

Social and Economic Issues Work Strand of the Devon Churches Rural Forum – Update for Meeting May 8th

The Barnstaple Archdeaconry Research Project Report “Aspects of Life in North Devon and Torrridge” was issued in early March. It was circulated to Forum members, clergy and Lay Chairs in the Barnstaple Archdeaconry, and to all those who had contributed to the research. Talks have so far been given to the Barnstaple Archdeaconry Rural Deans meeting, Hartland Deanery Synod and Landkey Mothers Union. Further talks are planned for South Molton Deanery Synod on June 22nd and Barnstaple Deanery Synod on July 13th. People have been quite excited and there has been animated discussion so it will be very interesting to see how/if churches feel they can take ideas forward.

Feedback has been positive and several secular organisations are interested in maintaining links and some are actively exploring ways they can involve the churches in their work. For example, In Barnstaple a new partnership is being explored to include churches and community groups in seeking new ways to care for the lonely and vulnerable.

Martyn Goss is working with Healthwatch Devon to deliver a conference on Loneliness on June 28th. Through the Forum we have been able to help “network” some of the different groups working on this issue. It is also one of our main agenda items for May 8th.

Some more focused work has been taking place with a group of parishes near Holsworthy, exploring how some of the ideas from the research can be applied in practice.

From some meetings, it has become clear that many agencies do not know what the church is already doing, and the extent of informal care already offered in our rural communities. Our website contains a section for a “directory of church and community activities”. Through this we hope to bring together a more complete picture of what is already available – and to which it is hoped some of the secular agencies may turn to find activities to which they can refer people, without the need for beginning new projects. However, it is a large job both to collate and upkeep this information, and further thought needs to be given to how we manage this, and also to how it connects with other sites offering community information such as Devon County Council’s [Pinpoint Service](#)

A meeting is planned with Martyn Goss for 3rd May when we can discuss some of these issues, and also work out how we dovetail the DCRFs work with Church and Society – from the Anglican point of view.

Loneliness, social isolation and mental health are being effectively covered by the work of CCS at the moment. Work with secular authorities on further joined up work on pastoral care and befriending is likely to continue in a natural way with the contacts already made. Other areas for exploration would include support for rural businesses and exploring how we can support children and families through working even more closely with our rural schools.

I attempted to find another date for those who expressed an interest in this area of work to meet, but was once again unsuccessful. Perhaps people would like a more specific agenda rather than an open meeting to discuss possibilities? To this end, and because we can’t do everything (!), I would appreciate a steer from the Forum on what sort of areas the Forum would like to see covered, and what sort of work it would like this work strand to cover. This could include networking, bringing together workshops and training or awareness raising events, or focus on providing resources and information via the website.

Penny Dobbin