

Devon Churches Rural Forum

Newsletter no. 4 Summer 2018



Caring for each other in Rural Areas

At our May Forum meeting we focused on some aspects of caring for each other in our rural communities. Sally Farrant (Exeter Diocesan Social Responsibility Officer) talked with us about facing **dementia**. Dementia issues in rural areas can be different from towns. There can be a lack of awareness of dementia symptoms, needs and the support available to live well in rural areas, coupled with professionals not always having local knowledge of the situation in particular communities, where access to services may be difficult and the nearest memory cafe many miles away, for example. Sally also explained how a network of support is crucial when neighbours, friends and the community can all come to the person's aid – which may be just continuing to be friends and calling round for coffee. She also encouraged us to think in terms of dementia friendliness in all our activities, not making only specific dementia friendly activities, so that people can continue to join in with activities they are used to, and so maintain their regular friendships and contacts.

Sally told us that Dementia Friends sessions are changing communities all across Devon. These sessions give hope, help people to live with dementia, and others to support them.

As churches, one of the most important things we can do is to become “Dementia Aware” - Dementia Friends sessions can be done on-line, in a church or as a whole village. Another idea we discussed was the possibility of running either regular or “pop-up” memory cafes using our churches as venues and some of our members helping as volunteers. Would your church be interested in this? If so, contact Sally for discussion.

Read more from Sally [here](#) and link to the Exeter Diocese page on Dementia Friendly Rural Communities and Churches, which contains a wealth of resources [here](#). And if you haven't already seen it, do take a look at the [Dementia Friendly Rural Communities Guide](#) which was launched at the Devon County Show.

We also talked about **care for the dying and their families** in our communities - this discussion was led by Rev'd Jane Lucas, Rural Dean of Holsworthy. With the closure of local hospital beds, more people are dying in hospitals far away from where they live either because it is not possible to organise appropriate care packages at home, or because there are no in-patient beds available locally. This can cause real difficulty and sadness both for the person at the end of their life and their families.

Many people who die in hospital have no family to look after them - often one spouse has already died and the immediate family (if any) live away. Neighbours from home may also be elderly, and if friends are in hospital a long way away they find it difficult to visit.

Perhaps there may be a role for churches in medical centres as listening posts or chaplains? We can also work closely with our hospital chaplains and volunteer teams.

Jane believes the current situation is not honouring to the families and the dying if they are not able to be cared for either at home or in a local in-patient facility. She asks how we, as churches, can help raise the voice about care for the dying in rural areas and how we can respond to care for our neighbours.

Reaching the lonely and socially isolated ... we still need your help to collate information about social activities you may run. If you haven't already, please take a couple of minutes to complete the form [here](#) so we can publicise your activities on our website and through our health and social care partners to help reach more lonely and isolated people in our communities. More information on this project [here](#).

You can read the full notes from our May meeting [here](#) - and for further responses to our “Focus on Farming” report in our last newsletter, please see the back page.



Re-imagining Rural Ministry: Moving Towards New Structures A report on our 2018 Conference

Our conference, attended by 95 people all involved in rural ministry, was held on Saturday 28th July, with the following (and more) subjects being discussed:

- Change – or should we call it adapting to our modern context?
- Turning aside to the “Bright Field” - of R S Thomas fame – a focus on the present and what is to come rather than dwelling in what has been.
- The great variety of marvellous activities and service already being undertaken by our rural churches within their communities.
- The need to help people see that where they are and what they do in daily life is their Christian ministry, and help to develop a language of faith that leads to deepening relationships and conversations.
- New structures for multi-parish groups being needed to support the current reality of people, governance requirements and the mission and ministry priority.
- Learning reflective skills, valuing and celebrating what we have, considering what resources and structures best support the good already happening.

- Great emphasis, in all models of ministry explored, on the ministry of all the baptised, of collaborative working, identifying gifts, calling out and supporting through training and mentoring.
 - The need for specialist ministries.
- Flexibility with clergy budgets to support whole church ministry.
 - Learning together and becoming a Learning Community.
- Finding ways to facilitate ecumenical dialogue and co-operation at the “middle” level (deaneries and circuits being non-contiguous to consider only two denominations) as well as at the District/Diocese level and on the ground practical working.
- Exploring the special gifts of each church and what it can bring to the whole.
- Believing our churches and communities having already within them all the gifts needed to be a ministering community in their place.
- Never forgetting that we exist to serve others – those people who live and work and visit our communities.

If you would like to read more, [summaries](#) of all the presentations and plenary sessions, copies and audio recordings of the presentations and Bishop Robert’s and Rev’d Graham Thompson’s addresses and all the resources mentioned during the day, are available on the conference page on our website [here](#)



Focus on Farming

Summer Farming Update

This year has seen one of the most difficult winters and summers both in the same year and farming has been on our news bulletins rather more than usual, which reflects the very difficult conditions our farmers have been facing, but at least means that more of us are better informed of the farming life this year.

For livestock farmers the period from May to early August was “pretty nail-biting”. The quantities of silage gathered was reduced from normal due to the dry weather - though this has affected some farmers more than others in that the maize has loved the sunshine and for those who also grow a maize silage crop, the two may balance out. The grass is also growing extremely well again now - like spring grass after the dryness - so there is hope for an extra crop of good grass silage in September . Any extra silage will be welcome as livestock farmers have used up much of their winter fodder to supplement the burnt grass during the summer - indeed some have used all their May silage already. This is on top of the need for extra feed last winter due to the extreme wet and cold conditions with the cattle inside for much longer. Cattle feed is about 10% higher than this time last year.

The price of milk is hardening and from 1st September most farmers can expect at least 30 pence per litre. This is because of a lower supply due to the cows producing less milk during the heat wave and continuing exits from dairy farming. One milk buyer has reduced his rounds from 13 to 8 because of this.

TB continues to be a concern, but more herds are now becoming free from the disease. Thank God.

For sheep farmers the winter was incredibly hard with the rain and snow and many lambs were lost. Throughout the summer there hasn't been enough pasture but the sheep are generally in better condition than might be expected.

Most of the corn has been harvested now, but yields are lower than normal . Autumn sown crops didn't grow well over the winter and spring crops were late because the ground was so wet and then the lack of rain during the growing season reduced growth. However, most of the combining has been done in dry conditions.

This is, as always, a time for giving thanks and praising God for the harvest, but it has been an incredibly difficult year for our farmers - both in caring for the animals and crops and in the financial implications of the extreme weather. You can find the Harvest 2018 Briefing from Germinate ARC [here](#)



The possible effects of **Brexit** on our farmers and countryside are also never far from our minds at present. You can read an excellent briefing from Germinate on the subject [here](#) and the NFU summary response to the government's consultation “Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming, and the environment in a Green Brexit” [here](#)

A Prayer from FCN

Bless us O God
we, who live close to the land.
Help us as you have helped others
before us.

They like we, knew the struggles,
the fears, the joys and the rewards
of life in a rural area.

Please help us to trust in the Lord
Jesus Christ, who said,
"Come to me, all you who are weary ,
and I will give you rest".

Help us to be aware
of the quiet beauty of the night,
the fresh green growth on trees,
the sweet song of birds.

We give thanks for all of these.
May we always show respect
for all your creation.

Help us to grow in love
and unity with you and
with each other.

We ask this through
Christ our Lord. Amen.

Focus on Farming

The Churches Response

At our May Forum meeting we agreed the following as our response to our "Focus on Farming" discussion. Please get in touch if you can help with any of them ...

Promote the use of the Germinate Resource ["Rural Isolation and Loneliness: A practical resource for rural churches"](#).

Investigate what is already done to support farming wives in particular and whether any more focused work is needed - with the FCN and Mothers Union.

Encourage farm visits for clergy and congregations to learn more about the farming life - could you help with this in your area?

To encourage churches to invite FCN to come and speak with them both to gain more volunteers and to help churches care for their farming communities locally

To collect stories of "good practice" relating to churches contacts with their farming communities - what is helpful? What do people enjoy? How are relationships formed? Please email us at the usual address with a phone number and we will ring for a chat - look forward to hearing from you!

To consider how the churches could contribute to the work of sustaining "Natural Capital" through bringing churches, environmental organisations such as the North Devon Biosphere Reserve and farmers together.

Events

- 15th September - [Creating a Buzz in Devon's Churchyards](#)
- 13th October - Germinate Conference - ["More than Belonging"](#)
- 13th October - South West Youth Ministries [Big Training Day](#)
- 24th October - [Eco Church Southwest Gathering](#) - to share stories, ideas, hopes and activities for eco-churches in Devon working to sustain God's creation
- 29th October - next meeting of the Devon Churches Rural Forum - the agenda will appear [here](#) when available
- 31st October - [Growing the Rural Church Conference: Building Conversations - Churches for Rural Communities](#)



Sign up for **Creationtide 2018** reflections and resources [here](#).

Reports, Books, Blogs ...

Link to the [Growing the Rural Church blog](#) - the latest entry is from Rev'd Geoffrey Fenton entitled "Reflections of a Rural Vicar: Being Church in a Village Community"

Find details of books suggested by members of the Forum and others [here](#) - recent additions include books about dementia, Learning Communities, the ministry of all the baptised, and more.

Read ["Recharging Rural: Creating sustainable communities to 2030 and beyond"](#) a major report from the Prince's Countryside Trust on rural sustainability and Professor Michael Winter's report on ["Changing Food Cultures: Challenges and Opportunities for UK Agriculture"](#)

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: The Ven 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.