

## Notes from the Meeting of the Devon Churches Rural Forum

16<sup>th</sup> November, Tedburn St Mary

1. Present: Mark Butchers, Jon Oliverio, Annie Jefferies, Nickie Johnson, Simon Franklin, Martyn Goss, Derek Baker, David Ursell, Susanna Metz, Paul Seaton-Burn, Jane Frost, Barry Jackson (Coventry Diocese), John Wibberley, Marian Carson, Alison Ball, Heather Sayle, Adrian Brooks, Maurie Webber, Penny Dobbin
2. Apologies: Jane Lucas, Stuart Wilson, Philip Wagstaff, Richard Yarwood, Elaine Cook, Colin Smallacombe, Douglas Dettmer
3. Following an opening prayer, the chair welcomed new members of the DCRF:
  - Jon Oliverio represents Youth Genesis South West – an organisation that brings communities, churches and the statutory services together to offer youth work in Devon. Youth Genesis enables volunteers to work alongside trained youth workers to magnify the resource available for our young people. He is currently working on a project in Great Torrington with Paul Reisbach (Exeter Diocese Youth Adviser). This is a good example of a rural town which no longer has formal youth work.
  - Susanna Metz is Rural Dean of Torrington, a parish minister and has a background in rural ministry training and research.
  - Paul Seaton-Burn is Team Rector of the Whiddon Mission Community and a member of the Bright Field Community, which reflects theologically on rural ministry and its lived experience.
  - Jane Frost is curate in the Totnes Mission Community, with a strong interest in rural ministry.
  - Maurie Webber is Lay Chair of Okehampton Deanery
  - Barry Jackson is visiting from the Diocese of Coventry
4. The notes from the last meeting were agreed.
5. Matters arising: the only item not covered by the agenda was to identify a contact from the URC for the Forum. We are waiting to hear from the URC, but Jon Oliverio is a member of the URC synod and will enquire whether he may be the representative. Action closed.

## 6. Main Item – Models of Rural Ministry

Mark Butchers introduced the subject by summarising the recent Exeter Diocesan “Re-imagining Rural Ministry” day workshop convened by Bishop Robert on 11<sup>th</sup> November. The day had reflected upon how rural ministry used to be and how it has changed, and given the realities of available resources and the missional imperative, how we need to re-imagine the models we work through.

For a full report of the proceedings of this item please [click here](#) and to access information about the various models mentioned by members during the discussion please [click here](#) and for books mentioned [click here](#).

### Summary

- There is commonality in the new and emerging models of rural ministry and mission from our different denominations, in the UK and around the world, and all have at their heart the need for all God’s people to work together as one body to serve their communities and for everyone’s gifts to be recognised and enabled.
- The shape of the local church will be in and of its local community and will hold within itself all the gifts it needs.
- It is important to note that new models are not only necessary as a result of finite resources but are about being the church and using the resources, gifts and talents we have all been given, as we are called by the Holy Spirit.
- This has implications for our ecclesiology including questions about the role of the ordained.
- Rural ministry is exciting, cutting edge, different from other contexts and needs particular training. We don’t always advertise it as such!
- In practical terms, centralising and sharing administrative functions at an appropriate level within the church structures would help immensely to release both clergy and congregations for mission and ministry.
- Church structures will need to be changed to support new emerging models.
- Locally based training and enabling is vital.
- Working ecumenically and with other partners (church based and secular) is part of the new way forward in calling forth the gifts of the whole community.
- New resources are emerging to support, and a welcome emphasis is being placed on, the ministry of all believers taking place in homes, workplaces and leisure activities.
- It takes time for shared conversations to lead to local ownership of new models – working with churches well before clergy retire or are not replaced is essential.

- Pilots and experiments in new models of ministry should be theologically resourced.
- A DCRF conference on “Re-imagining models of rural ministry” will be planned for later in 2018.

### **Actions**

It was agreed that Penny, Annie, Elaine and Marian would meet to discuss how to take the partnership working agenda forward in the work of the Forum (please refer also to May meeting notes on this topic).

Simon, Marian, Susanna, John, Alison and Mark would work on planning a “Models of Rural Ministry” day conference. Mark to convene a meeting.

#### 7. Growing the Rural Church Update

Marian had previously circulated her presentation ([link here](#)). She summarised the project’s aims of supporting growth in the rural church and in particular how our buildings are enabling us to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the communities of Devon with joy, and if they are not doing that, how they can be better enabled to do so. Marian is developing a range of partnerships with bodies inside and outside the church structures including Devon Communities Together, Mosaic Creative and others. A new Project Officer has recently been recruited who will begin work in January. This will increase the capacity of the project. The project is also developing a range of ways to help churches engage with their communities.

#### 8. NHS provision for the care of the dying in rural areas

This item was deferred as Jane Lucas had been unable to attend the meeting.

#### 9. Launch of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

Further information can be found [here](#). John Wibberley had been present at the launch of the Commission through his membership of the Royal Agricultural Society. The last Food, Farming and Countryside Commission was convened 15 years ago and pressure has been building to have another one, especially given the changes around Brexit. A significant part of the plan for the commission is to gather the views of a wide range of people and organisations and to reconnect with local food producers, farmers etc.

Martyn Goss said there were currently six national food initiatives in the UK. The food situation in the UK is not sustainable. The Devon Food strategy is looking at becoming more local and self-sufficient in our food needs. As Christians we need to think how we respond to this agenda. **Action:** Martyn to send a list of Food research initiatives for our website.

We agreed we would like the DCRF to provide input to the Commission. John suggested a short paper listing what we would like to see as our vision for Food, Farming and the Countryside in Devon. **Actions:** John, Martyn, hopefully with input from Michael Winter, will take the lead on this item. John will circulate a letter already sent to Michael Gove. Our main item at the January Forum meeting (Focus on Farming) will also feed into this.

## 10. Rural Training and Resources

Mark Butchers, Philip Sourbut, Marian Carson and Alison Ball have met to discuss shared support for learning and development and explored the Germinate Resources particularly. These can all be found via the [Germinate website](#) or via our [DCRF website](#)

Germinate Groups can be ecumenical and are locally based learning communities for people interested in rural ministry. A one day Germinate Enterprise workshop is planned for 3<sup>rd</sup> February – see our website [here](#) for more information. This is for anyone interested in setting up a rural business and for those who can mentor and support – including offering hosting for future Germinate Enterprise workshops. This particular day will be run by Gerry Marhsall – immediate past CEO of Germinate – who wrote the course. [Equipping for rural mission](#) is a four session downloadable course “helping congregations to better understand their church and the needs of their local community in order to review and develop their mission, working with others to effect change”.

[A Discipling Presence](#) focuses on mission and discipleship in the countryside. It has been produced by the Methodist and URC churches and is available from Methodist Publishing.

Marian Carson informed the meeting that a two year lay training post was being recruited within the diocese of Exeter and the person appointed would look at what training is already available, review and work alongside others to deliver. There is a strong desire to set up properly ecumenical rural training in Devon. All agreed that it is important to look at what is already happening locally, what is already available, and the work and training offered through Mission Sheds. Mark Butchers said that

building a network of lay training and other resources will be an important priority for 2018.

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018 Marian Carson, Alison Ball, Philip Sourbut and the newly appointed lay training person will meet to consider rural lay training needs.

#### 11. Deemed Items

Item b – Social Issues – We have a project to collect into one place information on church based community lunch clubs, coffee mornings, craft afternoons and so on, so that partners in the secular agencies may easily be able to refer people who may be lonely or socially isolated. Such agencies are often in contact with people with whom the church may not be, and such a resource would be very helpful. DCC have committed to transfer this information to the Devon wide community Pinpoint database. Churches have been asked for information several times, but it comes in very slowly! It will be necessary to use a more proactive approach if we are to make progress in this area. Annie Jefferies and Maurie Webber, with the help of Heather Sayle, agreed to take this forward. Action: Penny to liaise re website forms and information needed.

Item f – Adrian Brooks commented how helpful the Bright Field Day in May had been.

#### 12. Notices and Events

These were all listed in the [pre-meeting papers](#)

Members attention was particularly drawn to the research by Bristol University on loneliness and social isolation experienced by men in rural areas and the One Northern Devon conference on 30<sup>th</sup> November, where participation by churches is being actively sought. All members were asked to send information on events they know about to the secretary for inclusion on the website.

#### 13. AOB – None

#### 14. Dates of the next meetings

The 2018 meetings will be held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 9<sup>th</sup> May and 29<sup>th</sup> October (note change of date for the latter), all from 10 am to 12 noon at the Devon YFC centre, Cheriton Bishop.

The main item for January will be “Focus on Farming” to include a general update on farming matters, including pastoral needs, as well as a discussion on Brexit, farming and the environment and impacts on our farmers. Barry Dugmore will also report back from the November “Rural Resource Churches” conference.