

## **The Joint Benefice of St Michael the Archangel, Mere; All Saints, Maiden Bradley & St Mary the Virgin, West Knoyle, Wiltshire**

### **Answers to 'Let Us Talk' Questions**

These answers come from three consultations done in recent years in the benefice: two open meetings (2010 and 2013) and the benefice profile compiled in 2012 to fill the priest-in-charge vacancy. Inevitably some answers differ between the two rural parishes - Maiden Bradley (population 330) and West Knoyle (150) - and the large-village parish at Mere (3,000) Where these differences seem significant, we distinguish between them.

#### **1. What is the 'Personality and Character' of your local church?**

All three parishes see themselves as friendly and welcoming and playing an important and active role as centres of community life. This applies particularly to the rural localities, where the church buildings so visually dominate the village-scape, and the villagers think of the church as "theirs", even if they don't regularly attend services but use it for baptisms, weddings and funerals. All three churches have noticeably elderly congregations, and are conscious of the need to attract younger families and worshippers to ensure a future for the church. The churches are blessed with many friendly, gifted, sensitive, competent, energetic and willing people whose talents are there to use.

#### **2. What are the priorities of your local church?**

The top priority for all three parishes is to "keep the show on the road" by paying their own way financially, by maintaining their ancient buildings, by offering a variety of worship traditions, and by encouraging younger families and worshippers to take an active part in church life. The parishes recognise the need to reach out more into their communities, not simply to increase their own membership, but also to be Good Samaritans by finding and giving help to those who need it most: the very old, the housebound, single parents, the lonely, the very young and the poorer residents, the latter particularly in Mere, 16 per cent of whose families are classed as vulnerable .

#### **3. Is there one thing you would like to take on in the coming year (recognising that may mean you may need to stop doing something else)?**

In Mere, expand the youth work and the work with families, possibly adding a special praise service (for children) once a month at 11:15am or following the 5th-Sunday matins service. In the rural parishes, bring the church into the community rather than expecting the community to come to church by doing more visiting the old and sick, running a youth club, Sunday School, Lent lunches, and a pet service at the village show.

#### **4. Are there ways in which we can work together to achieve more?**

If "we" means the benefice on the one hand and the diocesan clergy and staff on the other, we cannot suggest any specific measures, although, given the difficult financial situation of the parishes, a reduction in diocesan administrative costs (but not clergy stipends) would relieve some of the financial pressure on the parishioners. This would allow the parishes to spend less time in relentless fund-raising and more time helping people to have an encounter with Jesus Christ and develop a relationship with him.

If "we" means the three parishes working together amongst themselves, we can suggest a number of measures:

- Create a stronger link with Upper Stour Benefice for work with the children and staff of the Whitesheet C of E Voluntary Aided Primary School in Zeals;

- Strengthen the Churches Together in Mere and District link, particularly with the young people in the Roman Catholic church in Mere;
- Hold regular meetings amongst the wardens and PCC members of the three parishes to encourage a cross-fertilisation of ideas and sharing resources and leaders.

#### ***5. How can we best measure the quality and impact of church life?***

We cannot easily measure the quality and impact of church life. Some statistical measures give rough indicators: attendances at services, number of baptisms and funerals, number of pastoral visits, number of church-run community activities and their attendances and levels of financial giving. But we know quality when we see and feel it, in terms of the general atmosphere - its joyfulness and the depth of meaning of the fellowship, worship and prayer life of the parishioners.

*6 March 2013*

# St Michael's in Mere, Wiltshire, England

## The church of St Michael the Archangel

The parishioners of St Michael's are an active and friendly group of Christians who enjoy the fellowship of worshipping together in the Anglican tradition and helping each other to find and grow our faith. We also help and support each other in our daily needs and reach out to others in the wider community.

Mere is a small town of about 2,600 in Wiltshire, England, set in the southwestern tip of Salisbury Plain, close to the borders of Dorset and Somerset. Parts of our church building date from the 11th century, and it attracts many visitors because of its interesting architectural and historical features.

The website tells the St Michael's story in four main sections:



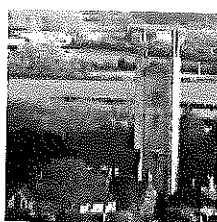
### What's on

We have regular services on Sunday and also during the week. We also hold other occasional services that appeal to special interests and tastes. You can also find out about our music, our activities for children and young people and other adult groups.



### Groups and community

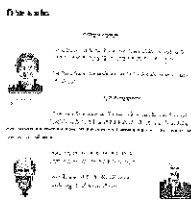
St Michael's runs many church-related activities in the main building and also in the Grove Building across the street. Other groups use it for their meetings, concerts, exhibits and comings-together. Here is what they do, with links and contacts to help you find out more.



### Building and history

Like all old buildings, our ancient church shows the history of Mere's Christian community in stone, hewn and carved wood, stained glass and brass. Find out why so many church guide books single it out for listing.

### Who's who



St Michael's now has a new vicar, the Revd Carol Wilson-Barker, who was licensed in September 2012. Churchwardens, a Parochial Church Council (PCC) and other lay people help her in her task. See who is in charge of the parish and how to contact them.

### St Michael's on the Map

