

Notes from the Devon Churches Rural Forum meeting

held on September 28th 2016

- 1 Archdeacon Mark opened the meeting with prayer.
- 2 **Present:** Archdeacon Mark (chair), Archdeacon Douglas, Andy Jerrard, David Ursell, Stuart Wilson, John Wibberley, Penny Dobbin

Apologies: Joanne Jones, Martyn Goss, Michael Winter, Richard Yarwood, Philip Wagstaff, Colin Smallacombe, Adrian Brook, Jane Lucas

3 **2016 Rural Conference**

The conference programme was discussed – during which wider issues were raised:

Released for Mission

Jill Hopkinson is due to present on the report “Released for Mission”, however she has some very sad personal circumstances at present. Archdeacon Douglas sits on the National Rural Affairs Group and will act as back up if necessary.

Archdeacon Douglas spoke about the need for intentional local follow up for “Released for Mission”. There needs to be some reflection on subjects such as clergy deployment and rural mission. This forum is the only place for integrated follow up.

Networking and working ecumenically

The question was asked “what are other dioceses doing with respect to rural work and mission co-ordination”?

Action: In the absence of anyone being free to attend the national rural officers’ conference in November, Penny offered to contact other dioceses and try and find out (NB this will not be until 2017).

Jill Hopkinson is attending the Methodist Discipleship and Training Network conference in January 2017 to discuss the resources available from the ARC. This network also keeps an overview of what’s going on rurally – what’s happening with the AONB, Natural Devon, National Park etc. An ecumenical approach in these areas would be helpful.

Action: Andy Jerrard will invite Archdeacon Mark to the next planning meeting for the network conference.

We need where possible to integrate the work of the different networks and churches. For example – if, from follow up from the Rural Conference, people are interested in rural chaplaincy work then we would link them to Joanne Jones and Andy Jerrard. Training from the Methodist and Anglican churches could also come together.

Action: Archdeacon Mark will contact Alison Ball to discuss how the two groups (Methodist Discipleship and Training Network and Devon Churches Rural Forum) might work together.

Action: Andy Jerrard will see if publicity material for the January conference will be available to hand out at the Rural Conference.

With all our areas of work, we need to be aware of what is already in place, and otherwise see what emerges.

The Bright Field Community

The Bright Field Community – are an Anglican community who have been meeting for one to two years to support each other and reflect on issues related to being ordained clergy in a rural setting. They are hungry to reflect theologically and to think creatively about new patterns of rural ministry from a deep theological position. The initiative has come from the grass roots of rural ministry. At the conference they will explore the idea of inviting other people to an event in February and see what might emerge.

Group working such as this is helpful in Devon not least because of the size of the county. Once a group grows it can divide to form new groups and keeping local is important because specific local issues can be addressed. Perhaps the Bright Field Community may be able to help other local groups of rural clergy to meet in a similar way.

4 Groups of the Devon Churches Rural Forum

We have discussed before the concept of the Rural Forum being the place where rural work is shared and discussed in an overall sense but that most work will be enacted by various task groups – some already active – some which may be formed.

The work areas currently include:

- Farming Issues, support and chaplaincy – led by the FCN, Andy Jerrard, John Wibberley.
- The Bright Field Community – led by Simon Franklin
- Rural socio economic issues and engagement – to be explored by Penny Dobbin
- Centre for Rural Ministry, together with training courses and conferences – Tim Gibson, Archdeacon Mark exploring
- Environmental concerns integrated with care for the land – this area will depend on who is interested, what people are interested in and what is already going on
- Email newsletter to begin in 2017 to contain a briefing on agricultural issues of the day, news of training and other events, and useful links. Penny Dobbin will co-ordinate this. The email should be sent to all PCC secretaries and all clergy including PTO. We will need help from The Old Deanery with this.
- Rural Advocacy – see discussion below

- Models of rural mission and ministry – this will entail continued follow up of the “Released for Mission” report. There is also a sense of advocacy arising in this area, to keep awareness of the rural church in all diocesan planning and to encourage the growth of small rural churches.

The feedback from the conference will enable delegates to indicate their interest in the various areas of work of the forum (see below).

Issues arising:

Communications

It would be really helpful to have a website, to host documents and to be able to supply links to other helpful sites and organisations. Perhaps John Moxom could help?

Action: Penny will investigate.

Rural Advocacy and Press Comment

At present formal media comment is generally handled by the Diocesan Communications Officer, Rebecca Paveley.

The question was raised about the need for a Rural Officer, part of whose work could be to provide an informed opinion to the press, and to be a reference point for anyone needing information about rural matters, perhaps coupled with a list of people who could be contacted about specific issues. Some concern about the term “Officer” – perhaps Rural Champion working ecumenically? Philip Wagstaff is the Rural Officer for the Methodist church.

Advocacy is needed in three main areas:

1. General outward communication of rural matters
2. Advocacy for the rural areas within the structures of society – the churches being the only organisation left with a presence in all the rural areas and integrated with all rural life
3. Keeping the positive aspects and the needs of rural mission and ministry and our rural communities to the fore within discussions in our wider church structures

5 Updates from current work

Farming Report

- Cash flow continues to be a major issue for many farmers
- Wheat is effectively the same price in real terms as it was in 1986
- In real terms, the milk price is as low as it has ever been – but it is beginning to look “slightly less bad”
- Prices for organic milk are much better
- Beef and lamb prices are not great – but are being supported by the weaker pound
- Prices for organic meat is doing better – one farmer had received the best price ever for a lamb this year
- The payment of the SFP continues to be a problem – there are 13,500 wrong payments still being sorted out nationally
- Hill sheep farmers have been suffering particularly with poor cash flow – especially those who graze on common land
- We often focus on dairy farmers but 1 in 4 of all farmers are living below the poverty line – and $\frac{3}{4}$ of upland farmers have made a loss on lamb production
- Banks are tiding people over whose payments are late or wrong – but they do not charge 0% interest! Also as banks have changed a personal relationship with the local bank manager is a thing of the past which makes it less easy to explain problems
- The weakness of the pound may help when fixing next year’s basic payment
- TB – rules keep changing – some of these changes have had further negative impact on cash flow for those affected
- Some of the people protesting about badger culling are using very unpleasant and intimidatory tactics

The book *Honey and Thistles. Biblical wisdom for the renewal of farming* by Christopher Jones & John Martin, Agriculture and Theology Project, 2015 has been reviewed by John Wibberley – he will send a copy around.

Barnstaple Archdeaconry Church and Community Research Project Update

- Aims:
 - Inform the church of local social, economic, political and environmental issues
 - Help us to frame our response to these
 - To make connections with other people working in these areas
 - To see where we can join in and celebrate
 - To see where we can work in partnership with others to help alleviate need

- Abiding image of the project has come to be about connections, disconnections and where and how we can help to build bridges between organisations, between church and other organisations, within and between communities, particularly so in rural areas.
- The research phase is complete - 42 people have been interviewed covering the police, health, social care, education, business, politics, farming, environment, rural, voluntary and community infrastructure organisations. Internet based research and a local newspaper survey have also been completed.
- Some areas to be highlighted include
 - Education and the support of our schools as the core around which to help build aspiration, work to reduce poverty, support families, increase skills pool and job opportunities, help people to reach their potential
 - The strength of our communities - the huge asset this is but also some of the issues it raises
 - Our world class environment
 - Our world class businesses – especially in manufacturing and high end engineering
 - Our place in the world – are we outside looking in or at the centre looking out?
 - Differences between rural and town communities
 - Rural issues – infrastructure, access to services, farming hardships
 - Roll back of the state with the need for more community and individual responsibility, the plethora of new organisations needing connection, the valuable opportunities for the church to serve and care for our wider communities
 - The common aims we have with so many agencies – but the different language we use
- Now in writing up phase – though information gathered is vast and taking a while to reduce to a readable amount.
- To be followed by communication to church and other bodies

6 Notices etc.

We agreed the name of the group to be “Devon Churches Rural Forum”

We can send one person to the national rural officers’ conference in November – however no-one is available to go.

The Rural Futures Conference run by Devon Communities Together will be held on 6th October in Ivybridge. Penny is attending and also Archdeacon Douglas. All are welcome.

7 AOB

We agreed to invite Elaine Cook the CEO of Devon Communities Together (and church warden in Chulmleigh) to join the forum and also Inspector Roger Bartlett of the police who has expressed an interest in the group.

8 Next meetings are confirmed as January 5th, May 8th and November 16th 2017 and we agreed to book the John Brommell room at Tedburn St Mary for all three.

9 The meeting closed with prayer.