

# **PRIEST-IN-CHARGE (0.5)**

## **MIDDLE MARCHES BENEFICE**



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## A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP RICHARD

Thank you for your interest in this post and in the Diocese of Hereford.

The Diocese of Hereford is the smallest in the Church of England in terms of population, and we believe that our parishes are at the heart of diocesan life. We are committed to supporting local ministry and enabling ministers to thrive. Being a small diocese means we place a high value on relationships. While we offer proper structures—such as Ministerial Development Review (MDR), and access to confidential wellbeing support including accompaniment and counselling—we also know that informal support is just as important. The accessibility of senior staff and a rich diocesan social life contribute significantly to the sense of community here. I also have access to a discretionary fund to provide emergency financial support when needed.

Our benefices are diverse—socially, economically, and theologically. We are fortunate not to experience the kind of aggressive partisanship found in some other places. On *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF), I have always affirmed that clergy will be supported to act according to their conscience, within the proper order of the Church.

We have a diocesan strategy, but it is intentionally light-touch. Our purpose is clear: to proclaim Christ and grow disciples. We shape our churches around three

core values—Christlikeness, prayerfulness, and engagement. These values have been explored in diocesan-wide ‘Years of Prayer, Discipleship, and Engagement,’ but their local expression is left to the discernment of each parish. In areas where there is limited relational connection—particularly with young people—we are working alongside the national church on creative outreach initiatives. Thanks to our total return accounting policy, we are also able to fund innovative local projects.

I hope you will find the Diocese of Hereford to be a happy, supportive, and enriching place in which to live and minister. I look forward to receiving your application.

Yours in faith,



The Rt Revd Richard Jackson  
Bishop of Hereford



# LIFE AS A MEMBER OF THE CLERGY IN THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD

As you will read, the Diocese of Hereford is a place of contrasts. We're geographically large, but our population is small. We straddle six local authorities (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Monmouthshire, Telford & Wrekin, and Powys) and two countries (England and Wales), but we are one Diocese with one Bishop. We are predominantly rural, with scattered communities, but we have a vibrant cathedral city, several historic market towns and post-industrial towns, and serve estate communities as well.

We are all committed, whatever our context, to our calling to make Christ known, to love God, one another and our neighbours, and to work for the common good. We do this not only through our churches but also through our church schools and academies which are an integral part of our Diocese.

We are small enough (in terms of numbers) that clergy can get to know one another and the diocesan staff quite easily.

In the Diocese of Hereford, we want to appoint and work with clergy who are excited by the demanding and exciting common task of "**Proclaiming Christ and Growing Disciples**". Our Diocesan Values encourage all of our church members become more **Prayerful**, more **Christ-like** and more **Engaged** with God's mission in the wider community.

This means that we seek church leaders committed to equipping and releasing the whole people of God, empowering them according to their

unique gifts, inspired by the vision in Ephesians 4. These leaders will inspire and enable others to actively participate in God's mission locally, focusing on growing leaders and developing teams rather than doing everything themselves - a collaborative approach often called Oversight Ministry.

Recognising that this model can be challenging, we provide comprehensive training and support through Ministry Development opportunities and the Accompanying programme - a mentoring scheme for all clergy new in post, whether this is their first role post-curacy or a new appointment.

The Accompanying programme pairs each new incumbent with an experienced priest who serves not only as a mentor but also collaborates closely with the incumbent and their Parochial Church Councils (PCCs). Together, they discern how God is guiding them to fulfil the plans and hopes outlined in the parish profile.

Incumbents who have participated in the Accompanying programme have praised it as "one of the strengths of the welcome offered by Hereford Diocese." They highlight how it creates a safe space where clergy can nurture one another, share knowledge, and build supportive relationships marked by good humour and growing trust. Participants also value the programme's focus on relevant topics that address the challenges of adapting to new responsibilities. Crucially, it offers space for reflection on God's vision for the benefice, helping incumbents deepen their understanding and commitment as they settle into their roles.

## OUR DIOCESE – THE FACTS AND FIGURES

Our worshipping community is made up of people of all ages and backgrounds. We are responsible for 406 churches, 12 Deaneries, 86 Benefices, and 344 parishes, serving approximately 326,000 people - we are the Church of England in Herefordshire, south Shropshire, and parts of Monmouthshire, Powys, and Worcestershire. We were founded in 676 AD and cover roughly 1,650 square miles, with many of our church buildings of historical importance.

Nearly 12,000 children attend one of our 78 schools and academies, although 40% of these schools have fewer than 100 pupils; there are more pupils in our C of E schools than regular attendees at Sunday services. In 2022, we maintained over 110 properties across the diocese which are occupied mainly by our stipendiary clergy and curates. We have the fewest stipendiary ministers but the highest clergy level per person simply because we're a rural diocese.



## MESSAGE FROM THE RURAL DEAN

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your interest in this post.

This is a deeply rural part of the world, with some communities tucked down very narrow, sometimes steep roads. You will need to be a confident driver. Once you arrive at your destination, however, you will be rewarded and surprised by some very beautiful locations and much-loved churches.

The Middle Marches Benefice is one which presents many opportunities for creative ministry, and you will find that there has already been some pioneering work done by lay people in some of the churches. You will benefit from some very committed and helpful colleagues, who bring a wealth of expertise, wisdom and ideas to bear on serving God in their local communities. There is also a part-time paid administrator to support you in your role.

It is probably helpful for you to know that some of the churches are in good heart and in a healthy place, others less so. There is work to be done in supporting and leading those communities which are not thriving as much as we would hope. The fabric of one of the churches has recently given us cause for concern, though services continued in the local village hall.

In the wider Deanery you will have 3 full time clergy colleagues, alongside a half time Mission priest. We also have a Pioneer Youth Minister and a Youth and Families Community worker who are licensed to work across the whole Deanery. They are working on building an exciting Youth Hub, which is entering its second year and beginning to bear fruit. It is part funded by the national church as a research project.

Chapter meets regularly and is a supportive and prayerful place. As Rural Dean, I think one of the most important parts of my job is caring for and supporting clergy.

I do hope that you will find much in this profile which will make you want to apply for this post.

With my very best wishes,



Revd Preb Stephanie Fountain

# OUR BENEFICE & COMMUNITY

The MIDDLE MARCHES BENEFICE was created in 2011 when St. Cuthbert's Clungunford, St. Edward's Hopton Castle and St. Mary's Bedstone joined the other four parishes on the retirement of their priest. This increased the existing group of churches from four to seven, creating a larger Benefice.

Each Parish has written below about their own community, but the Middle Marches Benefice is a community too. We have grown over the past 14 years to support each other individually and as Parishes. This became especially important when two of our more recent incumbents left sooner than expected. Within the Middle Marches Benefice community, we have commissioned lay local worship leaders and volunteers who help with services, safeguarding and pastoral care. We are committed to working very closely with our Priests supporting them through the blessings and challenges of our beautiful rural communities.

The seven parishes that now make up the Middle Marches Benefice have beautiful, unique churches with Clungunford at the East end of the Benefice to Llanfair Waterdine at the Western end, 15 miles away (30 mins by car). To travel from church to church, East to West (Clungunford, Hopton Castle, Bedstone, Bucknell, Chapel Lawn, Stowe, Llanfair Waterdine) would take an hour and cover 23.5 miles).

Our setting and community offer:

- Beautiful surroundings and countryside, very rural
- Warmth of communities in the Benefice
- Recently commissioned lay Local Worship Leaders taking services
- Well cared-for churches and churchyards
- One C of E Primary school
- Resilient – all kept going through Covid and vacancy
- Outreach – Butty Van is established
- Three churches are members of Inclusive Church
- Innovative approach to services, from BCP to newer e.g. Evening Reflections, quite a range to suit many needs
- Ride and Stride fundraising for Shropshire Historic Churches Trust supported
- Some parishes have local bus and train transport

# OUR PARISHES

## St. Mary's Bedstone



village of Hopton Castle. The hall is used for church refreshments and the Harvest supper as well as fundraising events. The village has been dominated for many years by the independent day and boarding school Bedstone College but this has recently closed resulting in local redundancies and a level of anxiety about its future.

Bedstone is a community of 35 households, dispersed over a fairly wide area. We have a small but faithful regular congregation which is swelled considerably at Festival services. A service of Holy Communion and a lay-led service is held every month. The village has a modern well equipped Village Hall which is shared with our neighbouring

## St. Mary's, Bucknell

### Our Beliefs

We attach importance to the sacrament of Holy Communion and value our monthly clergy-led services.

We believe in the value of Bible readings (we have a Bible in each pew) and Bible-based preaching.

We value the power of prayer led by both clergy and lay members.

We believe in the importance of celebrating the major festivals with our wider local community, especially our primary school families.

### Our Worship

St Mary's holds a weekly church service (10.30 Morning Prayer) with attendance normally between 10 and 20. There are 26 parishioners on the electoral roll but attendees are not confined to this group. We currently have a vacancy for churchwarden but there is considerable lay input into the services, and we have been blessed in having our own organist; at least three hymns are sung at every service. We hold a Holy Communion on



the second Sunday of every month and whenever possible over the festivals of Easter and Christmas.

The Act of Remembrance is taken very seriously in the community and attendance is always high on 11<sup>th</sup> November at the war memorial in the churchyard, which the entire school attends.

St Mary's welcomes worshippers from traditions across the Anglican spectrum with a blend of formal and more contemporary forms of service being used. The Book of Common Prayer is only rarely used, but a traditional liturgy is always used for Holy Communion. Two versions of Morning Prayer are in alternate use, one more formal than the other.

### **Our Building**

The building as a whole is in good repair and is very well looked after by hard-working volunteers, who also ensure daily access to the church for visitors. St Mary's dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century but was partly rebuilt and extensively restored in 1870. The roof was renewed in 1983. New lighting and sound systems were installed between 2004 and 2006. More recent work includes the installation of a ground source heat pump and the insulation of the entire ceiling, guaranteeing a comfortable working temperature all year round. The addition of secondary glazed entrance doors has helped this further. At the time of writing the churchyard wall was being repaired to a high standard.

The church has an integrated toilet and kitchenette in the north aisle allowing



refreshments to be served. There is ample space to accommodate tables and chairs without compromising the use of the traditional pews either side of the central aisle for worship.

### **Our Activities**

We hold a range of events, including quiz evenings, art exhibitions, craft activities and communal meals such as the Harvest Festival Lunch. The church supports wider initiatives such as local food banks, the annual Ride & Stride each September and the monthly Butty Van which provides an important support network for farmers.

### **Our School**

The village has an all-through Church of England primary school taking children between 2 and 11 years of age, with strong links with the church. It is part of the Blue Hills Federation and currently has around 50 children on roll. The school recently received a 'Good' verdict from OFSTED. The children attend several services each year including Remembrance Day, the Christmas Crib service, Easter, Mothering Sunday and Harvest Festival.

### **Our Parish**

This is basically the village of Bucknell, the largest settlement in the Middle Marches Benefice with a population of just over 700. The Benefice Vicarage is situated in the village. The village is in Shropshire but lies within sight of the borders of both Herefordshire and Powys. Facilities include a petrol station with small shop attached, a garage for repairs, a post office, butcher's shop, hairdresser's, plant nursery and a pub, the Sitwell Arms. There is a longstanding and well-used Memorial Hall which is

currently in the process of being replaced by a building on a new site close to the children's playground. The village is served by 4 return buses daily (except Sundays) between Ludlow and Knighton, and by 4-5 return trains daily (2 on Sundays) between Shrewsbury and Swansea. Local amenity groups include the WI, the Allotment Association, a toddler group, the Bucknell Walkers, the Bedstone Art Group and a youth club. A weekly 'Pop in' café run by local volunteers is held in the church every Wednesday and regularly attracts over 50 visitors.



The Bucknell Newsletter is distributed three times a year across the village and is a mine of useful information. Further details about the community can be found on the Parish Council website [www.bedstoneandbucknell.org](http://www.bedstoneandbucknell.org)

## **Chapel Lawn is ....**

.....situated in the beautiful Redlake Valley, approximately four miles from Bucknell with a population of about 190. It is a farming community which over recent years has welcomed people who have retired, changed their profession, or with high speed fibre and improved mobile services, chosen to make their base in the Redlake Valley, bringing with them a wide range of skills. Public transport is very sparse with one weekly bus. The "Redlake" newsletter is published quarterly and circulated to many households. The community supports a variety of initiatives – Women's Institute, Gun Club, The Redlake Artists (part of a thriving artistic community), The Redlake Community Benefit Society, Chapel Lawn Book Club, Flicks in the Sticks and Arts Alive events, including the sale of surplus produce in the centre of the village.

Further information about the village (including the church) can be found on the village website: [www.chapel-lawn.co.uk](http://www.chapel-lawn.co.uk)

**St Mary's, Chapel Lawn** was originally built in 1844 to serve as a Chapel of Ease to St George's Church, Clun. It was transferred to Bucknell's pastoral care in September 1987 and became part of a new Benefice in 1991, later expanded into the Middle Marches Benefice. The church has endeavoured over recent years to serve the wider community, either organising or supporting regular social events, such as the Annual Concert and the Ramble and Lunch. Funds raised from these, and a variety of other social activities, are shared between the church and other organisations within the village.

- At present there is one Common Worship Eucharist service per month.

- Average attendance at these services is 12 people about 9 of whom are communicants.
- There are 28 people on the electoral roll.
- Parish Offer is paid through the four sources recognised by Church House, i.e. voluntary giving, fundraising, investment dividends and fees.
- Other statistics can be viewed on the parish “dashboard” at <https://parishreturns.churchofengland.org/church/618306/reports/statistics-for-mission-dashboard/parish/>

## St Cuthbert's Clungunford

The River Clun runs through the Parish of Clungunford dividing it with Shelderton, Rowton and the main village of Clungunford to the east, and Abcott, Beckjay, Broadward and Hopton Heath to the west. The population of the Parish is around 350 people. There is a mix of all ages, although the greater proportion of the population consists of a very active retired community.

The Church and the Village Hall are the two main community centres. The Village Hall is used by many both within and outside of the village. The regular events include monthly ‘Flicks on the Sticks’ which shows popular films, a weekly Friday bar night, ‘Foody Friday’ and the ‘Sunday carvery’ are both monthly when the food is prepared by our Village Hall resident chef, ‘Bike night’ for motorbike enthusiasts is once a month and attracts over a hundred motorcyclists from around the area for tea, bacon butties and a chat, ‘Arts Alive’ theatre productions happen four times a year, and the Classic Car show has become a very well supported event.

The Church hold three services a month of which two are lay led, and the third is a clergy led Communion service. The average congregation for a Sunday service is around twenty though this is significantly higher at Christmas and Easter. In addition there is a weekly ‘Quiet Church’ which is a meditation session, and monthly ‘Sacred Space’ which again is a meditation based event. The Church runs ‘Cuthbert’s Café’ twice a month in the village hall, which is much warmer than the Church during the Winter! The 14th century building was majorly altered at the end of the 19th century when the pews were removed and replaced with flexible seating, and the ceiling barrelled giving it excellent acoustics. As a result we are able to hold concerts of various types. We have hosted ‘Clun Valley Music’ over the last three occasions of their concert series whose aim is to ‘bring high-quality performances of classical chamber music by artists of international standing to Clun and the surrounding villages’. The two concerts in 2025 attracted audiences of 97 and 138 people.



During the Victorian alterations the Church was also gifted a Binn's organ, which is grade 2 listed, and is used for the concerts including two by Jonathan Scott, an organist with an international reputation. The concert attracted people from across the UK. Other concerts have been given by local choirs and musicians. There are also two Poetry sessions run each year at Christmas and Easter.

Church events are well supported by those in the Parish. Annual events such as the Big Breakfast and the Harvest Supper (which typically includes a quiz) attract up to 100 people and 70 people respectively. The Church has two kitchen areas and toilets and so is able to hold events which can include hot food and drink.



We have a very supportive lay leader community as well as those reading during services and leading the Intercessions. There are usually two Bible study courses each year and we have run a 'Christianity Explored' for those new to the Faith.

## **St. Edward's, Hopton Castle**

The church is in good order with the roof being renovated relatively recently and new drainage put in.

- We have one service a month which is a Eucharist and we use the Book of Common Prayer.
- The average size of congregation is about five but for services such as Harvest, Christmas and Easter we have a much larger congregation, often as many as 40.
- There are 27 people on the Electoral Roll.
- In 2025 the Parish Share is £2500. There is an enthusiastic team of fundraisers who organise events that are very well supported.

## St Mary's Llanfair Waterdine

St. Mary's Church lies at the western end of the Middle Marches Benefice, 17 miles from Clungunford in the east. It is the only church of the seven which is west of Knighton. The parish is large with a scattered population of around 200. We have 135 names on our Church Electoral Roll.

The PCC is active and supportive. St. Mary's has always maintained a weekly service throughout vacancies and clergy illness. There are two 11.15 am communions, an all-age service, also at 11.15 am and a 6.30 pm evensong. We are lucky to have three regular organists on whom we can call, and all services have live musical accompaniment. In addition, organists from Knighton, Knucklas, Bleddfa, Berkshire and Dorset can be called upon when required. The local Choir, Llanfair Singers, is happy to assist, when asked, for Harvest, Easter, Carol Services and Christmas. The church encourages children to attend, especially for Crib and Christingle Services and Mothering Sunday. On alternate months, on the second Wednesday at 6.00pm there is either Compline or a very popular 'Reflection' service, when many from elsewhere and across the national border, read or write prayers. The average attendance at this service is 35 to 40 individuals.

There are three trained, commissioned, Local Worship Leaders at St Mary's who support the visiting priests at present and have always assisted the incumbents as required. Some years ago the PCC voted unanimously to join 'Inclusive Church' and their Mission Statement is displayed in the porch.

The church and graveyard are well-maintained and much building repair work has recently been completed. Some north aisle pews have been

removed to provide space for a 'Children's Corner' and other more social events. A produce and miscellaneous stall at the gate, and book stall in the porch, raise funds for the church and we are lucky to have the support of 35 members who contribute through the Parish Giving Scheme.

## St Michael and All Angels Stowe



Our church is beautifully situated with glorious rural views, and its diverse parish incorporates farming communities and a residential road on the outskirts of neighbouring Knighton.

We hold two regular services each month, a service of Holy Communion and a lay-led service of Morning Prayer, both from the Book of Common Prayer. Congregations for these range from five to twelve in number. Other services (most notably our Harvest and Carol services, after which refreshments are served) are better attended, attracting friends from across our wider community.

We hold an annual Duck Race, our major fundraising event. Again, friends from the community attend and support this, and many generously volunteer their time on the day.

We have a small but effective PCC and a group of officers and volunteers, committed to keeping the church open and accessible to all. In late 2023, we joined the Inclusive Church network and are proud of our membership.

## BENEFICE VISION

- Grow congregations
- Encourage younger people
- Stronger as a community in faith and numbers
- Promote faith awareness in the whole community – social groups and events
- Opportunities for people to access prayer and support both in and outside the church
- Open minded with type and timings of services - respecting traditional services but embracing the new
- Inclusivity, acknowledging there is a range of views in the Benefice over LLF and PLF
- We want Jesus to be front and centre of our endeavours
- We want to be brave enough to proclaim our faith more in our communities



## SERVICES AND WORSHIP

At present six of our seven churches have a service of Holy Communion each month, one church has two. The Holy Communion services follow BCP and Common Worship Order One formats and are taken by visiting priests whilst we are in a vacancy. Services throughout the Benefice on the other Sundays and some weekday services vary from very traditional BCP to mindful reflective, meditative services and all-age family ones. We have a very devoted and gifted team of commissioned lay worship leaders and volunteers who create and deliver services in their own Parishes and support others too.

We have a guild of organists who provide accompaniment for all Communion services and some of the other ones too. They also play for weddings, baptisms and funerals as well as additional festival services.

Festival services are usually lay-led with contributions from the community. Harvest services are particularly important in our rural setting. Local children enjoy joining in with festival services, especially Harvest and our Crib services.

Each church holds a service of Remembrance.

## SUPPORT FOR OUR PRIEST-IN-CHARGE

We realise that being the 0.5 Priest-in-Charge of a large multi-parish benefice means that nobody could do everything themselves. We want to reassure you that there is good support available, and we all want to help. The provision we have put in place includes:

- Benefice Administrator
- Team of 10 commissioned lay Local Worship Leaders and experienced Churchwardens/volunteers helping with services
- Good communication between Churchwardens and communities for pastoral or general needs
- Some very active and supportive PCCs.
- Benefice Organists' Guild
- Service rotas designed to reduce distances travelled on Sundays

## PERSON SPECIFICATION

- Active, inspirational, motivational, enthusiastic, sensitive
- Experienced in or with a passion for rural ministry
- A leader and reconciler, prepared to delegate
- Someone who will listen and respond to the needs of our deeply rural community
- Can travel independently on country roads and lanes in all weathers
- Be prepared to adapt and be flexible in their ministry.
- With resilience and who can handle the stresses of pastoral care (including end of life care) within their ministry
- Can communicate well with families and young people
- Someone able to work positively with parishes with varying views on LLF and PLF, who will support the use of PLF in those churches that wish to offer them.
- Someone who will lead prayerful worship and will preach inspiring sermons which connect faith and life.
- Will support and develop the ministry of others, especially our lay local worship leaders.
- Will identify and nurture the vocations of new leaders, both lay and ordained.
- Be prepared to get involved in community life and events

## CONTACT DETAILS

For an informal conversation about anything you've read in this profile, please do not hesitate to contact the Archdeacon of Ludlow's EA, Debbie Venables on 01588 673571 or via [Debbie.Venables@hereford.anglican.org](mailto:Debbie.Venables@hereford.anglican.org) and she will be pleased to arrange that for you.

We hope to meet you soon!

