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Ray Valley Benefice

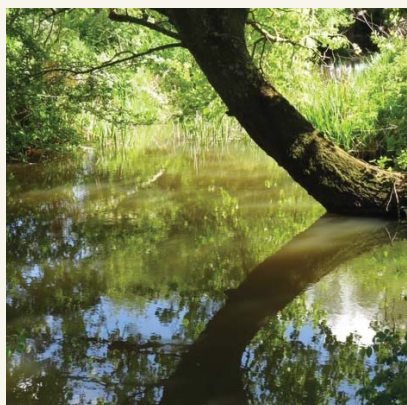
DIOCESE OF OXFORD, DEANERY OF BICESTER AND ISLIP

The Ray Valley Benefice

8 parishes near the glorious Otmoor Nature Reserve and
Oxford with all it has to offer

Links with all three residential colleges in Oxford (Ripon College,
Cuddesdon; St Stephen's House; Wycliffe Hall)

Active links with Westminster Abbey

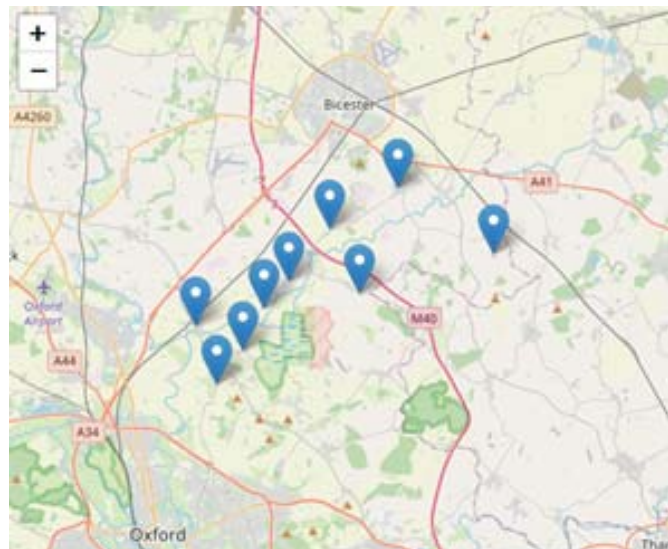


Contemplative, Compassionate, Courageous

PRESENTING PATRONS: EDWARD PAGE-TURNER;
EXETER COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD; PCC OF PIDDINGTON

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Letter from The Rt Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester

Dear potential applicants,

I am delighted that you are reading this profile and encourage you to pray about whether this position might be the role to which God is now calling you.

The Ray Valley Benefice is a truly beautiful part of the world. It has a fascinating history and much to offer in terms of activities, as well as transport links to urban centres. It is a place where people are down to earth and truly care about each other and their communities. I think you will sense this as you read the profile.

The congregations are clear in their desire to live out our diocesan vision as they seek to continue to grow in being contemplative, compassionate and courageous for the sake of God's world. You will read here some of what has been happening to date, as well as their plans for the future. They recognise the challenges they face and are praying for a Rector to work with them across the benefice in meeting these.



The people of the benefice would love to welcome a new Rector who is approachable and warm and who has a spiritual depth at their heart: someone who will listen well but also be a source of wisdom and encouragement. A willingness to be out and about and involved in the community life of our villages would also be important in order to show that Christians and priests are human too. If you're amenable to frequent the local pubs from time to time that would be a bonus!

The benefice recognises that our churches do not in all ways share the diversity of the communities we serve and would particularly welcome those who would increase diversity.

You will find a friendly deanery with supportive and experienced colleagues. Our episcopal area and diocese are in good heart, expectant for all that God will do and thankful for all that God is doing.

Please pray about whether you might be the right minister to join us. If you decide to apply, I would be delighted to receive your application for this key position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague and partner in the Gospel.

With every blessing

+Gavin Dorchester

The Rt Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester

Background

From 2016–2023 the RVB was served by a Rector, two House for Duty priests, and an LLM. Now, due to a combination of retirements and a member of the team changing status/ focus within the benefice, we are looking for an incumbent (Rector) who will relish the possibility of recruiting a new team. The eight parishes, described here, are encouraged by the response of congregations and PCC to begin a new chapter in our life.

The difference between RVB and other rural parishes is that, although we are near Oxford, and all that it offers, we have the Bicester Garrison (Royal Logistic Corps, Royal Engineer and Royal Signals personnel in the majority), Bullingdon Prison, one village with rapidly developing new housing, and all adjoining SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and BBOWT (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) reserves!

The geographical area of the Benefice is 100 sq km and a car or bike is necessary, but transport links from the area to Oxford, Bicester, London, Heathrow are all good.

Covid drew us together through the use of Zoom service provision, but congregations tend to stay local. The RVB was formed over 20 years ago and the enthusiasm to act as a benefice has waxed and waned in that time – geographical reasons as well as populations naturally favouring adjoining towns for school, business or social purposes. Coming together for services has enhanced our worship, especially for the smaller congregations, and building on this would be seen positively. We would like to attract someone who can listen to those who shout the softest, encourage diversity in service provision without losing those who relish traditional forms of worship.

During the vacancy we are being supported by two retired clergy (Islip) and the PTO in Ambrosden, plus the active support of several other ordained and lay ministers who live within the benefice or deanery (either retired or PTO), including a member of the Oxford Hospitals chaplaincy team who has additionally taken on the role of governor at Dr South's School (Islip). Our Benefice Administrator continues to work 8 hours per week from her home base in Murcott.

Why should you choose the Ray Valley Benefice?

The Diocese of Oxford's 'Contemplative, Compassionate, Courageous' slogan is one to which we subscribe – our challenge is making this a visible reality within our congregations. We seek to do this in ways that are individual to each parish, suiting the diversity within them and being brave about trying new ways to attract the majority who seldom engage with our churches. Various initiatives are, or have been tried – for instance, the local Fijian Methodist community use St Mary the Virgin at Ambrosden; café-style worship at St Nicholas, Islip; the development of pilgrimage routes around the area, particularly in Oddington. In common with many rural parishes, we try to build connections with young, busy people and children via the three local schools and community events, which double as fund-raising and fun-raising. If you want to find a place where you can use your imagination, ministry and pastoral abilities to good effect, look no further.

About the Benefice

The Ray Valley Benefice comprises eight parishes of twelve villages or hamlets, and lies to the north-east of Oxford and south of Bicester. It represents a microcosm of English tradition and modern change. The expansion of the Bicester area as a major centre of population is bringing new housing and families to the northern villages of Ambrosden (the Graven Hill self-build estate has featured several times in *Grand Designs*) and Arncott; closer to Oxford, Islip, Charlton-on-Otmoor and other villages are popular with families who teach or are educated in the city known for its university, car manufacturing and top-class hospitals.

The proximity of the M40 (to London and Birmingham), A34 and rail/bus links make the area attractive to commuters. Railway stations at Oxford Parkway, Islip and Bicester mean a journey to London is an hour or less. Across the benefice the countryside is a patchwork of busy farms, clustered within and around the popular RSPB reserve on the historic moorland of Otmoor with its 'Big Sky feel'. The Army garrisons around Arncott and Ambrosden add an important layer of social diversity as does Bullingdon Prison, less obviously, at Arncott.



Charlton-on-Otmoor's Palm Sunday celebration

The Ray Valley church buildings, with their origins in the 12th and 13th centuries, have all benefitted from restorative work, many with improved facilities, ensuring they continue as robust hubs of Christian worship and life. A look around the churchyards and memorials reveals local family histories dating hundreds of years. Islip, the birthplace of Edward the Confessor, was granted to Westminster Abbey in his will and to this day maintains close relations with the Abbey, while a stroll through the villages shows change and development is bringing newcomers into the community. A range of traditional events take place around the villages bringing church and community together, and two villages have Church of England schools providing opportunities for Christian formation and outreach.

It is this exciting mix of old and new, tradition and change, quiet rural and full workaday lifestyles that presents challenge and opportunity.

About the Deanery

The Deanery of Bicester and Islip is a happy place, with good relations between clergy and lay people, who have a strong role in the leadership of the deanery. Bicester town is at the centre, and is surrounded by four largely rural benefices. There are five rectors and a number of other clergy and lay ministers. We meet together regularly as chapter and synod to pray and discuss the life of our parishes, and endeavour to address the issues that are of importance in the Church and in the world. We have 38 churches, most of them ancient, and buildings and finance are often on the agenda, but we also try to keep our focus on outward-looking matters. We are pleased to be part of the Dorchester Episcopal Area, and we get good support from our bishop, archdeacon, and the team at Church House.

St Nicholas, Islip

Visitors to St Nicholas church (Grade I listed) often comment on its peace and beauty, and its sense of being well cared for. Edward the Confessor was born in Islip around 1005 and it is likely that a church was already present on this site, though the oldest part of the church dates from the 12th century. It is in good repair (servery kitchen and WC facilities were installed in 2005 behind a stunning glass screen designed by Nicholas Mynheer depicting stories from the lives of St Nicholas and St Edward), and the church is normally kept open during the day and floodlit at night.

A splendid set of bells is rung for services by an enthusiastic band including 3 teenage boys and services are enhanced by a regular choir with a broad range of music. No Mow May is kept to increase wild flowers in the well-maintained churchyard.

The church is used by a variety of groups through the week with local support for the Bicester FoodBank, and currently houses a small library of Ukrainian books. Christian Aid Week is supported as well as 5% of unrestricted income donated to outreach activities. Since Covid, an online Morning Prayer has attracted regular participants. Sunday church attendance is good, with monthly Sung Evensong, led by a strong choir, being popular with a wider congregation.

School services in the church for Harvest, St Nicholas' Day, Christmas, Easter and at the end of the school year are well supported by parents. The bi-annual Big Bike Ride is a major fund-raiser. Other activities in the village include a community choir, thriving village hall and shop run by volunteers, film nights and a cricket club.



St Nicholas website	https://stnicholasislip.wordpress.com/
A church near you	https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/294/
Church Facebook site	https://www.facebook.com/st.nicholas.islip (188 followers)
Church YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/@stnicholaschurch8276
Village email group	info4islip@gmail.com (500 members)
3 Parishes Magazine	11 issues per year with Noke and Woodeaton (330 print run)
The Church Explorer	https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/06/st-nicholas-islip.html
Parish kneelers	https://parishkneelers.co.uk/churches/oxfordshire/islip-st-nicholas

Holy Rood, Woodeaton

Our Grade I listed church, dating from the 13th century, with a complete restoration of its roof in 2010 (£160,000) is a little gem with many unusual features, including significant medieval wall paintings, surrounded by a lovely churchyard. We have an active flower rota, and the congregation also helps with cleaning the church and keeping the churchyard tidy.

The church is at the centre of the community. The annual Rogation Walk and the Christmas Carol Service attract the biggest congregations, drawing people beyond the regular congregation. The Easter service is held at Noke, while the Christmas Day service is at Woodeaton: exchanges which bind our two parishes and benefit both. Our Harvest Festivals feature interesting talks from local farmers. We have recently enjoyed the monthly celebration of Morning Prayer. Our bells are rung by visiting ringers and are a favourite feature of weddings, baptisms and other village celebrations. Items for the Bicester Food Bank are regularly collected at the family services.

Our financial position is solid, and we consistently pay our full parish share. Our income depends on collections (many paid now by standing order), occasional generous donations and fund-raising. We aim to hold fund-raising events every other year, notably the introduction of the popular Woodeaton Talks event.

Woodeaton is the smallest village in the benefice, and the closest to Oxford. Mentioned in the Domesday Book, it was much smaller in 1350 when it was reported that 33 of the 35 resident tenants succumbed to the Black Death. We have two main historical claims to fame. Richard Taverner, the translator of the Bible, lived in Woodeaton and was buried in the churchyard in 1575. James Sadler completed the first English hot air balloon flight, travelling 6 miles from Christ Church Meadow and landing in a field in Woodeaton in 1784.



A church near you

<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/6062/>

3 Parishes Magazine

11 issues/ year with Noke and Islip (330 print run)

Village What's App

The Church Explorer

<https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-holy-rood.html>

St Giles, Noke

The charming 13th century church is the central focal point of the village and is in good repair. It is used by local groups as a public meeting place. In the lower village there is a playing field, also used for community events (in fair weather). A special feature of Noke is that it is free of through-traffic – many villagers work from home and walk around, reflecting a strong community and blurred boundaries between churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike. There is a high level of goodwill towards the church, indicated by enthusiastic fundraising – plant sale, barn dance, barbeques, quiz & curry night, Three Parishes (includes Islip and Woodeaton) Christmas Fair.

The Friends of St Giles' was set up to assist with fundraising for repairs to the fabric and furnishings and to advance the Christian religion ('as per stated charitable goal'), bringing together all those who value the historical role of the church.

The Oxfordshire Way and the Oddington-Noke pilgrimage route pass through Noke, bringing in a number of visitors to the church. St Giles' is open 365 days of the year in daylight hours, and we feel there are opportunities for exploiting this fact as well as the exceptionally peaceful and attractive setting of the church.



Pet blessing service at Noke

A church near you <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5956/>
3 Parishes Magazine 11 issues per year with Islip and Woodeaton (330 print run)
Village email group
The Church Explorer <https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/05/st-giles-noke.html>

St Andrew's, Oddington

Our Grade II* listed church has a 13th century tower, 14th century chancel, 1810 porch and a nave. A major restoration of the church, particularly the interior, was undertaken in 2013. Makareti (Maggie) Papakura, a Māori Princess, lived in the village in the 1920s and is buried in the churchyard – she is greatly revered and we have many Māori visitors to her grave, who also join us in our worship.

The church is ornate, which comes as a surprise to visitors, given its tranquil setting overlooking Otmoor. It is locked during the week and open at the weekends, but the key is readily available on request. As the only public building in the village it is used for meetings and for social functions related to church activities. It has the most splendid setting with a view from the churchyard over Otmoor.



A church near you
Website

<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/261/>
www.churchofstandrewoddington.org

Otmoor Review

6 issues per year with Charlton, Murcott and Fencott (130 approx subs)

The Church Explorer

<https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/06/st-andrews-oddington.html>

St Mary the Virgin, Charlton-on-Otmoor

Situated in the middle of the village (one of the “Seven Towns of Otmoor”) and with a tower visible for miles around, the church attracts walkers who call in at the church for quiet reflection. It is a beautiful place for prayer, peace and coolness on a hot day and is open during the day.

The 2023 quinquennial revealed few matters of immediate concern. A kitchenette and WC were installed recently.

A thriving church primary school, with up to 100 children (aged 3–11), has good links to the church and holds services there a few times each year. Notably there is a May Day event when children parade to the church carrying decorated crosses and then dance for the entertainment of the village. A May garland of flowers is placed on the church’s rood screen. The ceremony has a long ancestry. Popular Advent/Christmas village light windows are a great draw locally.

A hall adjoins the school which is also available for community events. There is also a Football Club attracting people from the surrounding area, with a clubhouse and playing field. The Women’s Institute and Garden Society are other thriving local clubs.

Unusually, the village has families who can trace their local ancestry back centuries. Being comparatively isolated it was self-sufficient a couple of generations ago. Now it has to be dependent on deliveries or travelling to nearby centres but there is an hourly bus service stopping a half mile away which links Oxford Hospitals in Headington with Bicester. The doctors’ surgery is in Islip (3 miles away).

There is some sharing of church activities with Oddington with the Charlton resident organist playing in both churches. The church council has begun the process of closing the unused 1895 Murcott Mission Room.

There are strong links with the village community by involving all in Advent/Christmas village light windows.



A church near you	https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/283/
Community Facebook site	https://www.facebook.com/groups/329839935022765 (684 members)
Otmoor Review	6 issues per year with Oddington, Murcott and Fencott (130 approx subscribers)
Church Facebook site	https://www.facebook.com/CharltonOnOtmoorParishChurch
Church Facebook site	https://www.facebook.com/pages/St-Marys-Church-Charlton-On-Otmoor/828012163917198
The Church Explorer	https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/07/st-mary-virgin-charlton-on-otmoor.html

St Swithun, Merton

A Grade I listed church dating from the 13th and 14th centuries, in good repair with toilet and kitchen and a warm space for use by smaller groups.

Still renowned for stunning flower arrangements all year round. The Harvest Festival with supper is a major all-community event. Songs of Praise and Rogation Sunday are held on a local farm.

The village hall is a centre of many activities, hosting film nights, summer and Christmas fairs, which brings the community together, but some investment of effort is needed to build stronger bridges with the village community.



[A church near you](https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5943/) <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5943/>

[The Church Explorer](https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/07/st-swithun-merton.html) <https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/07/st-swithun-merton.html>

St Mary the Virgin, Ambrosden

As the parish church for the three villages of Ambrosden, Arncott and Blackthorn (each with their own characteristics, challenges and opportunities), we are fortunate (with the aid of a charitable trust solely for maintaining the church's fabric) to have installed a kitchen, toilet and multi-use area recently. With a large gazebo (affectionately named the tabernacle) smaller groups meet especially during lay-led services and at wintertime.



Our aim is to reach out to all three villages, to be involved in the varied community life in a way that expresses our Christian values and beliefs and for people to realise we are not just there for baptisms, weddings and burials (Hatch, Match, Dispatch!).

We serve a diverse population – families, workers, retired people, asylum seekers and military personnel, to name just a few, and there is a mix of old and new houses, farms, a primary school, a military base and housing, a prison, new housing developments and an assortment of businesses.

A Fijian Methodist community uses the church for their worship and an art and craft group makes use of our hospitality area.

We host visiting bell ringers, and a small group of 'mature' people are learning to ring the bells with support from local 'expert' bell ringers – it's never too late to learn!

[A church near you](https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5769/) <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5769/>

[Community Facebook site](https://www.facebook.com/groups/18012209620) <https://www.facebook.com/groups/18012209620> (3,600 members)

[The Church Explorer](https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/08/st-mary-virgin-ambrosden.html) <https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2021/08/st-mary-virgin-ambrosden.html>

[Benefice bell ringers](https://bicester.odg.org.uk/wordpress/) <https://bicester.odg.org.uk/wordpress/>

St Nicholas', Piddington

St Nicholas' Church is Grade II* listed and dates from the 13th century. The church is well maintained. Recently the bell tower has been re-roofed, stonework repointed and cleaned, and stonework repairs carried out around the windows. The church has a restored wall painting of St Christopher amongst other interesting architectural features. The church is peacefully situated in the village (no main road) surrounded by a well-maintained graveyard full of wild flowers in the Spring and an eco-habitat has been adopted allowing them to set seed before cutting back. The bells are regularly rung for occasions and by visiting bell ringers.

There is a strong sense of community with an active Parish Council, Village Hall Committee and PCC (the latter two, whilst holding their own fundraising events, often work together for joint events).

The recently refurbished village hall hosts a small library, and weekly events take place, such as bowls, art, craft group, book club and exercise groups. There is also a sports field with picnic facilities maintained by the Parish Council.

The aim is to willingly engage and serve the community by sharing Christian values, not only providing church services but also events for the community and wider community to join together. Popular events include regular coffee mornings with tabletop sales, Arts & Crafts Exhibition, and wreath making workshop. In addition, many in the community enjoy decorating the church for festivals and at Harvest people are encouraged to visit and see the displays whilst meeting others for coffee and cake. The highlight of the year has to be the Good Friday Pilgrimage Walk when villagers join to walk up the hill to where Ralph the Hermit built the first Piddington chapel. There are readings along the way whilst enjoying the surrounding views and we return for hot cross buns and coffee in the church. Other popular services include Remembrance when soldiers from the nearby Garrison lay a wreath and, of course, the annual carol service. There is a warm welcome to all, regardless of faith.



A church near you	https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5969/
Piddington church	https://www.piddingtonvillageoxfordshire.org.uk/st-nicholas-church.html
Piddington Parish Clerk	info@piddingtonvillageoxfordshire.org.uk
Community Facebook site	https://www.facebook.com/groups/piddingtoncommunitygroup/ (286 members)
The Church Explorer	https://thechurchexplorer.blogspot.com/2023/09/st-nicholas-piddington.html
Email	stnicholaspiddington@yahoo.com

A Year in the life of the Ray Valley Benefice

Remembrance Sunday is a special occasion in the small villages whose close-knit communities were hit hard in wartime. The Army presence in Arncoth and Ambrosden reminds us that we still seek the Peace of God.

Naturally the rural communities of the Ray Valley relish Harvest Festivals and Suppers, and celebrations are held in most churches as well as the schools.

Baptisms are regular joyful occasions, and nothing beats a summer wedding in a historic country church.

Fund-raising and fellowship events across the benefice include concerts and fetes, picnics and quizzes. Oddington's safari supper attracts benefice-wide support.

Rural endeavours of the Ray Valley are celebrated in May with Rogation services reaching out to local farms and countryside

Patronal Festivals are held during the year across the benefice with guest preachers and invited choirs being a speciality.

Advent is a busy time across the benefice with school children enjoying Christingle and Crib Services. Carol Services and meditations are popular.

Christmas services are enjoyed by the church family – Oddington and Ambrosden have candle-lit midnight mass.

Lent courses are held at Islip, Charlton and Ambrosden.

Holy Week brings Palm Sunday processions complete with donkeys, and meditations.

The Lord's Suppers as Charlton and Ambrosden make for an intimate and informal celebration

Good Friday brings the Piddington pilgrimage up Muswell Hill, and Oddington's village procession with the Cross.

May Day is special in Charlton with its renowned garland procession by children from school to church

Easter services are held throughout the benefice and affirm the church community's joy at the Resurrection and new life

	Sunday 1	Sunday 2	Sunday 3	Sunday 4
Ambrosden St Mary	10.30 FS	17.00 SP	10.30 HC	
Merton St Swithun		09.00 HC		
Piddington St Nicholas	10.30 HC			10.30 UB
Islip St Nicholas	10.30 FC	10.30 HC	10.30 HC	18.00 CE
Noke St Giles	16.00 SpS			
Woodeaton Holy Rood		09.00 FS		
Charlton St Mary		10.30 FS	10.30 FC	
Oddington St Andrew	18.00 ES			

HC = Holy Communion
 FS = Family Service
 FC = Family Communion
 CE = Choral Evensong
 SpS = Spring Service

Service pattern drawn from May 2024 – we would like to review the pattern (which is force majeure, dependent on current availability) with our new Rector.

The Ray Valley Benefice – at a glance

2023	Ambrosden (Blackthorn & Arncott)	Charlton (Fencott & Murcott – Mission Room)	Islip	Merton	Noke	Oddington	Piddington	Woodeaton	Total
Population*	2736 (317B & 1738 Arncott)	665	668	424	135	129	370	75	5202
Average congregation	10 (0.4%)	15 (2.3%)	25 (3.7%)	8 (1.9%)	10 (7.4%)	10 (7.8%)	12 (3.2%)	8 (10.7%)	98
Parish share % allocation	25%	17%	25%	8%	6.5%	6.5%	8%	4%	
PCC	7 & 1 ex officio	7 & 2 ex officio	6 & 2 ex officio	7	5 & 1 ex officio	6 & 2 ex officio	5	8	51 & 8 ex officio
Electoral roll	26	24	45	8	23	24	18	14	182
Bells	8	6	8	-----	2	3	5	5	
Choir	----		Yes	-----	-----	----	----	----	
Funerals	7	5	2	1	2	1	7		25
Weddings	1	0	5	0	0	2	0	1	9
Christenings	6	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	12
Pub	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Visitors**		125+	100+	10	50	100+	50+		
Shops	2	-----	1	-----	-----	-----	----	----	
I* School	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	Foundation School	
Village hall	3	1	1	1	-----	-----	1	-----	
Other groups using church	Fijian Methodist Community; Art & craft group		Music in Islip; walkers weekly coffee; Ukrainian library				Visiting bellringers		
Significant/ Other amenities	Garrison; H M Prison Bullingdon; Pre-school playgroups; Car dealers; 2 garages; H5 bus route	2 Veg/ flower stalls; Michelin restaurant (Murcott); Hairdresser; Charlton bus; H5 bus route	Railway station; GP surgery; Michelin restaurant; H5 bus route	Beauty salon	Access to Otmoor reserve	Member of The Small Pilgrim Places Network & burial place of Maori princess	Dog groomer; Beauty salon; poet John Drinkwater	Easy access to hospitals; Oxford	

* 2021 census https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/southeastengland/oxfordshire/E63004219__ambrosden/

** Visitors recorded in visitors' book

*** RVB Parish share £72,864 (2024)

Introducing our schools

Dr South's and Charlton-on-Otmoor's headteachers write:

In the RVB there are four state schools: one Church of England primary school in each of Islip and Charlton-on-Otmoor, one Local Authority non-church primary school in Ambrosden, and one Special School in Woodeaton. Each of the schools has its own very distinctive ethos and identity.

In Islip, Dr South's CE Primary School has a vision of Nurture, Educate, Inspire with a commitment to developing children to flourish to 'live life in all its fullness'. The small school offers a rounded education with a very large enrichment programme, including extensive outdoor education and a big focus on practical skills such as cookery, which supports the strong academic results obtained by the children. The school is currently graded Good by Ofsted.

In Charlton, the school's vision, 'Aspire and grow together' encompasses the commitment on ensuring that all children achieve their full potential and are encouraged to become socially responsible local, national and global citizens that think of others as well as themselves. There is a strong focus on giving children a good moral, spiritual and cultural grounding with excellent facilities including, introduced this year, an on-site Forest School area. The school is currently graded Good by Ofsted.

Five Acres is a large primary school in Ambrosden with a very distinct identity serving a large forces community from the local garrison, as well as non-forces children from the surrounding area. Its mission is to nurture the potential of every child in a secure, happy and inspiring environment based on four core values. The school is currently graded Good by Ofsted.

Woodeaton Manor Special School is a daytime school which aims to offer a nurturing environment to 84 pupils with severe emotional and social difficulties. The school is currently in special measures and undergoing a challenging period of change.

Historically, there has been extensive clergy involvement in all three primary schools, which is hoped will continue.



May Day at Dr South's, Islip

How do we show, and encourage ourselves and others, in faith?

- ◆ Over the years there have been Lent/ Study courses, Open The Book in two primary schools, coffee church in Charlton school and, during Covid, the Bible Course online by zoom.
- ◆ There have been monthly toddler gatherings (ABC in Islip, Tiny Tots in Charlton), midweek Morning Prayer in Woodeaton (with scope for more of this).
- ◆ Strong informal pastoral care in all/ most of the parishes with particular support for Ukrainians living in Islip and elsewhere, plus regular collections for Bicester FoodBank.
- ◆ Older people are reluctant to meet in person on dark evenings – the potential for more zoom/ online initiatives exists with the possibility of building confidence in discussing the Bible and faith.
- ◆ Organised trips to Wintershall, Westminster Abbey.
- ◆ Visiting preachers e.g. John Bell, speakers from associated charities e.g. PACT.

What can we offer you?

- ◆ A rectory in the centre of the benefice with CofE school. It is a spacious 5 bedroom house which is being updated in line with the Diocese's commitment to net zero carbon emissions. One bedroom is currently set up as an office with shelving. Glorious views over Otmoor from the large living room. Generous-size kitchen diner. Internet connection good (choice of Gigaclear on offer). A study downstairs with its own outside door for visitors should you wish. A reasonable size garden. Set in the quiet village of Charlton-on-Otmoor with plenty of chances to purchase fresh produce from the three farms in the village. A small friendly pub within walking distance.
- ◆ A variety of parishes which are diverse and engaging.
- ◆ Opportunity to build a new team with 1 House for Duty colleague, and potentially a second, providing opportunities for collaboration and fresh ideas.
- ◆ A PTO priest with a working agreement with the benefice, living in and focussed on the parish of Ambrosden.
- ◆ A benefice administrator working 8 hours per week.
- ◆ Supportive church wardens acting as a link to clergy and between the church and the villagers.
- ◆ We understand the importance of a healthy work/life balance flexible enough to suit family/ individual needs.
- ◆ The chance to live in one of the most beautiful and fascinating areas in southern England with cultural, sporting and family attractions within easy reach.



What we would like you to offer us . . .

- ◆ A spiritual presence with good communication skills (both in person and digitally).
- ◆ A desire to journey with us and help us grow in confidence in faith and outreach.
- ◆ Ability to engage with both ageing congregations and schools/ military personnel.
- ◆ Add 'excitement' to services and engage with new ways of worshipping including music from a broad perspective.
- ◆ Be an 'enabler', creative thinker and be visible.
- ◆ Encourage participative gatherings e.g. Taize, café church, lectio divina/contemplative services.
- ◆ Support training for laity to be authorised to minister in specific roles.
- ◆ A team player with some experience of rural multi-parish benefice ministry or able to demonstrate understanding of the particular dynamics/ demands of this context.



In the RVB there are great opportunities and by Easter 2029 we hope to have . . .

- ◆ Developed our engagement with the communities that make up the benefice.
- ◆ Experienced a visible pastoral presence of our clergy that they know, and are known in, the villages.
- ◆ Grown together in worship and faith.
- ◆ A broad range of worship.
- ◆ Increased usage of our church buildings.
- ◆ Regular meetings of clergy and churchwardens that we may support each other and learn from each other.

Is there anything else you should know?

- ◆ Parishes have, in the recent past, managed to pay the parish share in full and working hard to make the relatively modest shortfall which has accrued during recent years.
- ◆ The geography of RVB, which is long and thin, is not so conducive to benefice cohesion.
- ◆ Some PCCs without secretaries/ full complement.
- ◆ Few trained lay ministers.
- ◆ The vacancy has increased our sense of mutual support despite highlighting differences e.g. Islip's proximity to North Oxford inevitably means some young families choose to worship in some of the bigger churches with better provision for youth whilst supporting the village community.



Good Friday procession in Oddington