

Rector of the Upper Chase Benefice
(St Mary the Virgin, Sixpenny Handley with Gussage St Andrew; St
Rumbold's Pentridge; St Mary's Chettle; St Laurence's Farnham and St
Peter ad Vincula, Tollard Royal)

and

Dorset Retired Clergy Officer



Introduction to both roles by the Bishop of Sherborne

Rural ministry in Dorset is a joy and a delight. In recent years significant changes have been made in the way clergy are supported and encouraged, leading to a greater sense of collegiality in our rural areas.

This part-time Rector post has been created to create collaborative groups of clergy and lay leaders to reach out to our rural communities. This group of parishes have now been working together for some time and are looking forward to someone ministering amongst them.

This 'three days plus Sunday' post will enable us to be creative around pioneering and pastoral opportunities within our village communities. It would ideally suit someone who has a passion for rural ministry and has an energy and creativity to share with others, including work with young people and families who particularly feature in the Handley community.

In the diocese there is a renewed commitment to encourage the development of Lay Ministry, and local programmes of training to develop Lay Pastoral Assistants and Lay Worship Leaders have recently proved to be successful in this deanery in giving confidence to those with gifts and a willingness to share them for the benefit of all.

The Deanery will offer a warm welcome to whoever comes to this benefice. The parishes all enjoy beautiful rural countryside yet are within easy reach of Salisbury, Blandford and Shaftesbury. There is also a good road network down to the coast and New Forest as well as via Shaftesbury and Salisbury to the A303.

Dorset Retired Clergy Officer

There are currently over 200 retired clergy with Permission to Officiate offering ministry across Dorset, from North Bournemouth and Poole in the East to Lyme Bay in the West, from Swanage in the South to Gillingham in the North. Many of these retired clergy are attached to their local parish or benefice and offer an active ministry as part of the clergy team, at the invitation of and negotiated with the incumbent. Others offer a more peripatetic ministry covering for a variety of vacant parishes or giving support to clergy in a broader context. Those with PTO also offer a wide variety of other ministry including clergy review, mentoring, or offering spiritual direction.

I oversee Permission to Officiate and meet all those moving into Dorset who request the continuation of their ordained ministry. Those with PTO are supported by a faithful team of volunteer Deanery clergy retirement officers, who keep in touch with those who are active, as well as those who have retired from active ministry. This is a mainly pastoral role fulfilled by retired clergy themselves, responding to the needs of other retired clergy in their local setting. Some groupings of retired clergy meet regularly for quiet days, prayer and social events. The Deanery Retirement Officer also works closely with the Rural Dean, encouraging a wider Chapter lunch once or twice a year, and is a member of Deanery Synod acting on behalf of the retired clergy.

A survey I conducted last year amongst those with PTO revealed a willingness to do more in support of the local church, and local clergy. With so many talented ministers out there, it is not possible to follow up everyone, hence the need for a retired clergy officer to work with us, to encourage the

continuation of gifts and to further enhance what we offer as a diocese. Therefore the Archdeacon and I would welcome an additional member of our local team to assist us in the task of caring for and encouraging our retired clergy in a pastoral and strategic way, and the Deanery Retirement Officers would welcome a convenor to support their own ministry.

We offer this exciting new opportunity, wonderful countryside, supportive colleagues, some deeply spiritual places of worship and retreat and very much look forward to hearing from you.

Once you have read this profile, should you wish to know more about either role for further information please do not hesitate to contact the Archdeacon of Sherborne, the Ven Penny Sayer (01305 269074)

Bishop Karen



Introduction to the Rector Role

We are looking for a Part-Time Rector to help bring about change and growth, reconfiguring ministry so it meets our current and future needs. The post holder will live in the Sixpenny Handley Vicarage, centrally in the Benefice.

As part of the Deanery Plan, the Handley Benefice (St Mary's and St Rumbold's parishes) have for the past four years, been working in close partnership with three small parishes in the neighbouring Chase Benefice; (Chettle, Farnham and Tollard Royal), moving towards supporting one another as a new benefice.

With its significantly larger population, most ministry will be based in Sixpenny Handley; however, a vital part of the role will be to continue to foster supportive relationships with the four smaller parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Pentridge and Tollard Royal. To that end a united service on the third Sunday for all five parishes has been introduced and is working well.

The postholder will in principle give the equivalent of three full days a week, plus Sunday duties in this role.

Person Specification

The ideal candidate for this post will be someone who:

- enjoys rural ministry and village life
- is eager and able to help the rural church to flourish
- embraces challenge and change with hope and joy
- is collaborative in leadership with both clergy and laity
- is comfortable with a range of worship styles
- actively promotes discipleship and lay ministry
- engages enthusiastically with the wider community, the villages, the school, local scouts and other organisations.
- can help us realise the mission potential of the particular demography of the benefice

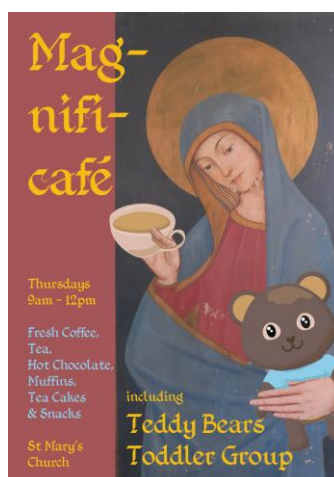
As a new church community, we have not stood still waiting for things to happen and we have established a number of initiatives to assist any new incumbent:

- The established support, dedication and commitment, as well as a warm welcome, of a small but enthusiastic church community ready to embrace change and a new future together.
- We fully understand the scope of this type of dual post; we have realistic expectations of the demands that this will create and expect to demonstrate flexibility and cooperation to assist the incumbent with both parts of this combined post as necessary in order to achieve a successful outcome.
- Thus, with this particularly in mind, we have established an experienced and knowledgeable paid administrator and a Treasurer, who are in post now and will both work closely with the successful candidate to address the day-to-day operation of the benefice, thus releasing the priest for mission, ministry and their important CR&PTO

role.

- Further we have established an unofficial Benefice Council which meets bimonthly to iron out any benefice-wide issues and deal with collective administration. It has a Chair and a Secretary and representation from all the parishes. Currently, during our interregnum, this Council directs the Benefice Administrator in her role of finding and paying clergy for routine services and organising all life-events services across the whole benefice which are led by a number of PTOs who have kindly supported us.
- We would not disguise the fact that all our parishes face challenges in various areas and especially with regard to finding sufficient money to fund the Share each year but we feel confident that we will be able to do so once a priest is in post.
- Our Benefice is blessed with enthusiastic, 'can-do' people, (witness the establishment of an effective embryonic Council, a number with exceptional experience who, with the guidance and direction and care of a local priest, even with limited days of work, can together grow interest and involvement within our parishes to realise our Diocesan Vision of "Making Jesus Known".

We collectively look forward to meeting anyone interested in knowing more about the appointment and stand ready to discuss or explain any points of detail.



MILTON & BLANDFORD DEANERY – Rural Dean Comments

The Upper Chase Benefice is located in the northeast part of the Milton & Blandford Deanery. The Deanery is in the Dorset Archdeaconry, itself within the Sherborne Area of the Salisbury Diocese, and is twinned with the Diocese of Rokon, South Sudan. The Deanery currently consists of 35 Parishes, but this arrangement is changing according to the Deanery Plan of 2021. The Deanery covers an area with Blandford Forum at its centre, a market town of 10,000; the remaining parishes are rural.

The population of the Deanery is approximately 26,000 and is growing due to significant new housing in and around Blandford Forum, with many now commuting to Poole/Bournemouth and Salisbury. The area is rich in cultural activities such as Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Salisbury Playhouse, concerts, choirs, local museums and the wonderful Jurassic coast for walking and good train services.

Within the Deanery there are: 8 Church of England Primary Schools and 2 local authority primary schools, one of which, Sixpenny Handley First School, is part of the Wimborne schools pyramid. There is 1 maintained Secondary school in the deanery (in Blandford), 3 Preparatory Schools and 3 Independent Schools (with Chaplains).

The Deanery Chapter meets monthly to offer mutual support, encouragement and prayer to the clergy across the Deanery. The chapter currently consists of 10 clergy including those licensed or beneficed in parishes, and 1 school chaplain. In recent years significant changes have been made in the way clergy are supported and encouraged, leading to a greater sense of collegiality and cross-benefice collaboration.

As the new Rural Dean, I continue to support the Upper Chase parishes. This new post is one of the outcomes of the Deanery plan to the extent that the smaller parishes, whilst having autonomy, now look to St Mary's Handley as the centre of the benefice.

In the past four years the five parishes have also been growing new forms of lay leadership and between them their lay-led services are taken by the seven Lay Worship Leaders. Evident throughout this period has been the high level of determination among many committed and gifted individuals from the local churches, not only to make their own churches flourish, but also to help one another. This has already created a significant spirit of resilience and resolve to meet the many challenges and opportunities which now face all rural parishes. We can now look forward to a more confident and joyful engagement in the mission to Make Jesus Known in our local communities.

The Reverend Jane Williams

Dorset Retired Clergy Officer

Role Description and Person Specification

TITLE: Dorset Retired Clergy Officer

WORKING HOURS AND DURATION 2 days a week. The Office will be held as a co-terminus appointment with Rector of Upper Chase

CONTEXT Working across Dorset as a member of the Sherborne Team primarily supporting the Bishop of Sherborne in her oversight of retired clergy with PtO.

REPORTING/LINE MANAGER Quarterly reports to the Sherborne Area Team Meeting, with Bishop of Sherborne and Director of Mission & Ministry offering light-touch line-management.

RESPONSIBLE FOR Volunteer Deanery Retirement Officers in the Sherborne Area

ROLE PURPOSE
To assist the Bishops of Sherborne and Salisbury in the oversight, pastoral care, support and deployment of retired and PtO clergy in the Sherborne Area.
This is a new post, developing the previous voluntary role of Clergy Retirement Officer in recognition of the vital role of retired PtO clergy in local teams and broader diocesan ministry.
The job description below recognises the need for more coordinated support for and appreciation of the ministry of retired and PtO clergy within the diocese, in tune with the Diocese's strategic aspiration to grow Courageous Christian Ministry.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
To assist the Bishop of Sherborne in overseeing the pastoral care and welfare of retired PtO clergy in the Sherborne Area, in cooperation with volunteer deanery officers.
To support the bishop, archdeacons and rural deans by coordinating the local deployment of our retired PtO clergy, according to their particular gifts and capacity.
To explore possibilities and vocations for interim and other ministry among retired PtO clergy and assist in their deployment.
To develop and oversee our team of voluntary deanery clergy retirement officers who offer local communication, pastoral support and coordination of their ministry locally, meeting with them regularly.
Working with the Director of Mission and Ministry, to help coordinate training and support for our PtO clergy.
Working with the Director of Mission and Ministry on the provision of support for those

approaching retirement, such as the diocesan pre-retirement course at Sarum College.
To organize with the deanery officers, on behalf of the Bishop of Sherborne, opportunities for retired clergy to meet periodically socially and for worship across the area.

To attend clergy funerals on behalf of the bishops and, together with the Widows' and Deanery Officers, maintain contact with the Sherborne Office and South Canonry in order to support the administrative processes required when personal circumstances change.

To connect with the Retired Clergy Association from a diocesan context and keep up to date with policy and good practice as it relates to retired clergy.

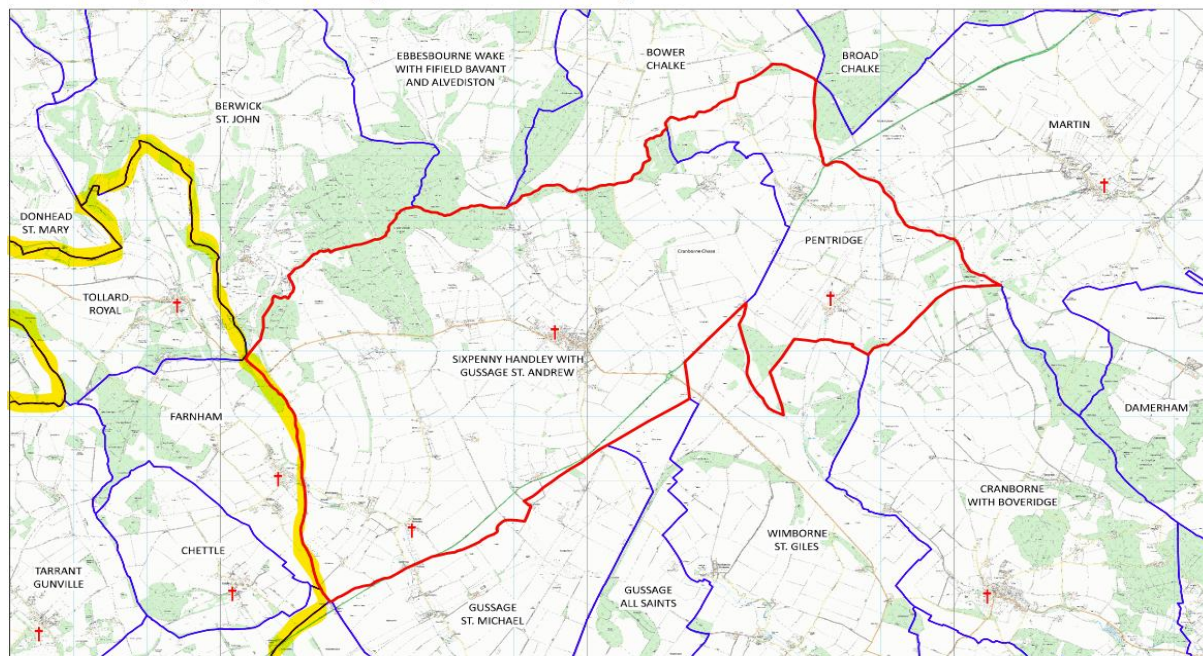
To assist and advise clergy with regard to retirement housing and to promote good communication and awareness of the Church's provision in this regard.

To communicate and co-operate with the See of Ramsbury Retirement Officer (when appointed) with a view to developing diocese-wide approach to PtO & retired clergy.

To offer periodic reporting and recommendations regarding retired and PtO clergy to the bishops, archdeacons and relevant diocesan committees – e.g. Sherborne Team meeting, and Discipleship, Vocation and Ministry Committee.

The Boundaries of the New Benefice of Upper Chase include:
Sixpenny Handley with Gussage St Andrew and Pentridge. Chettle, Farnham and Tollard Royal.

Benefice of Sixpenny Handley with Gussage Saint Andrew and Pentridge



This map was compiled for the Diocese of Salisbury by Alistair Sutherland in March 2022 with digital data from Field Dynamics. It contains parish data supplied by the Commissioners of the Church of England, church location data from A Church Near You, and Ordnance Survey data reproduced with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. ©Crown copyright and database right 2022. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey licences nos 100040148 and 100019918. Please note that some legal parish names may be abbreviated for clarity.

Our Parishes

(For any specific parish data questions, please enquire with the Benefice Administrator – Gill Baverstock – 01725 516311 who will be happy to assist).

The five parishes of Sixpenny Handley with Gussage St Andrew, Chettle, Farnham, Pentridge and Tollard Royal are all within the beautiful rolling downlands of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (formerly AONB), with all their villages located within a three-mile radius of the vicarage at Sixpenny Handley and thus easily accessible. The combined population of this area is almost 1800, but over 1200 of these live in Sixpenny Handley, making it the local centre of population, and designated in the Dorset Corporate Plan Settlement Hierarchy as a Rural Service Centre with a surgery, shops and first school.

The buildings where we meet are beautiful and at the centre of the communities they serve. They are old places steeped in history and can tell many stories, yet they are also very much alive with people who wish to meet and worship God.

Our churches are united in their desire to be places of welcome that offer the opportunity to encounter God and be an active part of their respective communities. This is realised in different ways by those involved and there are inevitably different approaches to worship and community engagement. Some have a blend of contemporary liturgy and informal services while others are committed to traditional forms of worship or a mix of ancient and modern.

The current services rota was adjusted to make it manageable during the vacancy, enabling the priest from the adjacent Iwerne Benefice to take a Holy Communion sometimes, however we are mainly reliant on retired priests officiating at other services of Holy Communion; each of our 7 Lay Worship Leaders is also taking at least one service a month. These services are organised by our administrator but it is entirely recognised that these interim service rota arrangements may not best meet the needs of all congregations and of course, the wishes of a new priest on arrival. The PCCs naturally anticipate change at that point.

Sixpenny Handley: St Mary The Virgin (Grade II*)

A church has been in Sixpenny Handley since the 13th century. The first recorded chaplain was Nicholas de Longspee who became a Bishop of Salisbury. The village is now one of the larger villages in eastern Dorset which was originally two 'Hundreds' (*division of a shire for military and judicial purposes under common law*), Saxpenna and Hanlege, these were united in 1575 as Sexpennyhanley. In the late 1800s the church was extensively rebuilt and the Norman font was moved into the base of the tower. In recent years the font has been restored and located in a more central position; a significant achievement in 2010 was the creation of a much-needed toilet facility. More recently we introduced a state-of-the-art sound and vision system with wireless remote controls and an improved hearing induction loop.

Our most recent project was to better equip the Church kitchen. This is proving a wise investment, enabling us to operate the Magnificafé, a community coffee and brunch venue which meets in St Mary's every Thursday morning. Post Covid the café has experienced significant growth with 30 plus attending weekly. It has established itself as a key hub of the village for young and old alike. Parents with their young children are starting to rely on it as a highlight of their weekly calendar as it is 'en route' after they drop off older children at the

First School. This is seen as a positive step for encouraging greater participation in church life among Handley's higher than average population of pre-school and school age children. Some are also dropping in making new friends and contacts; periodically we get an 'expert' in to offer advice on IT or indeed how to seek professional advice when needed for something troubling an individual. Although not the aim, it is also making a significant 'surplus' each year. Working with the Parish Council, this Thursday morning café is now part of the successful Handley Hubs initiative to create warm welcoming hubs for people in the village. As such it has established a good following from the older retired residents in the community. Building on this, we have recently started a very successful afternoon tea meeting each third Sunday afternoon, this time more aimed at the retirees, though we do see younger families as well.

We have a thriving PCC which includes a number of sub groups, including effective Finance and Fabric Committees and a small Friends Group. Much work is ongoing to repair/maintain various areas of the church, for which grants have been obtained. We have also received a significant legacy with which we hope to improve further our café facilities to build on that success and perhaps to refurbish the organ in St Mary's which, whilst working, needs attention.

St Mary's is often used for baptisms, weddings and funerals; the church is kept open during the day by our two Church Wardens to provide a welcome place of encounter for the local community and passing visitors. The village is a popular tourist destination on the Cranborne Chase and a caravan and camping site is located nearby which often brings in additional visitors to St Mary's particularly during the spring and summer months. The clock bells are a well-loved signature of our village and church life – with many complaints if they fail or are out of sync! A small but important sign that the church is known and loved in the community.

Unusually for a rural parish, Handley has a wide range of age groups and its profile is considerably younger than the average for North Dorset. There are a number of relatively new build small estates (8-12 homes) in the village with more to come. It is a young working village, not a retirement settlement (more than half of the population in employment), with a very lively community with young families. The First School in Sixpenny Handley (with Chettle, Farnham and Pentridge in its catchment), although not a church school, has welcomed the clergy to lead their assemblies and the school holds its nativity play in St Mary's with the place packed with parents and grandparents. Church members have been on the School Governing body and are involved in running a local monthly club for the elderly (Chase Community Friends), and serve on the committee of the Sixpenny Handley Community Fund (Community Charitable Incorporated Organisation). A similar relationship has been established with the local 1st Woodcutts Scout Group through clergy and church members, who are not only from Handley but also from the surrounding villages, serving as scout leaders. The Group based just outside the village is one of the largest and most successful Scout groups in Dorset and across the south of England. It has developed a very fine reputation with membership totalling around 130. Remembrance Sunday is keenly observed by the village at the war memorial by the Church and afterwards in St Mary's. The Scouts and veterans march up the High Street, often over 140 on parade plus, of course, a local crowd of onlookers. Over 40 small businesses are based in the village, as well as a doctor's surgery, a butcher, and a mini-market shop, all advertised on the community website see: <https://sixpennyhandley.info/home>

We are blessed with many useful well-used facilities. We are on a key bus route between Salisbury and Blandford Forum and then on to Dorchester, there is a modern Village Hall, recently refurbished, as well as excellent sport and recreational facilities including a football pitch, tennis courts, bowling green and cricket pitch. We have a skate park with great plans for a much larger improved version being developed. There are also two play parks which have equipment for young and growing children. A range of clubs and societies are on offer as well as special events at different times of the year, the annual summer one day Music festival - the Big Session - for instance has been a great success. The Handley congregation is able to run a Christmas Fayre/ Bazaar and a variety of spring and summer events, often linked into wider village activities such as the Scouts annual Bonfire Night or the summer music event.

The (civil) Parish Office offers a small library and a free bi-monthly parish magazine goes out to over 700 homes, including a dedicated section written by the PCC or priest. Weekly coffee mornings, a men's group and Church Sunday Lunch Groups have all been experimented with in the past before Covid, and the PCC is now working to introduce activities at which the church has a presence, for example we run a joint film club with the Village Hall Committee. In short this is a supportive, young, enthusiastic community with a strong sense of identity. We believe it therefore offers a unique opportunity for church growth in the Deanery.

Church attendance is usually around 25-33 most Sundays. We have organ accompaniment for the Communion services (sung to the Thorne St Thomas Mass), and a small music group plays for the informal services. St Mary's hosts a popular Community/Church Choir that sings at our services and other events, it is made up of both congregational and non-church members. One of the lay-led services has been run as a breakfast church and this could be revived. Church members arrange a monthly rota for readers, servers, intercessors and sidespersons, flowers, cleaning and for coffee after a service. A Bible Study Group meets monthly, the PCC meets quarterly, with some business completed in sub committees (Fabric and Finance). There are two churchwardens and three Lay Worship Leaders.

St Andrew's Chapel, Gussage St Andrew (Grade I)

"Gussage" means a small stream or spring and the Chapel at Gussage St Andrews is located on the site of an old nunnery. A wooden chapel was originally built on the site by King Alfred, as part of Shaftesbury Abbey, and then replaced by the present building in the 12th century.

The church has a small but regular, consistent congregation of between 4 to 8 people, drawn from across all the villages within the benefice and beyond and there is a small band of locals with connections to the church who clean the Chapel and arrange the flowers. Matins is led by the Lay Worship Leader. Recently we have taken to holding some benefice services there, as it is such a special '*thin place*', close to God and in such a peaceful setting. The church's sense of history is palpable because of its remarkable late 12th/early 13th century wall paintings discovered in the 1950s. Their condition has been a concern but they have been stabilised. In recent years the Chapel has been well looked after, benefiting from new electrics, heating, and a small organ as well as continuing to protect the medieval wall paintings. Some work is now needed on the ceiling and the Fabric Committee has this in hand.

This delightful building attracts many visitors who have heard of this Grade I treasure of national heritage. St Andrews thus provides a venue not only for worship but for events of interest to a wider community which celebrate our Christian heritage, such as talks on harvests and church windows in illuminated manuscripts. These are not only interesting but can raise useful amounts of money by donation.

St Rumbold's, Pentridge (Grade II)

Pentridge is mentioned in the Domesday Book and St Rumbold's is an ancient designation, but the present church was rebuilt between 1815 and 1855 and modelled on 14th-century style. This was made possible by a grant of "£70 towards enlarging the church upon condition that 140 seats be reserved for the poorer members of the parish". The church is simply furnished, but is often gloriously decorated with flowers.

The village is a delightfully tranquil and picturesque gem of a hamlet, straight out of a Thomas Hardy novel, hidden at the end of a lane off the A354 Salisbury to Blandford Road and consisting of a string of cottages that lead to the Church, the Village Hall and Green. Where the road ends, footpaths continue out onto Pentridge Hill with its fine panoramic views. The Village Hall has recently been refurbished and is now being used for events, including an annual Fayre and Barbeque. It is also used after major church services. The ecclesiastical parish includes the smaller hamlet of Woodyates and together with outlying farms, they have a population of about 200.

Services are always from the Book of Common Prayer, and readings from the King James version of the Bible, but with a light touch. The congregation usually approaches double figures, greatly increased for festivals, and is a joyful and loyal congregation who love to sing traditional hymns and who are always accompanied on the organ, and for festivals by the local Penwood Brass Band. The PCC meets roughly once a quarter. There are two churchwardens.

Pentridge and Woodyates are small communities where people love to get together and the various social and fundraising events held throughout the year are neither recognisably church *nor* community events but *both*. A surprisingly high proportion of the Handley and Pentridge population are under 20 (27%). Even though St Rumbold's is committed to using the BCP, we find various ways to welcome youngsters to our festival services, and the preacher needs to be ready for local children to turn up with their parents almost any Sunday.

Chettle: St Mary (Grade II*)

The Church is dedicated to St Mary. Excluding the Norman Tower which is early C16, it was rebuilt during Victorian times by the Castleman family. The organ has been fully restored after a successful fund-raising campaign achieved mainly from village events. The church clock has also recently undergone a conversion to automatic and the clock face was restored.

For years there has been a village rota to clean and decorate the church and more recently an occasional work party to tidy up the churchyard; not all of them necessarily regular churchgoers but people who still see the church as the centre of their community. So, while Chettle

normally has only a small regular congregation, for the festivals it can increase to about half the village, and harvest, Christmas and flower festivals are particularly appreciated by the local community.

This is a small, very rural village with approximately 100 residents, including many children. The village belongs to the 900-acre estate which has been owned by the Castleman family and their descendants since 1846. The 1710 manor house was sold a few years ago and the new owners undertook an award-winning restoration of the house, garden and parkland. The remaining houses and farmland of the estate continue to be owned by a descendant of the Castleman family. Tenants of the 30 or so dwellings pay less than market rents by contributing to the estate's long-term vision for building a sustainable rural economy, balancing biodiversity, food production and the local community. It is a lively community with an extremely successful and useful village shop selling locally sourced and organic food. If there's one village which takes climate change seriously, it's Chettle.

Regular attendance at services is often in single figures but with many more villagers attending Easter, Harvest, Remembrance and Christmas. The PCC meets roughly once a quarter. There is a churchwarden and two Lay Worship Leaders who share in officiating at the monthly service of Evensong. The PCC are currently tentatively considering the option of becoming a "Festival Church".

Farnham: St Laurence (Grade II*)

The nave dates back to the 12th Century, the tower is medieval, and the north aisle, chancel and vestry are Victorian extensions. The one external door leads from the porch which is also the bell tower, accommodating two bells which are set to chime. Although cosy in appearance, the church is surprisingly spacious and is in good condition. Following the 2023 quinquennial, our focus now is on replacing the heating system, as the old oil-fired boiler could fail at any time. We have a wildlife management plan for the churchyard, whereby we leave some of the grass long throughout the summer. We are fortunate that villagers will volunteer for periodic work parties to clean the church and tidy up the churchyard and we benefit from a volunteer mowing rota. The PCC pays for someone to clean the church before services.

Farnham is a village of 190 people and about 100 properties. The main part of the village lies in the valley with small settlements of Farnham Newtown and Elham Court on the periphery of the parish. The village has allotments which provide a social focus, as does the local pub, The Museum Inn, which is named after the museum set up in the village by the pioneer archaeologist Augustus Pitt-Rivers who owned the nearby Rushmore Estate. Some village properties are rented from the estate. Since the village has no community hall, book clubs, sewing and gardening groups are hosted in larger homes. The main annual events, each held every 3 years, are the Open Gardens and Farnham Street Fair, which are well supported by the church, village and beyond.

Attendance at regular services ranges from 4 to 14, with higher numbers for the Carol Service and Christmas Midnight Communion, often with congregations of 50 plus. Arising from the Covid regulations, in recent years a small choir has been mustered to lead the singing at the Carol Service. There is still a monthly Holy Communion (CW) at 6pm and a more informal Family Service, usually led by the Lay Worship Leader. There is a Vowles organ which is

regularly serviced but, with no regular organist, the congregations have become accustomed to singing 'karaoke' to a recorded accompaniment. Harvest Festival is a popular service followed by a shared meal in the church after the service. The small but effective PCC meets bimonthly and there is one Churchwarden, who is also a Lay Worship Leader.

The church has a strong pastoral ethos and members make a point of connecting with parishioners who are in need. As part of social outreach, the church arranges monthly Coffee Mornings, which are held in parishioners' homes and occasional charity quiz evenings in the pub. The PCC supports local and overseas charities financially through church collections at Christmas, Harvest and Remembrance and from other social and fundraising events. Although small in number, the PCC members listen closely to the views of churchgoers and parishioners, many of whom support the church in a number of ways, including fundraising for the building which is considered by the community to be a vital part of the local landscape.

St Peter ad Vincula, Tollard Royal (Grade II*)

The Parish Church is a beautiful late 13th Century place of worship surrounded by glorious countryside in a beautiful setting. It has six bells, most newly installed to ring in the new millennium. The chancel dates from the 14th century and is the earliest visible part. Other extensive works seem to have been done at that time, judging by the windows inserted in the south wall, and traces of painting found in the Chancel. In the 18th Century typical alterations were made to the furnishings. Of the original, only the communion rails remain. In the Victorian period the roof was completely reformed, and alterations made to the north aisle, changing the building considerably. The walls were squared up with lath and plaster set on studding which appears to be from old ships' timbers.

Tollard Royal is a village of just over 100 - a friendly place with a great community spirit. The old telephone box has been converted to hold a defibrillator, books to share and maps of the village for the many walkers who visit. In 2017, the village won the Best Kept Village Award. There is a strong Parish Council, a village website <https://tollardroyal.org/tollard-royal> and a very enthusiastic Village Social Committee, arranging a variety of events throughout the year. The Rushmore Estate owns the Old Cart Shed, which is used for fundraising events for the Church and also for the village's regular social events. The King John Inn has been part of the village for many years and offers both accommodation and an award-winning restaurant. The Larmer Tree, part of the Rushmore Estate, is a popular wedding venue.

Services are a variety of Common Worship and BCP, but the congregation is open to trying different styles. The small, but loyal, congregation (usually in single figures) is increased greatly and joyfully at the festivals and singing is an important part of our worship. Our popular Rogation Service is usually held near the Village Pond and the Remembrance Sunday service at the village War Memorial is shared with Farnham. The flower team do a wonderful job decorating and cleaning the Church during the year, excelling themselves at Festivals when they receive help from willing volunteers. The Bell Ringing Group encourages new members and ring for weddings and special occasions. There is an organ but no regular organist so digital music is the norm. The PCC meets quarterly. There are two churchwardens, one being a Lay Worship Leader.

Although small, Tollard Royal is an active, friendly and welcoming village, and St Peter's is an important part of community life. The village attracts an amazing number of visitors throughout the year and the church is open every day to receive them. It is a popular place for weddings with local couples, and some from further away with connections with the village. The Larmer Tree Gardens close by are a popular venue for weddings, and couples booking there sometimes ask for permission to have their wedding in the Church. The availability for rent of King John's House, next to the church is a great bonus for wedding parties. A Village War Memorial commemorates those killed in The Great War, and Remembrance Sunday is observed at the memorial. Always open, visitors from all over the world write of the peace, beauty, and tranquility they encounter inside the Church. It is often visited by walkers as it is in the midst of some of the finest views on Cranborne Chase.

Upper Chase - Benefice Summary

All the churches naturally face challenges: most have increasingly elderly congregations and declining numbers and this impacts on what can be done, as well as on church finances. Similarly, whilst the church is a valued part of the local community and many are prepared to support fund-raising events and assume that the churches will always be there for festivals and life events, those on the fringes are not committed to regular worship or to supporting the day-to-day life of the church. Changing this mindset, particularly amongst the young, is the key challenge. Church growth is thus our target for the future and there is great potential to do this, particularly in Sixpenny Handley with its younger population.

For example, some parishes are able to use their church buildings for community events in order to extend their profile in the villages; and Sixpenny Handley wishes to develop its informal services to include the parents and toddlers who attend the weekly cafe in church after dropping off children at the school. While our churches are still mainly run by retired folk, they are amongst the most determined (and experienced) to establish a pattern of growth for the future.

Each parish has its own PCC (sometimes quite small) and churchwardens, secretary and treasurer; there are also members of the congregation who take lead responsibility for many other issues such as safeguarding, finance, fabric and the churchyard and in being Lay Worship Leaders. Since 2022, across the six churches 7 people have completed their training and become Lay Worship Leaders, and in 2023, 4 people from the Sixpenny Handley congregation were confirmed, two adults and two teenagers.

We have recently been working with the Diocesan Vision of "Making Jesus Known", and with the five priorities: courageous Christian leadership, working for justice, forming creative partnerships in local mission, championing climate justice, and financing the future sustainably. We feel that our village churches are all blessed with opportunities to realise the diocesan vision and priorities because we engage with our local communities in very direct and personal ways, where many of the people who are not regular churchgoers are still well-known to members of the congregations and work with them in other aspects of village life. This keeps our churches (*deliberately as a matter of policy*) at the forefront of village life in order that the boundaries between church and community are permeable and fluid, enabling our churches to be thoroughly involved in the communities we serve and recognized as such. There is no doubt however, that we have suffered from delays in the execution of the

Deanery plan over at least the last 5 years and from a lack of firm commitment to the detail of such a plan as well as, of course, by interregnum. This is why we are so delighted to welcome the new joint role now agreed and permanently funded. The trick now is to make it happen and the most asked question in our villages amongst both church goers and others is – when will there be a new priest in place?

The congregations at all the churches are blessed to have a wide range of skills and experience, whether practical, administrative or managerial, and they have other willing people who give generously of their time and abilities. In fact, some only give in practical ways of help rather than attendance at services. There is the potential to use these skills more fully across the new benefice of some 1800 souls so that together we can help build resilience for the wellbeing and future flourishing, not only of Sixpenny Handley but also of all the neighbouring parishes.

We want to be vibrant, growing communities of faith and worship, financially stable and reaching outwards. We see this as inherent to who we are and what we do. We want to build on our excellent existing relationships with the local organisations in our communities, to be seen as a valued partner who makes a practical difference. We want to grow in our own spiritual journey with God, to be prayerful, faithful and joyful people, enthusiastically guided by God's Spirit and answering God's call to service in our communities. Thankfully, this enthusiasm has been identified by Bishop Karen and she recognises that in order to bring these aims to success our parishes need a priest, living in the centre of the whole community as a constant demonstration of presence and support.

One of the questions that we are constantly asking ourselves centres on how best to develop the good links with children and young people in our villages. How can we turn considerable local affection for the church buildings into regular worshippers so that people are not just on the fringes but integrated members of church life? What will bring people into our churches, so that they don't just walk past but they know what AND who is inside? We of course want to improve our links among all our parishes in the benefice, but also with the deanery and diocese. Sometimes rural churches can feel isolated and ignored, but we must play our part in correcting that, reaching out for help and advice in order to achieve our aims.

All our churches are well-placed to exploit this intended blurring of the boundaries between church and community to the full. But, rightly so, each of the churches has their own particular sense of mission which works in the context of their own villages, albeit brought together and focused by the embryonic Benefice Council that now exists and - with luck - in the future a priest!

PCC Administration and Finances

Each PCC has a Lay Chair and PCC members lead on, and have oversight, of the various PCC functions. Finances are handled in accordance with Charity Commission legislation and are independently examined each year.

In Sixpenny Handley in the last few years, a small finance team has been established to advise the PCC on all financial matters and provide support to the treasurer. This has been a great success and, after a few years of concern about being able to pay the Share, the PCC is now on a much sounder footing and is paying its way with some in reserve. As with many churches, it is challenging for our PCCs to cover the proportion of the Share allocated to us

(and increasingly so as church supporters get older) which affects what contributions can be made as well as the effort that can go into fund-raising activities. This is an ongoing issue across all rural parishes and much hope is laid on the new Diocesan Share system. All five parishes have paid their Share in the most recent years and are addressing the challenges we face for 2025 as the new Diocesan Share Scheme expects all benefices to meet the majority of their ministry costs. Again, our embryonic Benefice Council is much involved with this and has been discussing how the best possible results can be achieved.

We have already set up and are operating joint finances to manage our benefice life and other events. Each PCC makes monthly contributions to pay for the administrator, any clergy costs incurred by visiting priests during the vacancy and any initiatives on which we may embark together. We also use our benefice account to collect parochial fees and pay the DBF at the end of each quarter. We consider that, not only does this ease the workload of the PCC treasurers locally, but enables the PCCs to think and work collaboratively beyond the isolation of their individual parishes. It is but a short step to consider further collaborative work and joint fundraising in the future. Similarly, we take a whole benefice approach to dealing with any issue. Sixpenny Handley with Gussage St Andrew is large enough to support a fully established fabric committee, but we exchange and share help and information amongst ourselves, including best practice and advice. More can and will be developed in this area.

In short, we try, when possible, to deal with issues collectively when it is sensible to do so, with a view to helping one another, keeping in mind our local parish and benefice requirements and aims in order to succeed. We look forward to the challenges we face and travel in the hope that with God in one hand and a new priest in the other, success will not be far away.

Upper Chase Benefice making Jesus known!



The Vicarage – Sixpenny Handley (Not Listed!)

We are blessed with an excellent vicarage in Sixpenny Handley centrally placed within the new benefice. It is adjacent to St Mary's in the middle of the village and provides a smashing, large two-storey four-bedroom house built in 1962. It is comfortable, set well back from the quiet High Street with its own private driveway. To the front, the south side, it has a pleasant garden mainly set to lawn with wide ranging views; to the rear it offers a secluded and private space, but also sunny garden offering quiet respite. There is a garage, small workshop/shed and roughly 4 parking spaces. The house has undergone major improvements during 2023, and now has modern double glazing, a brand-new heating system with an air-source heat pump, new radiators and new insulation throughout, Solar panels have successfully been added to the roof in order to reduce electrical and heating costs. The property boundary on one side is to St Mary's and on the other offers quick access to the village recreation grounds with its excellent facilities, open fields and pleasant walks across the countryside. In sum it is in an ideal position, domestically and pastorally. The pictures below show (*in order*) the house front/parking, the study/office, the kitchen – leading through to a two utility rooms, spacious sitting room, one of the larger bedrooms – all have built in cupboards and finally the back garden. It was fully redecorated and carpeted to a high standard in 2024 for letting. It is currently vacant again, properly cleaned throughout and can be easily inspected. (POC is Mike Dyer 07584315550).



June 2025