

Devon Churches Rural Forum

Newsletter no. 6 Summer 2019



Rural Worship Workshop

Rural Worship - such a richness of ways we have to worship God in the midst of his creation and people.

Whilst Sunday by Sunday we sometimes struggle in our rural churches - especially in the colder months - we have so many glorious opportunities in rural, farming and village life to connect with people and offer praise and thanksgiving to God.

First there is the seasonality of the farming year. All around us we can see the evidence of sowing, growing, harvesting and animal husbandry - the lambs appearing in the fields in spring and the cows daily queuing up to be milked. We can see with our own eyes what a hot and dry summer or a wet and frozen winter can do to the land, and farming forms the basis of so much of our rural life. So we have opportunities to join with our farmers, as we celebrate the harvest, or pray for the year ahead, and particularly in these uncertain times to show how much we appreciate their work and production of our food and care for our landscape - all so inter-twined.

Then there are our traditional Christian festivals throughout the year - what does a rural Holy Week and Easter look like? Or Ascension Day on the top of a hill? Nativities in cow sheds are becoming more popular, and Mothering Sunday with glorious spring flowers of Devon primroses and daffodils are a delight.

There is also more and more research that concludes that being outside and connecting with nature is really good for our mental and physical well-being - well we probably know that instinctively I think - and as churches we have the opportunity to add "Spiritual well-being" to this list with our beautiful coast and countryside around us wherever we look. We can engage in prayer walks, beach events, pilgrimages or picnics - perhaps tying our events in with specially

designated days such as World Environment Day, National Friendship Day or 30 days wild with the Devon Wildlife Trust - and bring an extra dimension of prayer and worship to the whole - as well as connecting with people who might not normally connect their care for nature with the love of God. There are also lots of ideas around at the moment about forest or wild church worship opportunities - all of which help to connect us with our creator God. And of course - there are all sorts of resources being developed for Creationtide itself.

We have opportunities to bless our communities in celebration and sadness - perhaps the beginning of the new cricket season or the restoration of a village hall are celebrated and blessed, a person remembered in a special place, the loss of a school or pub marked with a celebration of its life and what it has meant to the village.

All these - and thoughts for how "Festival Churches" can add to our missional worship - are just some of the opportunities we have to make Rural Worship really special - no doubt you have lots more examples - which would be great to hear about!

So - to bring some of these ideas together - and develop some new ones - in conjunction with the Exeter Diocesan Worship, Prayer and Spirituality Group, the Growing the Rural Church Project and the Farming Community Network, on **Saturday October 12th, 9.30 am to 1 pm, at Teign Valley Community Hall in Christow, the Devon Churches Rural Forum is hosting a Rural Worship Workshop entitled "A Year of Rural Worship: God in Farm, Field and Village" and we would love to see you there!**

Whether you are a leader or a participant, lay or ordained, a regular church-goer or not - this workshop will benefit from your presence, ideas and experience. There is no cost, but for planning purposes, please book by 14th September (details overleaf) and bring a packed lunch.

A Year of Rural Worship: God in Farm, Field and Village

A Devon Churches Rural Forum Workshop - with the Diocese of Exeter Worship, Prayer and Spirituality Group, Growing the Rural Church Project and the Farming Community Network

Saturday October 12th 2019

9.30 am to 1 pm followed by shared lunch

Teign Valley Community Hall, Christow



- Develop a seasonal calendar of worship opportunities
- Hear from the Farming Community Network about their farming services
- Share and develop ideas for:
 - Traditional Farming and Christian Festivals
 - Spirituality events - prayer walks, connecting with nature
 - Blessing the community
 - Connecting with national “special days”
- Share resources
- For all lay or ordained participants and leaders in rural worship

Book by September 14th: No cost but for planning purposes please email Rev'd Penny Dobbin penelopedobbin@outlook.com

Please bring: Any worship resources you would like to share (with copyright assignation) and a packed lunch - coffee, tea and cake will be available

Venue:

<https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/community-buildings/teign-valley->



All resources and ideas shared will be made available on our website after the event. If you would like to download a copy of the poster to display you can find it [here](#) and the more detailed programme for the meeting can be found [here](#).

Focus on Farming

Farm Visits Programme

We've had two super Farm Visits this year, to Dairyfield Farm near CREDITON and Dartington Hall Farm near Totnes, and you can find reports of both visits and lots more photos on our website [here](#).

These visits are for anyone in our churches who would like to learn first hand a bit more about the different aspects of farming and how our food is produced so we can understand the issues behind the headlines and support our farming community as much as we can.

Next year (in March - date to be confirmed) we are going to be visiting the Arla factory in North Tawton where we'll see how the milk from Dairyfield farm, amongst others, is processed after leaving the farm, and then Rhude Farm near Holsworthy on August 5th when our visit will coincide with the birth of the calves and we can see the "nursery" side of dairy farming. More details nearer the time.



All aboard for the farm tour at Dartington Hall Farm

Farming Updates

One of the main themes, unsurprisingly, is the uncertainty and concerns surrounding Brexit. Different sectors of farming will be affected in different ways, but, especially for our sheep farmers who export much of their lamb to Europe, an immediate imposition of tariffs could be very difficult indeed. Otherwise, silage crops have been doing very well, the milk price has been holding steady, and the harvest generally has begun well though the rain this week will be welcome for grass and crop growth. You can find our full farming updates (to late June) [here](#).

Support for Rural Women

Rural women can be particularly in need of support as a result of isolation, concern about the business and the challenges of looking after family, farm and maybe having an off-farm job as well. Through the DCRF, the Farming Community Network, the Women's Institute and the Mothers' Union jointly developed an open letter to rural women offering support and contacts which has been made available at recent events.

If you know anyone in the farming community who is struggling and may benefit from someone in the FCN coming alongside to listen and support – please signpost them to the [FCN Website](#) which has details of both e and phone help lines. To find a Mothers' Union branch near you phone 01392 254126 - one of the Exeter Diocese MU aims is to help support those living in rural isolation in our communities. The Devon Federation of WI's telephone is 01392 255 386 and the "Find a WI" link is [here](#).



Farmer Jon Perkin with one of his goats at Dartington Hall Farm (above) and Will Jones of Dairyfield Farm explaining some of the mechanics of dairy farming (below)



DCRF Meetings

Since the last newsletter the Forum has met twice - in February and July. In February the main items we talked about were the Devon Communities Together Community Unity Project, some Growing the Rural Church Case Studies, the possibility of organising some rural placements for ordinands, support for rural women and more. You can download the notes for links and resources from this meeting [here](#).

In July we were joined for part of the meeting by our Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall Police, Shaun Sawyer, and some of his staff, as we discussed briefly some aspects of rural crime, the nature of the police's work in rural areas supporting people and how we can work together, especially in support of those who may be lonely or isolated. Professor Michael Winter presented his report on Changing Food Cultures and some challenges and opportunities for UK agriculture. We were also joined by Rev'd Dr Mark Betson who is the National Rural Officer for the Church of England. Mark explained his role in terms of both supporting the rural church on the ground and advising the national church on matters relating to rural life and church followed by a very interesting Q and A session where we discussed aspects of rural church life, including the missional use of our buildings. You can find the meeting notes for these discussions [here](#).

Our next meeting will be on October 16th at the Devon Young Farmers Centre in Cheriton Bishop, where our main theme will be to follow up on conversations with the Chief Constable in July on issues of rural crime and modern slavery and we will be joined by a number of people who will help our understanding of these issues so we can see how our churches can respond.



Mark Betson (left) and Michael Winter (centre) chat with Forum members after the meeting in July

Resources

The National Rural Crime Network has produced a report about domestic abuse in rural areas - you can access this via [this link](#)

The Clewer Initiative has produced a toolkit about modern slavery in rural areas - you can access this [here](#) - and they also held a southwest regional meeting on the subject earlier this year - you can find Dave Watson's report on the meeting [here](#) - Dave attended on behalf of the Forum. As noted above we shall be looking further at the issue of Modern Slavery in October.

The Rural Services Network is a fount of knowledge about many aspects of rural life - if you are not already - you can sign up to receive their weekly newsletters via their website [here](#).

You can keep up to date with new articles added to our website via our home page [here](#) various and relevant events via our "What's On" page [here](#)

Devon Churches Rural Forum is an ecumenical group that meets three times a year to bring people with an interest in rural affairs and ministry together to discuss and respond in practical ways to issues relating to ministry and mission, training and resourcing for rural ministry, farming matters, pastoral care of our farming community, 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 have details of any events, book reviews, liturgies or good news stories to share please let us know so we can share via the website and newsletter – as always via info@devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk

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.