

DART and AVON MISSION COMMUNITY

2026

Appointment of a full time Pioneer Minister

Based in Buckfastleigh, South Devon



FOREWORD – From the Archdeacon of Totnes, The Ven. Douglas Dettmer



Thank you for your interest in the post of Pioneer Minister in Buckfastleigh. This role is pioneering in a dual sense—both in its core purpose of breaking new ground in mission and church growth, and in its innovative nature in a Diocese of Exeter fully engaged with our *Pray, Grow, Serve 2035* strategy for mission across Devon. Buckfastleigh is set in one of the most glorious landscapes of England, in a rural areas on the southern fringe of Dartmoor; yet it has the character of a small post-industrial town with significant economic deprivation. The local parish church has served the social needs of its community lovingly and with considerable effectiveness; it now seeks to build on the resulting good connections between church and town by pioneering new forms of church community and encouraging more people of all ages and backgrounds onto the journey of Christian discipleship.

The **Right Revd Dr Mike Harrison** became **Bishop of Exeter** in November 2024 and since his arrival has continued to develop our diocesan vision for mission and ministry. Bishop Mike says: “The Diocese of Exeter’s vision to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy has evolved over the last five years. It’s a vision that fits with Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28.16-20, which is authoritative for me and I’m sure for many.

“Putting flesh on the bones of the vision, we have identified five priorities for this next season of our life together. First, **Missional Leadership**: equipping



and resourcing the ordained and lay leaders of our Christian communities as best as we can to develop disciples and make new disciples. Second, developing a “**Missional DNA**” across our Christian communities, encouraging outward-looking, invitational churches, hospitable to outsiders and engaged with their wider communities. Third, cultivating an intentional **Vocational Culture** so that



we are not asking *whether* God is calling me / us, but ‘*To what* is God calling me / us now?’ Fourth, **Children & Young People** being placed at the heart of our life, mission and ministry. And fifth, a **Mixed Ecology**: understanding that we need different ways of doing and being Church. Alongside time-honoured Church we need all sorts

of Christian communities which can engage with the 95% of our population who are as yet unengaged. I hope that these five priorities will become embedded at every level of our ministry going forward.”

Further information about our diocesan vision can be found at:

[Our Pray Grow Serve Vision - Diocese of Exeter](#)



Deanery & Diocese

The Dart & Avon Team Ministry serves town and rural communities set in an outstandingly beautiful Devon landscape, from the southern slopes of Dartmoor to the edge of Totnes. Excellent transport links via road and rail give easy access to the rest of the county and beyond. It is a fine environment for life and work.

The Pioneer Minister will be work within a ministry team including the team rector, who chairs the PCCs and has responsibility for strategic oversight, finances and buildings across the benefice; a half-time team vicar, who shares the cure of souls with the rector and will continue to be responsible for ‘inherited church’ ministry in Buckfastleigh including traditional church services; together with a licensed lay minister and retired clergy. The Methodist minister for Buckfastleigh, who is also superintendent minister of the Teignbridge circuit, is a member of the Steering Group for the project.

We aim to be a diverse and truly representative diocesan community and particularly welcome applications from women and from people of global majority heritage. The Diocese of Exeter is a good place to be in ministry, and it is a particularly exciting time of growth and development in our diocesan life.

May God bless you as you continue to discern whether you might be called to this ministry; do be in touch with me directly if you would value a confidential conversation about the post.

With my best wishes,

Douglas Dettmer, Archdeacon of Totnes

ADT@exeter.anglican.org (01626) 832064

A welcome from our Team Rector

Welcome to the Dart and Avon Mission Community – if you have got this far PLEASE DO READ ON!

Does rural and small-town Pioneer Ministry excite you? Do you have a willingness to test out where God is leading, and to be part of a Mission Community that is on an exciting journey as we work out together what God's plans are for us? Are you interested in helping us in mission—making new disciples and establishing new ways of being church, with a focus on the town of Buckfastleigh? If so, we would love to hear from you.

We are not looking for someone who can walk on water, but you will need to be a trained Pioneer Minister, whether lay or ordained, who is self-reliant and a team player, supportive and with a heart for mission. A sense of humour and positivity is a must!

The Mission Community is in a beautiful part of Devon, with easy access to major road and rail links. This role is not for someone looking for a quiet rural idyll, but is for someone with vision, passion and enthusiasm.

We are excited about the future and know the right person is out there to share our journey. Might this be you? If this interests you at all, can we encourage you in your discernment – please don't hesitate to get in touch if you want to talk further. We are looking forward to welcoming our new team member and fellow disciple.

The Revd Preb. Prof. Gina Radford, Team Rector

What is on offer

We are seeking to appoint a full-time Pioneer Minister based in Buckfastleigh. He or she will be either a licensed lay minister or an ordained minister with relevant experience and training for pioneer ministry.

The post is funded for 5 years in the first instance from strategic investment funding granted by the Church of England nationally to help churches across Devon grow, flourish and serve their communities well into the future. There is an accountability to the diocese for the funding, with the need to set clear outcomes and a plan to achieve these, and to capture learning that can be shared more widely.

The Pioneer Minister will be licensed by the bishop and paid by the diocese, responsible to the team rector and locally accountable to the Mission Community and the project's ecumenical Steering Group.

You will be joining us at an important time in the life of the Mission Community and the Diocese of Exeter. The post is initially funded for 5 years by the diocese as part of its wider missional strategy. As a Mission Community we are excited about where God is leading us and are looking for someone who will join us in the next step of our adventure with God.

Whilst the post is funded and licensed on a diocesan basis, there is real local ecumenical ownership and commitment to this post with our Methodist colleagues, who share the passion and vision for mission in the community.

Background

In the Dart and Avon Mission Community we believe we are on an exciting journey as we work out together what God's plans are for us and our local communities. The **challenge** is how to continue to maintain and grow our traditional mission and ministry; and yet also reach out into our wider communities. We have so much need, particularly in Buckfastleigh and South Brent, with high levels of rural deprivation and child poverty. We feel very strongly that we need to bring the message of God's love and hope into these communities, including in practical action and service; and to connect with

people where they are, with different ways of sharing Gospel and exploring new ways of being church. We seek to be an inclusive Mission Community and recently agreed the use of Prayers of Love and Faith in appropriate services.

We have real **opportunities**, particularly in Buckfastleigh, and it feels that God is moving in exciting ways. For example:-

- St Luke's Buckfastleigh run and house the local Foodbank and café. This operates weekly and is an important service we offer to the community and a way of connecting to parts of the community we may not otherwise do. We also fund a part time Debt Advisor who is proving very important in helping individuals get out of the debt cycle.
- The church hosts a number of community groups and activities in its hall, including Little Lambs for preschool children.
- St Luke's church building is at a critical stage as it has fundamental structural problems, despite being less than 30 years old. Following a period of discernment and exploration, the PCC are moving ahead with exploring options for re-provisioning of the church in a new and very different way. We are open to where the Holy Spirit leads us. So, the ground is already prepared for different and new ways of being church.
- We have a non-church Primary School which we have links with but would like to strengthen.
- As a church we have positive relationships with our wider community, including various third sector organisations and the Town Council.
- As a Mission Community we share this excitement for the future, and the vision for a Pioneer Minister is very much owned across the whole MC, whilst recognising that this post is based in and principally serving Buckfastleigh. But we also realise we can't do this in our own strength. So, we have embarked on "A Year of Prayer" to bring the Mission Community together to pray for our development.

Role Description

As a pioneer you will go where people are, listen, explore, engage. In rural settings such as ours, poverty and its causes and effects in deprivation, isolation and social injustice can be hidden. Adding to the knowledge you bring with you, you will discover talented and willing people, networks, organisations, assets, connections – and needs that have gone disregarded, opportunities ignored, enthusiasms overlooked, questions unasked.

The end result for which we work and pray will be an increasing number of people in Buckfastleigh engaging with the Christian faith and growing in discipleship, together with one or more new expressions of worship and Christian community in the town beyond the parish church building and the existing Church of England congregation.

Person Specification

We are looking for a prayerful, missional Pioneer Minister with spiritual energy and reasonable organisational skills who: -

- has an understanding and enthusiasm for rural life as well as being able to relate to the more urban needs of Buckfastleigh residents
- is resilient, caring and sociable
- is able to work independently whilst happy to commit to team working
- will communicate the Gospel in an inclusive and engaging style
- will explore creative and innovative ways in which to make new disciples and establish new forms and expressions of church, forming new Christian communities which will enable people unable to connect with existing styles of worship to be able to meet with God.
- has an understanding of the importance of listening to God and to the local community, getting to know people and being known by them; meeting them where and how they are.
- is able to discern the points of need within the community and find partners to help respond to these.
- is able to focus on those with no or very little church connection.
- can encourage a passion for mission and grow new pioneer leaders.

You will be a full member of the Mission Community Ministry Team who will offer support, fellowship, and development. However, you will not be expected to undertake “traditional” ministry, but to offer distinctive and complementary ministry and so add to the breadth of mission and ministry within the community.

You will be supported on a day-to-day basis by the Team Rector and overseen by a small ecumenical Steering Group which will include local Methodist colleagues.

Qualities and Experience

Essential: -

- A wholehearted commitment to mission and evangelism – making new disciples and developing new ways of being church.
- If lay, appropriate theological training/knowledge to enable the minister to be licensed as a Lay Worker by the Bishop of Exeter. If ordained, appropriate training and experience.
- Relevant training in Pioneer Ministry.
- A track record in establishing relationships and networking; community engagement; identifying needs; and working with other groups and individuals within community.
- A proven ability to plan, organise, lead and be accountable for initiatives.
- Being able to work within teams, and lead teams yourself.
- Creativity, and the ability to develop fresh ways to engage with the community in mission.
- A Christ centred ability for self-reflection and an openness to personal development, supported by an appropriate pattern of prayer and worship.
- Well-developed communication & interpersonal skills (written and verbal) are essential, including the use of social media.

Desirable: -

- An understanding of, and experience of mission and ministry in, rural communities.

The Dart and Avon Mission Community

The Mission Community consists of the parishes of Buckfastleigh, a small town; the large village of South Brent; and the smaller villages of Dean Prior, Littlehempston, Rattery and Staverton with Landscope—seven churches. Part of the benefice is in the South Hams and the remainder in the Teignbridge District Council area situated between the sea to the south and Dartmoor to the north. The benefice is approximately midway between Exeter and Plymouth. It is well served by road and rail, the Devon Expressway (A38) running through it, and the main railway line from London Paddington with stations at Newton Abbot and Totnes. The parish of Buckfastleigh includes Buckfast with its Benedictine Abbey, a well-known place of worship and a very busy tourist attraction. The parish of Staverton adjoins the river Dart and the Dartington Hall Estate, renowned for its arts and music. The South Devon Steam Railway is based in Buckfastleigh and runs through Staverton to Totnes.

Currently the ministry team of clergy and lay ministers meets monthly, and the members of the team share in the leading of services across the churches. We recently appointed 7 lay worship leaders across the Mission Community, who lead our lay-led services within the parishes. We work together across the Mission Community with regular meeting of churchwardens; safeguarding leads; treasurers; pastoral visiting teams etc. in addition we hold joint PCCs meetings with all our PCCS at least twice a year. The 5th Sunday services are joint events; as not all our churches have a weekly service, church members are increasingly moving between our churches for Sunday services. We have good relationships ecumenically and regularly run joint courses, parish lunches etc with Methodist colleagues.

Our Mission Community Vision is:-

- *to support and grow traditional ministry and discipleship*
- *to reach out more widely and innovatively into our communities to show God's love in our lives and by our actions*
- *to make new disciples for Christ and explore new ways of being church.*

Buckfastleigh

Buckfastleigh has a population of about 4,000. There are three areas of former local authority housing and some private developments. There are two primary schools in the parish, one in Buckfastleigh and St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary in the adjacent village of Buckfast. There are various clubs and societies including the Scouts which meet in the church building. There are significant socio-economic issues within the town, which are more usually associated with urban settings.

St Luke's is a modern building situated in the centre of the benefice and the town. There are 34 members on the electoral roll.

A very successful and much appreciated Food Bank operates from the downstairs hall of the church. There are a thriving Mothers' Union and a large variety of groups and events, some run by or sponsored by the Church, make full use of the building.

The present St Luke's is a successor to the chapel of ease which stood on the site until 1992. The remains, after an arson attack, of the Parish Church of Holy Trinity stand on a hill above the town. The churchyard is still open for burials. The decision was then made to demolish the chapel of ease and build the new St Luke's which includes all facilities and a large hall under the worship area. Regrettably the building suffers from serious defects which will involve major works, and we are currently exploring an exciting vision for the future of St Luke's, supported by professional advisers.

The house for the Pioneer Minister is in Buckfastleigh. The accommodation includes the usual rooms downstairs including a study, with four good bedrooms above. There is also an office in the church.

