



Hardington Vale

Parish Profile January 2025

We are a single parish benefice comprising a number of rural communities on the Somerset – Wiltshire border, within the Frome deanery.

Welcome to Hardington Vale

We are seeing God at work here, creating faith and sharing his love in Jesus.

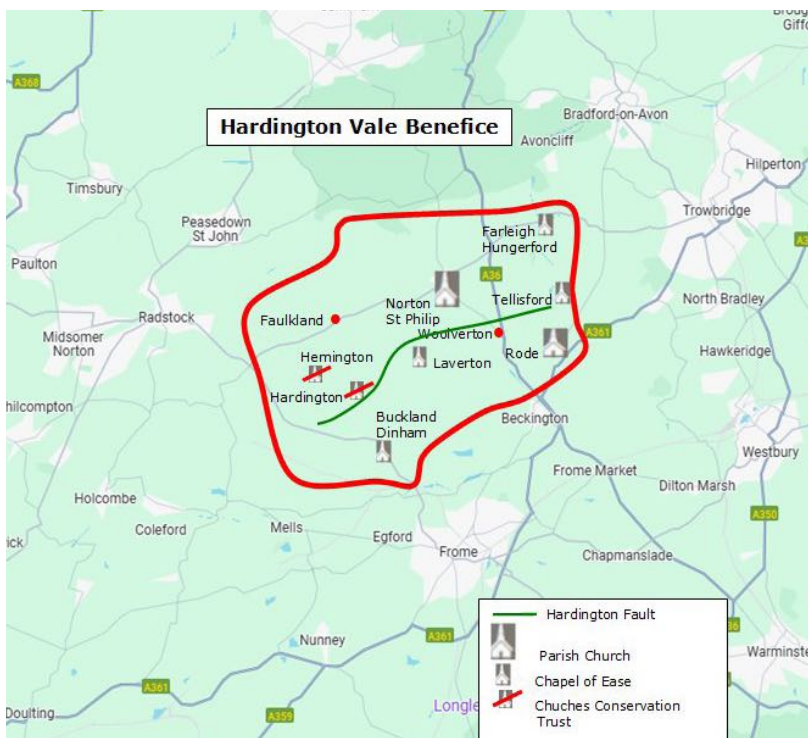
We are looking for a new Rector who will lead us into the next stage of our journey together, inspired by the love of Jesus to love God and love others. Our churches embrace a range of traditional and contemporary styles, reflecting a rich heritage of faith and our heart to communicate the good news of Jesus in our generation and context.

Today Hardington Vale includes ten villages and hamlets, with six churches in regular use, and another two managed by the Churches Conservation Trust. The present configuration and practices of our Benefice reflect how individual parishes have been combined over the decades – Appendix 1.

This profile tells you about us and what's important to us, our hopes, dreams and challenges as a church and wider community. It also tells you about what we feel God is leading us to look for in our new Rector.



Our prayer is that, as you read and explore, you will be able to hear whether God is calling you to join us and help us move forward together.



About us: *the Parish and the Church*

Hardington Vale Benefice is in northeast Somerset between Frome, Trowbridge and Bradford on Avon, 5-10 miles south of Bath. It is named after a geological valley in the carboniferous limestone running through the benefice.

While the Rectory and Parish Office are in Norton St Philip, many exciting things are happening in Rode, the site of our other Parish Church, and in our other village communities. There is a huge opportunity to develop faith across the whole benefice and this is an essential part of our outlook: while each village is proudly independent, nevertheless we work together in love. This is reflected in the wonderful things going on between villages, which have come about through church members and the wider community sharing the development of various initiatives and progressing together.

These initiatives include:

- Welcoming 84 Ukrainians in 2022, together with our neighbouring parish
- Friends of Rode and Norton Schools, with a wealth of supporting activities
- Gathering toddlers and their parents/carers (Tots and Toys, Rode Toddler Group)
- Based on the Deanery's youth research, creating more provision for young people, including our popular monthly Youth Space for teenagers
- Teaching, prayers and actions to address global and local environmental concerns, including sensitive care of our churchyards
- Organising transport and volunteering to drive: The Ridings, and Rode Community Transport
- An ad hoc choir singing for Christmas carol services and harvest festivals
- Concerts with an eclectic mix of music in church buildings
- A variety of events raising money for Heart of Rode and other Friends' Funds specific to individual church buildings
- The local, national and international charities we support as a parish; currently these are Focus Frome, Safe Families and Asha – see links in Appendix 2. We also have a strong link with The Mission to Seafarers and celebrate Sea Sunday each year

“It is difficult to express in words our gratitude... for safe housing, for helping us send our children to school, find a job, and adjust to life here.”

“The Ridings makes life possible now I am not driving and I am so grateful!”



Our strengths and challenges

We've had a long and honest look at ourselves as a church and have listened to what members of our communities have been telling us through our consultations with many groups across age-ranges.

Here's what has emerged! Direct quotations are shown in inverted commas (see also Appendix 3).

The underlying principles and values that guide us

- Being centred on God and being the body of Christ in Hardington Vale
- Bringing "knowledge and love of God to all", "practising actual working, loving Christianity"
- Being prayerful
- Having Biblical teaching that helps us become the disciples Jesus is looking for today
- Being outward looking and serving our communities, "a spiritual resource for people in difficulties", "a stable bedrock to guide all our lives"
- Celebrating our rural context, with all its special opportunities
- Being caring, cherishing and safe, "a place for listening to each other"
- Being welcoming to all
- Sharing responsibility and recognising and nurturing gifts



We aim "to bring people together with a common understanding of Christian values, to help those in need, to educate children in our faith, to support one another, and to spread the word of God and the love of Jesus."



Our strengths and joys

- Unity, fellowship, participation and support for each other across the parish
- Regular prayer across the parish
- Structures and leadership that work well, including a single PCC; wardens and administrator for the whole parish; combined finances – Appendix 4
- The wide range of regular worship offered by our churches (Appendix 5) including Breakfast Church, Holy Communion (Common Worship and BCP), Informal Worship, Morning and Evening Prayer and an Iona Service. We try to include contemporary worship songs as well as traditional hymns. In our survey, almost equal numbers mentioned their desires for a style of worship that is (a) with traditional liturgy and music, or (b) all-age, family friendly, contemporary, and diverse



- A variety of sizes of congregation, from our larger parish churches to small village churches
- Our pioneer project in Buckland Dinham – Appendix 6
- Healthy, longstanding ecumenical partnerships, e.g. joint services and events with Rode Chapel (including a monthly joint communion service midweek), weekly ecumenical prayer, Meeting Place on the first Sunday evening of each month and Rode Remembrance Sunday service.
- A positive attitude to seeking out and trying new ideas, approaches and fresh expressions of church
- Good links with our schools, including team-led assemblies – Appendix 7
- Home groups – see below



Our strengths and joys

- Well maintained buildings (Appendix 8), with flexible spaces, especially in the two parish churches, allowing a wide and growing variety of events, e.g. occasional evening concerts and monthly lunchtime concerts featuring piano and other instrumental recitals, jazz performances, solo vocalists and choirs which attract audiences from near and far. The concerts have raised money for the Fabric Funds and have helped buy a grand piano
- Food and hospitality, including breakfast church and church lunches after united services
- The range of groups on offer in churches, e.g. Tots and Toys, Forget-Me-Not café, Youth Space, complementing the amazing number of groups and activities in wider communities
- Our beautiful location, village life with an expectation of community, a sense of integration, unity and safety for all ages, a wide range of amenities and fantastic schools
- Being able to provide for members of the community at all stages of life, including marriages, christenings, and funerals – Appendix 4



Our Hometowns continue to flourish and, in the past year, four have become five: one group grew big enough to seed another. It is heartwarming that there are now more than 50 Christians in the Parish regularly meeting, praying, studying the Bible and reflecting together, including people who don't necessarily worship with us.



Our challenges and opportunities

- Our ageing profile and how we can engage with younger families, young people and children, including developing even closer links with our village schools and getting better at using a variety of media
- Isolation and loneliness in our communities and how we can better support people
- The many unchurched people across our communities and the pressures of life that make engagement challenging, e.g. busy family Sundays, “most events are in the daytime, people work then”
- The location of the church building in Rode, across a busy A road from the village
- The sense that we can be rather “Norton-centric” as a parish
- We are aware that our benefice of 3,027 souls is blessed with good housing and higher than average income and education (<https://cuf.org.uk/parish/510103>), yet those who don't drive face difficulties with transport, potentially leading to “remoteness and isolation for the lonely”. This is especially so in those village communities which no longer have church services. There is also a lack of affordable housing



Our vision and priorities

Our “mission action plan” (MAP) arose from our involvement in the Partnership for Missional Church process just before the pandemic.

The MAP is a live item in all our PCC discussions and has helped us identify together the areas God is prompting us to develop or do more of as we join in his mission here. All of this is about both building a healthy church family and reaching out and partnering with our communities, building on strengths while recognising the challenges. There are five key priorities at present:

Planning around families and young people (as well as other parts of our demographic we may not be reaching as well as we should), so we see more parents, children and young people as disciples of Jesus, living for him in their generation.

Prophetic challenge to care for our environment, so we see more real and sustainable ways in which, in partnership with our communities, our churches are caring for our environment and advocating for climate justice nationally and globally as stewards of God’s creation.

Practising hospitality, so we see more members of our community, especially including those who are lonely, elderly or marginalised, feeling welcome and at home in our buildings and / or with our congregations.

Praying and praising together, so we see more vulnerability and openness in praying with each other; celebration of God’s Spirit being powerfully at work in answer to prayer.

Projecting our faith, so that what we learn and celebrate together in church is what we live out boldly on a daily basis, so more members of our communities are helped forward on their journeys of faith, becoming followers of Jesus.

The full mission action plan can be seen via the link in Appendix 2.

The Partnership for Missional Church process also led us to establish the key spiritual discipline of Dwelling in the Word, with which we commence many of our meetings, including the PCC. This has had a transforming effect on how we listen and work together.



Our teams

*We are blessed with a large number of committed people who work together well.
We see this as a huge strength.*

These include:

A single PCC for the parish, which helps to unite us and move us forwards together. We have an Assistant Chair, a dedicated PCC Secretary, a Treasurer and a pro-active Safeguarding Officer.

Our four Parish Wardens oversee pastoral care, finance, buildings and strategy across the parish and are supported by church and chapel wardens and deputy wardens in each of our church locations.

Readers and Lay Worship Assistants: we currently have three readers (lay ministers) and seven lay worship assistants, who are actively involved in leading services and preaching. We are also blessed with a number of retired priests with permission to officiate.

Five Lay Pastoral Assistants support many across our parish.

Home group leaders.

Our Parish Administrator, based in the office in Norton St Philip, supports all of us and is the busy hub keeping the wheels turning!

Fabric Committee and Friends groups look after our buildings inside and out and have very effective links in all our communities, so we are well supported in maintaining our beautiful buildings.

Teams who run a range of regular activities, including Tots and Toys, Forget Me Not café, Youth Space, Mini breakfast church.



Why might you be interested in being our Rector?

From all our consultations and reflections, the following gives you an idea of things that really matter to us. We're praying that you will be someone who has:

Faith which is inspiring and infectious as you follow Jesus. You are able to communicate the Bible well, showing its relevance and meaning in current contexts. You are a person of prayer, humility and honesty, a confident Christian leader who wants to share the love and good news of Jesus widely.

Compassion and empathy, able to respond to life's events so that people feel welcomed, listened to and supported, with a firm commitment to developing excellent pastoral care.

The willingness and ability to hold together the diversity of worship and outlooks in a unity which has been carefully nurtured across the parish.

Ability to nurture the church as well as being outward looking and committed to our different communities, able to get alongside all types of people and understand their hopes and concerns.

Enthusiasm for the future role of rural churches, whatever this looks like.

Vision and a readiness to challenge us, encouraging new strategies to engage meaningfully with our communities.

A commitment to developing gifts and a willingness to work with us as a team, enabling and delegating, seeking and acting on advice.

A sense of humour and joyfulness.

What we offer you as the new incumbent

Your support:

We are a supportive and friendly bunch, willing to get stuck in and work as a team. We're blessed with financial resources, effective structures and buildings in good order. We have good links into our communities and church members are well represented in most facets of life in our villages.

We are flexible and adventurous, excited to explore new ways of responding to the needs around us. We are committed to supporting our new rector, ensuring they feel welcomed, valued, and encouraged as they embark on their ministry with us.

Our Parish Administrator and existing teams will work closely with you to share the load.



What we offer you as the new incumbent

Your home:

The well maintained and spacious rectory, with four good sized bedrooms (one en-suite), study, sitting room, kitchen, dining room, utility room and integral garage. The house is set in a large, secluded garden in which there is a small studio. The rectory is adjacent to the church, parish office and school.



The wider area:

Our rural setting has abundant walking routes and open areas, together with excellent farm shops. We are close to Bath, which offers shopping, culture and leisure facilities, as well as the towns of Frome and Trowbridge. Older children attend a number of good secondary schools in the area.

Finally...

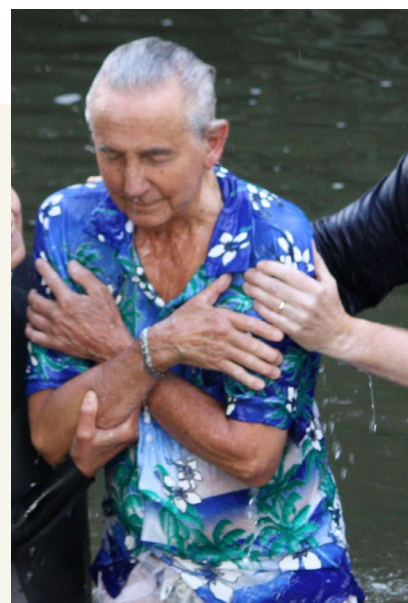
A number of times in the last few years, especially through the Partnership for Missional Church process, we have sensed God reminding us about Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones:

He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know".

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered into them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

(Ezekiel 37: 3, 10)



God has been working in our "vale" for centuries and, we passionately believe, is still at work today, breathing life into us, creating faith and sharing his love in Jesus. We want to join in God's work and, if you have been excited and stirred by this profile and would like to know more, please explore our website. If you have questions or would like a conversation about the post then the Archdeacon, Ven Anne Gell (adwells@bathwells.anglican.org) or Area Dean, Revd Preb Liz Dudley (fromeareadean@gmail.com) would be delighted to hear from you.

How we became a single parish benefice

In 1971 the two Rode churches, St Lawrence and Christchurch, were combined with Woolverton's St Lawrence, Tellisford's All Saints and Farleigh Hungerford's St Leonard into the single entity of Rode Major. The incumbent lived in The Rectory in Tellisford and managed the development of a single PCC for Rode Major, with a shared parish magazine, The Link, which is still distributed monthly.

Rode being the largest village, a new Rectory was built there in the 1980s. Christchurch Rode and St Lawrence Woolverton both closed in the 1990s, the former because of structural problems, the latter for lack of congregation. Both buildings were sold and became residential properties. In 2002 Rode Major was combined with Norton St Philip's St Philip & St James, Laverton's St Mary, and Hemington's St Mary (all on "the other side" of the A36) in the new Benefice of Hardington Vale. These three parishes all had their own PCCs and Treasurers, and a small degree of the former financial independence remains in our current united PCC structure.



In 2017 there were further developments:

- St Mary's Hemington was taken on by the Churches Conservation Trust
- The three remaining smaller village churches – Farleigh Hungerford, Laverton and Tellisford – became Chapels of Ease or Festival Churches, meaning that they no longer had to adhere to a certain minimum frequency of services. These no longer had the status of parish churches, and they are now looked after by "Chapel Wardens" who can be assisted by as many Deputy Wardens as their congregations choose to appoint. Chapel Wardens sit on the PCC
- Now Hardington Vale had two "Parish Churches" – St Lawrence in Rode, and St Philip and St James in Norton St Philip; we elected four Parish Wardens, each with specific responsibilities: Finance, Buildings, Pastoral, Strategy. These two churches also have Deputy Wardens to carry out the other duties of a church warden
- Rode rectory is still part of the united parish and has been occupied by a curate until very recently

A Standing Committee comprising the Rector, the PCC Chair, PCC Secretary and the four Parish Wardens has met as needed between our quarterly PCC meetings, to move forward urgent business such as building works, heating systems and churchyard policy. The Standing Committee's Minutes inform the PCC and streamline decision making.

In the last few years Frome Deanery has had to reduce the number of incumbents from 7 to 6, and in the subsequent reorganizations we gained the parish of Buckland Dinham with its church of St Michael and All Angels. This parish already had a pioneering project under way (see Appendix 6). The technicalities of including Buckland Dinham in Hardington Vale Benefice, including the church becoming a Chapel of Ease/Festival Church, were completed during 2024.

The second church maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust is St Mary's, Hardington Bampfylde, formerly linked with Hemington. Now we have two villages without a church: Woolverton, and Faulkland.



Useful links

| | |
|---|--|
| Our parish website: | hardingtonvale.org.uk |
| Our Parish Mission Action Plan | hardingtonvale.org.uk |
| Annual report for APCM 2025 | hardingtonvale.org.uk |
| Parish data synopsis from Church Urban Fund | cuf.org.uk |
| Our supported charities: | Asha: asha-india.org Safe Families: safefamilies.uk Focus Frome: focusbath.com |
| Our schools: | rodeandnortonschoolfederation.co.uk hemingtonprimary.co.uk |
| Our parish councils: | Norton St Philip and Farleigh Hungerford nortonstphilipparishcouncil.gov.uk Rode rodevillage.com Tellisford and Woolverton tellisford.parish.uk Buckland Dinham bucklanddinham.org |



Our community consultation, autumn 2024

Our community consultation reflected optimism, confidence, and quiet ambition to extend the impact of a living faith, especially to children and the young.

Here are some of the responses to individual questionnaires:

How people describe the purpose of "church" here

A place of worship, sanctuary and welcome, providing support and pastoral care both for the church family and for all in the community, spreading God's word, and being available for special life events (weddings, christenings and funerals). "Church" is not restricted to buildings: the purpose of church is "practicing actual working loving Christianity," "for comfort, solace and support," "a spiritual dimension to life," "a spiritual resource for people in difficulties," "a place for listening to each other," "focusing love on the community," "making disciples," "teaching children," "facilitate faith," "support believers and spread faith into the community," "bring knowledge and love of God to all," provide "a stable bedrock to guide all our lives," and "an inclusive community voice for the village."

At Tots and Toys, those happily involved in church see it as a community of people of faith with a responsibility to live life in a particular way; those with no connection see church as a marvelous space to be used extensively by the local community. Others said that church buildings should be open, and people should feel welcome there.

In answering this question about "church," references to God appeared more frequently than Christianity or Jesus, and community was mentioned more than twice as often as God.

Who we are: positives and negatives

Those who don't drive face difficulties with transport, potentially leading to "remoteness and isolation for the lonely". People being prepared to go across the Benefice to support another church, "multifaceted involvement" and "strong community spirit"; caring, kind, "supportive", "generous", "neighbourliness", "watching out for others" with a caveat that "everyone knows your business"; "willingness to accept each other and live peacefully side by side".

Amenities include the shops, Post Offices, café, village halls, schools, pubs, library, bus service, and two parish magazines (covering the large number of activities).

Difficult things related to church include a "lack of cohesion with people from different churches [communities]"; the benefice being "fragmented by the A36"; "distances between churches," and "church not being seen in a good light"; "non-believers feel excluded"; how to reach out to all to share the gospel of Jesus; "limited church offer for the young especially teenagers"; "finding connections in busy lives." But overall we are in a blessed rural setting which is generally safe.



Our parish electoral roll and finances

| Location | Church electoral roll | Baptisms | Weddings | Funerals |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|--|
| Norton St Philip | 65 | 0 | 0 | 2 – 4 memorial services 2 at Hemington ¹ |
| Rode | 42 | 1 | 1 | 1 + 1 memorial service |
| Tellisford | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Farleigh Hungerford | 9 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Laverton | 19 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Buckland Dinham | 20 | 1 | 0 | 4 + 1 memorial service |
| Parish totals | 162 | 3 | 2 | 10 + 6 memorial services |

Our Benefice's financial landscape is quite special: we have one Treasurer who does the day-to-day finances and co-ordinates closely with the Parish Warden for Finance and a designated person who looks after GiftAid envelopes. Each village has chosen its preferred arrangements, reflecting a respect for the diversity of village communities and their preferences for how to operate within the Benefice.

Finances at a glance (as 31st December 2024)

| Headline | Amount (£) | Notes |
|--------------------------------|------------|---|
| General Fund (Unrestricted) | 97,376 | One PCC and therefore one general fund |
| Designated Funds (Magazines) | 29,036 | Designated magazine funds are not restricted |
| Friends Funds (Restricted) | 171,450 | Each of the 6 churches has its own Friends who are responsible for the maintenance and insurance of their particular church |
| General Fund Total Income | 119,887 | One PCC and therefore one general fund |
| General Fund Total Expenditure | 96,182 | One PCC and therefore one general fund |
| Surplus for 2024 | 23,705 | |
| Parish Share 2023 paid in full | 63,316 | Across the 5 churches in the parish at that time |
| Parish Share 2024 paid in full | 74,317 | Includes Buckland Dinham, which is now incorporated into Hardington Vale |
| Parish Share 2025 | 76,233 | Includes Buckland Dinham, which is now incorporated into Hardington Vale |

¹ Church now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust

Sunday service patterns

| Location | 1st Sunday | 2nd Sunday | 3rd Sunday | 4th Sunday | 5th Sunday |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Norton St Philip | Breakfast Church (with mini breakfast church) | Holy Communion | Informal Worship | Holy Communion | United service (Holy Communion) |
| Rode | Holy Communion | Breakfast church | Holy Communion | Informal Worship (contemplative) | |
| Tellisford | (monthly midweek communion service) Evening Prayer (fortnightly) | | | | |
| Farleigh Hungerford | | | Morning worship / Holy Communion (alternating) | | |
| Laverton | Holy Communion | Morning Worship / Matins | Morning Worship / Matins | Morning Worship / Matins | |
| Buckland Dinham | | Iona service | Holy Communion | Evening service | |



Our exciting pioneer project

An exciting pioneering project is underway in Buckland Dinham, a rural village on the western edge of the Benefice.

The Church of England defines pioneers as “people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit’s initiative, identifying opportunities and gathering others to establish new Christian communities within their local context”

- <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/pioneering/what-is-a-pioneer/>

Following the pandemic, St Michael’s in Buckland Dinham faced uncertain times, with a much smaller congregation and no formal church officers. A series of meetings with the Diocese focused on pioneering, prompting the question, “Could this approach work in rural churches?” With the support of the incumbent, the area dean, and the congregation, a team of four moved their church membership to the village to put this pioneering vision into practice. The team’s long-term goal is to connect with the village and nurture a Christian community. They aim to focus on listening rather than telling.

One of the key events offered by the local church members is the monthly Saturday Coffee Morning in the Church, a popular gathering that attracts people with good coffee, cake, and a warm, welcoming atmosphere in a beautiful setting.

The worship team is also offering a variety of services that are fresh and engaging, including regular Holy Communion, Services of the Word, and vibrant celebrations of Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas, and Easter, which draw people of all ages. They are also working closely with the Parish Council and Community Council for Somerset to help rekindle community activities lost during the pandemic.



We hope that a vibrant Christian community will grow again in Buckland Dinham. They look forward to working closely with the new Rector as they serve God and the local community.

Our schools

Since 2016 Rode Methodist VC First School (Years 2-4) has been linked in Federation with Norton St Philip VA Church of England First School (Reception and Year 1).

The Federation allows each school to retain its identity and character formed over the last 150 years, within the contexts of their individual communities. The Rector has been involved historically as a Foundation Governor, and the Christian ethos of both schools is underpinned by the Rector and other Foundation Governors working together with the schools' Head, who welcomes a group of representatives from the Anglican and Methodist churches to take weekly assemblies in both the Rode and Norton sites. School also visits the church in NSP to learn more about baptism and different events that happen there.

At the end of every term Rode school goes to an assembly in Rode Chapel and NSP school goes across to the church. School also enjoys using the church for staging its Christmas production and last year joined in part of the Palm Sunday procession as it happened midway through the Fundraising Colour Run!

Our third school is Hemington Primary School which became an academy in 2018 and belongs to the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership. Teams from Hardington Vale lead "Open the Book" in Hemington Primary. Older children attend schools in Frome, Bradford on Avon, Writhlington, and Bath.

Our church buildings and churchyards

Across the parish we are blessed with a range of beautiful, historic church buildings, lovingly cared for and supported by their communities, usually through Friends groups (Heart of Rode, Friends of St Philip & St James). They are maintained in good repair (see quinquennial reports summary below). Much more detail can be found by following the links on the parish website!

All the church photos in this section came from the Hardington Vale website.

Quinquennial Inspections

| Church | Date of inspection | Significant work identified | Work in hand or complete |
|--|--------------------|---|--|
| St Philip & St James, Norton St Philip* | 2023 | Some masonry repairs and repointing. | Rope access work to tower. Some masonry repairs. |
| St Lawrence, Rode* | 2022 | Stone-tiled roofs need to be re-covered. | Roofs to the Nave, South Aisle, North Aisle and Porch recently finished. Final phase to chancel now in progress and completion anticipated by end of 2025. |
| All Saints, Tellisford | Due early 2026 | External repointing. | Boundary wall repairs. Wall repointing arranged. |
| St Leonards, Farleigh Hungerford | 2019 | Bell tower work including additional 6th bell and platform. | Bell tower work in progress. |
| St Mary's, Laverton | 2024 | No significant work required. | |
| St Michael & All Angels, Buckland Dinham | 2024 | Refurbishment of LychGate. | Scaffold support erected to enable removal of timbers for replacement. |

* Parish churches



St Philip & St James, Norton St Philip

The building dates back to the 14th century, with many phases of development over time, notably in a 19th century restoration. The award-winning Hub was built in 2008, providing accommodation for the parish office, a meeting room, toilet and small kitchen. Recent re-ordering has replaced the pews with modern, flexible seating.



St Lawrence, Rode

The church is a beautiful Grade 1 listed building. There is evidence of a Norman church having been on its site, but the present church dates from the 15th Century. Over time it has undergone significant renovation and improvements, including, in 2000, a toilet and kitchen facilities. The wooden bell frame has been replaced with a new steel one so that the six re-tuned bells (mostly 270 years old) could be rung again after 50 years of silence.



All Saints, Tellisford

The oldest visible part of the church is the Norman Arch in the porch, dating from around 1180 and the tower was built from its foundations in about 1490, the square-headed windows in the Nave dating from the same period. The pulpit bears the date 1608. Various phases of restoration and development took place in the 19th and 20th centuries.



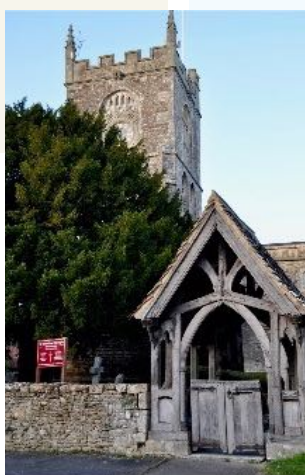
St Leonards, Farleigh Hungerford

A charming English Perpendicular building consecrated in 1443. A Victorian curate of St. Leonard's (Rev August Toplady) wrote the famous hymn 'Rock of Ages' and the church continues to provide comfort, spiritual refreshment and a warm welcome to its services and to visitors. It is a listed Grade 2* building.



St Mary's, Laverton

The earliest parts of the church date from Saxon times and many changes have been made in successive generations. The church comprises a chancel, a vestry and a nave with a porch on the north side. There is a saddleback tower containing the belfry at the west end. The church is adjacent to Manor Farm farmhouse and is surrounded by Duchy of Cornwall land. The church has been visited by successive Dukes of Cornwall and their signatures in the church's bible record their visits.



St Michael & All Angels, Buckland Dinham

Parts of St Michael's church date back to around 1200 while the north chapel was added in 1325 and the tower in 1480. The church was restored in the late 19th Century to its present form. There are many notable features including a ring of 8 bells, a Jacobean pulpit and an attractive Victorian lych gate.

Frome Deanery

Working together across the Deanery, we seek to be a transforming Christian presence in every community where more and more people catch God's love and choose to be Jesus' disciples.

We would expect the new incumbent to work collaboratively with deanery colleagues both lay and ordained to share gifts, expertise, experience and passion so that the deanery wide vision becomes a reality that is lived in our parishes.

We see ourselves as a pioneering deanery returning to the values of the early church as described in Acts 2:42-47 ... fellowship based on love and prayer that seeks to give glory to God and to share in the Kingdom in ways that are inclusive, affirming, and energising for all.

Our current deanery plan is underpinned by the following four strands:

Planning which is fundamental to making our vision succeed

Resourcing so that initiatives are cross-deanery and include both the rural and the town churches working together

Communicating sharing our successes and struggles, supporting each other and using social media to communicate well with the wider community

Supporting we appreciate that our vision is challenging, but we are confident that we can succeed if we have the right mind set and support each other.

Having done some pastoral reorganising, our focus is now shifting to the realising of the aspirations already shared and finding a way of working together that is effective, Spirit-led and fun.

Revd Liz Dudley

Area Dean Vicar of
Christ Church St. Mary's

Diocesan statement – *our vision for growth and transformation*



Introduction

We are delighted that you are considering whether this post of Rector of the Benefice of Hardington Vale 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 worshipping 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 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.

What implications does this have 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?

