

Devon Churches Rural Forum

Notes of the meeting held 4th February 2020 held 10 am to 12 noon at Devon Young Farmers Centre Cheriton Bishop

1. Archdeacon Mark opened the meeting in prayer
2. **Present:** Archdeacon Mark Butchers (chair), Penny Body (Secretary), Stephen Skinner (rural minister), Danny Semorad (farmer, church warden, Devon Historic Churches Trust), Dave Watson (rural lay minister), Philip Wagstaff (PEMD Rural Officer and Superintendent Minister), Howard Wilson (Methodist Southwest Regional Learning and Development Co-ordinator), Susanna Metz (rural dean, relief milker), Jane Lucas (farmer and retired minister), Jane Frost (rural minister), Jane Skinner (rural minister), Heather Sayle (Mothers' Union), David Ursell (farmer, rural minister), John Hayhoe (rural minister), Janet May (rural minister), Simon Franklin (Bright Field Community), Douglas Dettmer (Archdeacon of Totnes), John Wibberley (Agriculturalist), Mike Clark (Mission Community Development Advisor for Barnstaple Archdeaconry).

Special welcomes to Mike Clark attending his first meeting. Philip Wagstaff also informed the meeting he was being posted to Kent from September. The meeting wished him every blessing but his presence and input to the DCRF will be sorely missed.

3. **Apologies:** Martin Beck, Stephen Derges, Chris Keppie, Joanne Jones, Sylvia West, Ruth Frampton, Colin Smallacombe, Andy Jerrard, Sam Upham, Jane Hayes, Graham Whalley, Elizabeth Burke.
4. The [notes of the last meeting](#) were agreed
5. Matters and actions arising from the last meeting not covered elsewhere on the agenda
 - a. Sylvia to give DFWI contacts to Chris to aid working together (need update on status – carry forward action)
 - b. Penny and Chris to continue work on the seasonal calendar of worship from the DCRF Rural Worship Day (continuing)

- c. Penny to ask John W if he can maintain contacts with Dartington Farm to give updates on the work and research seen on the farm visit – John W will do this.
- d. Simon to send Penny any available rural theology write-ups done by the Bright Field Community (Item 6d from last meeting) (see item 7).
- e. Penny to complete a section on [“Who does what” in the DCRF and progress the DCRF contacts list](#). These are completed but in the light of Philip’s move Penny will take back “Meetings and Agendas”. An internal confidential list of members’ contacts has been circulated and a public version is available on our website.
- f. Mark and Chris to discuss how to progress Item 9a from the last meeting re. churches liaising with their neighbourhood police officers (carry action forward).
- g. Heather noted that a Mothers’ Union trustee has been trained in Modern Slavery awareness and is happy to speak with churches on the subject. Please contact Lesley Thurley via [Exeter Diocese MU](#). Dave Watson is similarly available to talk with churches in North Devon.

6. DCRF Project Updates

a. Placements for Ordinands

Simon explained that the idea of working with Sarum College to place ordinands with rural parishes where churches are trying new models of rural ministry has not been fruitful this year, and the new cohort would not be suitable for Devon placements.

The hope for the project was to use the resources of the DCRF to encourage people to think differently about rural ministry. Theological colleges often do not teach new models for rural ministry and the old ones are no longer fit for purpose. Douglas noted that some newer courses have included rural ministry but it can get squeezed out of the curriculum.

The meeting encouraged further exploration of the placement idea with SWMTC and St Mellitus.

Philip said we need to promote rural as a mainstream ministry. It is also a very ecumenical one. Being a rural minister in the community is of vital significance. He also said that the Methodists worked closely with Queen’s College in Birmingham and have been doing some work to explore the current role of the presbyter. John W suggested a day/weekend for students,

showing what is going on in wide ranging rural ministry settings, combining a conference with getting out and about. Penny suggested working with Mark Betson and the ARC to share ideas.

Action: Simon will take these ideas back into the working group (Simon, Philip, Heather, Stephen) and discuss how to progress.

b. Farm Visits and North Devon Show

Danny reported that he was still waiting for a date from Arla for the proposed tour – they were keen on the visit but many staff changes had made contact difficult. Danny will continue trying for March, but if not then late April or May.

Danny has been in contact with the chairman of the North Devon Show who is very keen to host Bishop Robert for his visit on 5th August. **Actions:** Mark, Danny and Chloe Axford will liaise regarding this visit. Danny will also ask Bishop Robert's office to send an invitation to clergy to join him both for the visit to the show and the visit to Rhude Farm afterwards, as we did with Bishops Jackie and Nick last year.

c. Feedback from National Rural Officers Gathering November 2019 – [see reports on our website](#)

7. Theology and Models of Rural Ministry

Mark introduced the topic by referring back to our 2018 conference on Reimagining Rural Ministry and the follow up which had been to develop a “toolkit” type resource pack for multi-parish rural ministers and churches. Accordingly, a small group has met three times and produced a draft package. This is envisaged as being in three parts. The first would be a theological reflection to celebrate the joys of rural ministry and to include questions for PCCs. The second paper would document for PCCs and Methodist councils outlines of possible models for rural ministry – not in a prescriptive way, but offering options and ideas. The third would offer practical guidance and options for streamlining work within Mission Communities, links to available templates and policies, and identifying gaps where further work is needed. The first two parts combined had been circulated before the meeting.

The discussion centred on these main points:

- The paper seemed to capture the important aspects of rural ministry

- Who and what the toolkit is for, and how it is to be used needs to be clearer.
- Various theological points, for example:
 - God in the incarnation is vulnerable – how do we reflect this in our church life when our training teaches us to be robust and resilient rather than vulnerable
 - The Gospel is the same at all times and in all places – how does it apply to our situation now in practical terms.
 - Add a section about the nature of God and how this reflects on our practice/how our practice may need to change
- The balance between the positive and negative aspects of church life needs to be looked at. The paper may be too positive. We must not deny the negative and it is possible that the celebratory may make people feel they need to do more. It depends on the viewpoint of the reader. This part of the paper could be re-named as a “Celebration of what is good in rural ministry” and address the burdens more specifically in a separate section. However, for some, looking at the “good news” can also help to release some of the burden by reminding people of brighter things.
- Identifying the burdens by type:
 - Practical – money, buildings, people, resources
 - Exhaustion, stress, depression – further affecting outlook
 - Administration, governance - streamlining
 - Failure to live up to expectations – change the expectations
 - Conflict
- We talk about the old model being broken – perhaps we need to define the old model before we can see what needs to be kept and where we need to move towards a new one.
- The paper needs to decide how radical it aims to be versus offering smaller practical steps.
- Include more about the land and farming.
- There is no suggestion that “one size fits all” for any model – but this may still be causing concern with some of the models – we need to make it very clear that we are offering options and ideas.
- There were significant issues of training and succession planning with the NZ model. Any change to a new model will need support from in practical ways and from the Bishop’s Staff.
- Pruning is needed whatever model we follow.
- We need to look at appropriate measure for the rural church to avoid feelings of failure by not always living up to “urban” measures of a “successful church”.

Actions: Mark and Penny will meet to collate the feedback and agree the next steps with the small group.

8 Deemed Items

[Farming Update](#)

9 Notices and Events

The Big Green Event at the cathedral on 22nd February was specifically mentioned. John W also sent around information about the Exmoor Society essay writing competition.

10/11 AOB – turned into themes for future meetings!

A short discussion on looking at the ethical, environmental and welfare issues in farming ensued. People are becoming very interested in these subjects and it would help if we could help inform churches of the issues. We agreed this would be an excellent subject for our July meeting and we would invite someone from the NFU and other local experts to come and speak to us about the various issues and explore “what it’s like being a farmer at the moment”. Jane L also suggested asking a local farmer to write a monthly article for the parish magazine to help narrow the gap between producer and consumer.

For the November meeting, the meeting felt that a focus on environmental issues from a theological perspective would be useful, especially as this would be close to the COP 26 conference. Chris, David Curry and Sam Wernham would be asked to help with this.

Future meetings

Wednesday 8th July 10 am to 12 noon

Monday 2nd November 10 am to 12noon

12 Douglas closed the meeting in prayer

