



Benefice of Axbridge, Shipham and Rowberrow



Benefice Profile November 2021



Contents

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Welcome	3
Summary	4
Where we are	6
Our Benefice	
An Overview	8
Our Benefice Schools	9
Benefice Communications	10
Patterns of Worship	11
Staff and Team Members	14
Finances	16
Your Home	17
Our Parishes	
St John the Baptist, Axbridge	18
St Leonard, Shipham	20
St Michael and All Angels, Rowberrow	22
Bath and Wells Diocese	24
Area Dean and Chapter	25
2021 Benefice Survey	26
SWOT Analysis	27
What we learned during the pandemic	28
Looking Forward	29
Contact and Links	30



Welcome

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Thank you for taking the time to read our Benefice Profile. We believe that our Benefice can provide a rich and rewarding opportunity for ministry and that this Profile will give you an insight into who we are, what we do and where we feel that God may be leading us. We pray that this helps you to judge whether you are the right person to help us move forward to share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.



Loving Lord, we pray for our Benefice, that in this time of vacancy we should learn still more confidently to be your hands and your voice, living and loving as we follow you. We pray that you would send us a teacher, a shepherd and a friend to draw us even closer to you, and to encourage us to be in your will and to serve you in the power of your Spirit. **Amen**





Summary

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

The Benefice of Axbridge, Shipham and Rowberrow

We are a group of three rural parishes located on the edge and within the Mendip Hills in Somerset. We are part of the Axbridge Deanery in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. Our three churches are:

Axbridge: St John the Baptist

Shipham: St Leonard

Rowberrow: St Michael and All Angels

We have been a united Benefice for many years.

Each parish has its own unique character, but we enjoy working and worshipping together, particularly since the restrictions caused by the Pandemic.

Mission Statement

To share the unconditional love of God, to nurture the faith of believers, and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Vision

We are looking for somebody to work together with us to develop our mission statement and to grow our churches, supported by a strong team of committed Christians; to seek new places and new ways of telling our story of the God who loves us, inspires us and empowers us to be His witnesses.

Who are we looking for?

Qualities

A friend and guide to help us on our spiritual journey; considerate of our varied spiritual needs. We hope our new Priest-in-Charge will enjoy working with people of all ages and can help the congregations demonstrate the relevance of the Christian faith in everyday life within our communities.

Key Tasks

- ◆ Encourage and develop both our spiritual life through prayer and bible teaching, and our love for the world in all its diversity and fragility.
- ◆ Nurture the gifts of individuals to serve God in the Church and community.
- ◆ Broaden our outreach; to integrate and strengthen further the Church's presence in our communities, particularly for young people and families.
- ◆ Support the new ways our churches are opening up to involve the wider community.

Administrative Support

A Benefice Administrator (4 hours per week) has recently been appointed who is based in the Church office in Axbridge.

We can offer you the support of an enthusiastic ministry team, and the chance to live in an attractive rural part of the country. If these objectives appeal to you, we would love to hear from you.

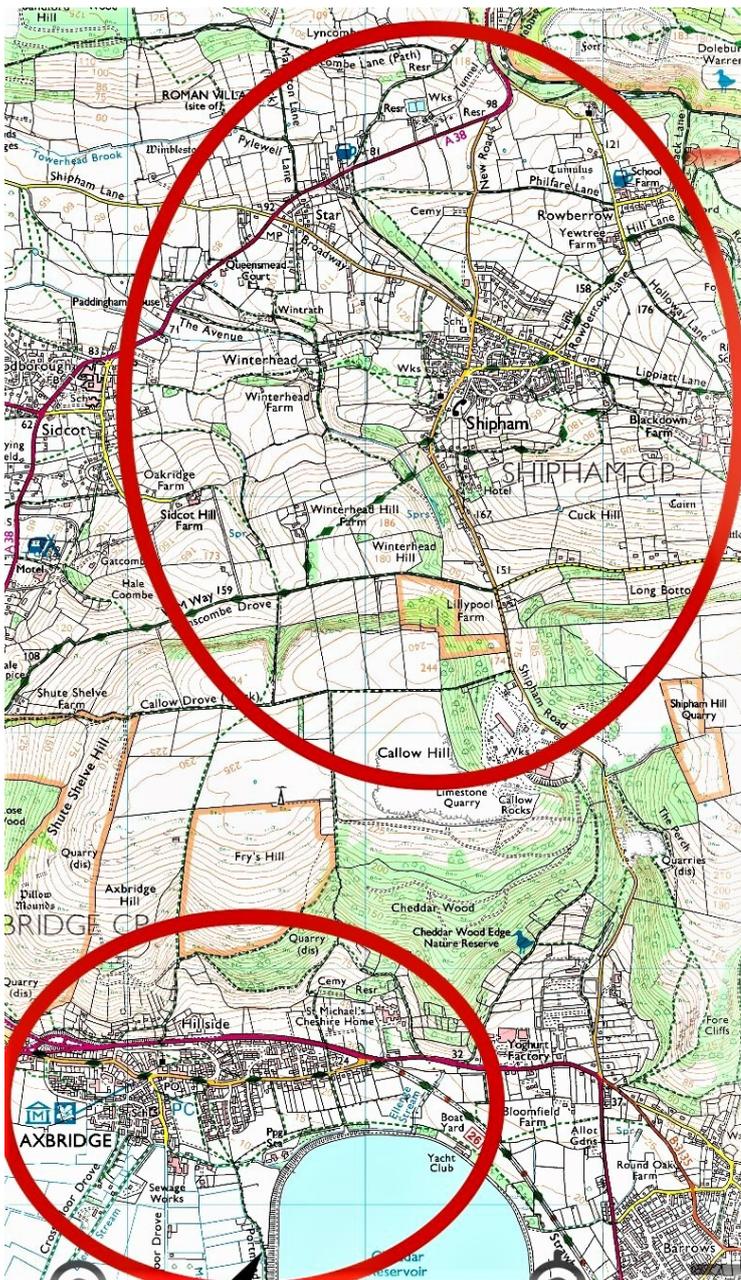
Where we are

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ



Our Benefice lies in Somerset predominantly in the local council area of Sedgemoor. Bristol is 15 miles north, Weston-super-Mare 10 miles east and Wells lies 8 miles west.

The three parishes are dominated by the limestone



Mendip Hills, a stunning landscape of steep slopes and undulating plateau punctuated by spectacular gorges and rocky outcrops. In recognition of its special qualities the area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Axbridge nestles at the southern foot of the hills and Shipham and Rowberrow are on the western slopes some 500 feet above Axbridge. Shipham is 4 miles north of Axbridge and includes the hamlet of Star which straddles the A38, and Rowberrow (part of the civil parish of Shipham) is a further mile away.

Bristol airport is 7.5 miles north of Shipham and the nearest railway station is Yatton. The Falcon bus to Bristol and Plymouth runs along the A38 with stops at Shute Shelve and Star.



Where we are

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ



Top left: Cheddar Reservoir from Fry's Hill above Axbridge

Middle left: Fry's Hill above Axbridge

Bottom Left: Looking across to the hamlet of Star

Top Right: Drone view of Axbridge

Middle Right: Cheddar Yeo and the Mendips

Bottom Right: Drone view of Shipham



Our Benefice

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

The histories of the parishes are distinctly different. Axbridge, with the status of an Elizabethan royal charter and a town, owed its prosperity to agriculture, and its ancient Parish Church is a monument to its wealthy past. Shipham and Rowberrow were centres for mining calamine and lead in the 18th and 19th centuries. The major industry in the area at present is limestone quarrying. Agriculture is now restricted to sheep, cattle and chicken farming.

All three parishes have become centres for commuters to the major towns of Bristol, Bath, Wells, Taunton, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Weston-super-Mare and experienced considerable growth in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. New infill housing for 19 affordable homes is currently under construction in Axbridge and a controversial planning application at the western end of the town was awarded planning approval for up to 53 new homes in February 2020.

There are pockets of deprivation across the Benefice but particularly in Axbridge where there is a higher proportion of lone parent households (22%) and people living in social rented housing (13%).

Axbridge attracts a regular stream of passing tourists, especially cyclists and walkers – the Strawberry Line from Yatton to Cheddar passes through the town and visitors come to see the Medieval square, visit the Church (2,500 to 3,000 visitors a year) and the small museum. A Farmers' Market is held in Axbridge on the first Saturday of each Month where Benefice members run a Fair Trade Stall.

Shipham and Rowberrow also attract many walkers, mountain bikers and cavers to the Mendip Hills. The West Mendip Way runs across the Benefice and part of it is used for the annual Benefice Cross Walk on Good Friday .

All three parishes have strong, supportive and friendly local communities with much going on and plenty of clubs and societies catering for many interests. There are very active Town and

Parish Councils. Axbridge has produced an excellent neighbourhood plan which is currently at the independent examination stage.

(see <http://www.axbridgeneighbourhoodplan.co.uk/>)

The civil parish of Shipham includes Rowberrow and Star.



The three parishes within the Benefice are active in ensuring a Safer Church for all. The PCCs have adopted 'Promoting a Safer Church' as their safeguarding policy, and promote its values and practices. We have made progress in completing the Parish Dashboard to ensure that we are following good practice in all areas of safeguarding, recruitment and training. At present we have established Parish Safeguarding Officers in Axbridge and Shipham and we share relevant experience throughout the Benefice.

Looking further afield, the Diocese has a link with Zambia and the Benefice established a link with the remote parish of Lugwalo in 2008. During this time, we have been able to support them not only through prayer, but also through the purchase of Bibles, bikes, several youth missions, building works and a very successful youth agricultural project. Although communication is difficult between us, we maintain contact at present with Father Moses, the Archdeacon of Lusaka Diocese.



Our Benefice Schools

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Both Shipham (65 pupils) and Axbridge (150 pupils) have strong Church of England First Schools and nurseries (ages from 2 to 9) which emphasise their Christian distinctiveness, ethos and values. They are both part of the Wessex Learning Trust - a group of sixteen established local schools providing education up to the age of 19. Nine of the schools in the Trust are Church of England Schools.

(See <https://wessexlearningtrust.co.uk/>)

There is a wide open door for the Church to be involved in both Axbridge and Shipham schools and the ties with the headteachers and staff are very strong and well respected. There are great opportunities to develop and strengthen these links further with staff, children and parents. Church members and the Benefice Priest-in-Charge have automatic representation on their governing bodies. School's ministry plays an important part of the lives of our churches and takes up significant time of our incumbent.

Axbridge First School has usually held a service in Church once a month for all the children, staff and parents. We have not been able to have this service for some months as a result of the Coronavirus restrictions but the link between the school and the Church has been maintained and Jo Newton, one of our Readers, is visiting the school to run assemblies there.

Similarly, Shipham First School and Pre-School children have regular class visits to the church, regular end-of-term services, Harvest, Carol Services, and the Nativity play. Jo Newton is also taking weekly school assemblies there.

(See <https://www.shiphamfirst.co.uk/>)



Shipham Church of England First School

Christian Values

'They will soar on wings like eagles' Isaiah 40:31

Mission Statement

Creating a safe and happy environment where each child can grow academically, socially, spiritually and emotionally

Our aims

At Shipham Church of England First School we are committed to the following aims:

- to establish a community in which every member is valued and respected
- to welcome all children.
- to promote self-discipline, good manners and a sense of responsibility
- to provide a broad, balanced and well-structured curriculum in accordance with the National Curriculum
- to promote an enjoyment of learning and develop independent learners with enquiring minds
- to promote understanding and respect for the Christian faith and for the spiritual, cultural and moral values of others
- to establish and maintain positive partnerships between home and school, the Church, other local schools and the wider community
- create a positive, happy, safe and stimulating environment

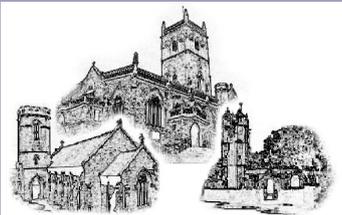
Creating a bright future



Building on our Christian Foundation, we aim to provide a happy, secure and exciting environment, encouraging all children to grow in every way

'I have come that you might have life in all its fullness' John 10:10

(See <https://www.axbridgefirstschool.co.uk/>)



Benefice Communications

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ



Left: Catch This, an attractive community magazine which is edited by members of the Church. It is appreciated by readers and advertisers alike. Below: weekly In Touch for Church attendees and on-line subscribers with the readings and collect printed on the other side.

What's On...

Parish Profile
The first meeting of the Benefice team responsible for writing the Parish Profile was held on Tuesday and will meet again in 3 weeks time. If you would like to discuss the profile or have photographs of Church activities which might be useful, please contact Mike Day.

Funeral of Roger Hughes
The funeral will take place on 1st July at 2.30pm at Shipham Church. Because of Covid restrictions attendance is by invitation only and it will not be possible to provide amplification into the Churchyard. You are encouraged to pay your respects by standing along the route between the Church and the cemetery.

Holy Dusters
We will be meeting in Axbridge Church on Friday morning 2nd July from 8am to give the Church a clean. Do come along if you can. Coffee and cake provided for our helpers!

Messy Church
Our popular Messy Church in Axbridge has not been able to meet since the start of the pandemic but we are hoping to begin again after the summer holidays. We are looking to assemble a team of people to help with Messy Church so do contact Liz Foster if you are interested.

Church services on Zoom
Zoom services will continue monthly from the end of July.

Dear Lord...

Loving God, we come as we are, with our cares and concerns. We long to touch you and find healing in your embrace. Strengthen our faith and heal our brokenness, that we may worship you with joy.

We pray for the Benefice team preparing the Parish Profile, for guidance and vision as they describe our hopes for the future.

We pray for our police as they patrol our streets, for visitors to know what to do when faced with danger.

We pray for our area where Coronavirus cases are increasing, that hospital admissions may start to fall and young people especially will be protected from infection.

We pray for Alex and Julia whose banners are called today in Shipham.

We pray for any we know who are in particular need, especially David, Ken, Jonathan, Sue, Jerkin, Jean, Sloee, Peter, the, Valerie, Stokes, Mary, Grant, Gill, Armstrong.

We remember all who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially Roger Hughes, Graham Nicholson and George Bailey.

We pray for those who live in Orchard Road, The Pinnings, Axbridge and Horseaze Lane, Elm Close, Shipham.

In Touch
In the Benefice of Axbridge, Shipham & Rowberrow
Sunday 27th June 2021
Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Prayer for the vacancy
God our Father
You have called each one of us in Jesus and called us to be His Body in this place. Send us your Holy Spirit, at this time of uncertainty and change, to fill us with vision, energy, and faithfulness in prayer, that we may be true to our calling to bring new life to our community, and guide with your heavenly wisdom those who are to choose a new incumbent for this Benefice, that the one who we receive may be a wise and gentle shepherd of your people, ready to serve us with joy, to build us up in faith, and to lead us by example in loving obedience to your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Services Today

10.00am	AXBRIDGE & ZOOM	Morning Worship
10.00am	SHIPHAM	Parish Communion
4.00pm	ROWBERROW	Holy Communion

The service from Axbridge continues to be linked with Zoom and will be available afterwards on YouTube.

Meeting ID: 848 7054 2482, Passcode: 294593

Taking Place This Week...

Mon 28th 10.00am	Axbridge	Study Group (on Zoom)
Mon 28th 7.30pm	Shipham	Homegroup (on Zoom)

Evening Prayers on Wednesday and Friday at 6.15pm.
Please contact Liz or Malcolm for the Zoom details.

Next Sunday, 4th July, Fifth Sunday after Trinity

8.00am	SHIPHAM	Holy Communion
10.00am	AXBRIDGE & ZOOM	Parish Communion
4.00pm	ROWBERROW	Evening

Above and above right (middle)— Church websites— regularly updated. (<http://www.stjohnthebaptistaxbridge.org.uk/index.asp>)
<https://www.shipham.org.uk/churches/shipham-church/>)

Below right – Church YouTube channel where all our Zoom services are posted
(https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB2c_vh_Tx2YmK4Pg66IUw)



Patterns of Worship across the Benefice

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Services Pre-Covid			
Incumbent, one Assistant Priest & three Readers			
	Axbridge	Shipham	Rowberrow
1st Sunday	10.00am Parish Communion	8.00am Holy Communion	4.00pm Evensong
2nd Sunday	8.00am Holy Communion 6.30pm Informal Communion	10.00am Parish Communion	10.30am Morning Prayer
3rd Sunday	10.00am Parish Communion	10.00am Together in Worship	8.00am Holy Communion
4th Sunday	10.00am Parish Communion	10.00am Parish Communion	4.00pm Evensong
5th Sunday	10.00am United Benefice Communion in rotation		

A well-established pattern of services (pre-Covid) guaranteed a service every Sunday at each of the three churches of the Benefice, as shown in the table above. A strong feature of our worship is both its range and diversity across the three churches.

There are variations to the pattern for the major festivals e.g. a wooden Cross is carried on Good Friday over the Mendips from Shipham to Axbridge. Stops are made along the way for prayers, readings and meditations.

Holy Week services take place on each evening across the Benefice. Ash Wednesday and Ascension are celebrated in one Church for the whole Benefice. The Christingle services in Shipham and Axbridge and the Carols by Candlelight in Rowberrow are very popular. Special services are held on Mothering Sunday and for Harvest.

From the start of the Covid pandemic lockdown, Sunday services continued on Zoom, with one service for everyone in the Benefice, and all participants in their own homes. It was considered



vital to continue live worship together, rather than have pre-recorded services. This was very well received by our congregations, reflected in on-line “attendances” of typically 50 to 60 people.

Zoom services were led from Axbridge, being the only Church with internet access, but still with participation from all three congregations. The success of this was due to Zoom and sounds expertise in Axbridge, and to the “virtual studio” technology which allowed the Shipham organist and a fellow musician from Axbridge to provide live music from their own homes.



Patterns of Worship across the Benefice

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Services Post-Covid (Vacancy)			
One Assistant Priest, three Readers & visiting clergy			
	Axbridge	Shipham	Rowberrow
1st Sunday	10.00am Parish Communion	8.00am Holy Communion	4.00pm Evensong
2nd Sunday	10.00am United Benefice Communion from Axbridge on Zoom		
3rd Sunday	10.00am Parish Communion	10.00am Together in Worship	
4th Sunday	10.00am Morning Worship	10.00am Parish Communion	4.00pm Holy Communion
5th Sunday	10.00am United Benefice Communion in Shipham or Rowberrow		

The Zoom services are recorded, edited and posted, on our YouTube channel. This has proved popular for a number of parishioners and for others living outside the Benefice who are unable to make Sunday morning services.

As a new pattern of services became established for people to worship in their own churches, it was decided to continue with a monthly United Benefice Communion service on Zoom, largely for the benefit of those unable to travel far, or wishing still to self-isolate, but also to retain the sense of belonging together as a Benefice, which was such a strong feature of our corporate worship on-line during the pandemic.

The table above shows the current pattern of services in our Benefice as we move out of lockdown and manage during the vacancy.

There is lay involvement in all our services and we have a strong group of intercessors, readers and people who assist with administering communion.

Prayer plays a key part of our Benefice. We have an e-mail prayer chain administered by one of our Readers which has been particularly beneficial during the various lockdowns.

During lockdown Zoom evening prayers were held on Wednesday and Friday evenings. This has now been reduced to once a week. Prayers for healing are held as part of some of our Communion Services.

Regular homegroups meet in Shipham and Axbridge. Additional homegroups are often held in Advent and Lent during the day and evenings which study common material.

There are strong ties with the local nursing homes, Daneswood Care Home for adults with learning difficulties and St Michael's Cheshire Home. Home communions are also an important ministry of the Church.

We have a very successful Benefice Choir drawing on singers in the three churches and from the local area. This friendly group provided a strong musical support for services at the main festivals and for United Benefice services. We have a substantial library of music covering the Church's year in a wide variety of styles from medieval to contemporary, including music written for the choir. Since 2016 the choir has been run by a musical director and administrator, both temporary posts without remuneration. Examples of recent pieces sung by the choir are at <http://www.stjohnthebaptistaxbridge.org.uk/beneficechoir.asp>



Patterns of Worship across the Benefice

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

In order to give a typical view of membership and attendance, we present figures from the most recent years before the Covid pandemic.

Membership and Attendance <i>Figures for 2019 in Statistics for Mission, submitted at the start of 2020</i>			
	Axbridge	Shipham	Rowberrow
Electoral Roll As at the end of 2019	74	48	17
Church membership As declared for the 2020 Common Fund	53	37	12
Usual Sunday Attendance Average for 2019 (excluding festivals)	30	30	11

Regular attendance at Axbridge has seen a big fall since the last parish profile was prepared in 2004 when the average attendance was 75 whereas both Shipham and Rowberrow show identical figures. A number of former key people in the Church have moved to other parts of the country to be nearer their children and grandchildren and a large number of older, local Axbridge members who have lived in the Town all their lives have passed away. These people have not been replaced and there has also been a steady decline in families and younger people.

Conversely, the switching of the time of Evensong from 6.30pm to 4.00pm at Rowberrow throughout the year has seen an increase in attendance at this service.

For a sufficiently representative picture, the totals for Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals are shown below for three years.

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals (in Church) Totals for the three years 2017 to 2019			
	Axbridge	Shipham	Rowberrow
Baptisms	9	8	0
Weddings	11	3	2
Funerals	27	16	6



Staff and team members

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Assistant Priest – Ken Brown

I was ordained in 1973 in Bristol and served two curacies in that Diocese. I then did 16 years as an RAF Chaplain and a further five as a Prison Chaplain after which I was made Rector of Crook Peak Parish.

I enjoy leading worship especially preaching.

I would hope that this could continue with a new incumbent, although health issues put a question mark over how long I shall be able to carry on.



Readers



Pam Williams

I have been a Reader in the Benefice since 1999 and have enjoyed ministering in all three churches. Our ministry team looks forward to working with the new Priest-in-Charge to grow and deepen the faith of our communities.



Peter Rutter

A Reader for 33 years, now PTO, 13 in the Benefice (20 years elsewhere in the middle). I am a spiritual director. I like the breadth of spirituality in the three churches and look forward to a Priest-in-Charge able to nurture all shades.



Jo Newton

I have been a Reader for five years, and I enjoy the variety of opportunities to serve that this affords. I am hoping for a priest who can help us reach out with God's word to all sectors in our community.

Church Wardens

Axbridge



Malcom Owen



Liz Foster

Shipham



Christine Prince



Pam Williams

Rowberrow



Jane Gunn



Katharine Leach



PCC members & Lay Pastoral Team

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers

Axbridge PCC



Mary
Sacristan

Bob
Treasurer

Mike

Peter
Benefice
Treasurer

Nigel

John

Stephanie

Brian

Shipham PCC



Trish
Sacristan/Verger
Electoral Roll officer

David
Organist &
Clerk of Works

Margaret
Lenny's
Co-ordinator

Aileen
Benefice Admin-
istrator/"Catch
This" Editor

Marion

Shipham Lay Pastoral Team



Pam

Trish

Janet

Rowberrow PCC



Adrian
Tower Captain
Clerk of Works

Joan

Sue

Vernon

Julie
Safeguarding
Officer

Tim

Margaret
Treasurer



Finances

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Church Finance Headlines pre-Covid

Figures for 2019

	Ax- bridge	Shipham	Row- berrow
Parish Share	38,430	19,293	10,922
Total Income	91,853	39,259	15,043
Total Expenditure	93,294	36,180	18,733
Total Funds held (Current and de- posit accounts)	74,082	45,130	68,508

The Financial Year for 2019 has been taken as the most recent year before the effects of the Covid pandemic were felt. All three parishes pay their parish share and all our Church buildings are well maintained and in good condition.

Axbridge Church

2019 cannot be described as a typical year for our Church, due to the unusual costs incurred during that year for the building of a new access ramp. (The income and expenditure figures for 2018 and 2020 were under £70,000.)

We rely upon the support of a small number of faithful personal donors, one of whom covers nearly 10% of the annual running costs of the Church. We are also grateful for grants from national restoration funds and other local groups, including the Friends of Axbridge Church.

The 2020 financial year was typical for charitable giving, being £4,674, which was 7.3% of money received.

The supported charities in 2020 were:

- Movement – Youth Church
- Church Mission Society
- Church Housing Trust
- Children's Society
- Royal British Legion
- Zambia Link through the Diocese

Shipham Church

There is generally sufficient income from regular giving and an annual Gift Day to cover the usual financial commitments of the Church. Income was reduced by the Covid pandemic, and funds held (all unrestricted) have been used to cover the deficit incurred.

The Church is committed to giving 10% of all expected income to mission. Planned payments are made to:

- Mission Aviation Fellowship (international)
- Changing Tunes (national)
- Alabaré (local).

We also support:

- Shipham First School
- The Children's Society
- Tearfund
- Royal British Legion
- The local Women's Refuge
- Zambia Link through the Diocese

Rowberrow Church

The income includes a £6,000 donation towards a new organ, which was installed in May 2021. The bulk of funds is held in Restricted Funds, donations given specifically for the fabric of the Church. Following the Quinquennial Inspection in June 2021, money is needed for roof repairs.

Due to Covid and no fund raising we sent a Gift Aid letter to our supporters to enable us to pay our Parish Share 2020/2021.

In the 2019 financial year our charitable giving was 10% of money received, through which we supported:

- The Children's Society
- Julian Trust Night Shelter
- Royal British Legion
- Zambia Link through the Diocese

The Benefice has a strong commitment to social justice. It supports Christian Aid week and the Cheddar foodbank.



Your Home

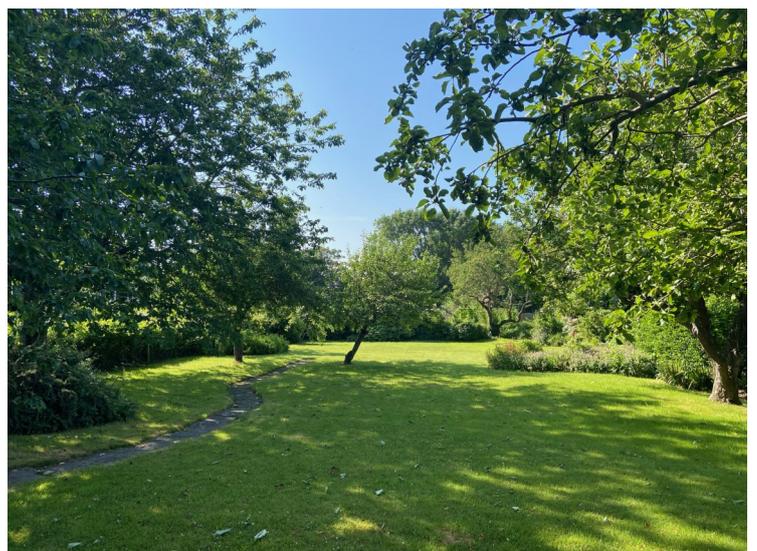
Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ



The Rectory is in Axbridge on the Cheddar Road, about half a mile from Axbridge Church. It is a spacious five-bedroomed detached house built in the 1930's, with some original features. Heating and hot water is via gas-fired central heating. There is a downstairs cloakroom, a large study overlooking the front garden with easy access from the front door, lounge, dining room, kitchen and utility room.

Upstairs there are 3 double bedrooms, 2 single bedrooms, a bathroom and airing cupboard. From the upstairs bedrooms there are lovely views to the Mendip Hills to the north and the Isle of Wedmore Hills to the south. The rear bedroom has a balcony overlooking the rear south-facing garden.

It stands in its own grounds with a single garage, ample parking and mainly lawned gardens, front and rear. There is a south-facing patio with access from the sitting room.





Our Parishes – St John the Baptist Axbridge

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

The Parish of Axbridge

The Town of Axbridge has a population of just over 2,000 residents. It has a doctor's surgery, a post office, small Co-op store, hairdressers, tea rooms, a small cinema, two pubs and some small businesses. There are many whole-town events which generate wide networks of friendship and collaboration. The most impressive of these events is undoubtedly the ten-yearly Axbridge pageant. The town is immensely proud to hold this event illustrating its history over the last 2000 years. It takes place in the Town Square and involves over 400 residents. The Town's website can be found at: <https://axbridge-tc.gov.uk/>

The Church

The Church of St John the Baptist stands in the heart of the small town of Axbridge, above the medieval Square. There has been a Church here since the 13th century. Work on the current building began in the early 15th century.



It is now designated a Grade I listed building. The crossing tower is over 100 feet (30m) high, and holds six bells. It is acknowledged to be one of the finest peals of six bells in the South West. The bells are rung regularly by a passionate local team of bell ringers.

The Church is well maintained and a lot of work has been done recently by one of our Churchwardens to gain funding to keep it in good repair.

In recent years there was a successful fundraising

campaign to create a gently sloping walkway into the Church to make it easier for people with disabilities or parents with children to access the Church.



The group who led this project is now looking at a partial re-ordering of the Church, removing some of the pews to create a Heritage/Community Hub and flexible space for groups to discuss, learn, play or share a meal. We have a Friends of Axbridge Church group who raise money for fabric projects.

We have a two manual plus pedal mechanical action organ, a small grand piano and an electronic piano. Two visiting organists and a pianist play for our 10am Sunday services by rota. During the pandemic the other services have been supported over Zoom by the Shipham organist and a clarinettist. An excellent sound reinforcement system is installed and the Church has broadband with WiFi access, which is used to provide Zoom services live from Church.

Sharing God's love

We have been running Messy Church for the past 13 years and there have been many local families who have attended each month and been a vital part of our Church. Unfortunately, the restrictions of COVID have meant that Messy Church has not met for well over a year and we are now looking at how we can restart this mission.

The adjacent Church Rooms has a small hall (let to local groups) and a new kitchen with the Benefice Office upstairs and an office space which is hired to the Town Clerk of Axbridge Town Council.

We are a Fairtrade Church, support Amnesty International and campaign on social justice issues.



Our Parishes – St John the Baptist Axbridge

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Nurturing the faith of believers

There is an active prayer life in the Church with the Prayer Chain, thursday evening prayer meeting and two Christian Meditation groups which are part of the World Community for Christian Meditation. The groups have around 12 regular participants and warmly welcome all who come, from all faiths and none. Members regularly participate in events and retreats: local, regional, national, international and online and have direct active links with WCCM in the UK & WCCM International.

We have a study group based in Axbridge but available to all by Zoom which has recently been working through the “Living in Love and Faith” course. House groups are held in Advent and Lent.

Proclaiming the Good News

Axbridge Church is seen as a significant part of the community and still attracts large congregations to the special services such as Easter, Remembrance, Mothering Sunday, Harvest and Christmas. There is a very popular carol service accompanied by the Bristol Brass and the Christingle is a high point of Axbridge life when the Church is full to bursting with families.



There is a strong connection with Axbridge First School, a Church of England School, (see page 9). The church and its friends organise various events throughout the year including the church fete, open gardens, auction of promises and beetle drives.



For many years there was a large regular congregation but numbers have declined in recent years with people moving away from the area and the deaths of some of our much loved Church family.

There is still a smaller but regular and committed congregation who attend each week. Most of our congregation are in the over 60's age group. As a result, there is no longer a Sunday School but we do have a table for children at the back of Church on Sundays. and we are now looking at how we can restart this mission.

We are working on the challenge of achieving Eco Church status. We already qualify for the bronze award and are well on the way to achieving a silver award. We have also started taking part in the “Wilder Churches” initiative, a partnership between our Diocese and Somerset Wildlife Trust to get to know the wildlife in our churchyard (which is closed) and work together to find ways to increase the value of this special place for wildlife.



We also run a popular tetra pak recycling project. We are working with a local group called Axbridge Climate Emergency to raise awareness locally and help us to reduce our carbon footprint.



Our Parishes – St Leonard's Shipham

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Shipham Village



Shipham with Star has a population of about 1100. The heart of the village is the Square and Green containing the War Memorial, Hansford's Shop and Butchers, St Leonard's Church, the Penscot Inn, and Studley's Garage. There are other businesses in the parish including several working from home. The village website is www.shipham.org.uk



The Village Hall is host to a wide range of clubs and societies offering activities and interest for all age groups. It has recently achieved a top award for its excellent facilities and management quality, and is a great asset to the village www.shiphamhall.co.uk.

Other events bring the community together, such as a May Fayre on the Green, a Village Progressive Supper, and productions by the Shipham Players.



The Church



There has been a Church in Shipham since the mid-13th century. The current church building dates from 1843, is a fine Victorian church and is Grade II listed. It has a peal of six bells and a dedicated team of ringers.

A well-maintained two-manual plus pedal pipe organ is located in the west gallery. We have a blend of traditional hymns and modern songs in our worship, using the organ or piano and other instruments as appropriate.

St Leonard's has a friendly, welcoming, loving and committed congregation who play an active role in the life of the church and village. Children are always welcome, and the church is open during the week for private prayer. Photographs are taken of church activities and displayed in church.

Sharing God's love

We have an opportunity to share God's unconditional love through "Lenny's Coffee Shop", a church outreach, serving light lunches, coffee and cakes, run by church and community volunteers. During lockdown the focus changed to taking cooked lunches to the housebound. Lenny's currently operates as a Pop-up Cafe in Church, with the intention of having a better seating area, and improving our kitchen facilities. We hope this will encourage people to come into the church building and we would welcome other uses of the church during the week.



Our Parishes – St Leonard's Shipham

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Nurturing the faith of believers

We nurture the faith of believers through:

- Weekly home group for bible study, prayer and fellowship
- Prayer days in church with people praying in half-hour slots
- "Coffee Pot", a ladies' morning group for coffee, chat and a reflection
- An ecumenical Men's Breakfast group meeting occasionally
- Annual "Big Breakfast" for men across the Benefice and local churches
- Patronal Festival breakfast

Proclaiming the Good News



We share the Good News particularly in our special services. The Harvest Thanksgiving is well attended, when the church is beautifully decorated by the flower team and Shipham School pupils. It is followed by a Harvest Supper in the Village Hall with a wide cross-section of the community participating. Other popular services are at Easter and Christmas. On Remembrance Sunday the service with uniformed groups is followed by more people joining at the War Memorial for the Act of Remembrance. We have links with Daneswood, a residential home in the village for young adults with learning difficulties. A small team takes services there at festival times.

We have strong links with Shipham First School and Pre-School, (see page 9)

Other links with the community

- Fortnightly Save the Children lunches were started by church members almost forty years ago and have continued ever since. They are now run by the "Friday Lunch Bunch", raising over £50k for Save the Children. An annual highlight is the Good Friday lunch after the Cross Walk.
- Churchill Singers rehearse weekly in church
- Concerts hosted by us or by other groups
- St Leonard's Quiz held in the Village Hall is an annual fundraiser which involves teams from right across the village
- Joining in with the village Open Gardens weekend and the local History Society exhibition by decorating the church and churchyard



Why we are committed to Shipham church and community

- The local church is an important Christian witness in the village
- Friendship, fellowship and support for one another
- Willingness to worship using a wide range of Christian hymns and songs
- Desire to grow in our faith and to grow our church





Our Parishes – St Michael and All Angels Rowberrow

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

The Parish of Rowberrow.

Rowberrow has 36 houses and a population of approximately 64 adults and 15 children; these include a small number who were born and bred in the village. There is good communication within the village via a closed e-mail address list.



Walking, cycling and horse riding in Rowberrow and its adjacent forest have always been popular with local people. The area was “discovered” during lockdown by walkers and mountain bikers from far and wide. The number of visitors increased exponentially, creating some issues with car parking. The Swan Inn is used by locals, but often swamped by visitors.



St Michael and All Angels, Rowberrow.



It is probable that Rowberrow has been a site of Christian worship since Saxon times, but the oldest part of the present church building is the 15th Century tower and the majority dates from a Victorian refurbishment completed in 1865. It currently has a small, faithful, mainly elderly congregation at regular services, drawn largely from surrounding villages.

Rowberrow Church is a special place within our Benefice. It has a wonderful setting and whilst only a short distance away from the busy A38 its services have a unique sense of awe, peace and calm. The Easter Eve vigil service is for many the highlight of the Christian year.

Sharing God's love

We aim to make contact and share God's love with the villagers through special events, some of which also act as fund raisers. We also do so through one-to-one contacts, genuine concern and neighbourliness.

Previous owners of the adjacent Manor have been wonderful supporters of the Church, allowing their grounds to be used for parking, and hosting events in their house and garden. The Manor is about to change hands; we hope the good relations will be continued with the new owners.



Our Parishes – St Michael and All Angels Rowberrow

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Some past Rowberrow Events

- Village Fete
- Harvest Supper
- Open Tower (with hog roast provided by the village pub)
- Cheese and wine evenings
- A variety of concerts
- Potential for recitals on the new organ as a result of a generous bequest

Nurturing the faith of believers

During lockdown several elderly and house-bound members have embraced technology and appreciated the opportunity to join worship and prayer meetings online. Others eagerly awaited the return of live services and went to great lengths to attend as soon as this was possible. We have often reached our “Covid Capacity” of 24.

Proclaiming the Good News

In normal times, a wider group attend the “special services” traditionally hosted by Rowberrow within the Benefice – Palm Sunday with walk to Shipham, Easter Eve Vigil, Harvest Festival, Remembrance and Christmas Eve Carol Service (You Tube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mBTaa900ig).

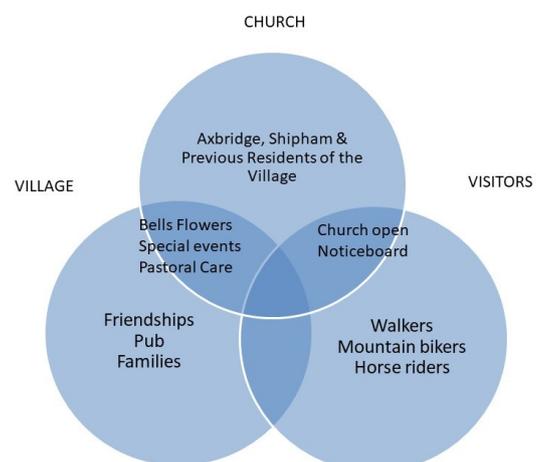
Entries in the Visitors’ Book demonstrate that, when it has been possible to open the Church at weekends, passers-by have appreciated this. We trust that God has been able to speak to some of them through the peace in the Church and the beauties of creation on the doorstep.



Some reasons for “belonging” to St Michael and All Angels Rowberrow

- previous residence in the village
- appreciation of the Book of Common Prayer service
- the genuine friendliness and care of the congregation for each other and for visitors
- bell ringing
- the peace and rural setting of the church.

Relationship between Village, Church and Visitors





Bath and Wells Diocese

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ



Living the story. Telling the story.

The Diocese of Bath and Wells is one of 41 Church of England dioceses in the country. The diocese stretches from Portishead in the north to Crewkerne in the south, Minehead in the west to Frome in the east.

Our vision, and the diocesan strategy that is emerging from it, speaks of the story of Jesus; his life, teaching and work, his death and resurrection; the story which is the context of our faith and the content of our message.

We seek **to live** this story as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world and **to tell** it, both in sharing the good news and by the way in which our lives speak about Him.

The diocesan strategy is built around three priorities:

- ◆ To place mission and evangelism at the heart of all we do.
- ◆ To re-align our resources towards mission.
- ◆ To identify, develop and release the gifts of all our people.

This has been developed in a number of areas:

Deaneries. Each deanery now has a Deanery Mission Plan (DMP) to identify and address priorities for mission in the local area. This has encouraged a lot of collaboration across deaneries in mission and discipleship development. DMPs will continue to be important in the coming years as decisions about resource allocation will be made in the light of what the plans say.

Pioneering and fresh expressions. Our Pioneer Project (part-funded by the national church) seeks to encourage pioneering across the Diocese to reach those communities where we currently have little impact. Deaneries and parishes are being resourced to develop pioneering within their areas and to encourage the vocation of those who are called to work with people outside the inherited church.

Lay ministry and vocation. Our priority is to develop the ministry of all God's people, lay and ordained working in partnership. We increasingly emphasise lay leadership and ministry in our diocesan programme, and we are developing new pathways for lay vocations in order to allow this to develop.



Area Dean and Chapter

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Axbridge Deanery

Axbridge Deanery encompasses an area stretching from the Somerset coast around Burnham on Sea to the top of the Mendips near Wells. We are mainly made up of rural villages with Burnham and Highbridge towns as the one significant town. However, our main tourist areas around Brean and Berrow can attract as many as 60,000 people in peak tourist season. Axbridge Deanery is also home to the famous Cheddar caves, another area of significant tourism. The area around Highbridge and Burnham and the villages of Cheddar and Wedmore has seen significant housing development and population growth.

Across the deanery there is great respect for each other in all of our different contexts – chapter meetings are very supportive as we share our joys and our concerns over lunch and help each other through the often complex demands of parish life. Deanery Synod gathers around four times a year where we encourage active participation through discussion in groups and in plenary to ensure that each meeting is a good learning environment. At recent synods we have heard about the needs of the local hospitality industry, committed the deanery to action on climate change and reflected together on our experiences through the Covid pandemic and lockdowns.

Deanery Mission Plan

The current Deanery Mission Plan includes space for creativity responding to current context. The plan celebrates the way, that as a deanery, we are good at working across boundaries and encourages ways in which we can support each other by sharing in training opportunities and the creation of local teams with neighbouring parishes and in local ecumenical settings. Hopefully our strap line 'Resourcing Effective Ministry for Effective Mission', gives a good indication of what we are about.

As part of the plan, whenever a vacancy arises, it is our intention that any new incumbent also takes on the role of 'Champion' for a particular focus. There will be an opportunity for the new incumbent in Axbridge, Shipham and Rowberrow to take the lead on a particular need across the deanery and to create opportunities for learning for colleagues and parishes. This will be discussed further at the interview stage. As a new venture there is plenty of room here for innovative thinking.

With the neighbouring benefice to this also in vacancy and the diocese engaging in the process of evaluating how ministry is envisaged and used, the deanery has recommended that the living is suspended for a time. This will give the opportunity to reflect on the ministry needs in the local area and will mean that the new priest in charge of Axbridge, Shipham and Rowberrow can play a full part in this process, in case any pastoral reorganisation' is envisaged

Our deanery has its own website where you can see what's going on and view the Deanery Mission Plan. (<https://axbridgedeanery.com/>.) If you would like to know more about the deanery and the champion role, then please don't hesitate to contact me at wedmorevic@gmail.com or 01934 713566.

Reverend Richard Neill, Area Dean, Axbridge Deanery



2021 Benefice Survey

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

A survey questionnaire entitled “Your Community, Your Church , Your Say” was delivered to every home in the three parishes in May 2021 with the option to complete it on-line. There were 8 questions and the response rate varied from 7.5% in Axbridge to 29% in Rowberrow. The majority of respondents were female and over the age of 65 and were Church attendees. The results revealed some common themes:

- ◆ The local Church is most valued as a place to worship God and to celebrate life’s events.
- ◆ Those who are not regular Church-goers attend special services and appreciate the church as a place for private prayer and quiet.
- ◆ Where Axbridge and Shipham are already open during the week, there is a wish to see the increased use of the buildings for community activities, such as the heritage display in Axbridge Church, and the recent success of Lenny’s Coffee Shop moving into Shipham Church.
- ◆ The need for outreach to young families and children, to encourage and make provision for them to attend church, in whatever form might be attractive to them. Existing links with the schools could be a vehicle for this,
- ◆ There is a need for extending outreach to the wider community, with something for adults on teaching/discussion of Christianity.
- ◆ The need for flexibility in style of worship and music is recognised, providing for both new and existing members of the churches.

Here are a few quotes from the survey:

“I belong to an incredibly supportive church community.”

“Youth, youth, youth! The next generation of Christians need to know that there is something here for them, and not think that church is for the older generation.”

“The more the Church building can be used the better.”

“We used to come more often, but family/sport activities increasingly took us elsewhere on Sunday mornings.”

“I think the core Church community needs to look outside itself, and make services more accessible and more inclusive.”

“I think that we need a stronger sense of what “being church” means as opposed to what is associated with the building on the hill.”

“Worship needs to be more open and relevant for families and young people.”

The results of the surveys were shared on line and within the context of a service in Axbridge. What was very apparent from the survey is that there is much goodwill towards the churches in our three parishes, which gives a good foundation on which to build our future relationship with the community.

An exercise was carried out in our United Benefice Service in July 2021 to get people to share their favourite hymn or piece of scripture. People spoke a lot about going out, but it was very striking how in the thinking about values the sense of going in (in prayer) was also very strong.



SWOT Analysis

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis (both internal and external) was carried out by the Benefice profile writing team in June 2021 to help us write the parish profile and shape our vision for the future.

Strengths

- Worshipping together
- Buildings in good repair
- Benefice works well together
- Diversity of worship
- Solid groups of regular worshippers (a faithful core)
- Strong links with local schools
- Strong commitment to prayer
- Forward looking
- Care and look after each other

Weaknesses

- Uneven spread of ages within the congregations
- Church competes for people's time
- Children's work – someone to lead it
- People don't have the energy/feel too tired to reach out to the community
- Challenge of communicating the relevance of the Christian faith to everyday life in the local community

Opportunities

- Our strong links with local schools
- Eco church to engage with young people
- Lenny's café moving into Shipham Church
- Use Church buildings for wider community participation
- Contactless giving
- Communities' goodwill towards their local church
- Zoom services have helped an elderly congregation

Threats

- Dwindling numbers
- Fatigue and COVID
- Tarnished image of the Church of England
- Watering down of the Christian Gospel
- Some people perceive the Church of England to be out of touch with the modern world and also unwelcoming
- Secular society
- Technology can alienate some people
- Apathy
- Possible lack of leadership during the vacancy



What we learned during the pandemic

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers

The Benefice profile writing team also carried out a “free thinking” session to consider what we learned during the pandemic to help us shape our vision for the future. This page summarises our thoughts.

Practical effects

Positive

- Increased community spirit through people helping each other out
- Living locally, getting to know more people in our communities especially our neighbours
- More support for local businesses
- Appreciation of our beautiful locality and our gardens
- Undertaking jobs we have never got round to doing
- Less physical/financial hardship in our largely privileged communities than in others.

Negative

- Delayed medical treatments
- Sadness at not seeing loved ones (especially those in care homes, and those at the end of their lives)
- Difficulties of obtaining supplies and transport
- Bereavements directly as a result of COVID
- Some people really struggled financially- Cheddar food bank was well used

Our church and our faith

Positive

- Zoom services brought people together in a different way
- Many people in our congregations embraced new technology through the help of other members
- Some new and previous members attended our Zoom services
- Much more contact between the three parishes
- Positive impact on people’s faith-”My God is sufficient for me” and “Love thy neighbour”

Negative

- A few people have been lost from our congregations and are not returning to church now that the restrictions on collective worship have been removed
- No church services had an impact on those not willing or able to embrace new technology
- Our church finances suffered through lack of regular service income and fund raising (though much is planned giving and successful gift days were held)



Looking Forward

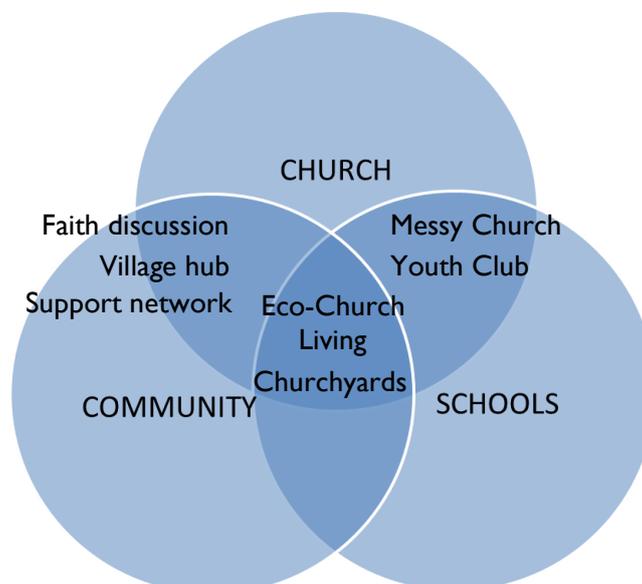
Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

We seek to see God's family growing in our parishes, both in terms of spiritual growth of the existing congregations and in number through outreach. We aim to further our mission plan to spread God's love and truth in our communities.

To this end we are praying for our new Priest-in-Charge to help us with our vision for:

- ◆ Developing the present ministry in our different churches through strong leadership and a love of the Bible, to encourage and deepen our prayer life and to strengthen the faith and fellowship in our congregations, to enable us for outreach in the power of God.
- ◆ Building on the existing links with local schools, increasing outreach to children, young people and families, with the news of God's love for them.
- ◆ Further developing and widening the links with other members of our communities and mission partners, whether through personal contacts, special events, co-operation with community organisations, or other new initiatives, to share the relevance of the Christian faith in everyday life.
- ◆ Expanding on the initiative for Eco Church status and providing a haven for wildlife in our churchyards.

Looking Forward and Reaching Out – some ideas from the Benefice Survey



Most of all we are praying for our new Priest-in-Charge to have “a passion for God and for God's people”.



Contact and Links

Share the unconditional love of God, nurture the faith of believers and
and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

Contacts

For any queries regarding the vacancy:

Anne Gell Archdeacon of Wells (PA Sue Anderson)

T: 01749 685147

E: adwells@bathwells.anglican.org

Useful Links

Diocese:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/>

Deanery:

<https://axbridgedeanery.com/>

Town/Village Websites:

<https://axbridge-tc.gov.uk/>

<http://www.shipham.org.uk>

Church Websites:

<http://www.stjohnthebaptistaxbridge.org.uk/>

<http://www.shipham.org.uk/churches/shipham-church>

<http://www.shipham.org.uk/churches/rowberrow-church>

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB2c_vh_Tx2YMkm4Pg66IUw

Local Schools:

<https://wessexlearningtrust.co.uk/>

<https://www.axbridgefirstschool.co.uk/>

<https://www.shiphamfirst.co.uk/>

<https://www.fairlandsmiddleschool.co.uk/>

<https://www.kowessex.co.uk/>

<https://www.sidcot.org.uk/>

Local Authorities:

<https://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/>

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/>