

Vacancy in the Benefice of Lower Teesdale – Bishop’s Letter – February 2025

Thank you for your interest in the post of Rector for the Benefice of Lower Teesdale in the beautiful area of South-West County Durham made up of villages, hamlets, and farmsteads in and around the historic town, Barnard Castle. From Laithkirk in the North of the benefice stunning views of the Pennines are enjoyed, and on lower ground in the South, the beauty and drama of the River Tees.

This is a hopeful time in the life of these six churches (currently organised as four parishes but with plans to re-organise into two). The population of the communities combine to just over 4000 people and includes one Church of England Primary School and one Community Primary School. The faithful and determined people of these churches look forward to welcoming a new Rector who can build on the already strong foundation of worship, outreach and schools work that together they may make Christ’s love known more widely and deeply in a variety of creative ways in the communities they serve.

This year the Diocese of Leeds has been celebrating its 10th birthday, marking its creation from the former dioceses of Ripon and Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield. There is a growing appreciation of the ways in which the breadth of vision and depth of resources of a large diocese can support the ministry of parishes in our various contexts. We have also embarked on the Barnabas programme, supported by central funding, to encourage and enable clergy and parishes to be confident in our mission, in our future, in our leadership and our witness. There is much more to be found on the diocesan website at [Barnabas](#).

I arrived in the Diocese 18 months ago and personally I have found an incredibly warm welcome, supportive colleagues and an enabling culture. There is a sense of ‘youthfulness’ in the structures which encourages creativity and innovation and is not hampered by deep seated tradition which can limit openness to change. Further, the unsettling journey of establishing a new organisation is now complete. In the Ripon Episcopal Area, as is the case across the Diocese, clergy and ministers are deeply committed to mission and ministry and appreciate the collegiality they enjoy with one another, working together to overcome challenges, develop vision and implement plans. In my opinion, and based on my experience, this is a very positive and hopeful time for someone to consider joining the Diocese of Leeds (or moving within it).

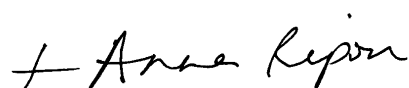
We hope the new Rector, with understanding of the joys and particular challenges of rural ministry, will work creatively with colleagues in the Richmond Deanery, including the newly appointed Rural Change Enabler, to explore new ways to help our churches and people sustain their loving presence and outreach in their communities. The deanery is strong and clergy and lay people support one another and work well together.

It is important to note that the tenure of the previous two incumbents has been shorter than hoped for reasons I am happy to discuss with interested parties. Nevertheless a great deal of good work within the wider community and with schools and families has been achieved, and there is desire to further develop shared working, worship, and vision. Members of the congregations are faithful, keen, committed and creative and will be delighted to work with their new rector in mission and ministry such as youth work, pastoral care and making disciples.

In return, my personal hope is that someone reading this, discerns a call to these places and people with a first priority to listen to and love deeply those in the churches, as much as those beyond. The uncertainty of recent years has taken its toll. Hope for the future is brightening and with a little help, guidance and leading can be fanned into flame. But there is also weariness and the faithful would be grateful for compassionate priestly care in their midst.

I hope that you will find in this brochure and other papers prepared by the parish a sense of the opportunities for growth in your ministry and your own discipleship, and that you will be able to perceive whether you are being called to take further this process of discernment. If you wish to have an informal conversation with me, I would be glad to hear from you.

With all good wishes and prayers,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Ripon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.