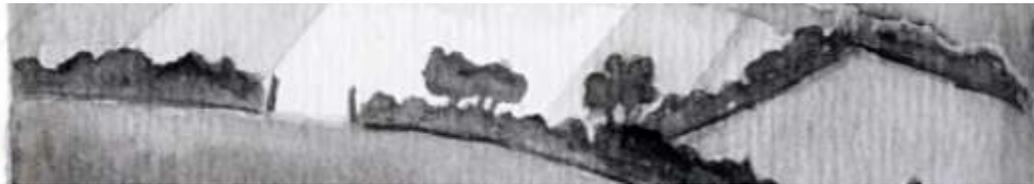


T h e B r i g h t F i e l d C o m m u n i t y

Re-imagining

Rural Ministry Today



Okehampton

15th May 2017

The Bright Field

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying*

*on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

[From: R.S.Thomas, *Laboratories of the Spirit*:
Macmillan London Ltd, 1975]



Introduction

Neither a 'strategy' nor a 'therapy' group by design, *The Bright Field Community* began life in 2015 as a series of occasional conversations between a diverse group of clergy (from several dioceses in the South West) who were similarly worried about the present and future of rural ministry.

Initially concerned with offering a robust critique of *Released for Mission*, the group has slowly deepened its commitment to undertaking fundamental theological exploration in a form that is nurtured by prayer and emerges from the community as a whole.

In October 2016 members of the Community took part in an Exeter Diocesan conference on the rural church, and it was from this day that the idea of hosting an event on the theme of re-imagining rural ministry emerged. Most recently the group has agreed a provisional statement of its work and purpose (see page 5).

In organising this day - which carries no diocesan *imprimatur* other than the generosity of Martyn Goss and the Archdeacon of Barnstaple in providing for the venue - we are aware of flirting with a bundle of expectations concerning what an event on rural ministry could or should involve.

Therefore, to leave the day without a specified Aim or projected Outcome would seem to be a recipe for confusion and misunderstanding. We hope that it won't be, but equally we are sure that to anticipate what any of us will take away from the day would be to claim a prescience that we neither possess nor desire.

So instead our hope for the day is that you will find it:

- First, to be of *spiritual encouragement*

To this end, the shape of the day will repeat the 'practices' we have come to pursue in our regular meetings, and which we eventually spotted were reassuringly proximate to those adopted in the early Christian community as described in *Acts 2:42*: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. As a group of clergy from a variety of church traditions and very different experiences, we have found a real measure of community (*koinonia*) and enormous encouragement in practising these staples of Christian life together. And,

- Second, to encourage *theological imagination*

The influential social theorist Charles Taylor has developed the idea of 'the imaginary' to indicate how our experience of the world is facilitated by the imagination. In Taylor's account the imagination is no spinner of fictions but rather a cognitive power which enables us to make sense of the *whole* of things. For example, we see only one side of a house at a time, but this does not stop us imagining the whole house. If this is so, then the pervasive demand to 're-imagine ministry today' involves not private fictions or pragmatic solutions but the imaginative, even poetical, task of articulating how ministry today takes its part in 'the mission of the whole church' to proclaim 'the whole Christ to the whole world' (*The Mission & Ministry of the Whole Church*, GS Misc 854).

Timetable

<i>From</i> 9.45	Coffee & tea
10.15	Welcome & Introductions
10.20	<i>Lectio Divina</i>
10.45	Loosening the ground Your experience of rural ministry
11.15	Re-imagining rural ministry Reflection & discussion
12.30	Lunch
1.30	Seeds of Hope What next?
2.30	Depart

Who we are

Sue Blade	<i>Team Rector, Sampford Peverall Team Mission Community</i>
Paul Seaton-Burn	<i>Team Rector, Whiddon Mission Community</i>
Hilary Dawson	<i>Vicar, Holyford Mission Community</i>
Simon Franklin	<i>Rector of Moreton Benefice</i>
Selina Garner	<i>Team Vicar and Missioner for Wellington Team Ministry</i>
Tim Gibson	<i>Hon. Asst. Curate for Isle Valley Benefice</i>
Chris Martin	<i>Vicar, Churches 4 All Mission Community</i>
David Moss	<i>Ret'd. Principal, SWMTC</i>
Jill Purser	<i>Assistant Curate, Culm Valley Mission Community</i>
Sheila Walker	<i>Assistant Curate, Churches 4 All Mission Community</i>
Tim Treanor	<i>Team Rector, Wellington Town Parish</i>



The Bright Field Community

The BFC is a group of leaders building, nurturing and sustaining Christian communities in the Church of England. We were drawn together around a desire to re-imagine rural and multi-parish ministry and a concern for the appropriateness of the inherited model. We meet because we are passionate about rural ministry.

We take our name from the poem by R S Thomas,
The Bright Field.

We commit to:

meet together monthly;
eat together;
pray together;
use Scripture in contemplative ways;
listen to God and one another;
encourage one another in vulnerability, faithfulness and
living with that which cannot be resolved;
reflect theologically with the help of academic theologians;
share experience; and
engage with contemporary issues in rural ministry.

Through this we hope to raise awareness, advocate for rural ministry and for our colleagues, foster healthy church communities, and offer support with appropriate training.



*On finding one pearl of great value
he went and sold all he had and bought it*