

Valuing everyone

Marlene Mason, manager of the Quantock Foodbank, discusses the support provided to the community through their unique service which operates the Foodbank through and alongside a Mobile Pantry.



Quantock Foodbank's fully electric mobile pantry

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.

How does this project strengthen community connections?

Creating and running the foodbank has brought people together in new ways and has helped to foster 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, one of the things the church didn't do so well was engage with anybody outside of itself. 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.

[Read Marlene's interview in full at bathwells.org.uk/news](https://bathwells.org.uk/news)

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Coming together as a 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 Exmoor Benefice, who helped organise the event said, "The cattle market is a very significant place for people here on Exmoor.



Singing in the Ring, a service at Exmoor livestock market. Image: Leanna Coles

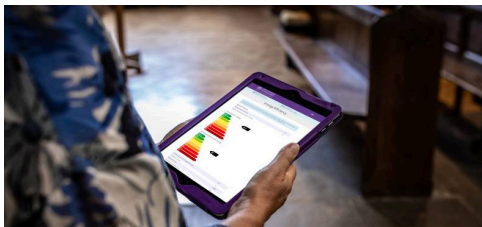
Week in week, week out, people gather to buy and sell cattle and sheep. Singing in the Ring is a lovely opportunity to gather in a different way and celebrate all the life that gathers around the market. It is about mutual support for the agricultural community. It is a very special community, and there 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

Caring for Creation

The Church of England's Energy Footprint Tool is now open for churches to log their 2024 energy usage, helping churches understand their carbon footprint. By measuring the energy used for heating and lighting, the EFT calculates emissions. this work is an essential part of caring for God's Creation, by helping to combat climate change. Last year 60% of churches in Bath & Wells participated, This year, the goal is to boost that number to help reach the Net Zero target by 2030.



Offering a warm welcome

Churches throughout the Diocese of Bath and Wells are providing Warm Spaces for those facing challenges in heating their homes or who are seeking company 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.



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, which is used in a variety of ways. The passage for 2025 will be Isaiah 55. 1-9, suggested by Revd 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.

Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

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

