# Mission Community Plan for the United Benefice of Bradworthy

### "Building the Church, One Person at a Time"

**Scripture Reference:**
"So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Romans 12:5 (NIV)

#### Opening Prayer

**Heavenly Father,**
We thank You for calling us to be Your church, a place where all are welcomed in Your name. As we seek to build relationships and invite others into fellowship with You, guide us with Your wisdom and love. Let our words and actions reflect Your grace and truth, so that in all we do, we bring glory to Your name. Help us to listen well, serve joyfully, and invite others with sincerity and love, as we work to build Your church one person at a time.
**Amen.**

## Introduction

The United Benefice of Bradworthy is a rural benefice located in the Holsworthy Deanery, Archdeaconry of Barnstaple, comprising nine parishes: Abbots Bickington, Bradford with Cookbury, Bradworthy, Bulkworthy, Milton Damerel, Putford, Sutcombe, and Thornbury. Stretching across the rolling hills of North Devon, this benefice embodies the traditional beauty of rural England with its agricultural heritage and historical churches. The benefice has been formally established for four years, following a deanery reorganization that brought the parishes together, though their communities have long been intertwined​(Bradworthy Benefice Pro…).

Each parish within the benefice is unique, ranging from the larger, more active village of Bradworthy, with its vibrant community, primary school, and developing housing, to the smaller, more dispersed parishes like Abbots Bickington and Bulkworthy. Our churches, many of which are listed as Grade II or higher, bear witness to centuries of Christian worship. Yet, despite these ancient structures, we are not a church focused on the past, but one that is seeking to grow and respond to the present needs of our communities.

Our benefice is deeply rooted in its agricultural traditions, with a significant portion of the population involved in farming and related industries. However, less than 10% of our community members are directly involved in farming today, reflecting the changing nature of rural life ​(Bradworthy Benefice Profile). Many people now commute to nearby towns, such as Holsworthy and Bideford, for work, and some even further afield. The population is also increasingly diverse as new housing developments, particularly in Bradworthy, bring in residents from other parts of the country, including remote workers and younger families​.

While this growth presents wonderful opportunities for outreach and community engagement, it also brings new challenges. Many of the traditional village structures of support and cohesion have shifted, and there is a growing need for the church to be a place where people can find connection and belonging in the midst of change. The balance between long-established families, who have deep roots in the area, and newer residents, who are seeking community, requires us to be adaptable and open to new ways of engaging and welcoming people into the life of the church.

Our rural setting also presents practical challenges, such as the physical distance between parishes, limited public transportation, and the need for personal vehicles to navigate the narrow lanes and isolated hamlets. In this context, being present and accessible as a church means more than just opening our doors on Sunday; it requires us to meet people where they are, in the community, and in their everyday lives. This Mission Action Plan reflects our commitment to not only be a place of worship but to be a people of prayer and service who reach out with joy and welcome to all, in both traditional and new ways​.

We stand at a crossroads as a benefice, poised between the heritage of our past and the opportunities of our future. As we move forward, we are guided by a desire to build relationships, foster authentic connections, and invite our community into a deeper experience of faith. This plan seeks to address the needs of our parishioners, both those who have been here for generations and those who are just now joining us on this journey.

This Mission Action Plan (MAP) reflects a vision for how we can be an inviting and welcoming presence in the communities we serve. It is informed by my initial three months as Rector, during which I have focused on listening, building relationships, and becoming visible in the wider community. This plan represents the beginning of what I believe God is calling us to do together.

## Foreword

When I prayed about this role and visited the churches in this benefice, I sensed that God was calling me to be part of something special here. Over time, I have come to believe that this plan is an unfolding of that call, but it is not complete. It requires the involvement, thoughts, and prayers of the wider benefice community to develop further. This is very much a draft MAP, a starting point from which we will build together.

This plan forms part of a broader strategy that aligns with the Mission Action Plans of the Ruby Country and Holsworthy Benefices​(Mission Action Plan 2024), as well as the vision of the Diocese of Exeter​, and will incorporate the MAP of Holsworthy. While it reflects the unique character and needs of our local parishes, it also seeks to dovetail where appropriate with the mission goals of our fellow benefices, emphasising growth in prayer, making new disciples, and serving with joy.

#### Alignment with the Diocese of Exeter Vision

Our plan aligns with the Diocese of Exeter’s vision, which focuses on:

* **Growing in prayer**: Deepening our relationship with God as individuals and as a community through intentional and regular prayer.
* **Making new disciples**: We are committed to nurturing faith through personal invitation and relationship, helping people encounter Jesus in their everyday lives.
* **Serving the people of Devon with joy**: We aim to serve with genuine joy, reflecting the love of Christ in practical and meaningful ways​.

### Core Mission Priorities

1. **Invitation and Welcome**
	1. **Building the Church One Person at a Time**: Our mission is to extend personal invitations to people where they are, meeting them in everyday spaces—whether at the local pub, in community groups, sports clubs, or casual gatherings. Relationships will form the foundation of our approach, and over time, these relationships will open doors for more intentional conversations about faith and invitations to church events and services.
	2. **Creating Spaces for Community**: We will create welcoming environments for people to meet and engage, whether in formal church services or more informal settings. Events like Harvest, Christmas, and Easter will remain important, but we will also offer opportunities for people to engage in spaces like cafés, tea gatherings, and social events in and outside the church.
2. **Presence in the Community**

We will be intentional about being where people already gather, offering presence and relationship in everyday places. This might involve attending community events, sports clubs, or local groups, where we listen, build relationships, and become a trusted presence in the lives of the people we serve. Over time, we hope these connections will lead to spiritual conversations and opportunities for deeper engagement with the Christian faith.

1. **Prayer as the Engine Room**

Prayer will be central to everything we do, both personally and corporately. We will establish a rhythm of prayer that sustains our mission, encouraging both formal prayer gatherings and individual commitment to daily prayer. This ongoing prayer life will be the foundation for all our outreach and engagement efforts.

1. **Discipleship and Lay Ministry Training**

A core element of our Mission Action Plan is to **equip and empower** our congregation to grow in faith and take an active role in the life of the church. Discipleship is not just about personal spiritual growth but about preparing people for **ministry, leadership, and service** within our parishes and beyond. As a mission community, we are committed to raising up leaders from within our congregation and providing opportunities for training, mentoring, and spiritual development.

**Developing Lay Ministry**
One of the key aspects of this plan is the encouragement and development of **lay ministry**. Lay ministers are vital to the future of the church, especially in a multi-parish rural benefice like ours, where the geographical spread and the diverse needs of each community require a collaborative leadership model.

I propose that we:

**Continue to Identify and train lay leaders** within each of our clusters, empowering them to take on leadership roles in worship, pastoral care, community outreach, and administration.

**Expand the roles of existing lay ministers** by offering further training and support, enabling them to grow in confidence and take on more responsibilities.

**Encourage new ministries** to emerge that reflect the gifts and passions of our congregation. Whether it's leading Bible studies, facilitating prayer groups, organizing community events, or taking part in pastoral visiting, we want to support lay ministers in pursuing their calling.

Deanery-Wide Training Opportunities: LYCIG
As part of this focus on discipleship and lay ministry, we will actively participate in **Deanery-wide training opportunities** that support our mission goals. One such program is **Leading Your Church into Growth (LYCIG)**, which provides practical tools and strategies for growing and revitalizing churches.

LYCIG is particularly valuable because:

It focuses on **equipping local church leaders**—both clergy and lay people—to foster growth in their churches by building a welcoming, evangelistic culture.

The course provides **practical training in leadership, outreach, and discipleship**, helping church members feel more confident in inviting others to explore faith and participate in church life.

**Workshops and modules** address key areas such as running effective small groups, evangelism in rural settings, and how to make church services more engaging and relevant to those outside of the church community.

By encouraging our lay leaders to participate in LYCIG, we ensure that they are **empowered to lead** with a strong theological foundation, practical skills, and a passion for seeing the church grow.

#### Mentorship and Ongoing Support

Alongside formal training, we will also establish **mentorship relationships** within the benefice, where experienced lay ministers and clergy can mentor those who are exploring or developing their ministry. This relational approach ensures that new and existing lay leaders receive the personal support and guidance they need to flourish in their roles.

Regular **meetings and retreats** will be organised for our lay ministers and leadership teams, providing space for reflection, spiritual growth, and planning. These gatherings will also help to build a sense of **community and mutual support** among our lay leaders across the benefice, fostering a collaborative spirit.

Discipleship Pathways for All Congregation Members
Discipleship is not just for those in leadership but is the calling of every Christian. We will create **discipleship pathways** for all members of our congregation, offering opportunities for everyone to deepen their faith and grow in their understanding of God’s Word. This could include:

* **Bible study groups** that provide regular, in-depth teaching on scripture.
* **Prayer groups** and quiet days that foster spiritual reflection and discernment.
* **Workshops on spiritual gifts**, helping people discover their unique talents and how they can serve God and the church.
* **Small groups** that meet regularly to study, pray, and encourage one another in their faith journeys.

**Cultivating a Culture of Invitation and Evangelism**
As part of discipleship training, we will place a strong emphasis on **invitation and evangelism**. Many people within our congregation may feel unsure about how to invite others to church or talk about their faith, so training in this area will be crucial. Through both **Deanery-wide courses like LYCIG** and locally-led training, we will equip people with practical tools for sharing their faith, whether that’s inviting a neighbour to a church service, leading an Alpha group, or simply offering to pray for someone in need.

**Encouraging Lifelong Growth**
Discipleship is a lifelong journey, and as a benefice, we are committed to fostering an environment where **spiritual growth is continuous**. By offering opportunities for learning, service, and leadership at all stages of life, we hope to build a church community that is vibrant, engaged, and actively growing in faith.

1. **Serving with Joy**

Our mission will be one of joyful service. Whether we are hosting events, running community projects, or offering hospitality in church spaces, we want people to experience the joy of Christ in all that we do. By serving with genuine joy and love, we will reflect the grace and goodness of God to those around us.

1. **Reconsidering Liturgy and Service Structures**

As we seek to invite people to church services, we recognise the need to be adaptable in our approach. This includes reconsidering our liturgy and service structures to meet people where they are in their faith journey. While maintaining the core message of the gospel, we will explore how to make services more accessible and relevant to those who may not be familiar with traditional church practices.

### Strategic Initiatives

#### Worship and Welcome Teams

As part of this Mission Action Plan, I propose the creation of Worship and Welcome Teams within each of the three identified clusters across the benefice. This suggestion aims to strengthen our ability to offer worship and community engagement that is both welcoming and responsive to the needs of our growing and diverse population.

The suggested three clusters would be organized as follows:

Cluster 1: Cookbury, Bradford, Thornbury

Cluster 2: Abbots Bickington, Putford, Bulkworthy

Cluster 3: Bradworthy, Milton Damerel, Sutcombe

These clusters represent natural groupings of parishes that, while distinct in character, share geographical proximity and can benefit from working more closely together in mission and ministry.

#### The Role of the Worship and Welcome Teams

The proposed teams would serve a dual role: overseeing the coordination of worship services and leading community engagement efforts within each cluster. This would allow us to better tailor our services to the local context, ensuring that they remain welcoming and accessible to both regular worshippers and those who may be new to church or faith.

Each team would be made up of volunteers, ideally including a mix of clergy, lay leaders, and congregation members from the parishes within the cluster. Their key responsibilities could include:

Planning and coordinating services: Ensuring that services reflect both the traditions of our churches and the evolving needs of our communities. This could involve reviewing liturgy, introducing new elements of worship that are more accessible to newcomers, and exploring creative service formats (e.g., Café Church, informal worship, or family-oriented services).

Welcoming newcomers: A key focus of these teams would be to create a welcoming atmosphere. This might include having designated greeters at services, making follow-up contacts with first-time visitors, and ensuring that newcomers feel integrated into the life of the church.

Building connections: Beyond Sunday services, the teams could be responsible for organizing informal social events, such as coffee mornings, village gatherings, or family activities, that foster community and create opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Outreach and Invitation: These teams would also play a crucial role in extending personal invitations to local residents. This could involve partnering with other community groups, visiting new residents, or finding ways to be present at local events like fairs, markets, or sports gatherings.

### Community Engagement Beyond Church

A key component of this Mission Action Plan is the intentional engagement with our communities **beyond the walls of the church**. While church services and events are essential, our presence in everyday community life will be equally important in building relationships, fostering trust, and creating opportunities for spiritual conversations.

Being Present Where People Naturally Gather
We recognize that many in our communities may not initially seek out the church, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t open to connection or conversation. By intentionally participating in local community activities and events, we can meet people where they are, in environments that are familiar and comfortable for them. This approach allows us to build trust and relationships over time, laying the foundation for more personal invitations to explore faith or attend church services.

#### Our presence can take many forms, including:

**Attending local events**: Engaging with people at fairs, carnivals, fetes, or sports events offers opportunities for casual, friendly interaction. Whether it’s hosting a stall at a community event or simply being present and available, these gatherings allow us to connect with a broad range of people who may not normally come to church.

**Partnering with local groups**: By collaborating with local clubs, schools, and organizations, we can offer practical support, provide spaces for meetings, and help with community initiatives. This approach reflects our desire to serve the wider community, while also creating opportunities for relationship-building.

**Churchyard Projects as Wildlife Havens**
One particularly exciting opportunity for community engagement is the ongoing transformation of churchyards into **wildlife havens**. In Bradworthy, this project has already proven very popular with a segment of the population that typically doesn’t engage with traditional church activities. By reimagining these sacred spaces as places that serve both spiritual and environmental purposes, we invite people to reconnect with nature and the church in new ways.

We propose expanding these churchyard projects across the benefice, making use of national and international observances that align with environmental stewardship and community involvement, such as:

**National Tree Week**: Hosting tree-planting events in our churchyards and surrounding areas to support biodiversity and engage the local community in ecological preservation.

**International Bat Night**: Organizing evening events that celebrate the wildlife found in our churchyards, using them as opportunities to educate and engage families and children in nature conservation.

**Rural Mission Sunday**: A day dedicated to celebrating rural ministry, where the community can come together for worship, fellowship, and the enjoyment of outdoor activities in our churchyards and nearby fields.

These events not only bring people into contact with the church but also help to highlight our commitment to caring for creation, which resonates with many in today’s world, especially those concerned about environmental issues.

Special Community Events and Focal Days
Beyond wildlife projects, we envision a range of **focal days and special events** throughout the year that can serve as touchpoints for community engagement. These events could include:

**Carnivals and Fetes**: Participating in or hosting local carnivals and village fetes offers a light-hearted way to connect with people. Whether through a simple church presence, a fun activity stall, or offering refreshments, these events are fantastic opportunities to build rapport.

**Quiz Nights**: Hosting quiz nights in local pubs or village halls, where people can enjoy themselves in a relaxed environment. These events would not only provide a chance for social interaction but could also lead to deeper conversations and connections with the church.

**Rural Themed Days**: Celebrating the unique aspects of rural life through themed days such as agricultural shows or harvest celebrations. These events can bridge the gap between traditional rural culture and the church, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging.

**Building Trust Through Long-Term Presence**
Our approach will be slow and intentional. Building meaningful relationships takes time, and our presence in the community should not be rushed or overly formal. Instead, we want to be **available and approachable**, allowing trust to develop naturally over time. By consistently showing up in these spaces, we create openings for spiritual conversations and personal invitations to join us for worship or other church events.

**Invitation to Discuss Faith**
As relationships grow, we will look for opportunities to introduce faith discussions, but only when the time feels right. We want to ensure that these conversations happen naturally, in the context of genuine relationships. Our goal is to offer **personal invitations** to explore faith through services, events, or courses like Alpha, but always in a way that reflects care and respect for where each person is in their journey.

Community engagement beyond church is about **meeting people where they are**, in the spaces they already inhabit. It is about fostering connections and building relationships that, over time, may lead to deeper conversations about faith and an invitation into the life of the church. Whether through environmental projects, community events, or simply being present at local gatherings, this initiative reflects our desire to be a **church that serves and connects** with the whole community.

### Special Services and Exploratory Events

An essential aspect of our mission is to offer special services that meet people where they are, in both life’s significant moments and in everyday activities that bring the community together. These services provide unique opportunities to connect with the wider community in ways that are meaningful, accessible, and spiritually enriching. While traditional services like baptisms, weddings, and funerals remain important touchpoints, we also recognize the need to create brave, new liturgies that speak to the everyday experiences and interests of our community.

Tailored Services for Special Occasions
As part of our commitment to community engagement, we propose the creation of special occasion services that are designed to resonate with both churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike. These services allow us to respond to the real interests and concerns of the people we serve, offering them a space for reflection, gratitude, and celebration that is both spiritual and inclusive.

Examples of services that have proven effective or are planned include:

* Pet Blessing Service at Christmas: This service, held during the Christmas season, invites people to bring their pets to church for a special blessing. It’s a fun and meaningful way to engage with families and individuals who might not otherwise attend a traditional church service. For many, their pets are beloved companions, and this service allows us to honour that connection in a spiritual setting.
* Flower Blessing Service during the Flower Power Weekend: In conjunction with our community-wide effort to plant 2,500 spring bulbs, we will hold a flower blessing service to thank all those who contributed to this initiative and to celebrate the growth and renewal that comes with the planting. This service will not only acknowledge the hard work of volunteers but will also create a space to reflect on the beauty of creation and the ways in which we can partner with God in caring for the environment.

Opportunities for Creativity and Relevance
These examples are just the beginning. We have an opportunity to be brave and creative in the types of services we offer, tailoring liturgy to meet the specific needs, interests, and concerns of our community. For example:

* Harvest Festival with a Modern Twist: Rather than simply holding a traditional Harvest service, we might include elements that reflect contemporary environmental concerns, such as thanking God for sustainable farming practices or highlighting local organic produce. We could even hold part of the service in a community garden or on a local farm. **What we are trying for the first time is creating a harvest service with input from those who do not regularly attend non prescribe to being a Christian.**
* Blessing of the Tools: In rural communities where agriculture, crafts, and trade are part of daily life, we could hold a special service to bless the tools and work of our community. This might include farm tools, kitchen utensils, or even laptops for those working remotely.
* Community Milestone Celebrations: Services that mark significant local or national events, such as Remembrance Day, National Tree Week, or village anniversaries, offer opportunities to gather people for reflection and gratitude, incorporating prayers and blessings that speak to the broader community's experience.

#### Exploratory Faith Engagement

Beyond special occasion services, we will continue to offer more informal and exploratory faith events, such as Alph and similar programs, which provide a welcoming, low-pressure environment for people to ask questions and explore the Christian faith. These exploratory events are especially important for those who may be curious about Christianity but are unsure where to begin.

Our goal with these programs is to offer a gentle introduction to faith, allowing people to come as they are and engage at their own pace. Whether it’s through group discussions, shared meals, or personal reflection, these programs create spaces where spiritual conversations can happen naturally and where people feel safe to express their thoughts and doubts.

Making Church a Welcoming Space for Everyone
By offering special services and events that respond to the real, felt needs of our community, we create more entry points for people to engage with the church. Whether through a fun, light-hearted event like a pet blessing or a more contemplative service that reflects on the rhythms of life and nature, these services demonstrate that the church is a place where all of life is celebrated and honoured.

This approach aligns with our core vision of building the church one person at a time, recognizing that everyone’s journey of faith looks different. By offering a variety of services and events, we ensure that there are multiple touchpoints for people to connect with God, each other, and the church.

#### Acknowledgment of Colleagues' Plans

This plan acknowledges the mission priorities of our neighbouring benefices, Ruby Country and Holsworthy. Both benefices are committed to outreach, growth, and service, with Ruby Country focusing on adult evangelism and governance structures, and Holsworthy working on building their own MAP. We will continue cross-benefice collaboration, aligning our efforts where possible, and anticipate incorporating another Mission Action Plan from a colleague benefice in the future.

#### Call to Prayer

We invite everyone in the benefice to join in prayer as we seek to live out and develop this mission. Pray for the wisdom to build relationships that lead people closer to Christ and for the courage to invite others into fellowship with God. Together, with God's guidance, we will build His church, one person at a time.

**“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”** — Galatians 6:9