

**Devon Churches Rural Forum Meeting**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020, 10am-12 noon – by Zoom**

**Minutes**

1. Archdeacon Douglas opened the meeting with prayer.

2. Welcome and introductions

Present were: Douglas Dettmer (Archdeacon of Totnes, Chair), Chris Keppie (Diocese of Exeter Church & Society Officer, taking minutes), Stuart Wilson (Market Chaplain), Dave Watson (Methodist Lay Minister), Danny Semorad (Farmer, Church Warden, Devon Historic Churches Trust), Sylvia West (Deanery Synod Secretary and DFWI), Ruth Frampton (Team Rector), Janet May (Curate), John Corrie (ret'd Mission Tutor & Priest), Susanna Metz (Rural Dean, Team Vicar, Relief Milker, Teacher of Ministry and Mission), Marisa Cockfield (Team Vicar, Police Chaplain), Martin Beck (Devon and Cornwall Police Rural Crime Officer), Sarah Cracknell (Diocese of Exeter Growing The Rural Church Manager), Elizabeth Burke (Rector), Jane Skinner (Team Rector), Howard Wilson (Regional Learning and Development Coordinator, South West), Mike Clark (Barnstaple Archdeaconry Mission Development Adviser), Simon Franklin (The Bright Field Community), Richard Yarwood (Professor of Human Geography, Plymouth University), Nora Corkery (acting CEO, Devon Community Foundation).

Archdeacon Douglas (Chair) welcomed all, and particularly a new member, John Corrie, who introduced himself. He has a particular interest in rural mission; and moved to South Hams 3 years ago, from Birmingham. He retired in 2013, having worked at Trinity College, Bristol, where he was tutor in mission (its theology and history, and rural mission – in which he facilitated a course with Jeremy Martineau). He also taught at All Nations Christian College for 11 years in 1990s; and was Associate Priest in a rural context at the same time. He has been helping Woodleigh Deanery to explore rural mission with 'lively discussions'. He's interested and excited to learn more, and to contribute anything to our thinking and practice.

Douglas welcomed Sarah Cracknell, manager of the diocesan Growing the Rural Church project, who will speak.

Douglas updated the group on Penny Body (our outstanding Secretary). She is recovering well from a planned operation and is now resting more for the rest of this year, although has kindly offered to send out minutes and next agenda. Her partner, Alan, has his own health challenges. Our thoughts and prayers are with them both.

3. Apologies

Received from John Wibberley, Jane Hayes, Andy Gerrard, David Thubron, Simon Leigh, Graham Whalley, Jane Frost.

4. [Notes from the last meeting](#) on 8<sup>th</sup> July were agreed.

5. Matters and actions arising from the last meeting (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)

The [National Rural Officers conference](#), organised by Arthur Rank Centre, is online this year, 12-13<sup>th</sup> November. Normally Penny Body attends, but is unable to this year as she recovers from her operation. Chris Keppie will attend the second day (with sessions on environment from A Rocha, and farming from NFU) but is unable to make the first day. Dave Watson kindly offered to attend the first day (including sessions on rural poverty, community businesses in places of worship, and the Prince's Countryside Fund). Chris will give Dave details; and both will feed back next meeting (**Action**).

## 6. Main Item - Update on [Growing The Rural Church](#) – Sarah Cracknell, Project Manager

Sarah spoke to this [presentation](#)

- Slide 2 – **Why Change:**
  - 2020 came out of a fairly turbulent period. The previous manager left in 2019, and the team was also otherwise understaffed that year. With a new full complement, the team was keen to get on with the work at the beginning of the year – obviously this didn't last long with covid-19.
  - Why a change of emphasis?
    - GTRC were asked by Strategic Development Fund to complete mid-term (2017-23) review.
    - Very keen to build legacy for both diocese and national church.
    - Covid has really impacted service delivery model: originally 1:1 face to face support to PCCs etc. were clearly not currently possible.
    - Impact on sustainability given closure of church buildings – despite generous regular giving from many, there is clearly some financial impact.
    - Positives: requirement to be creative (e.g. use of Zoom) has led to new openness and willingness to innovate and adapt. Also a surge in community spirit and increased value of the local – we need to harness and maintain this moving forward.
- Slide 3 – **What We Will Offer:**
  - Downloadable toolkits, guidance and videos
  - Facilitation videos – to be used in small groups to guide through exercises and discussions
  - Bookable live webinars – on particular topics that churches may be thinking about, with Q&A discussion – e.g. forming a joint council, or becoming a festival church. Benefits: more efficient (we can speak to more churches at the same time), and easier peer discussion between churches
  - Face to face events and training will continue as before – when safe to do so – at deanery level
  - 1:1 zoom surgery sessions – if questions on resources, or on areas not covered elsewhere
  - All of the above will be on a new online resource hub. This will primarily be an Anglican resource – but, newly, this will be available to all denominations, and also non-rural churches! So increased accessibility is another positive.
- Slides 4-5 – **The Resource Hub's 3 portals:**
  1. **Resource** – toolkits and guidance on governance, consultation, faculty application, funding etc.
    - a. Where To Start: ('Lightening The Load' (cf Slide 6 below) and 'Stories on The Street' resources) – gentle introductions

- b. *Making Changes* (for churches further underway: practical, technical, legal advice and guidance)
  - 2. **Connect** – community facing (e.g. artists / small businesses / local farmers who have ideas – how to approach and work together with the church)
  - 3. **Create** – church facing (information for creative use of churches – eg community, commercial, missional activities)
- Slide 6 – **“Lightening The Load”** (in Resource section)
  - Written by Ven Mark Butchers (recent chair of DCRF and Archdeacon of Barnstaple, now Principal of SWMTC) and Revd Penny Body (DCRF Secretary) and many other clergy and lay leaders in Devon (many connected to the GTRC/DCRF)
  - Huge – covers every area of church life – governance, mission, etc!
  - A toolkit (not a course) – find the bits that you need; it can then be used for churches’ own discussions / workshops etc. as best works in a local context. Although it’s not expected to be used as a full course, it’s broken down into particular Session topics.
- Slides 7-8 – **Summary of Sessions in the Lightening The Load toolkit**
  1. Celebration and appreciation of rural church life
  2. Naming & exploring the burdens and expectations which weigh heavy on clergy and laity. It doesn’t offer solutions – but initial naming helps the beginning of new collaboration and conversation
  3. Models of ministry – what alternatives are there to traditional approaches which may be ‘buckling’
  4. Buildings and bureaucracy – how to ‘lighten the load’ with ‘economy of effort’. E.g. floating ideas of becoming a festival church / setting up friends group – and then signposting to further reading for possibilities
  5. Priorities and pruning – bringing the previous sessions together. What needs to go, how can we free people up? Developing a short/medium term action plan (focussed on this, rather than a Mission Action Plan)
- Slide 9 – **Stories On The Street** (in Resource section)
  - Resource to help churches engage with communities for positive transformation
  - 6 modules: vision, celebration, heart of compassion, building relationships, understanding our community, stepping out in faith.
  - In-depth bible studies
  - Piloted in Shirwell Mission Community – very positive response
- Slide 10 – **Making Changes**
  - Simplifying governance, consulting your community (different specific sections – e.g. closing a church, or enabling a farm shop), Friends Group, Festival Church, Welcome (for private prayer / tourists), planning a project, working with the DAC, applying for grants and funding
- Slide 11 – **Create** section
  - Partner agencies – e.g. Champing, Devon Pilgrim, Devon Work Hubs
  - Resource to help churches working towards carbon net zero (with Chris Keppie)
- Slide 12 – **Resource Hub Launch**
  - All resources are being created at the moment. A launch event will happen on 11<sup>th</sup> January (Plough Sunday) – please come to launch event. Bishop Robert will introduce by video. **Action:** Sarah will send an email for Zoom link.

Questions and comments following Sarah's presentation:

- AD Douglas thanked Sarah for a very clear and helpful presentation. He is very grateful for the wisdom and experience of this group, especially under the leadership of Mark Butchers and Penny Body. He thinks this has the potential to become a *national* resource, and to be available and applicable for *all* churches.
  - Sarah: yes; and later, there will be a version with less Anglican jargon!
- Nora Corkery, acting CEO of [Devon Communities Together](#) – which has a mission to help communities help themselves. Thanked Sarah for the presentation. DCT was engaged at the beginning of GTRC project, and she repeats DCT's original offer – if there's anything they can do to help support / promote the hub (especially sections focussed towards community); or if any churches want help engaging communities, or support accessing grants - she hopes both can be promoted through the new hub. DCT is an Asset Based Community Development organisation – they can offer ABCD training and resources.
  - Sarah – very happy to hear these offers; will certainly take you up on this!
  - Douglas – these collaborations are at the core of what we do.
- Danny Semorad, church warden and farmer. Congratulated Sarah on brilliant work – it's really helpful to be able to point people to all this information and resources.
- Dave Watson, part of leadership team of Torridge Methodist circuit, and councillor. Also really welcomes the initiative – appreciates the ecumenical approach also, to enable us do things better together.
- Simon Franklin, recently retired minister. Important to get 'the right resources under the right noses' – do archdeacons / rural deans need to promote these?
  - Sarah: once hub is live, we'll track how it's being used. The Archdeacon of Exeter, Andrew Beane, is chair of the project board. Sarah anticipates working more closely with archdeacons moving forward. She works with Mike Clark, mission development officer. She also uses the Anglican diocese Roots and Shoots online newsletter; and also GTRC's own newsletter, again open to all denominations.
  - Douglas: archdeacons are expecting to be channels and to signpost proactively to all the resources; he also hopes to use and grow this forum. Both/and rather than either/or in terms of promotion!
- Douglas: what will the hub look like practically?
  - Sarah: email exchange, signposting to resources, 1:1 Zoom appointments to talk through resources and what has already been done. People can try a Lightening The Load session, and then have a follow up 1:1 Zoom – i.e. there will still be individual consultancy, especially at the beginning, and as long as needed. (The original plan to work towards recruiting and training volunteers to help facilitate courses, when able to meet in groups, is difficult at the moment, but is still the long-term plan!)
- Marisa Cockfield: how do we engage with non-churchgoers who value the life of the church, but are not part of the 'worshipping community' – can they become part of the PCC?
  - Douglas: strictly, one has to be a 'communicant member of the Church of England' (early C20 compromise that set up canonical church government). This hasn't changed, but not all that is done by or for the church needs to be done by and through the PCC per se – e.g. a church building committee or social committee etc. could be non-communicant, non-PCC members. This could be a formal 'Friends'

group, but it's possibly best to be done informally. Faculty or financial decisions etc. need to be signed off by the PCC; but in a healthy community, much operational community work can be done outside of the PCC. These Friends groups can be missional: as greater connection with the life of the church, people's faith can be (re)kindled. Final point: for a group of 8 churches, for example, their 8 PCC's can be unified to one, which 'lightens the load', and helps other ex-PCC members to take up more community roles.

- Elizabeth Burke (Holsworthy): Comment: we have a new 'Friends Group' which isn't a traditional financial Friends group - Elizabeth has asked non-communicant people to help with wider church activities. Question: how inundated are you?
  - Sarah: we still have availability at the moment!
- Sylvia: 1) really helpful previous discussion about the potential role of people beyond PCCs. 2) for many churches struggling to hang on, talk of Festival Church etc., may be too much to consider at the moment.
  - Sarah: yes, acknowledgement that maybe too much talk on this (as on her mind!) But there are lots of other resources before that stage. Also, there's a beautiful introduction from Penny Body on concept of festival church: idea of 'fallow' land rest and replenishment; also, exploring doesn't necessarily mean becoming a festival church and permanently closing.
  - Douglas: festival church is not 'doublespeak' euphemism for failure, whether permanent or temporary closure; rather, it's still a beautiful space being used in different ways.
- Sarah and Douglas: many thanks to this group again for all their involvement.

## 7. Notices

A reminder of cancellations and postponements of previously planned events – see [here](#).

## 8. AOB

- a. Douglas: Mental Health. Are we noticing recent uptick in rural suicides? Generally it seems that incidence is higher in rural areas?
  - Elizabeth Burke – yes, certainly noticing increase in mental health issues; more people with no previous contact with church who are suicidal are coming to her. She's also really feeling others' anxiety increasing: in farms, for example, there are no redundancies or 80% furlough as elsewhere, yet huge worry about Covid infection from outside, and therefore increased isolation. Just since a few days ago (when PM made latest lockdown announcement), this seems to be heightened.
  - Janet May (curate in Little Dart Mission Community) – not necessarily a rise in suicide, but she knows that Samaritans have had a huge increase in demand for their services
  - Nora Corkery – farms and micro-enterprises are completing surveys through the rural enterprise hub – people are specifically asking about wellbeing issues more. Resource for people not at breaking point. Please see details on Devon Communities Together [website](#) for various resources.
  - Stuart Wilson (Bratton Clovelly) – there was suicide out of the blue in August from the agricultural community. As a market chaplain he has certainly noticed a change in atmosphere – farmers are really resilient but things have really got to them recently. He

and Andy Gerrard are there at markets for people to be able to talk to them. Douglas: this highlights the really critical role of chaplaincy

- Marisa Cockfield introduced a pilot that the Anglican diocese will be starting in the new year to train a lay volunteer in each deanery in Barnstaple archdeaconry as a mental health first aid (MHFA) advisor – a ‘go-to’ person (non-therapeutic) for local clergy to contact for advice on signposting and resources.
  - Chris Keppie added that clergy and lay people from all denominations in Devon have also been doing MHFA ½ day introductory awareness courses online (subsidised by the trainer and diocese) which will continue in 2021. [See here](#) for details and to book.
- b. Nora Corkery: A new Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Rural Productivity Group group started meeting this week, with DCT sitting on it. A newly appointed LEP Rural Productivity Officer, Chrissy Ingle, will be responsible for it. Nora will liaise with her. **Action:** Douglas suggested that Nora puts Chrissy in touch with Penny. Nora – will do, and will also mention DCRF at the LEP RPG meeting.
- c. Nora will send out Q2 impact report of Devon Communities Together to be sent out via the minutes – [here](#)
- d. Martin Beck (D&C Police Rural Crime Officer): would like to speak in next agenda meeting – ideally 15 minutes. **Action:** To liaise with Chris.

9. Dates and themes of next meetings:

Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021, 10am-12 noon, by Zoom

– on environmental action in our rural churches: needs, challenges and opportunities

10. Closing Prayer led by Douglas