

Devon Churches Rural Forum

Newsletter no. 3 Spring 2018



Re-imagining Models of Rural Ministry

Rural ministry is amazing - we have the immense privilege of being fully a part of the lives of our village communities. We offer space and shape for welcoming new arrivals, celebrating new partnerships and saying goodbye to loved ones. We mark the seasons of the farming year with festivals of praise, thanksgiving and celebration and hold our farmers and farm workers deeply in prayer. In our smaller communities we are able to really get to know each other - our members are part of the glue that binds and builds our community life so that in times of trouble we may all pull together, and in times of joy we may have much fun! Our buildings are a repository of the history of our communities, and are increasingly offering a space not only for quiet reflection, prayer and worship, but community events, festivals and practical needs such as mobile post offices, community shops and toddler groups.

As an organisation we have people and buildings in every community, and in an age when many statutory organisations are looking for new ways to serve the people of our very rural communities, we can help to “join the dots” working on the ground as we do in serving our communities with social activities, community food networks and natural neighbourly care (and more). Yes - we all know how wonderful rural ministry can be - how glad we are to be able to serve God’s people and celebrate his goodness in the most beautiful surroundings. And yet, too often we feel tired, burdened by “paperwork”, what feels like the never-ending needs of keeping our buildings and churchyards in good repair and feeling like there are fewer of us to do more and more. As a wise priest once said to me - God never drives, he only attracts - yet sometimes we feel quite driven. We know something isn’t quite right with the way we are “being church” at the moment - but try as we might - it can feel really difficult to see how to change things.

In the Devon Churches Rural Forum we have been thinking about all this, and looking at different models of rural ministry from around the world, and within our different denominations.

The good news is that many have gone before us and have really exciting ideas to offer. One really encouraging idea is that we have already, within ourselves, all the gifts and resources we need to fulfil God’s special call for us - be it large or small - in our particular place: the trick is discerning our call! There is also commonality in these new and emerging models of rural ministry and mission in that 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. We also need to take a serious look at how we organise our “governance” work, perhaps sharing more widely across groups of churches - and all this means we also need to take a look at our structures, so that they support our ministry better.

If you would like to read a summary, or the full report, of our November Forum discussion, please click [here](#). There are also direct links to other resources and models - please click [here](#) and [here](#). And read about our exciting conference on **Re-imagining Rural Ministry** overleaf.

Devon Churches Rural Forum Conference - 28th July 2018

“Re-imagining Rural Ministry: Moving Towards New Structures”

To help us explore the ideas on the previous page further, we are holding our second DCRF conference on 28th July 2018 at Cullompton Community Centre. Archdeacon Mark says “current models are creaking at the seams, putting pressure on clergy and laity alike. How can we re-shape, re-imagine and re-invigorate for the future?” This ecumenical conference is open to all and aimed at laity and clergy in leadership roles in their churches. There is no charge but you need to book via Joanie Harris joanie.harris@exeter.anglican.org or 01392 294940. Details and flyer can be accessed [here](#)



Rural Mission Sunday 15th July

Germinate always offers a real wealth of resources and inspiration for rural churches, mission and ministry. One of their initiatives is to celebrate the life of the rural church in Rural Mission Sunday. The theme this year is “Growing Together” and you can register your event and find all sorts of resources and ideas on their website <http://germinate.net/mission/rural-mission-sunday/rural-mission-sunday-2018/>.

Also, we are now blessed in having a **Germinate South West Regional Ambassador** - Stephen Derges - who we welcome as a member of the DCRF. Stephen knows Devon really well and says “the aim of the role is have a 'face' for Germinate on a local area basis.” He can provide advice on all Germinate’s activities and resources and help groups and individuals navigate through the ever-changing nature of rural ministry ([read more here](#)). If you would like Stephen to come along to a church service, meeting or any other event to share on any aspect of Germinate’s ministry, please contact him on 07929 835796 or stephend@germinate.net

Growing the Rural Church Project now in its second year, is moving from strength to strength, helping churches work with their local communities in developing new mission initiatives, Friends Groups, ideas for governance restructuring, enterprise opportunities, specialist uses for our churches and more. Have a look at the expanded [project website](#) for inspiring ideas, and the first Annual Report, which offers a real insight into the work of the first year and the amazing things that have happened for some of our churches. The report concludes with these words “Step by step we are seeing more churches reclaiming their role at the centre of their communities, as a place of worship, as a place of heritage, as somewhere that meets community needs. Crucially we see this develop when worshipping and non-worshipping members of communities are come together to ask two questions, first, “what does our community need?” and second, “how might our church, as people and a building, meet that need?” If you are an Anglican church and would like to get involved, fill out an expression of interest form on the project website.

Good News from Holsworthy

Jane Lucas (Rural Dean) writes “The Holsworthy Hospital is looking to be re-opened for in-bed patients. The NDHC Trust have been asked to respond to the CCG’s statement that they are ‘not supporting their closure of the in-bed part of the hospital’ within two weeks”. This has been a real community effort and many people from our churches were involved. Jane will also be leading a discussion on care for the dying in rural areas at our next DCRF meeting on 9th May.



Stephen Derges

Focus on Farming

Spring Farming Update

As we all know, the weather this spring has been very wet and cold and our livestock farmers have suffered a lot of extra stress in what has been one of the wettest and coldest seasons for some time.

Animals have needed to be kept inside for longer and there has been a shortage of straw for bedding. In Devon we are reliant on importing straw from other parts of the country where more is grown, but last year being quite dry, the corn didn't grow as high and so less is available. It is also more expensive. Earlier in April the NFU re-launched their fodder bank to put farmers with excess fodder or bedding to sell in touch with those who need additional supplies. Sheep farmers have also suffered greater losses of pregnant ewes and lambs than usual because of the cold and wet.

Ploughing and sowing is behind schedule, but I have been told of an old saying this week "Out of Season, Out of Reason" - meaning don't plant just because it's the right season but wait until the conditions are right. Often the weather will make up for itself (and haven't the last few days been beautiful?) - for example the first silage cut may yield less than normal, but the second be extra good. However, if planting gets too late, harvest yields will be affected.

The milk price is holding at the moment, and some milk buyers are in talks with some supermarkets to look at the possibility of introducing a minimum price for farmers, which would be good news.

Joanne Jones from the Farming Community Network adds "The changes to TB testing rules means that more herds are being blood tested at an earlier stage - this is picking up many more cattle that have been exposed to TB and more being slaughtered, but hopefully will bring outbreaks under control quicker." Joanne also says that the FCN is now seeing cases arising where animal activists are causing issues on farms and stress to the farmers concerned. In part this relates to mis-reporting of animal welfare standards on British farms. Clips from other countries are sometimes used which do not give a true reflection of welfare in this country, which is amongst the highest in the world. Joanne says "our aim at shows this year will be to promote British Farmers and their produce in addition to offering support".

Please continue to pray for all our farmers and farm workers and give thanks for all they do for us both in producing food and caring for the land.



At our Forum meeting in January we held a wide ranging discussion of farming issues and concerns. We looked particularly at the factors affecting farmers and our pastoral care response, and then in some detail on the emerging strategy for farm subsidies after Brexit, with the Environment Secretary focusing on "Public Money for Public Goods", the major worldwide concerns about soil erosion and work being done in the head-waters of the Exe project to work with farmers and land-owners to help reduce soil run off, and the idea of "Natural Capital" and the need to protect and sustain the things of creation that support all life on earth, if we are to avoid serious social and economic, as well as ecological liabilities. We also touched on food networks and food poverty and Devon's food strategy. Finally we discussed ways in which we as churches can respond to these issues, a discussion we shall continue at our forthcoming Forum meeting.

If you would like to read more, please click [here](#) for the full meeting report and links to the various speeches, policy and strategy documents and research results mentioned during the discussion. You can also find links to various farming related organisation websites [here](#).

The Church's Response?

We shall be considering how our churches, and the DCRF itself, can respond to the issues raised during our "Focus on Farming" discussion, at our next meeting on May 9th.

One thing we would like to do is to collect together examples of good practice in understanding the issues and concerns of our farming communities, joining together in community social events, highlights from your harvest and other farming festivals and more ...

For example, at our meeting we heard from the Three Rivers Mission Community in South Devon about how a "Bishops in Mission" meeting last year between Bishop Sarah and a group of local farmers has had some helpful knock on effects: some young farmers have started selling at local markets in the villages and others have begun to market their produce more locally. The farmers who met felt very much listened to – providing a helpful model for the church – through listening first - and the following harvest festival felt as if it had been reclaimed by the farming community.

Please email me (see below) with a contact phone number and let's chat about your experiences - it would be great to be able to share your good news

Open Farm Sunday

10th June this year is Open Farm Sunday - a fantastic opportunity to get out and about, visit some farms, and find out how our food is produced. If you want to find a local farm to visit the [Open Farm Sunday website](#)

And as Julia Neville says "it's an ideal time for churches and farmers to collaborate to celebrate the work of those who produce our local food". Do let Julia know if you plan a local event and she will include in next month's "Faith Matters" Bulletin email julia.neville@exeter.anglican.org



Do check our [What's On pages](#) for details of conferences, events and training days - local and national ...

Devon Churches Rural Forum is an ecumenical group that meets three times a year to bring together people with an interest in rural affairs and ministry to discuss and respond in practical ways to issues relating to ministry and mission, training and resourcing for rural ministry, farming matters and pastoral care of our farmers, and various rural social, economic and environmental concerns.

Website: devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk Email: info@devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk

Chair: Rev'd Dr Mark Butchers Secretary and Editor: Rev'd Penny Dobbin

If you are not reading this on screen, you can find the documents and links referenced via "hyperlinks" direct on our website either by navigating the menu or using the search facility. Any problems with accessing information please email us. If you would like to attend a meeting of the DCRF please also email us and you will be sent meeting info direct. Details of past and future meetings can be found [here](#).