ Encourage opportunities for fellowship.
- ◆ Stress the importance of prayer to the life of the Church.

Pastoral care

- ◆ Become more outward looking and aware of the needs around us.
- ◆ Provide pastoral care for as many of those in need as we can.
- ◆ Allow more time for the clergy to visit those who would prefer an ordained minister.

Ecumenical Links

The only church of another denomination in the benefice is the Baptist Church in Montacute which works closely with Montacute church in various ways. There are many Christians living in the benefice who worship elsewhere; it would be good to develop links to support each other in mission.



Our Challenges

Our churches have changed in many ways in recent years and we recognise that we still have a long way to go. We are looking for leadership as we seek to meet the challenges of the rural church in the 21st Century.



Family T@4 in Norton Village Hall

In common with many churches, the demographics of our congregations do not reflect the communities we live in. While our Family T@4 and Café Church services are attracting a wider age range, they are not yet integrated into the everyday life of the churches. Our faithful more traditional worshippers currently bear the brunt of financing and running the churches. We seek a way to integrate the new without losing our existing congregations.

'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' Matthew 9:37

This is our prayer as we seek more volunteers to help us run the everyday business of our churches and reach out to our communities. One of our churches has not had a churchwarden for a while and another is looking to fill the post after a recent retirement. There is an increasing need for pastoral care in our communities which we would love to be able to meet more fully.

We seek ways to cut down on inward looking church activities to free us up to go out to fulfil Jesus' command:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
Matthew 28:19

Our buildings, while beautiful and reasonably well maintained, present an ongoing challenge. Three of our churches have toilets and kitchen areas but others would like to bring their buildings up to this minimum of standards. The heating systems in most of the churches also need upgrading.

All churches have had a Quinquennial survey in the past year or so, with no major problems being identified. Most urgent and minor works have been completed, though there are some long term works in some churches that are awaiting the required funding. Stoke church has recently had to deal with a leak in the oil supply, which will impact their finances this year.

While only two of our churches have not been able to pay their full Parish Share recently, most are currently running at a financial deficit. Fundraising and planned giving need boosting across the benefice. Congregation numbers across the benefice seem to have bottomed out after many years of decline and are now on the rise in most parishes. Working with the Diocesan Giving and Funding Team, Contactless giving terminals have been introduced and are helping to increase donations.

We are also conscious of the workload that can be placed on the Rector and are actively thinking about ways to more effectively share the load and free up the Rector's time for the key tasks.

But perhaps our biggest challenge is to show how the love of Jesus is relevant to the people around us; to share with those who say they are not religious, the love, joy and peace that knowing Christ can bring.



Teddy Bear Jump from Norton Tower

What we are looking for in our new Rector

We recognise our need as a benefice to grow in faith, grow together and grow in number and are seeking a leader who can build on what we have and inspire us in new directions.

Key Tasks:

- **Outreach** - To help us share the Gospel and grow our congregations.
- **Discipleship** - To welcome people as they are and inspire and enable them to become who they are called to be.
- **Worship** - To assist us in making our services more welcoming, accessible and inspiring and to take our worship out into our communities.
- **Pastoral Care** - To help us display Christ's love and care among the people we serve.
- **Children & Young People** – To encourage children and young people to explore and come to faith through regular services, outreach in schools and community activities.

Skills Needed:

- **Communication:** Able to inspire and be at ease in conversation with all.
- **Leadership:** Able to organise, direct, delegate and manage.
- **Listening:** Both to God, and to God's people.
- **Mobility:** Able to drive and navigate the lanes of our rural parishes.

We are looking for someone who:

- Can build on what we have begun, has the vision and faith to see what could be and the strength and enthusiasm to lead us forward.
- Has a love and respect for God's Word and stands firm on it.
- Can share the Gospel message in ways appropriate to the context.
- Can recognise and work with the differences within our churches and villages, helping us to achieve our common goals.
- Is approachable and accepting of all, with patience, empathy and a sense of humour.
- Is able to enjoy the challenge of ministering to our seven parishes, but is aware of their own limitations and the need to share the load.
- Is a team player who recognises the talents and skills of others and encourages their use and development.

This word cloud gives a flavour of the responses at the recent benefice meeting:



The school children and young people were also asked what they wanted in a new vicar:





What we can offer our Rector

- ♦ A warm welcome into the village communities, to help you settle and make friends and contacts; friendship and hospitality; care and support for you and your family.
- ♦ Prayer support, co-operation and encouragement.
- ♦ A Benefice administrator who works 4 mornings a week.
- ♦ An experienced ministry team including a curate (completing 2026), an Associate Priest (SSM), two PTOs, four Readers and one LWA.
- ♦ Four well-trained Safeguarding Officers who ensure there is a commitment to Safeguarding responsibilities across all benefice activities and that clergy, PCCs and church members are well informed.
- ♦ Committed lay involvement in all aspects of church life – leading and supporting worship, housegroups, children's and youth work, pastoral care and administration.
- ♦ A thriving Open the Book team who go into the four primary schools regularly and produce videos of bible stories.
- ♦ A committed 'traditional worship' foundation and a growing 'Fresh Expressions' community.
- ♦ Full working expenses and congregations that respect clergy time-off and holidays.
- ♦ Patronage support from CPAS and Christ Church Oxford which takes a keen interest in the benefices in which it has a patronage interest. This extends well beyond the appointment process and can take the form of certain grants for the incumbent, a biennial incumbents' conference at Christ Church, and a biennial invitation to parishioners to a service and dinner.
- ♦ Each parish has an active PCC with four having two churchwardens and one with one. The other two have a team that share the duties.
- ♦ Benefice Council with representatives from each PCC. The Council deals with cross Benefice issues including worship, mission and finance.
- ♦ A Treasurers' Forum that coordinates cross-benefice finances.
- ♦ Seven Church buildings in good condition which are all open each day.
- ♦ A home in a beautiful part of God's rural creation.



All Saints Chapel (ASC) This is situated in the centre of Stoke-sub-Hamdon and is an additional place of worship within the Benefice. It offers an ideal space for more informal services, meetings, study courses and other outreach activities. The Light-house Café, which is a community, volunteer run café, operates weekly at ASC and is popular with church and non-church visitors from the wider community.

The Rectory

The diocese is seeking to buy a new house in Stoke to be used as the rectory. (See www.hamhillchurches.org/rectory for updates). In the meantime, the rectory in Chiselborough is offered: a four bedroom house, purpose built in 1990 in a beautiful location, with garden, plenty of parking and a garage.





Current worship

The current pattern of services is led by the Ministry Team with occasional help from external ministers. Responsibilities are allocated on a 3 month rota. The PCCs recognise the need to review the pattern and times of services. The newly appointed Rector together with others in ministry and representatives of each parish will be involved in developing the appropriate pattern of worship across the Benefice.

	Sunday 9.30am	Sunday 11am	Sunday pm	Wednesday 9am
1st	Norton CW MP Montacute CW HC Chiselborough CW HC	Odcombe CW HC Stoke ASC Café Church West Chinnock CW HC		Stoke BCP HC
2nd	Middle Chinnock CW MP Montacute CW MP Norton CW HC	Odcombe CW MP Stoke CW HC Benefice Café Church	Benefice Taize (Quarterly) 5pm	Montacute BCP HC
3rd	Chiselborough CW HC Montacute CW HC	Odcombe CW HC Stoke Praise Service West Chinnock Café Church	Norton Evensong 6pm	Stoke BCP HC
4th	Chiselborough CW HC Montacute CW HC Middle Chinnock CW/BCP HC (alternates)	Odcombe CW MP Stoke CW HC	Benefice Family T@4 4pm	Norton BCP HC



HC Holy Communion
CW Common Worship
BCP Book of Common Prayer
MP Morning Prayer
ASC All Saints Chapel

5th Sunday: Single Joint Benefice HC CW at 10.30am rotating between each church.

The Benefice Café Church and Family T@4 also rotate between the parishes, meeting in village halls as well as churches.

Fortnightly "Thursday Worship" service in ASC, led by the Curate.



Occasional offices

There are about two dozen baptisms a year which usually take place during main worship services on Sundays. We have an open policy towards baptism for both children and adults. There are around 10 weddings a year, mostly of local people. There are around 45 funerals a year, the majority of which are taken by Readers. All churchyards are open.



Finance

The financial situation of each parish for the period January 1st to December 31st 2024 is shown in the table below:

PARISH	WC	Income £	Expenditure £	Unrestricted Reserves £	Restricted/ Designated Reserves £	Parish Share 2024 £	% Paid 2024
Chiselborough	18	26159	27,210	12263	5873	11839	100
Middle Chinnock	9	14473	12432	11440	5682	5622	100
Montacute	25	37000	42660	8337	110000*	17958	100
Norton	23	26518	30273	9823	57825	18338	100
Odcombe	12	14516	26678	40000	0	10374	65
Stoke	20	27830	33502	12525	5226	20091	47
West Chinnock	9	14498	14028	6432	7713	5540	100
TOTALS	117	160994	212648	100820	192319	89762	84

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
Proverbs 3:5



Stoke Remembrance Service



- ♦ *Montacute has a legacy of £110000 which has been designated to restoration of the clock and to fund modernisation of the building.
- ♦ Each church has a dedicated treasurer. All PCC accounts are in good order.
- ♦ There is a Benefice Treasurers' Forum which coordinates cross Benefice finances and acts as a support group.
- ♦ Most parishes donate to external charities, by specific fundraising or from general funds.
- ♦ Full accounts can be made available to applicants on request.



Photo Gallery



Ivelchester Deanery

The historic deanery of Ivelchester (founded in 1218) has 29 parishes split across 5 benefices ministering to just over 29,000 spread across its 180 square miles. Within the parishes you will find 10 primary schools and 2 secondary schools. Employment is considered 'full' by national measures, but like many rural parts of Somerset the incomes generated by households is mixed and dependent on whether high income skilled aerospace jobs are held or agricultural and 'cottage' industries undertaken.

The opportunities and challenges for parishes to be places of mission and worship are at the core of both the Deanery Mission Plan and those plans generated by each parish. The core aims of the Deanery plan focus on supporting parishes in their local mission and worship through enabling partnership and facilitating the development of, and sharing of ministries.

2025 has seen 4 of the 5 benefices face changes due to pastoral re-organisation. As such, the deanery has begun to look at changes in our ethos of being church, moving from clergy centric modes towards a model of Shared Local Ministry, with mutuality of ministry and team-work to the fore. In essence we are looking at how to enable and equip all the baptised in their offering of 'souls and bodies to be living sacrifices sent in the power of the Spirit to live and work to the praise and glory of God'. With partnerships and the sharing of ministry at the heart of our aspirations, it is hoped that any new incumbent within the deanery will be open to sharing their expertise in enabling and equipping all for their local mission.

Chapter - We are a sociable group, supportive of colleagues. We meet monthly on rotation about folks' homes with Communion or Bible Study, and above all for the chance to share and care for each other in our ministry. We also take the opportunity at Easter and Christmas to get to the pub and have a good lunch together!



Diocesan statement

Our vision for growth and transformation

We are delighted that you are considering whether this post of Rector of the Ham Hill Villages Benefice in the Diocese of Bath and Wells might be right for you. In order to help your prayerful discernment, we want to share a bit about our diocesan vision, within which we hope your own ministry might flourish.

Appointing a priest incumbent is amongst the most significant decisions that any benefice makes. When appointments work out well, they contribute significantly to parishes flourishing and growing in a host of different ways – in spiritual depth, in impact within local communities and in the numbers of people becoming part of the local church. Such flourishing is not, of course, all down to the person appointed as priest. It depends first and foremost upon God. It also depends upon everyone in a benefice being willing and able to contribute their unique gifts, skills, resources and abilities: working alongside their priest and sharing in the ministry of the benefice.

The flourishing and growth of churches always needs attention, but especially now as we come out of the shock created by the COVID pandemic. The impact of the pandemic created a sharp acceleration in the pattern of decline in church attendance that has been seen in our diocese over many years. Thankfully there are some signs that we are recovering from the COVID decline. For example, data showed that average adult weekly church attendance in our diocese rose between 2021 and 2022. Statistics only ever tell a partial story. It is even more encouraging to see churches around our diocese developing approaches that respond to the opportunities and challenges in their local context and enable growth to happen.

A vision for growth and transformation

Our diocesan context, described above, has convinced us that for our next season at least, our aim across all our parishes needs to be growing our churches, within and beyond our church buildings, in both numbers and depth of faith, so that we can better work for the transforming of our communities and the life of God's Kingdom amongst us.



Shared priorities

To help us pursue this aim, and following consultation across the diocese in 2023, we are inviting all parishes to focus on four particular areas of our ministry together. It is important for clergy considering working in our diocese to know what these priorities are, even though what they look like in practice will vary in each place.

To value and cherish the people and resources we already have

We aim to ensure each person is well supported and equipped as a follower of Jesus Christ and for any ministries they may feel called to undertake, within the local church and wider community. We are committed to supporting the well-being of all our leaders and church officers, both lay and ordained. We have a fully funded clergy well-being service, the offer of peer support groups, and an excellent team of Diocesan support staff fully focused on supporting our parishes, chaplaincies and schools.

To develop new Christian worshiping communities

Whether it be new forms of worship in a wide variety of settings and times, church revitalisations or church plants, we long to see the good news of Jesus connect with the people in our communities that our traditional offerings struggle to reach.

To share in ministry and leadership

We are committed to the New Testament vision of the church as a vibrant body of people all using their God-given gifts. We are committed to a model of shared local ministry: raising up and equipping lay and ordained leaders able to share together in leading the church and serving God's world.

To deepen and grow faith

This is foundational to all we do. We long to see people of all ages and backgrounds, but perhaps especially children, young people and young adults, having more opportunities to discover, explore and grow in faith.



The outcome we are looking for

When he talks about his own ministry in 1 Corinthians, Paul captures the dynamic we are seeking to achieve. “I planted,” he says, “Apollos watered, but God gave the growth”(1 Cor 3: 6). We know that our churches will only flourish and grow as a result of God’s action among us – it is God who gives the growth.

But Paul is also clear that we have a part to play too – in watering and planting, in doing the things that enable the conditions for God’s growth to be supported. So, covered by prayer, our confident hope is that if we are intentional in seeking God’s guidance in planning and supporting growth, then God will honour that to see his people flourish and thrive - in spiritual depth, in impact within local communities, in the numbers of people becoming part of the local church and in transforming communities locally and beyond.

Local shaping and diocesan support

There can’t be any ‘one size fits’ all approach to turning the priorities outlined above into action. They always need to be adapted to local circumstances, opportunities and needs. The task of our diocesan support services is to get behind all that local benefices are doing and apart from their general support, there is specific support for exploring how to grow new Christian communities, how to discern and equip a growing range of ministries in your context and how to work well with children and young people. All these areas of support are grounded in exploring what it means to live out our faith.



Implications for the appointment of clergy

It is important for us all to appoint clergy to benefices who are ready, willing and able to pray for and share in the vision we have for the flourishing and growth of churches and Christian life in our diocese. We want to create an environment that could be described as high challenge, high support. This means appointing clergy who will not only value all that already exists but will be eager to work with others to build on and develop it. It means appointing clergy who are committed to learning, being creative, and to starting with the gifts God has given to them, their benefice and the wider community. We are therefore looking to appoint candidates who will

- be committed to praying and intentionally seeking the growth and flourishing of the benefices in their care
- relish and expect to work in an environment that is high challenge, high support
- work joyfully and collaboratively with those who share with them locally in ministry and leadership, with their congregations and with others in their locality, to identify ways to grow and develop their churches with the grain of local priorities, resources, skills and passions
- enjoy working in partnership with deanery and diocesan colleagues.

We hope this might be you! We hope that you’d like to join us on the adventure and course we’ve set for our next ten years. We’re praying that God will send us the right labourers for the harvest that God has set before us. Could this be you?

+ Michael.

Bishop Michael

Anne

Archdeacon of Wells

