

Devon Churches Rural Forum Meeting Notes

2nd July 2019 – 10 am to 12 noon

Devon YFC Centre, Cheriton Bishop

1. Archdeacon Mark opened the meeting in prayer

2. **Welcome and Introductions**

The chair offered a special welcome to guests from Devon and Cornwall Police: Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer who is also the National Lead for Modern Slavery, Martin Beck who is the Rural Crime Officer for Devon and Steve Grant and Vicky Goodwin from the Communications department, who all attended for the first part of the meeting. Martin will also be a regular member of our Forum. Mark also welcomed especially our guests and speakers Rev'd Dr Mark Betson, the National Rural Officer for the Church of England, and Professor Michael Winter OBE, University of Exeter & Board Member for Natural England, UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Rothamstead Research, and to Chris Keppie the Exeter Diocesan Church and Society Officer, attending for the first time.

Present:

Mark Butchers (Chair and Archdeacon of Barnstaple); Penny Dobbin (secretary), Dave Watson (Methodist lay minister and rural parish councillor), Danny Semorad (farmer, church warden, member of Devon Historic Churches Trust), David Ursell (Anglican minister, farmer and past rural officer), Stephen Derges (free church leader and Ambassador for Germinate), Chris Keppie (Exeter Diocese Church and Society Officer), Elizabeth Burke (rural minister), Sylvia West (PCC and deanery synod secretary and representing the Devon Federation of WIs), Philip Wagstaff (rural minister and Methodist rural officer for Plymouth and Exeter Methodist District), Jane Lucas (recently retired rural minister), Susanna Metz (rural minister and Rural Dean of Torrington), Douglas Dettmer (Archdeacon of Totnes and member of the National Church of England Rural Affairs Group), Mark Betson (National C of E Rural Officer), Jane Frost (rural minister), Michael Winter (Agricultural Professor).

3. Apologies were received from Marisa Cockfield, Sarah Cracknell, Matthew Tregenza, Sam Upham, Ruth Frampton, Jane Hayes, Marian Carson, John Wibberley, Stuart Wilson, Nickie Johnson, Heather Sayle, Andy Jerrard, Janet May, Graham Whalley, Elaine Cook, Simon Franklin.
4. The [notes of the last meeting](#) were agreed as a correct record.

5. Matters Arising

- a. Penny referred to the correspondence from the “Find Your Voice” Group regarding looking for venues to hold community singing groups for those over 65 years of age and/or with learning difficulties:

“Find Your Voice offer fully funded music and movement programmes for over 65yrs or adults living with learning disabilities. Programmes are 10 weeks long, with each session being 45 minutes music and 45 minutes movement. With facilitators around Devon and 3 existing partner venues they are looking for 7 further partnership venues. If you are involved with day centres, services, community spaces etc. that might be able to host a programme or you would like to join a class please see [here](#) or contact James Galbraith (via finance@findyourvoice.org.uk).”

The information sheet on dementia and help with developing Memory Cafés is an outstanding action. **Action: Penny**

- b. DCRF Conference on Models of Rural Ministry Follow Up – Mark said a meeting was planned for 3rd July to follow up issues raised and explore possibilities for a tool kit for multi-parish rural ministry.
- c. Sylvia reported that following the last meeting an open letter to rural women had been drafted by the FCN with input from the WI and MU. This contained information on help and contacts available to rural women and had been distributed at the Spring Council meeting of the Devon Federation of WIs, together with information leaflets from the FCN, and had been received well.

A further meeting is being held on October 5th entitled “Link Together” as part of the WI’s work to alleviate loneliness and social isolation. This event will also have speakers from the FCN, Homestart, Westbank, local transport providers and more. Sylvia will present the work being undertaken by the DCRF. The aim is to continue to raise awareness and to share ideas that help people to connect with each other.

As so many aims and concerns are similar, Sylvia is also continuing to develop connections between local WI branches and local churches and these are progressing well.

- d. We also discussed the progression of the DCRF’s Church Based Community Activities Project – where we are collecting information on as many church based social activities, such as lunch clubs and coffee mornings, with the aim of linking

them up with people who may be lonely or socially isolated in our communities, via “social prescribers” in our different public and voluntary agencies.

6. Reconnecting with Rural Communities – Devon and Cornwall Police

The Chief Constable spoke about the gradual reduction in rural services generally and that the urban voice often seems to be heard more loudly in terms of resources.

As well as agricultural and wildlife crime, our rural areas have instances of modern slavery, pop-up brothels, issues with isolation and mental health. Shaun spoke about the high number of knife related murders in our cities which rightly has a high profile – but the tragic deaths through suicide, particularly in our farming communities, are equally important.

Approximately 20% of the force’s work is related to people with mental health issues and those who may go missing due to dementia. Issues of social isolation, loneliness and fear need to be tackled.

In our communities people don’t want all their services to be “digital” so whilst email and websites can be very useful in reporting and sharing information, people are very much needed. But, there are only 0.08 officers to cover each square mile in our area.

In Devon and Cornwall, through Martin Beck’s role, the force is aiming to connect more with rural communities. The police would also like to support us in the churches with our work in local communities. There are already good relationships with the Street Pastor and College Pastor schemes and there are 30 police chaplains supporting the force in Devon and Cornwall (Rev’d Marisa Cockfield – member of the DCRF is one). The police are also already working well with the Dartmoor Rescue team, who know their particular area as well as anyone could, and the National Farmers Union.

Shaun concluded that “the gap between 999 and daily life has got bigger” and he wants to get back to the police being able to be out and about more.

Martin Beck added that he has much experience in rural policing in North Devon and emphasised his desire and need to work with local communities. He said there are national strategies to tackle some aspects of rural crime including agricultural theft, sheep worrying, fly tipping, equine crime and poaching and part of his job is to turn national strategy into practical local implementation. Heritage crime – including damage to churches and wildlife crime also come under his brief.

7. Follow Ups:

- a. We will arrange for Vicki Goodwin to meet up with Chris Keppie and Chloe Axford (Exeter Diocese Communications Director) to discuss how we might be able to communicate some of these issues and how people can respond and help **Action: Penny/Martin to make the contacts**
- b. We will circulate Martin Beck's details to all members in case they would like to follow up any specific issues or involve him in any community activities **Action: Penny/Martin**
- c. Penny to pass details of Farming Community Network contacts to Martin to help with supporting our farming communities. **Action: Penny**
- d. Martin will give Penny contacts for all the Sector Inspectors in Devon so that we can follow up with information on our community activities database so that the police may be able to refer people if they could benefit. **Action: Martin**
- e. We also mentioned the possibility of using churches, and church based community activities, as a base for community policing – perhaps with someone from the police attending a coffee morning occasionally, for example, or using the building as a base for activities. **Action: all to bear in mind for whenever useful**
- f. The theme for our October meeting had been to focus on Modern Slavery in a rural context. We will expand this to include rural crime and community safety more generally, and Martin will also invite one of his colleagues to speak on Modern Slavery. **Action: Penny/Martin**
- g. Penny to provide Mark Betson's contact details to the Chief Constable via Martin for onward follow up. **Action: Penny**

Our police colleagues then left the meeting for further events across Devon – the chair thanked the Chief Constable and his staff very much for finding the time to join us and looked forward to further working together.

8. DCRF Project Updates

a. Placements for Ordinands

Philip Wagstaff reported on behalf of the working group. He said that following the first meeting of the group (Simon Franklin, Heather Sayle, Philip Wagstaff, Stephen Skinner) an initial proposal had been sent to Jill Hopkinson at Sarum College and once feedback was received the group would meet again. Both short term and long placements were under consideration with the aim of offering experience of rural ministry in all its richness and diversity.

There is a concern that rural training in colleges and courses nationally does not have a particular focus and that we therefore need to do something more locally.

Forum members who had experienced a rural placement had found it invaluable either in helping them to discern their future ministry or in providing resource and experience when they found themselves in rural ministry.

Mark asked the group to ensure that Philip Sourbut and Donna Lazenby (for SWMTC and St Mellitus respectively) were kept informed of the work. **Action: Simon**

b. Rural Worship Workshop

This is planned for 12th October, 9.30 am 1 pm to be followed by a shared lunch, at Teign Valley Community Hall. An updated [programme](#) and [poster](#) can be accessed via these links.

The workshop is for anyone involved either as a participant or leader of rural worship, and will include the development of a seasonal calendar of worship, traditional farming festivals, opportunities for blessing the community in loss and joy and spirituality events such as prayer walks and connecting with nature. It is being supported by the Diocesan Worship, Prayer and Spirituality Group, and the Growing the Rural Church Project because of its links to Festival church worship.

Numbers signed up are quite low at present and members are asked to encourage members of their churches and other networks to consider whether they may be able to join.

Philip will circulate through the Methodist churches. Penny will also speak to Chloe Axford, GtRCh and Cathy Scoffield to get the event advertised more widely in the diocese. It is already on our website and the Diocesan Events page. **Action: Penny and Philip**

c. Farm Visit Programme

Our first farm visit was held on 30th April to Dairyfield Farm, Down St Mary, by kind invitation of Joanne and Will Jones. A report and pictures are available on our website [here](#). Our next visit is to Dartington Hall Farm, by kind invitation of Jon Perkin, on 13th July. There are spaces remaining for the visit and again members are asked to encourage people in their networks to consider coming.

Post meeting note: A report and pictures from this event is available [here](#).

9. Presentation from Professor Michael Winter

Michael is involved in research on environmental land management schemes, post-Brexit planning, he is a board member for Natural England and a member of the Bovine TB Review Group and his personal research interests include family farming issues and sustainable agriculture.

He presented a summary of his work for his 2018 report “Changing Food Cultures: Challenges and Opportunities for UK Agriculture”. The full report can be accessed [here](#) and his presentation can be found [here](#).

His report covered the changing aspects of Food Culture and he considered this under the headings of Availability, Acquisition, Appropriation and Anxiety. He looked at aspects including diet and nutrition, the preponderance of processed foods and an apparent increasing diversity of foodstuffs which may not be all that it seems. He concluded with a series of recommendations for food and farming policy, market structures and skills development. He emphasised that in the world of “public money for public good” that nutritional security should be seen as a public good.

Michael also said that the landscape has changed quickly since his report was published this time last year and there is an added urgency to develop policy on food strategy and security for our country. On June 27th an independent review was launched by the government into the development of a National Food Strategy. Further information can be found [here](#).

A discussion on Brexit as it affects British farmers followed. Uncertainty over Brexit continues to cause real concern to our farmers. Some areas of support have been agreed in the Withdrawal agreement, but it is unclear whether these would stand in the event of no deal because although agreed with the EU, some of these agreements may not be compliant with WTO rules.

Michael concluded the discussion by urging all involved to recognise that whilst the effects of Brexit, particularly with no deal, will be different for different farmers – for example between dairy or sheep farmers – that some farmers will find changes to tariffs really difficult. He stressed that farming matters, for food and nutrition, public health, the environment and nature recovery and that looking after our farmers is critical.

Those wanting to find out more about the impacts of Brexit on British farming may find the NFU website helpful <https://www.nfuonline.com/news/eu-exit/>

Mark thanked Michael very much for spending the time with the Forum and sharing his wide and deep insights into issues of food and farming.

10. Rev'd Dr Mark Betson

Mark said he had been in post now for six months and worked both with Germinate (with whom he is based) and nationally with Church House. His background is as the Rural and Environmental officer for Chichester Diocese and as the Regional Director for the FCN in the South East, and in farming.

His current role is to support policy development in rural matters for the Church of England, exploring the theology of farming and supporting rural churches across the country. He seeks to be as positive as possible about rural ministry – asking the question “What gives you joy about being a Christian in this place?”

He sees different models of church in different contexts. The suburban church often tends to act in “gathered” mode, whereas the rural church works more on an extended community model and needs to be fully engaged with their local communities. Rural churches whilst having smaller absolute numbers tend to have greater penetration into their communities with a higher percentage of the general population being involved in church in some way. He said our church buildings were key tools in our mission and ministry and that the development of festival churches was not about mothballing buildings but how to help a church flourish in its particular context.

Danny commented that his parish church is used for as much as possible in the village so that people can see there is always something going on. Dave Watson spoke about the benefits of rural churches engaging with their parish councils in the development of Parish Plans, so that church and community become even more integrated in serving their communities. Mark agreed and is an advocate of churches getting involved with the neighbourhood planning process as an excellent way of sharing ideas and getting plans on paper.

There followed a discussion about how to manage church buildings where there are more than one (from different denominations) in one community. Mark spoke about the need for good relationships between denominations, ministers and communities at all levels and Philip said that a regional and local approach was needed to allow the best solution in a particular place to develop and that sometimes national structures could make communication and decision making less easy.

Philip spoke about the need to establish the “Community Value” of a church building when disposing of a building in the context of the Charity Commissioners requiring the disposal to achieve “best value” for the charity.

Mark Butchers thanked Mark Betson very much for being with us today enabling us to get to know him and have the opportunity to discuss various issues with him. Mark Betson

responded that he would be very happy to come to a future meeting.

Philip and Penny will both be attending the National Rural Officers Gathering, organised by Mark and Elizabeth Clark (Methodist and URC Rural Officer) in November.

11. Deemed Items

Updates on farming, support for rural women, social action activities and feedback from the March Modern Slavery meeting can all be found [here](#)

12. Notices and Events – please see our What's On page [here](#)

13. AOB

David Ursell shared an article about the particular issues that will be faced by Sheep Farmers in the event of a no deal Brexit – this will be made available on our website.

Chris said that he was very pleased to be a part of the Forum and offered to use his good offices to help get more information about the work of the DCRF communicated. Mark said the Forum was also very glad to have Chris as a member.

We briefly discussed including environmental concerns and refugees on a future agenda for the Forum.

14. The next meeting will be on 16th October and the theme will be Modern Slavery and Rural Crime as well as updates on existing and any new projects.

Post meeting note: 2020 meeting dates will be 4th February, 8th July and November 2nd, all at the Devon Young Farmers Centre, Cheriton Bishop, from 10 am to 12 noon.

15. Douglas closed the meeting in prayer. Eleven members of the Forum then re-convened for a shared lunch at The Old Thatch Inn and continued in discussion with Michael Winter and Mark Betson.