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Manna Mailing – February 2025

Caring for our community

Community is at the heart of who we are, a gift from God that calls us to live in relationship with one another. At its best, community reflects God’s love – where people come together, share burdens, celebrate joys and support one another through life’s challenges. Our faith inspires us to look beyond ourselves. It calls us to respond to the challenges we see and reminds us that true strength lies in the bonds we build with one another, guided by God’s presence among us.

This Christmas more than 300 people from all parts of the rural community of Exmoor came together to celebrate as one. Singing in the Ring at Exmoor Farmers Livestock Market was a celebration of Christ’s birth but also an opportunity to give thanks for all who are part of their community, and the support and care they offer one another.

Revd David Weir, Rector of Exmoor Benefice who helped organise the event said, “The cattle market is a very significant place for people here on Exmoor. Week in, week out, people gather to buy and sell cattle and sheep. Singing in the Ring is a lovely opportunity to gather in a different way and celebrate all the life that gathers around the market. It is about mutual support for the agricultural community. It is a very special community, and there is a lot of support available, the Hill Farm Network, Farming Community Network, the chaplains, the church, the Health Hub. This was a celebration of all of that.”

In a world that often feels fragmented and isolated community offers us a sense of belonging and purpose. As we walk this journey of life, we do so hand in hand, reflecting God’s love and sharing His light with the world.

News in brief

Energy Footprint Tool now open for 2025

The Church of England’s [Energy Footprint Tool](https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment/energy-footprint-tool) is now open for churches to enter their energy use from 2024. The data collected helps churches understand their carbon footprint. This work is an essential part of caring for God’s Creation, by helping to combat global heating and climate change. The easy-to-use online tool reveals a church’s carbon footprint, based on the energy it uses to heat and light its buildings. Last year 60% of churches in Bath and Wells used the EFT. This year, the diocese wants to get as close to 100% as possible to help achieve the target of Net Zero by 2030.

Diocesan Bible Passage

Over the past few years, the Diocese of Bath and Wells has developed the habit of choosing a [Diocesan Bible passage for the year](https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/dwelling-in-the-word/dwelling-in-the-word), which is used in a variety of ways. The passage for 2025 will be Isaiah 55. 1-9, suggested by Jo Stobart, Area Dean of Somerset South. One of the ways in which this passage is used is through the practice of Dwelling in the Word – listening to God through scripture and each other.

Offering a warm welcome

Churches throughout the Diocese of Bath and Wells are providing a Warm Spaces for those facing challenges in heating their homes or seeking community during the cold, dark winter months. Initially launched in response to the sharp rise in fuel costs, these Warm Spaces have proved so popular across all age groups that many churches have continued them. They remain committed to offering a haven of warmth, hospitality, and connection to everyone in their community.

Reflecting God’s love

By Toby Wright, Dean of Wells

Someone once asked the great Anglican monastic theologian Herbert Kelly this questions: ‘How do we know what the will of God is?’ to which he famously answered, ‘We don’t. That’s the joke.’

Kelly is right: we can’t know precisely what God’s will is in a certain situation. But we can open up opportunities for God to ‘come through’ our actions, and building community is a key way of doing this. In any situation we can try and tune our lives a bit more to God. And across our diocese our commitment to our communities is key to this.

So, when we meet people, a simple smile shows the person before us we see them as a friend. This is not to suggest ignorance or naivety. We are not unaware of the limitations and imperfections of a person, but we are prepared to focus more deeply, to the depths of the heart in each person. To seek out the goodness that only love and trust can bring to birth.

As a Cistercian writer recently put it: ‘Let us welcome each person as Christ, because in all truth it is Christ whom we welcome. ‘You did this to me’ (Matthew 25). Let us look for the beloved face of Christ in each person, for each is his true face.’

But why start our focus on community, with those around us, and not God? Good question. Perhaps it is best explained by a lovely saying from the Desert Father, John the Dwarf: ‘You don’t build a house by starting with the roof and working down. You start with the foundation.’

They said, ‘What does that mean?’

He said, ‘The foundation is our neighbour whom we must win. The neighbour is where we start. Every commandment of Christ depends on this.’

**Toby Wright**

**Dean of Wells**

Interview Marlene Mason Quantock Foodbank Administrator

**What inspired the pantry pilot in Watchet?**

We wanted to help people who are struggling with financial challenges to get back on their feet. We refunded bus fares but many villages have no public transport; therefore the pilot in Watchet proved the need for a mobile service to enable equality of access for other Quantock communities.

**How does the pantry operate now?**

Using our community funded electric van, we take food, toiletries, and household items to central locations. It’s a community effort supported by local people, businesses, churches, schools, parish councils, and all who donate generously.

**Do you provide more than just food?**

More often than not, we provide a listening ear and also offer support to access, or direct people to relevant advisory and information services, such as financial or housing advice. This helps people get back on their feet and maintain their independence.

**How did COVID-19 change your approach?**

COVID showed us the importance of taking services to people. In rural areas, transport and isolation are big challenges, so we adapted by taking the food and essentials to those in need rather than them having to come to us.

**How does this project strengthen community connections?**

Creating and running the foodbank has brought people together in new ways and has helped to fosters trust with those who need its support. Years ago, communities were naturally more connected, but now we must make the effort to ensure no one feels isolated.

**What misconceptions do people have about food banks?**

Many think food banks are only for “needy people,” but life can change unexpectedly for anyone. It’s about offering support without judgment. We have to see each other as God sees us. We have to help each other and recognise that each person in our community is valued.

**How important is the church’s role in bringing the community together to support those in need?**

When we first launched the Food Bank, it was apparent to me that one of the things the church maybe didn't do so well was engage with anybody outside of itself. We needed to follow where God was taking us. We needed to listen to Him to understand how to support our community. God showed us it wasn’t just about us, it was about the whole community; partnering with and using the skills and expertise of other organisations.

**Did the decision to have an electric delivery vehicle support your vision for the future of your community?**

We live in the Quantocks Natural Landscape, a designated area of outstanding natural beauty; and it seemed a terrible thing to proliferate cars and emissions. With the support of Quantock Deanery and the wider Quantock communities we were able to find an eco-friendly solution. We bought an electric van, with solar panels on the roof to power equipment; doing this also supports our commitment to the fifth mark of mission - to care for Creation.

**Is this project about more than just meeting needs?**

Absolutely. It’s about building relationships, sharing skills, and creating a sense of belonging. We constantly reassess to ensure we’re responding to what the community truly needs.

**How has the project grown since 2018?**

What began as a small initiative has exceeded all expectations, proving the power of our faith and the desire to serve others. It’s truly a community-led transformation.