

## Devon Churches Rural Forum

### Meeting Notes from 5<sup>th</sup> January 2017 at Tedburn St Mary Village Hall

1. The meeting began with prayer
2. **Apologies** had been received from: Colin Smallacombe, Martyn Goss, Jane Lucas, Michael Grandey, Michael Winter, Chris Southgate, Joanne Jones, Tim Gibson, John Peak, Douglas Dettmer and Adrian Brook.
3. **Present** were: Archdeacon Mark, Penny Dobbin, David Ursell, Simon Franklin, Stuart Wilson, Annie Jefferies, Alison Ball, John Wibberley, Elaine Cook and Andy Jerrard.

A special welcome was made to our new members:

Annie Jefferies who is lay chair of Tavistock deanery and a member of Bishop's Council

Alison Ball who is Learning & Development Coordinator for the South West for the Methodist church

Elaine Cook who is CEO of Devon Communities Together (formerly known as Community Council of Devon) and also Church Warden at Chulmleigh Church

Archdeacon Mark also gave a background to the Forum by way of introduction.

In the past Exeter diocese has supported rural ministry through the provision of rural officers. However, when the last person in post retired, the Anglican post was not replaced, though there are rural officers in the Methodist and URC churches. In an effort to fill the gap left by the loss of the rural officer post, this group formed. Archdeacon Mark became chair in early 2016. Since then we have been reflecting on the name of the group and how we should function. This is a work in progress, but thinking is that the Devon Churches Rural Forum (as we have become known) becomes an umbrella for communication and co-ordination while active work takes place in other groups some of which are longstanding (such as the Farming Community Network) and others which may be new. The Forum then becomes a place to share ideas and to see where there are gaps etc. At the conference held in October 2016 (see below) people present expressed their interest in different aspects of rural ministry and mission and so new groups are emerging. The Forum is ecumenical and Mark has checked the usage of the name "Devon Churches Rural Forum" with Churches Together in Devon (DCT). It is particularly important that DCT approves the name and gives it its imprimatur as our ecumenical umbrella group. The Forum has a fluid structure which continues to emerge. Philip Wagstaff commented that the URC church was also exploring how to best support rural work and Mark will contact the moderator to explore what working together is possible. **Action: Mark.**

4. The notes from the last meeting were agreed

## 5. Matters arising and actions not covered by main agenda

5.1. Looking at existing models of rural support and mission co-ordination in other dioceses. Penny has emailed Jill Hopkinson asking for information and contacts and will report back on research at the next meeting. **Action: Penny**

5.2. Methodist Discipleship and Training Conference – God’s Best Kept Secret is on 21<sup>st</sup> January. Open to all.

### 5.3. Communications

John Moxon (Exeter Diocesan Communications officer) recommends the use of Church Edit as a host for a website. There is a special offer in January giving 19 months service for the usual cost of 12 months. The cost is £175 per year for one editor or £210 per year which would allow up to 5 editors for the website.

Church Edit offer templates for the basic website layout, with facilities including a calendar, photo album and forms builder as standard. Documents and links to other websites are very easy to add and links to social media accounts can be made. The cost includes free technical help and support and tutorials to help make the most of the site.

Exeter Diocese has offered to fund the cost of the website and the Forum agreed we should go ahead with the five editors package. **Action: Penny to follow up and set up initial website.**

5.4. Police involvement on Forum – Inspector Roger Bartlett, who had expressed interest in the Forum will be retiring shortly. However, he is exploring who might be the best person to be involved and will let us know shortly.

5.5. Philip Wagstaff attended the national rural officers meeting in November 2016 and will circulate a report. **Action: Philip**

## 6. Rural Conference (8.10.16): Feedback and Follow up

Archdeacon Mark reported that the conference had been good in parts but that there were things to learn for next time. It was very good to get people together, there was a good sense of affirmation and encouragement and good ideas emerging from the group discussions and plenary. However, it was also felt there was a bit too much on the programme, with too great an emphasis on statistics and sometimes abstruse theology.

One of the best things to emerge from the day was the large number of people who indicated an interest in different areas of work. A summary of the numbers interested in the different areas is attached to these notes.

Simon Franklin said the conference did what it set out to do, which was to open out discussion. With so many threads of interest, it was always going to be a full day, but many people had said that it did cover the areas that mattered to them in their ministry. Through the conference we have set up expectations for follow up which is a good thing, but we do need to be able to meet these.

It is hoped there will be a written report from the event's discussions. Action: **Mark to chase up**

The following is a summary of follow up for those expressing an interest in the various work areas so far:

- 6.1. **Bright Field Community:** names of all those interested have been passed to Simon with a "save the date" for the follow up day. This was to have been held in February but has now moved. Simon will let people know. **Action: Simon**
- 6.2. **Farming Issues:** Jo has sent an email to all interested to find out their specific areas of interest and will follow up. **Action: Jo/Andy/Penny**
- 6.3. **Training courses/conferences:** all those who expressed an interest have been emailed with a set of options for offering and receiving training and the subjects they are interested in. The results have been collated and Mark will be following up in liaison with Alison. **Action: Mark**
- 6.4. **Environmental concerns:** Martyn is looking at integrating the various environmental initiatives in the diocese and will keep those who expressed an interest up to date. **Action: Martyn**
- 6.5. **Rural Advocacy:** There are various different types of advocacy (see notes from previous meeting). This area also includes contact with the press. We need to move slowly to ensure the right approach in this area. Rural advocacy in socio-economic terms will also form part of the socio-economic work area of the Forum.
- 6.6. **Socio-economic issues and community engagement:** An attempt to find a date to meet for those interested in January/February was not successful. We will try again. In the meantime the Barnstaple Archdeaconry Church and Community Research Project Report will be sent around the group of those interested (when ready) and we shall hope to use this as a starting point for discussion of how we may go forward with this work. **Action: Penny**
- 6.7. **New models of ministry and mission:** A holding email has been sent to all interested to say that Archdeacon Mark will be in touch. **Action: Mark**

**The following additional discussion arising from the above took place:**

Andy reported that he had identified a resource for training for suicide concerns. Sessions are available for 90 min talks, 3hour workshops or a 2 day course to train

people as “suicide first aiders”. This could be considered for a rural training day or for PCCs. The training is not specifically Christian, being run by ex NHS staff, but given the prevalence of suicide in the rural/farming community, it could be a helpful resource.

Philip said more joined up working on training between the different denominations for lay and ministerial training would be very helpful and that people appreciated local training options.

Stuart spoke about farm training days both for rural ministers and those from towns wishing to understand more.

Good links with secular organisations and local government will enable us to share information on conferences and workshops that are relevant to rural ministry.

The Devon Churches Rural Forum could broker training opportunities both by circulating information on existing opportunities and by providing a pool of people who can offer training in different areas.

Elaine commented that October was a generally busy month for conferences with the Devon Association of Local Councils and the Devon Rural Futures (run by Devon Communities Together) and the Rural Services Network also taking place.

It was commented on that Devon does not have an overall “Rural Forum” supported by local government as several other counties do. The possibility of greater linkage of the DCRF with local government and other agencies was mooted.

## **7. Updates from different groups**

### **7.1. Pastoral Care: FCN and Market Chaplaincy**

Andy is still looking for more people to become market chaplains which he described as “holy hanging around”! Holsworthy has a well-established team but other markets need more volunteers. The aim is to set up robust teams that survive even when particular individuals move on. Market chaplaincy can give church leaders a wider public face within the community and people in the markets recognise the church is active in “their” world. He also commented that farmers will relate to a minister in a different way when they are in their workplace than they would in a church.

The Exeter chaplaincy team held a service in the market at Christmas which was attended by around 500 people.

Kivells (auctioneers) offer great support for the chaplaincy service.

The Methodist church has a general chaplaincy training course which could be used as a resource.

It was agreed that a short description of the role of a market chaplain volunteer would be written (**Action: Andy**) and included in the DCRF newsletter and on the website when launched (**Action: Penny**), to encourage more volunteers.

John will recirculate the Farming Community Network paper for the new members of the Forum.

## 7.2. The Bright Field Community

Simon explained that the community comprised a group of about 10 rural Anglican clergy, but they wanted to widen both geographically and ecumenically.

The community came together because they felt they were often working in structures that were almost but not quite untenable but also feeling a real dedication to rural ministry. They didn't want to leave rural ministry, but did need a place to say "this is how it feels – but how can we manage" and to ask "if our current structures don't work, how can we help other models of rural ministry to emerge?". The community meets to reflect and discuss, but not to try to answer these questions too quickly. The approach is to take time to "turn aside" (from the R S Thomas poem - hence the name of the community) and to adopt an "active waiting" approach to see what emerges.

The community is now at the stage of discerning what the next move in its life should be. So far they have been able to provide a stability to one another and to be "helpfully subversive" about structures, but not to rush into adopting new ideas. The group is a "community" because rural leaders need to have a collegiate-ness about them.

The community has an annual time away, and also planned a day for new people interested in the spring.

One comment was that the conference will have reached people who are motivated – but not necessarily those in rural ministry who may be approaching the end of their tether. The question is how to help these ministers.

The basic question underlying all is "How do we help little communities to flourish, and not just survive".

## 7.3. Farming Report

Andy said that cash flow remains a major issue for farmers. Store cattle prices generally rise in early December, but not this season – an indication that even though the basic farm payment has gone up by 16% (largely due to currency fluctuation) that people are being very careful and not spending. The gaps between farm inputs and outputs are growing as

feed, machinery and fertiliser prices have increased. It is difficult to predict what will happen if the pound remains low. Some major supermarkets source around 50% of food from imports – so a weaker pound may lead to greater demand for local produce. It looks likely that the price of milk may soon rise as local demand is rising. Lamb prices were quite good, but have dropped recently, though most are now sold. Apart from dairy, the mood across the country is quite positive. It will be interesting to see how the agricultural strategy post Brexit develops in terms of level of regulation, subsidy format and access to different markets.

#### 7.4. Training and Courses

Alison Ball spoke about her work. She is the Learning and Development Co-ordinator for the South West in the Methodist Church. Her team encompasses Church and Community Development, Ministry Development and Discipleship Development. Alison specialises in training and discipleship development.

The forthcoming conference on rural ministry (God's Best Kept Secret) arose from conversations with circuits in north Devon, who wanted some local training specific to their very rural context.

There was some discussion about the nature of rural church with a growing understanding of the differences between rural and urban ministry. In some ways rural churches can be very close to their communities and there is much to be celebrated – but these aspects are not always reflected in church mission statistics. In the Plymouth District 95% of Methodist churches class themselves as rural and the South West strategy group is exploring a broader rural strategy.

Alison is also well connected with the network of ARC Germinate Groups and has access to many resources and opportunities – but people are all very busy – we could be more effective through working together.

It may be helpful to form a small ecumenical group with people interested from the DCRF rural conference and the Methodist team to reflect on training needs together. This could include input on rural training for new ministers either in training or induction phases – Philip Sourbut and Kim Mathers would be helpful additions to the group. **Action: Mark and Alison will liaise**

#### 7.5. Barnstaple Archdeaconry Rural Research Project and rural socio-economic issues

Penny reported that the Research Report would be completed by the end of January and send around the Forum as soon as available. **Action: Penny**

Elaine reported on a new project being set up by Devon Communities Together to offer business support to start-up, small and micro rural businesses. This will be led by Mike Felstead at DCT. The focus areas are mid Devon, Torrington, Teignbridge, West Devon. It

would be helpful to be able to make contact with farm businesses. **Action: Andy and Joanne could liaise with Mike (via Elaine).**

Exmoor National Park Authority has much expertise on rural housing projects.

## **7.6. Environmental issues**

No further report – see section 6.4

## **7.7. Reflection on models of rural ministry**

Philip reported that Cumbria now have a covenantal model for rural ministry. He will follow up with contacts for further discussion on how this works. **Action: Philip**

Simon will be looking at models of rural ministry as part of his Sabbatical (February to April 2017). John has international contacts to gain experience from other countries. There may be some helpful information from the research into other diocesan models for rural support (see 5.1).

It was agreed we need to follow up these and other ideas with those expressing an interest from the conference, perhaps leading to a day of discussion. **Action: Mark**

## **7.8. Rural advocacy and relations with the media**

No further report – see section 6.5

## **8. Items for 1<sup>st</sup> newsletter**

The first newsletter should include information that the DCRF has formed, what it does and who is on it. It is likely to be in email format and link to the website. There was some discussion about its purpose and readership. **Action: Penny and Annie will meet to discuss further and progress.**

## **9. Expenses and Budget for the Devon Churches Rural Forum**

Martyn has confirmed that the department of Church and Society can support the financial needs of the DCRF at present. These include the fees for the website, some travelling expenses and conference fees, support for meeting venues and some support for conferences and workshops. If the work of the Forum expands we will need to review.

## **10. Notices and Events**

There will be an event hosted by Bishop Nick on Dartmoor on February 10<sup>th</sup>. This includes people

invited from business, nature and public sector agencies and churches looking at the question of “what makes our communities flourish?” Summaries from discussion may hopefully be made available for the DCRF website.

The Farming Community Network Plough Sunday service will be held on January 15<sup>th</sup> at Sandford Parish Church at 6.30 pm.

#### **11. AOB**

For the next meeting we agreed to focus on one or two subjects that could be discussed in more depth, with other areas being covered by written reports.

The new Young Farmers Centre at Cheriton Bishop may offer a good meeting venue in the future.

We were asked to pray for Jeremy.

#### **12. Dates of next meetings**

10am, May 8<sup>th</sup> and 2.30pm, November 16<sup>th</sup> 2017 both at Tedburn St Mary Village Hall, John Brommell Room

#### **13. The meeting closed with prayer**