

Bishop of Leicester's Rural Commission Report 2018



Deep Wells & Green Pastures

**“The water that I will give will become
in them a well of water gushing up to
eternal life”**

John 4:14

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Foreword from Bishop Martyn



Photo by Nick Clarke Media

I never cease to be amazed at how God weaves together the experiences of our lives to prepare us for the next leg of our journey. That was certainly my reflection on arrival in Leicestershire.

After many years working in urban communities in South Yorkshire, it took me a while to understand why God called me to rural Gloucestershire.

Living in a small village (the shop, pub and school had all long since closed, and the bus service was reduced to once a week!) was a steep learning curve.

However, on my arrival in Leicestershire, I could see how important my rural experience would be. As this report makes clear, we are predominantly a rural diocese.

If the work of this Commission helps us to change our self-understanding, it will have been a great success. For most people outside of our Diocese, the Diocese of Leicester conjures up pictures of a dead king, a football team surpassing all expectations and a multicultural and multifaith melting pot. But this is only part of the picture. This report is a step along the way to reminding those of us who live in the Diocese that the typical Leicestershire church is small, beautiful, and vibrant, made up of farmers, business people and retirees, and so embedded in the life of the community that even those who call themselves atheists, still volunteer to cut the churchyard grass and ring the church bells.

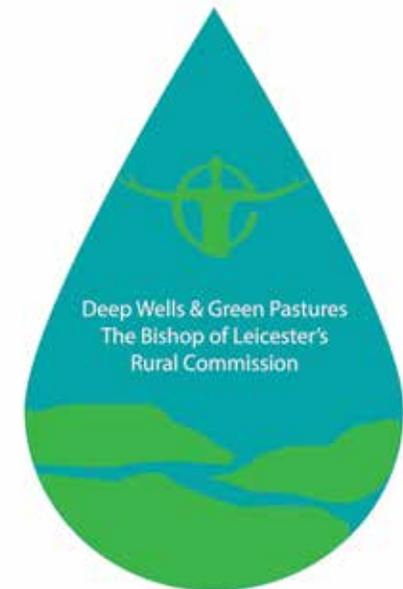
As well as changing our self-understanding, I hope this report will also help us celebrate the diversity of rural life in Leicestershire. From bustling market towns, to quiet villages, from former mining communities to new housing developments, the term 'rural' can hide many significant differences. And this is why it is so important for the church to be a part of every community and to prayerfully discern what God is doing in that community.

This in turn explains why I so heartily endorse one of the most significant recommendations of this report (p14) - I am not in the business of closing churches! Indeed, we need more churches not fewer! So, I will strive in every way possible to grow the number of churches in the Diocese, by which I mean, growing numbers of small Christian communities dedicated to learning what it means to love God and love their neighbours.

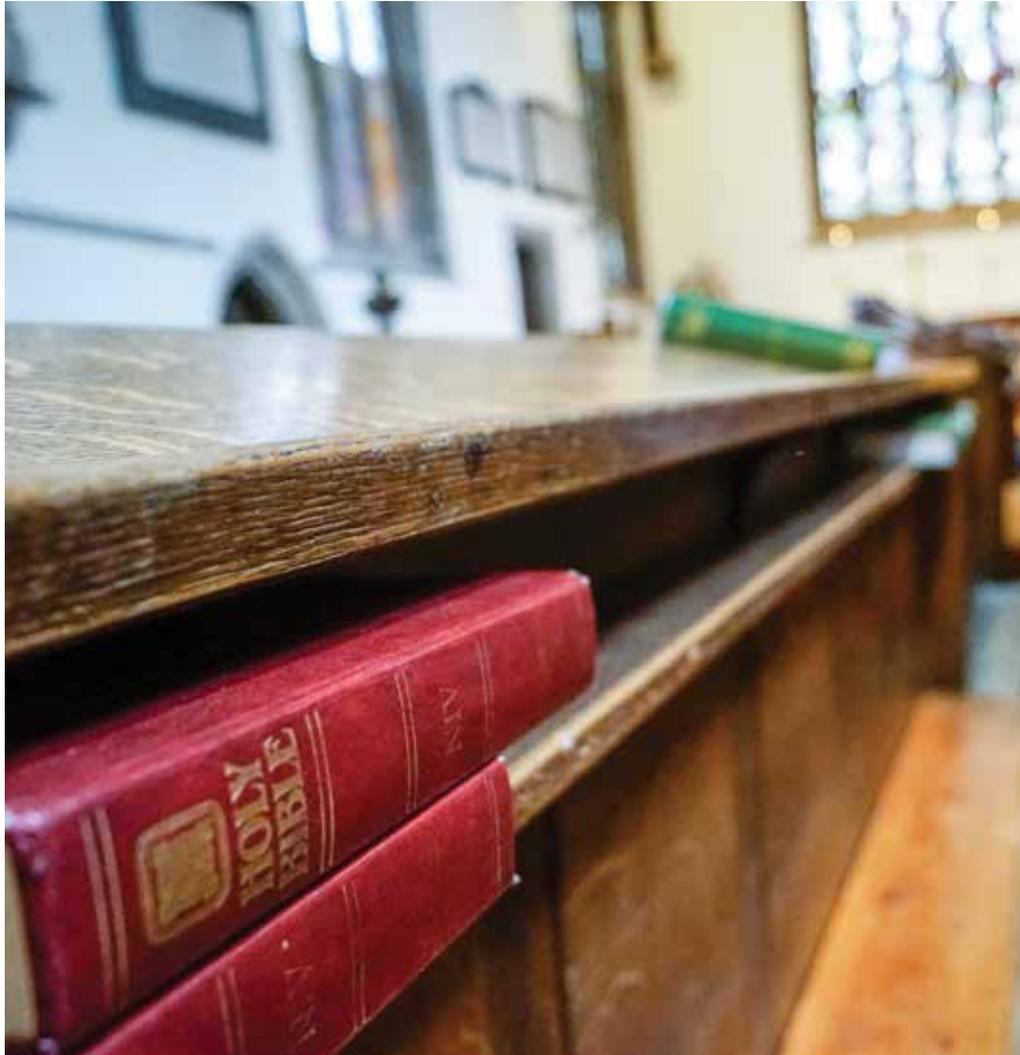
I am enormously grateful to the members of the Commission for all their hard work and in particular for their careful listening and discerning. The way they have fulfilled the task has been every bit as important as the outcome of the task. That said, I wholeheartedly accept all their recommendations and commit to ensuring that this report is followed by a detailed action plan to ensure its implementation.

My thanks also to all who have taken part in the consultations and written to the Commission. May God lead us on to green pastures and deep wells.

Rt Revd Martyn Snow
Bishop of Leicester



Leicester Diocese will shift in self-understanding from an urban diocese with a rural edge to a rural diocese with urban heartlands, working in partnership, led by all God's people



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Executive Summary – What a good one looks like – (WAGOLL)

Diocesan Context: *Leicester Diocese will shift in self-understanding from an urban diocese with a rural edge to a rural diocese with urban heartlands, working in partnership, and led by all God's people.*

Rural Contexts

Rural churches are actively committed to, and engaged with, the flourishing of the whole local community. They bring leadership. They walk alongside local people, and at times convene and facilitate challenging conversations.

Schools, Children and Young People

Church schools are places of transformation for children, young people and the wider community. All schools are seen as an intrinsic part of rural mission and ministry with church and school co-creating the future. The voice of the child is front and centre.

Mission, Evangelism and Growth

Every member of the local church community can talk confidently about their faith in such a way as to invite people into the sacred space of the local church. This means articulation of the faith by all generations for all generations.

It includes invitation into traditional and non-traditional church gatherings. Wherever the 'well' is, come and drink from it.

Discipleship and Vocation

In any church community all can talk about what being a disciple means for them. People readily share their stories about how God is at work in their lives. They share how their faith is growing and they sense what God wants them to do.

Leadership and Ministry

Churches working together are served by collaborative teams. These teams have been created and agreed by local people. All of God's people lead in ways which are responsive to what God wants them to do in that place.

Governance and Buildings

Governance is fleet of foot and is responsive to local needs and context, with a high degree of mutual trust and mutual support. If there is a building, it is open and accessible to everyone. There is a sense of community ownership of the building and, as a result, the care and security is assured. The church is also available for other Christian denominations.

Finance and Giving

Rural churches have a vivid awareness of the generosity of God. From this the default narrative is of abundance, not scarcity; recognising the 'deep wells' from which rural churches can draw upon from within their midst. A profound understanding of God as the source of all life, rooted in the experience of preparing, planting, nurturing and harvesting, leads to generosity of time, talents and treasure. Groups of rural churches develop a greater degree of trust, including trust with money, and support each other in crisis.



The Commission makes a number of recommendations both to the rural church community and to those who shape and service the Diocese. If these recommendations are implemented, then we can expect to see the following changes and shifts. Learning from practice in our schools, we present these as WAGOLLS.

Introduction

*‘The water that I will give will become in them
a well of water gushing up to eternal life’*

John 4:14

*‘He makes me lie down in green pastures’
Psalm 23:2a*

The Bishop, following his initial visits to the parishes of the Diocese, wished to explore the questions raised by our rural context with respect to the Church of England’s mission and ministry in Leicestershire. The Bishop set up this Commission to address these matters whilst acknowledging that much work and support has already been shared with rural churches in our recent history, especially by the Department for Mission and Ministry alongside many others based at St Martins House. The Bishop hopes that we might learn from this in order to focus resources in the most productive way to grow God’s Kingdom.

This Commission celebrates the many signs of God’s Kingdom growing in number of disciples, depth of discipleship and loving service of the world already present across our rural communities and explores how the Diocesan vision to be ‘Shaped by God’ is worked out further and imaginatively in these places.

Primary Objectives

- Enable the voice of the rural church and rural community to be more fully heard, understood and acted upon in the Diocese and beyond as we seek the growth of God’s Kingdom in the number of disciples, depth of discipleship and loving service of the world.

- To celebrate the joys and identify particular opportunities and challenges for the church in these contexts as part of the Shaped by God Diocesan Purpose. This includes celebration of the stories of our rural parishes and ecumenical partnerships in Leicestershire; identifying places and communities which might be described as witnessing to the deep ‘wells’ of Christian story and life or manifesting God’s good provision as ‘green pastures’ and discerning God’s provision for the future where challenges arise.

Secondary Objectives

- Outline the rural contexts in Leicestershire; identify how small populations relate as villages and hamlets, and understand the existence and nature of how these rural communities then relate to larger places such as market towns and urban populations. We also wish to identify relationships of rural communities with their places of work, education and leisure, and how rural people establish their principal and life giving relationships through places and/or networks. Through this we suggest some of the main opportunities and challenges facing the rural contexts in Leicestershire.
- Identify issues and the next steps needed to develop a Diocesan strategy for the presence, witness and sustainability (spiritually, ministerially, communally and economically) of rural churches (both communities and buildings).

This includes proposals around approaches to mission and ministry for these rural contexts that support formation, discipleship and creativity, and enable growth in the Kingdom of God as seen in numbers of disciples, depth of discipleship and loving service of the world.





Methodology

The main Commission has met six times for half or whole day meetings with many other one to one conversations and other correspondence by members of the Diocese.

We have understood rural in a broad way. On the one hand in terms of statistical analysis we have used the definition utilised by public authorities and the national church i.e. communities of less than 10,000 people are deemed to be rural. On the other hand we have engaged with anyone or any community who experientially understands themselves to be living or working in a rural context. We also have recognised that some smaller communities which are now growing in population, sometimes connecting them with other centres of population, may still operate with a rural mind-set even if they are now connected to towns or larger settlements.

- Our meetings have focused on spiritual discernment as we have engaged with scripture and prayed together, focussing on rural contexts in the light of what we have heard.
- We have sought to listen and learn from people serving and ministering within rural contexts alongside those who provide advice and support to these communities. Six public consultations were held across the Diocese, open to all but rooted across different areas:

Tur Langton
South Kilworth
Packington
Sheepy Magna
Asfordby
Leicester City Centre

- In addition we have undertaken consultations with Bishop's Leadership Team, Area Deans and Deanery Lay Chairs, children and young people, Head Teachers and governors of church schools. We have welcomed 'witnesses' who spoke directly from their experience and expertise. These have included:

Rupert Allen, Diocesan Advisory Committee Secretary
Gill Elliott, Archdeacons' Projects Officer
Alison Booker, Coplow Benefice & Area Dean
Peter Hooper, Asfordby Benefice, Area Dean & Rural Officer
Chris Oxley, Avon Swift Benefice and FCN Network
Janet Arthur, Chair, Leicestershire Historic Churches Trust
Pam Posnett, Rural Affairs Lead for Leicestershire County Council
David Newman, Warden of Launde Abbey
Claire Wood, Archdeacon of Loughborough
Jon Barrett, Mission and Communications Enabler
John Orridge, Director of Finance and Support Services, Diocese of Leicester
Stephen Barney, Chair, Leicester Diocesan Board of Finance
David Wilson, Chair, House of Laity and Chair, Growth Fund Tier 2
Louise Corke, School for Ministry Tutor and Team Vicar, Kegworth Benefice
David Hitchcock, Pioneer Minister, Hugglescote Benefice
Judith Wells, Reader, Belvoir Parishes
Carolyn Patullo, Reader, Fenn Lanes Benefice

- We have engaged with both qualitative and quantitative information. We have reconsidered existing national and diocesan data through a rural lens. The detailed findings from our listening exercises and consultations are all held and available at the Diocesan Offices.
- We identified key and recurring themes which were then addressed in more detail, noting wherever we found 'green pastures' and 'deep wells' of Christian life, practice and witness whilst recognising challenges, deficits and even in some cases despair.
- The Report is written by different members of the Commission in a shared enterprise modelling the vision of lay and ordained, people from urban and rural contexts, working and learning together in partnership. We have exercised some editorial control to create a sense of coherence across the varying writing styles.





Learning from other places and the national church

Many other Christian people have been reflecting on the opportunities and challenges for churches and schools particularly shaped by rural contexts. We have sought to learn from them with a number of our recommendations being shaped by what we are witnessing elsewhere. In particular we have noted:

- There is no single or perfect blueprint to follow. Local discernment in terms of diocesan strategy is paramount.
 - Common issues arise in the literature as opportunities and threats but they are greatly shaped by the specifics of context.
 - The care and stewardship of ancient and often significant buildings with small, and often increasingly elderly congregations, is increasingly problematic everywhere. This is magnified by lead theft.
 - The same words are used in very different ways by different people. For example, the phrase 'Festival Churches' can be used as a strictly technical definition with insurance and other legal constraints following. Or it is used much more loosely to refer to a church that is used less frequently particularly at Festivals. Therefore, clear definition is needed when such terms are used.
 - We do not discern that there is such a thing as rural ministry, rather that there is ministry in a rural context which does require particular skills and working methods.
 - Mobilising, empowering, nurturing and encouraging the entire people of God, lay and ordained recurs over and over again in the literature as the besetting challenge.
- Dioceses which specifically highlight their rural context and seek to address it in specifically rural ways are reporting more positive impact on mission and morale than generic approaches applied to all contexts of mission and ministry development.
 - Some dioceses have sought external funding such as Strategic Development Funding from the Church Commissioners. This diocese has already chosen to focus on Fresh Expressions and Resourcing Churches for such funding bids.
 - Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Ministry is significant amongst small and rural churches as they are potentially more fleet of foot than some other church communities and so can be more adaptive.
 - Our approach is still unusual compared to much of the wider Church of England in that we have considered Church Schools as an integrated part of addressing these issues.



Theological Frameworks

Each time the Consultation has met we have read the bible together and engaged with it with a rural lens and set everything within prayer. The following describes some of our key theological underpinnings, discussed further in Appendix A and available on the Diocesan website.

1. Jesus was a rural person living in an urban world. The synoptic gospel writers, often shaped by the norms of ancient biography, give particular weight to his birth and his death in a city. However, his formative years in Nazareth were in a small town near to small scale fishing and agrarian communities. His parables most clearly show his use of rural and farming imagery e.g. The Sower, Matthew 13:1-23.

2. Places and landscapes carry significance and memory. Wells have great theological resonance. Many places grow up around the availability of water. In both New and Old Testaments, they are the locations for many encounters and discourses between people which also often reveal the divine. For example, Revelation 7:17 looks to the provision of 'springs of water' in the fullness of God's kingdom or Isaac meets Rebecca at a well (Genesis 29) and having formed that partnership, they would give birth to Jacob and Esau.

The quest for real physical water is then reframed to a quest for living waters and spiritual satisfaction. We were drawn to God's provision for his people, the competition that comes from scarcity and the deep contours which make up the underlying sense of place.

3. Green Pastures speaks of lush and fertile provision. The Psalms are shaped by both rural and urban motifs. Many English people have equated this image from Psalm 23 with

lush English pasture. However, within the Middle Eastern context, such pasture was more sporadic and patchy with for example, the desert suddenly blooming (e.g. Isaiah 35:2). Green pastures therefore spoke of the steadfastness of God alongside the creation of new opportunity which emerges as surprise and emerges often in places which may be more typically barren. This begged us to look hard, to be open and surprised.

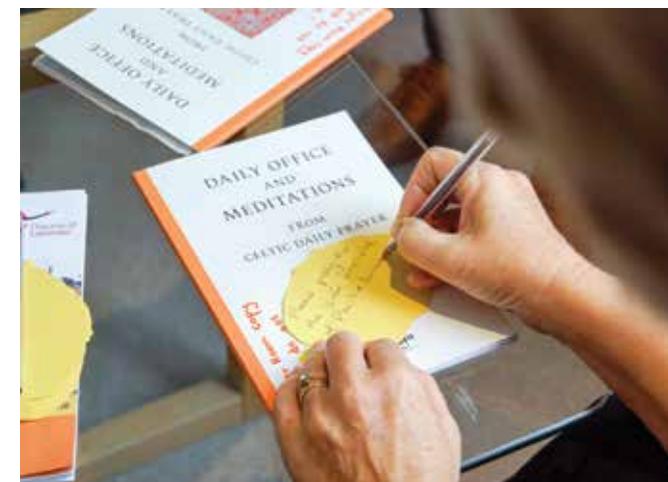
4. We also engaged with the processes of change; the need to address the past, face the challenges of the present and to re-imagine a future for rural mission and ministry. **We found resources in the biblical tradition of lament** articulated most in the Psalms of Lament. These have both an individual character e.g. Psalm 22 and a communal character e.g. Psalm 44. They are honest and enable people to set their pain before God and through that to discover a new depth of trust in God for the future. This stands in contrast to complaint or moaning.

5. The New Testament uses many images to describe the church but prevalent is **the organic imagery used by St Paul in describing the church as a body** (1 Corinthians 12). This picture provides a vision of interconnection and interdependence. It is literally human scaled and it recognises that life and growth are natural phenomena we can expect also to see in the Body of Christ. These insights help underline the importance of the life of the Diocese. This is how we have understood the local church.

Secondly, we noted that in many rural contexts there is a much greater sense of community connection and established relationships across the whole community than in other geographical contexts.

This therefore also means that the boundaries around the edges of the Christian community are hard to pin down and narrowly define. This is a key part of what it is to be the church in a rural context.

6. The sociological character of rural communities is as complex as any other and is diverse especially as society changes. There is plenty of evidence of post-Christian and post-secular ideas being present in rural communities. **Incarnational theology** which understands the world into which Jesus Christ comes (John 3:16) has always been a vital task in Christian mission. Any response to the challenges of evangelism or discipleship or even the functional organisation and governance of rural churches therefore must be shaped by local wisdom and an awareness of God's Spirit already being at work in the world which we are seeking to discern.

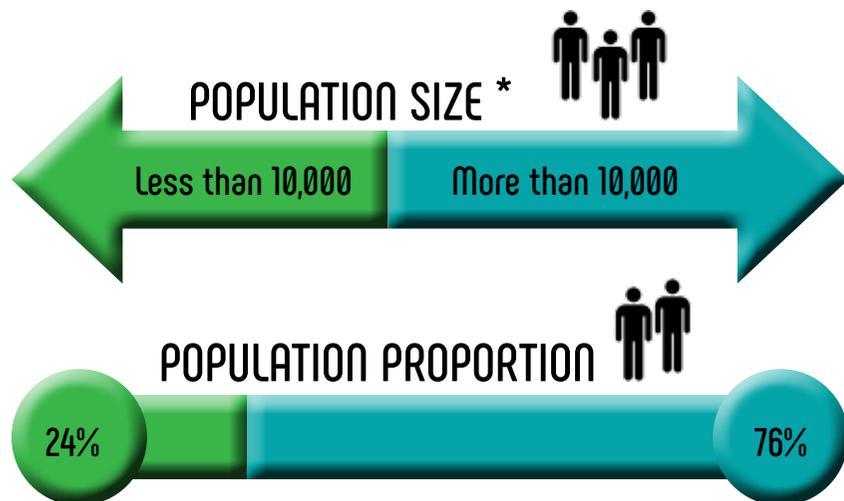


Key Population Statistics

Rural Diocese



Urban Diocese



RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

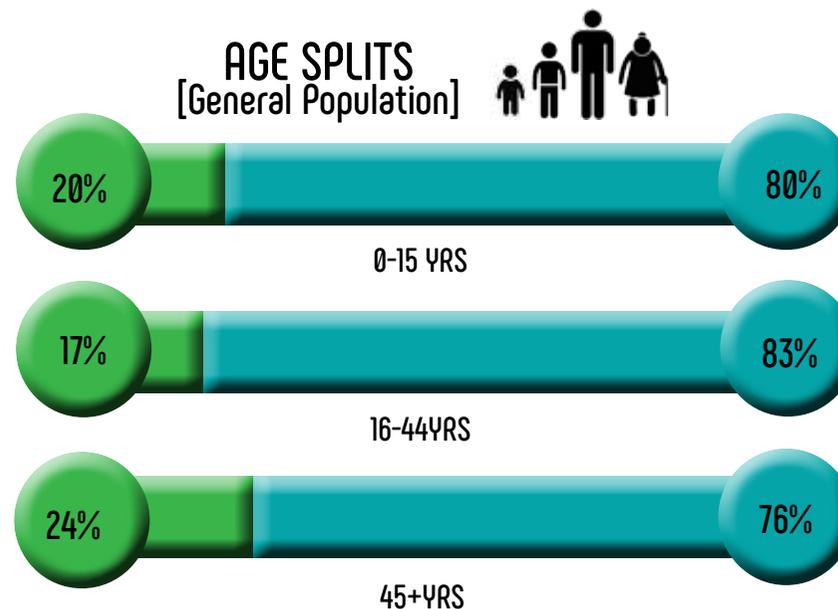
Rural	Urban
Christian: 136,201	Christian: 365,797
No Religion: 52,151	No Religion: 200,752
Not Stated: 13,794	Muslim: 69,328
Hindu: 2,325	Hindu: 66,242
Muslim: 1,229	Not Stated: 46,839
Sikh: 996	Sikh: 21,446
Other: 672	Other: 3,567
Buddhist: 402	Buddhist: 2,378
Jewish: 147	Jewish: 676

ETHNICITY



BAME - Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic

AGE SPLITS [General Population]



* This definition of rural community is defined by the Office for National Statistics and Department for Communities and Local Government 2013. Please see for example https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239477/RUC11methodologypaperaug_28_Aug.pdf

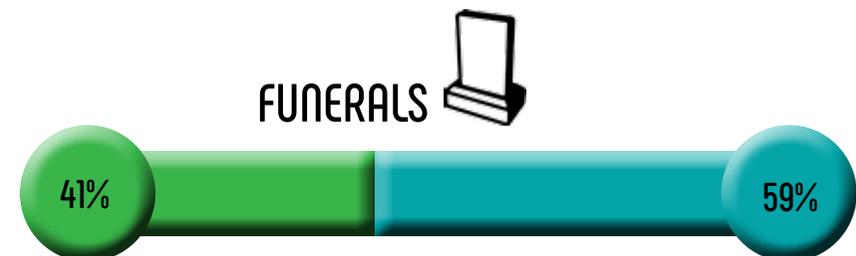
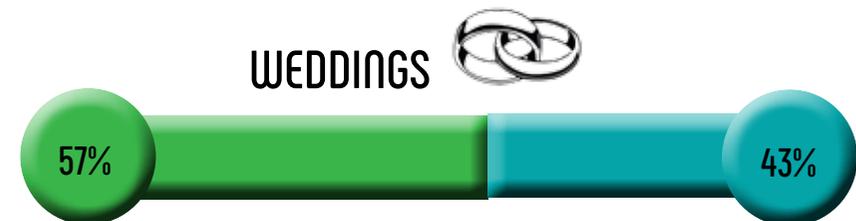
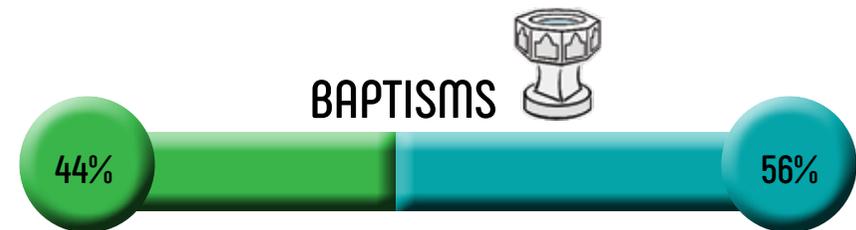
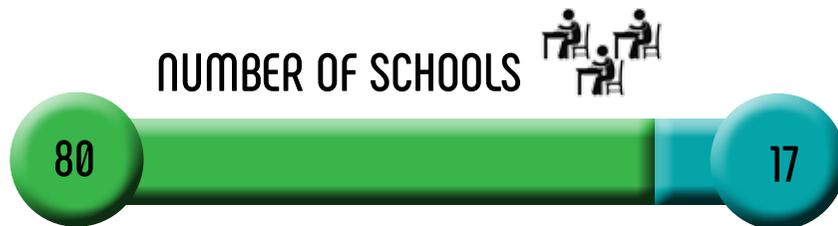
Key Ministry and Mission Statistics



Rural Diocese



Urban Diocese



Key Findings

a. We are connected

Our Diocese is made up of mostly rural communities with market towns and in the geographical middle is the city. Even though some of those at the geographical edges will look across to other counties and dioceses, fundamentally we are small enough to be able to build some real connection across the church in every context.

We have seen how the rural experience might contribute to the urban/town and also we have recognised the value of that happening vice versa. We note that rural contexts shape a distinctive way in which the Christian faith is lived and expressed whilst recognising it is the same faith and ministry everywhere. Therefore we speak not of rural mission or ministry but of ministry and mission in rural contexts.

b. The whole church needs the gifts of the rural church

The Rural contexts offer experience of small Christian communities which are authentic and full of life and offer commitment to their contexts. Rural churches often have long histories in their buildings and in their people which contribute to a sense of place and bear witness to how Christianity might be present and generously available to all in every place. Rural churches are usually embedded in their communities with deep and significant relationships which would be the envy of most town or urban parishes.

Partnerships between churches and other community organisations including schools are often present and are growing without the diminishment of strong local identities.

New patterns of local schools working together as Academies provides experience of rural team work which in many places enhances local provision. The arrival of social media (so long as wifi is also available) provides new opportunities for communication enabling good stories and good practice to be shared. Confidence building to share such experience is necessary. We have seen that if we are to be more fully the body of Christ then we need to actively build the communication and connections between all our different contexts with learning to be shared as peers and fellow pilgrims rather than 'them and us'.

c. Work with others to work for mission

The call to grow the church is just as much urgent in rural areas as any others but this will have its own character and pace concurrent with the context. A full rediscovery of what it means to be a baptised Christian and part of the ministry of the whole people of God is the single change which will have most impact on growth. The remnants of clericalism and still expressed hopes for a parson in every community have sometimes got in the way of realising this vision.

We believe that each rural church has a future with God – whether a somewhat gentle resting life for festival occasions or something much more dynamic and imaginative. This mission needs to be primarily lay led, discerned locally with prayer and consultation and with support from others including the clergy. Every community however small is called to speak clearly of their purpose and to live fully their mission. Each of these groups of churches, fresh expressions of church and pioneer Christian work would then effectively form a Community of Christian Missional Communities.

Currently, too many people feel they have carried too much for too long but with this approach no one would be alone and resources could be shared and focused more intentionally, rather than everything spread too thinly.

d. Shared vision brings shared learning

Finally, we recognise that our patterns of ministry and the way we organise the church has to change. We have heard many people calling for simplification in governance and management. We have heard from churches and deaneries in the Diocese who are taking risks to form new relationships in ministry and developing specialisms.

We believe that functional solutions are unlikely to work for the church but rather local discernment of connections and partnerships based on relationships and underlying synergies are most likely to be most fruitful. Imposed external solutions even with good intent to grow the church are likely to be futile. This locally driven approach then will create a more organic set of configurations of groups and teams of churches. We recognise that any support offered needs to be shaped by the rural experience.

We believe this palette of possibility should include Minster Churches based in some of the towns or large villages with hubs around them sharing spiritual wisdom, practical resources and learning how to constantly adapt to the fast pace of changing society in the rural contexts.





WAGOLL

Leicester Diocese will shift in self-understanding from an urban diocese with a rural edge to a rural diocese with urban heartlands, working in partnership, and led by all God's people.

Key Recommendations to the Diocese

- A. There is a process to be undertaken in the Diocese which intentionally celebrates the blessings of rural ministries and their distinctive commitment, alongside a process of lament which considers the losses which people have experienced and the pains which they carry, in order that we assist one another to walk more confidently towards the future. We invite the Diocesan Liturgy and Worship Group to develop a pastoral process and a pastoral liturgy to assist rural communities to lament. This may also have use more widely across the Diocese.
- B. The Commission recommends that the Bishop and his Leadership Team ensure that the following detailed sectional recommendations are worked through our Diocesan structures, included within their work plans and addressed across our governance to enable a culture change to take place. This new culture will more fully value and understand the rural experience of being Christian. We therefore suggest that the Diocese uses this lens to further shape future decision making and strategy.

An intentional process to implement, analyse and review this such as through an Action Plan will need to be commissioned and undertaken.

- C. We recommend that the Diocese makes public and clear that our strategy is not to close church buildings but to grow churches. Churches and church buildings are not necessarily the same thing. Our strategy is to grow churches wherever possible and where that is not possible to maintain Christian presence and witness until such time as new church growth might sprout. The decision about the future of rural church communities remains primarily with the local community as does the decision about rural church buildings. We wish to remove the fear of closure as it casts a destructive and demotivating shadow.
- D. We recommend that all rural churches ensure they have a clear vision and missional purpose which should be discerned locally and principally by lay people. We envisage this local missional discernment to be undertaken supported by a Diocesan Rural Mission Team made up of lay and ordained people. We suggest that Communities of Missional Communities be developed – these may already exist as teams or groups, or they may be new configurations which for example include schools or churches in a neighbouring deanery. We recommend a permissive approach which allows for all the permutations of partnerships to be considered locally. Existing mission planning tools, such as those produced by Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre, or

'Know your Church, Know your Community/Context/Neighbourhood' produced by the Church Urban Fund, should be investigated for their suitability for use in our rural contexts.

- E. We suggest this discernment process is supported by a Diocesan Rural Mission Team led by a part-time Diocesan Rural Enabler. The Enabler Role would be to convene and lead a team, made up of mostly lay people with experience of rural contexts and all with a heart for rural mission and ministry. This team will work alongside rural communities to support local discernment, to learn and to share this learning with the wider diocese; fostering wherever possible cross-fertilisation between rural, sub-urban and urban contexts. All this work needs to be overseen by a member of the Bishop's Leadership Team and integrated alongside the other Diocesan initiatives such as those coming from the Mission & Ministry Department, the Generous Giving Team or Vocations work. Launde Abbey may provide spiritual and prayerful wisdom rooted, as it is, in a rural context.
- F. We recommend that the Diocese adopt a much more strategic approach to our rural contexts especially in relation to house building within the diocese; paying particular attention to its opportunity and impact on rural communities. We recommend that this is done in partnership with the Diocesan Board of Education, the Diocesan Glebe Committee, as the strategic management of resources are considered in relation to the wider work of the Diocese, and the Social Responsibility Panel.

1. Rural Contexts

“ People know each other well in each community ”

Introducing the topic

The Diocese of Leicester Statistics for Mission show that 68 % of parishes in the Diocese are classified as rural. Issues such as housing, amenities, employment, agriculture and food production, and the place of the church are all important to those living in rural communities. Our Rural Contexts are continually changing.

The church is often the visual symbol of the identity of the village. Most, if not all, know it is there, and feel a sense of ownership, even if they don't attend worship – it will always be a part of village life and always be available, especially for weddings/baptisms/funerals.

Experience we have noted

- The Statistical Digest of Rural England states that ‘More house-builds are started and completed per household in predominantly rural areas than in predominantly urban areas.’ Large numbers of new houses need to be built and new areas of land need to be identified for their development, much of which has been sought in and around our villages.

There is often much opposition to the developments from villagers, including members of church congregations – they feel under threat and want to protect the land, as well as being concerned about the increased traffic on country roads and the oversubscription of local schools.

- The Draft Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (2017) recognises the need to protect our environmental assets: ‘There has already been a significant amount of new housing development in our rural areas and villages, some communities welcoming and embracing the change, others sometimes feeling disadvantaged by pressures on local amenities, schools etc.’ The Draft Strategic Growth Plan proposes to shift the focus away from these areas to more urban locations.
- Housing in Leicestershire is expensive, rural areas being desirable places to live, and lack of affordable housing leads to young families, especially, being unable to buy property. There is a large amount of rented and tied housing, which can mean uncertainty about the security of homes.
- A different style of rural context may be found in areas of NW Leicestershire, where for many years there was a thriving coal mining industry. The last pits to close were in the late 1990s, but the loss of jobs and close-knit mining communities can take many years to recover from.
- The budget for services and amenities in Leicestershire has suffered recent cuts, with more anticipated in rural areas. Bus services, road maintenance, health care, social care, libraries and parks may all be affected.

- Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that people in rural areas typically need to spend 10–20 % more on everyday requirements than those in urban areas. The more remote the area, the greater these additional costs. The minimum cost of living in rural areas is greater than that in urban areas, caused mainly by the higher cost of transport and domestic fuel. The lack of adequate public transport means that most rural households need cars. Families in rural areas need earnings well in excess of the minimum wage to afford the necessities of life. Yet low pay is more common in rural than in urban areas. The worst-off rural families are likely to have an income well below a socially acceptable minimum, even if they have jobs.
- The most recent report from the Lords’ Select Committee noted that cuts in rural areas are impacting communities and that there should be radical change in how the countryside is looked after. The report’s Chair said that some of the worst spots for deprivation and intergenerational poverty exist in rural England.

“ We are still an important presence – a central resource. ”



- The Statistical Digest of Rural England states that: ‘The highest rate of home workers was found in rural hamlets and dispersed areas, at 34 %, compared with 13 % in urban areas. Overall rural areas had a higher rate of home working compared with urban areas.’ The average broadband speeds in the majority of rural areas are lower than speeds in urban areas - increasingly important for how businesses operate, in addition to access to services and wider social activities.
- Loneliness and isolation are issues facing those (particularly the elderly) in rural areas, by social isolation, inability to access support services, the unavailability of high speed broadband – preventing people from benefiting from important developments and innovations in access to health related services.
- Farms and farming communities are still a large part of our rural contexts. Farming is a challenging occupation with many issues to contend with, such as animal disease, fluctuating market prices and the weather. There is also great uncertainty about the future as Britain prepares to leave the European Union. The Farming Community Network (FCN) is a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times.
- Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre provides downloads of seasonal resources at the appropriate time of year to help with the preparation of services to mark Plough Sunday, Rogation, Easter, Lammas, Harvest and Christmas.

- The Diocese of Oxford’s work on relating to new housing communities recommends that good practice includes: regular public and private prayer for those new to a parish/benefice; personal call to new homes; a leaflet with local knowledge and details of local provision of services; asking people what their needs are; offering community wide events.

What is going well?

The consultations around the Diocese produced some encouraging comments:

- Cohesive village communities - a sense of belonging, safety and helpfulness in their local neighbourhood.
- New, changing and growing communities with the addition of new housing.
- Good relationships and genuine fluidity between church and community.
- A church being open is a really big opportunity, offering a ‘sacred space’ for villagers and visitors alike.



- The occasional offices of baptisms, weddings and funerals have significant take up and give opportunity as an essential part of mission.
- Churches are undertaking many social outreach events in the form of lunch clubs, coffee mornings, quiz nights, family nights, etc.
- A new rural economy through on-going diversified activity in farming: adding new businesses to traditional farming such as products from livestock and crops, retail outlets and catering, rural crafts and workshops, tourism (camping, b&b), distribution centres. Farms can be worked on in huge acreages by contractors covering very large areas.

What are the key challenges we are facing?

The key challenges arising from consultations:

- Establishing a congregation in a village where family activities occur on Sunday mornings – it is difficult to engage busy working people and families with church services.
- Change in village demographics. How do we engage new people moving into the village as the village expands - missional opportunities?
- How can the church participate in a positive way, to reach out to those in need in our villages?
- The uncertainty in the economy, especially with Brexit approaching.

- Access to services – this underpins rural deprivation.
- Transport – as it relates to Sunday worship, especially when congregations move between church buildings.
- Rural communities are generally older and not very diverse – interface between a very diverse city and hinterland with a much more monochrome county. How do we foster connection and learning, and challenge segregation?



WAGOLL

Rural churches are actively committed to, and engaged with, the flourishing of the whole local community. They bring leadership. They walk alongside local people, and at times convene and facilitate challenging conversations.

Recommendations

- * 1.1 The rural church may well be more visible in the community than is possible in other settings. There needs to be real engagement between church and community – invitation; community and church based events; relationships with schools; pastoral care; regular discussion by PCCs and leadership teams on how faith can be shared in the parish.
- ▲ 1.2 New housing presents opportunities in the mission of the church, to welcome newcomers to the community, to help people make friends, and to demonstrate and share the Christian faith. We invite the Diocese to build on work already begun on a strategy in relation to engaging with new housing developments, with the rural voice fully present in its development.
- ▲ 1.3 We invite the Diocesan Social Responsibility Panel to look at its work through the rural lens, considering rural poverty and related issues, and drawing on the work of the Together Leicester network.

- * 1.4 Commend the good examples of loving service of the world we see in many rural places and invite the sharing of good practice and communication of the stories to inspire other places to address the need of their local context.



2. Schools, Children and Young People

“Hosting a ‘party’ in the church with Christian music for school children was very popular, the children wanted to come back and parents got involved.”

Introducing the topic

Leicester Diocese has 97 Church schools and academies, educating approximately 22,000 children and young people. Many of these schools are in rural areas and provide a unique opportunity for Church communities to interact with the wider community.

- 49 schools have converted to Academy status. 16 are independent or Single Academy Trusts (SATs). 33 academies are within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).
- Number of schools with fewer than 100 pupils: 34
- Number of schools with 100-200 pupils: 24
- Number of schools with more than 200 pupils: 39
- Number of Rural* schools: 80
- Number of Urban schools: 17

**schools situated in Output Areas of fewer than 10,000 residents*

Experience we have noted

This section includes the commission’s reflections on how the rural church might focus the work they undertake with schools as mission. It also includes some questions for our rural Church schools to consider.

The Commission’s consultations included regular references to Church schools. There were discussions with school leaders (including Multi-Academy Trust Chief Executive Officers), governors and clergy throughout the consultation period. The views of children and young people have also been gathered.

In 2014, the Church of England Education Office commissioned a review of small, rural schools. This report was updated in March 2018 with a new report, ‘Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools.’

What is going well?

There is much to celebrate and be thankful for...Praise God! Church schools are worshipping communities that enable disciples (children and their families) to grow in their faith and offer loving service of the world. The commission heard a compelling example from a rural priest who described the Church school as the pivotal place for discipleship in the parish.

Our Church schools are often the place where the rural Church interacts with children. The commission’s consultations highlighted time and time again the positive interaction between Church and school in initiatives such as ‘Open the Book’ and in one case ‘Worship Workshop’.

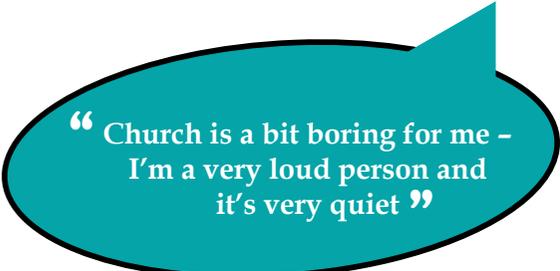
A number of rural Churches have engaged children, young people and their families through ‘Messy Church’. In some cases, this is held at a local Church school.

Children and young people who attend Church regularly, speak positively about their experience of Church. They want to be in Church. They want to be involved. They value being valued.

“Being part of a multi-academy trust has helped us a lot in terms of our ability to develop our staff and therefore the impact this has on our children. It has also helped us to share costs between other smaller schools and therefore we can be more creative with premises and admin staff.”

Head teachers and Governors of rural schools are fully committed to the Church's aim of being 'presence' in every community. It might not be expressed as that but it is heartfelt nonetheless. This is demonstrated in part, in the way school leaders in rural areas clearly express the value of their parish priest. They feel their absence keenly during periods of interregnum. This is particularly noticeable in rural areas.

School leaders of rural schools talk very positively about the experience of working in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs); noting benefits particularly in sharing and making best use of scant resources. School staff are energised and encouraged when working in MAT partnerships and leaders feel empowered and released to lead their schools.



“ Church is a bit boring for me – I’m a very loud person and it’s very quiet ”

What are the key challenges we are facing?

The Diocesan Board of Education's vision for our Church school family is that by providing education which is **effective, distinctive, rooted** and **inclusive**, our schools can be places where the lives of children and young people can be transformed.

Rural schools make a unique and distinct contribution to the work of the wider Diocese and the national Church. Indeed, rural schools can and many already do, echo the marks of mission seen in 'Shaped by God

Our rural schools can be places of **transformation, inspiration, celebration** and **welcome**.

The challenges of our time mean that the ability of all our schools to deliver this is at risk. This is most marked for our small, rural schools. Facing the challenges of delivering excellent inclusive provision, enabling an holistic education that goes much further than Ofsted would ever require and serving the community, our small schools are all increasingly hamstrung by a range of issues.

One of these is decreasing budgets. Leicestershire County Council is working to adopt the 'National Funding Formula' (NFF) for school budgets. Schools currently receive a lump sum grant of £150,000. With the introduction of the NFF, this is set to be reduced to £110,000. Per pupil funding will increase by approximately £700 but this will only benefit schools with more than 60 pupils.

It is important though, to recognise that the difficulties facing school communities are not simply financial. Issues around securing leadership and governance are also acute. Rural school buildings are often old and challenging to maintain.

This, along with fluctuations in pupil numbers, makes for precarious school communities. In these instances, it is important that we ask ourselves whether our schools are serving the needs of the children or the adults.



“ The school remains a focal point of the village and its community. It is one of the most clear ways that brings the community together and allows new and old villagers together to make friendships. ”

Yet, although precarious, our schools are also life-giving and joyful places which act like 'community glue'.

The DBE's view is that rural schools are best placed to withstand current and future pressures by joining a MAT. As already noted, there are examples of the benefits of MAT partnerships emerging across the Diocese and particularly for rural schools. However, school leaders and governors fear that by joining a MAT they cede control, lose autonomy and local identity. They are anxious that what is special about their local church school will be lost.

Children's experiences of worship in Church schools are that it is highly engaging, innovative and participatory. Unfortunately, their experience of worship in Church does not always reflect this. Children express a real sense of frustration when they cannot participate fully; whether that be in leading worship or in understanding what is happening. They often describe services as 'dull'. The physical space for worship is important to them too and they are disappointed when they are relegated to the back of church.

What is clear is that Church school and Church must face up to these issues. The Church of England's Chief Education Officer, Rev'd Nigel Genders has made this point many times: 'doing nothing is not an option.'^[1]

[1] 'Working Together' 2014, p3



WAGOLL

Church schools are places of transformation for children, young people and the wider community. Schools are seen as an intrinsic part of rural mission and ministry with church and school co-creating the future. The voice of the child is front and centre.

Recommendations

- * 2.1 Church communities should consider the role of their church school in discipleship and what their vocational response could be. Churches should review their worship practices and physical spaces to reflect the participatory and engaging ways worship is conducted in Church schools.
- * 2.2 When supporting rural schools to face the future, clergy and Foundation governors should focus structural conversations not on loss of power or autonomy, but rather on the Church's vision for education and its commitment to securing the future of distinctively Christian education; for now and generations to come. Church and Church school should work together to re-imagine ministry and 'how effective education will be delivered in this context in the 21st Century.'^[2] The Commission encourages church and school to consider alignment where possible to do so.

[2] 'Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools' 2018, p25

- * 2.3 Church communities could strengthen further their partnership with schools in the journey of loss and lament. In the same way that church communities are coming to terms with changing patterns of ministry, schools are experiencing a real sense of loss when they are faced with the realisation that their school can no longer be led and governed in the way it has been for many years. Offering a pastoral and hopeful response to schools at this time is critical and our calling to offer a loving service of the world.
- * 2.4 Churches and schools explore more courageously the potential of sharing building space for worship, social and educational purposes.



3. Mission, Evangelism and Growth

“We aim to be outward-looking and generous. Outreach includes ‘Coffee Heaven’ and ‘Church in the pub.’”

Introducing the topic

For the purposes of this chapter we need to consider growth in the size of the worshipping community as our key metric. Growth in the depth of discipleship and growth in loving service of the church community are both leading factors that are important in their own right. They may contribute towards the growth of the worshipping community but they are treated more clearly in other parts of this report. We choose to consider the 'worshipping community' rather than 'usual Sunday attendance' because of the particularity of rural contexts. Our consultations have established that looking at the regular congregation tells only a small part of the story about those who identify with village churches.

It is apparent from a survey of the material we have collected that there is more comfort talking about the 'mission' of rural churches than there is 'evangelism'. This is itself a comment on the organic and deeply embedded nature of the English village church.

We will seek to draw a distinction below sufficient to identify 'mission' as that which is incarnationally embedded and attractional on the one hand, with 'evangelism' as intentional faith sharing beyond mission on the other hand.

Experience we have noted

- The open consultations provide a wealth of material on the mission, evangelism and growth of rural churches, noting what is working well, what are the challenges and where are the good ideas.
- The Diocesan Statistics for Mission (Stats for Mission) provide raw data for analysis that is divided between communities of more than 10,000 people (shorthand 'urban') and communities of less than 10,000 (shorthand 'rural').
- An Area Dean provided a paper for the Commission and attended a meeting to discuss it. The deanery has a string of larger settlements and a large number of small rural communities covering most of its area.
- Evidence and recommendation to the national church were included in 'Shaping Strategies for Mission and Growth in Rural Multi-Church Groups: a summary of key findings and implications of recent research' (Strategies), James Bell and Jill Hopkinson (Archbishop's Council 2017).

What is going well?

- The consultations identified 'being there' as a key feature of rural churches and sought to evidence the value of this by numbers of baptisms, weddings and funerals. Stats for Mission demonstrate that in all three cases the numbers have remained reasonably constant for rural churches whilst there has been a slight decline for urban churches between 2008-2016. It has been noted that it is rare for a village baptism, wedding or funeral to not involve the church.
- Big seasonal events and festivals were highlighted in the consultations as providing an opportunity for village churches to become the centre of village life and in turn for the Christian community to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God. Stats for Mission demonstrate a gentle decline in rural church Easter attendance but significant increases in Advent and Christmas attendance that is at a marginally greater rate than in urban contexts.



- A presentation from an Area Dean identified the 'chaplaincy model' of 'deformation, formation and reformation' as something that works very well in small village contexts. The argument is that as life impinges on community members (a house move, divorce, bereavement, marriage, the birth of a child, puberty...) the church is uniquely able to offer a sacred space in which people can form their new identity. Many village church leaders will recognise their pastoral practice in this.
- The consultations welcomed the growth brought through Fresh Expressions of Church citing, 'Pub Meal Talk and Discussion' and 'Messy Church'. 'Strategies' recommends that 'growth in rural multi-church groups means creating space for the new to grow alongside existing congregations. Church growth will increasingly mean pioneering and developing new approaches to church, including fresh expressions of church, that take place across the week, not necessarily on a Sunday morning.' 'Strategies' also notes, 'Encouraging growth should not just be about 'strategies' which aim to increase the size of existing congregations. Reproduction of churches could be a useful concept to develop thinking further to ensure that mission and evangelism are contextual.'

“ There is no growth without good leadership, ordained or lay ”

What are the key challenges we are facing?

- Stats for Mission tell us that Normal Sunday Child Attendance in rural churches is dropping in line with the national average whilst electoral roll and adult attendance is flat over the eight year period 2008-2016. Rural churches are becoming more aged. The consultations told the same story.
- The consultations include multiple references to the challenges for church growth of reducing clergy numbers. 'Strategies' argues that 'growth requires a patient long-term input, particularly by clergy.' This report refers to Church Growth analysis demonstrating churches growing with parish population size up to 2000 then reaching a plateau. This suggests that conventional patterns of ministry begin to fail as clergy become responsible for larger populations sizes and that the growth of rural benefices is now exceeding this threshold.
This is illustrated by highlighting the importance of individual pastoral visits. Some see the growth in ministry of the whole people of God as a challenge for rural churches needing to step out of this decline. One priest says, 'I believe we need to find ways in which we can explore contextually the concept of Discipleship in ways that enable participation and ownership.'
- Comments made at the consultations largely reflected an attractional model of church alongside the recognition that newcomers into villages and younger generations appear to be uninterested. There is little reference to intentional faith sharing.

- There is clearly a need to re-imagine church so that the pastoral and relational strengths of churches serving small communities can be more effective in a changing social context. 'Given the deep and intricate relationship between many rural churches and their communities, any strategy for mission and growth needs to build on these existing relationships, exploring where God is already at work in the community and making use of gifts and skills in congregation and community.' ('Strategies')

“ We have a monthly men’s breakfast with inspirational talks, linked to the Gospel, and relevant and meaningful for today - also a linked family breakfast every quarter.”

WAGOLL

Every member of the local church community can talk confidently about their faith in such a way as to invite people into the sacred space of the local church. This means articulation of the faith by all generations for all generations. It includes invitation into traditional and non-traditional church gatherings. Wherever the well is, come and drink from it.

Recommendations

- * 3.1 Attention should be given to develop the means, language and conversation of intentional faith sharing appropriate to rural communities and networks. Whilst a larger proportion of the rural population attends church, the clergy notice that this can be with lower levels of commitment than in many urban places. This has been described using the analogy of 'number of customers and how much each are buying'. Growing the depth of discipleship to motivate worshippers to become faith sharers and working out with them how this can best be done is essential.
- * 3.2 Pastoral/chaplaincy practice is strong in rural ministry and rural contexts provide fertile territory. This could be strengthened by developing a deeper and well-articulated understanding of the 'sacred space' described as 'a safe place for people to explore identity change' (including conversion).

- * 3.3 Whilst inherited churches are finding their resources spread more thinly, there is an opportunity to reach younger generations and new networks through the development of Fresh Expressions of Church.

Innovative and imaginative approaches to multiply the number of ecclesial communities in diverse cultural modes that are not necessarily clergy led should be promoted. The Diocesan Pioneer Development Workers should be seen as an essential resource in effecting this.

- * 3.4 We have heard the need for resources. We have noticed that many Church of England models of evangelism do not fully comprehend the experience of rural Christians. Building on the good work already done, we recommend creating resources using rural examples that can promote learning and encourage evangelism across the whole Diocese.



4. Discipleship and Vocation

“We are blessed with extraordinarily committed faithful lay people.”

Introducing the topic

Vocation. The call of God to every Christian to discover and use their gifts in service of the Kingdom. This may be in a recognised and authorised ministry as well as through their daily life as a disciple. The Church of England website says 'vocation emerges and continues to emerge, throughout life. Coaxed out by prayer and conversation, shaped by God and confirmed by the church community.'

Discipleship. The recent report to General Synod 'Setting God's People Free' describes a disciple as 'someone who is actively seeking to know Jesus more deeply, to learn to love and live in God's way in every area of life.' Rowan Williams says 'a disciple is one who is called to learn how to be a place in the world where the act of God can come alive'.

We were very keen to ensure that these topics were about *all* Christians, both lay and ordained and were lifelong.

Experience we have noted

- The open consultations provide considerable material on these topics. There was also a specific consultation with those who work in these areas.

There was mention that we often default to a dependence on clergy for these topics. The words 'discipleship' and 'vocation' were rarely talked about in rural contexts or widely understood.

- The numbers of vocations to ordained or licensed ministry is lower in rural areas than in town/cities. This may be due to demographics - large churches generate more vocations and these tend to be in urban areas. It may have fallen 'off the radar' of busy rural clergy focused on keeping 'the show on the road'.
- We noted that vocation is much larger than licensed ministries (whether lay or ordained). We heard many stories of those who are living out their calling to serve in many (often unnoticed) ways.
- Training for ministry rarely covers input on the challenges for rural ministry. The first pathway for ordained ministry in rural contexts has just started in one Theological College, from which we may learn more about context based training.
- There is good work on-going in the Diocese to create a discipleship and vocation strategy that has now started. This renewed focus on these topics is critical if we are to grow and develop.

What is going well?

- The Consultations identified some rural contexts where these topics were firmly on the agenda and there has been fruit. Where there has been targeted training or input for smaller congregations this has been popular and well received.

The three questions coming from the Bishop about growth in numbers, depth of discipleship and service of the world have started the process of discussing discipleship more openly (but we are starting from quite a long way back in many cases).

- We have done well in developing and promoting licensed lay vocations (however in doing this we have often presented these as the only options).
- Places that are using simple holy habits such as asking 'where have you seen God at work?' have enabled people to start to talk about these topics. Congregations that have continued to use practices like this have seen change in developing vocations (of all – not just ordained) and in their understanding of what it means to live out their Christian life. These habits are key tools for developing discipleship. The place of prayer was also frequently mentioned.
- There are good examples of vocation that are not full time stipendiary clergy e.g. focal ministry, self-supporting ministry, chaplaincy, workplace ministry, pioneer leaders, and these offer strong role models.

“Prayer underpins everything.”

What are the key challenges we are facing?

- To develop discipleship and vocation will require a change of mind-set in our churches and those who lead them. It has not been a priority in our rural churches where the focus has been more on maintaining buildings and regular worship. It has been seen as 'the work of the clergy' rather than for all. The underlying clerical dependence model is strong. Many in congregations do not feel confident to talk about these topics.
- Discipleship is sometimes seen as attending Sunday worship rather than living it out Monday-Saturday in the context where we are.

“ How do we make disciples out of those new to the Church and deepen their faith? ”

- There is reluctance to travel and gather outside of the immediate locality, even though people recognise that learning and working on these topics is best done in small groups. We have adopted a model of small groups that meet on a midweek evening and whilst this is appropriate in an urban setting there might be better alternatives for rural contexts that we could explore.

WAGOLL

In any church community all can talk about what being a disciple means for them. People readily share their stories about how God is at work in their lives. They share how their faith is growing and they sense what God wants them to do.

Recommendations

- * 4.1 We need a new language and to tell more stories that explain what is meant by discipleship and vocation in rural contexts.
- * 4.2 We must get these topics more visibly on the agenda. Ways of doing so include: offering training/ resources for those in leadership/all to help them have a discipleship/vocational conversation, suggesting easy ways to introduce and practice holy habits that underpin discipleship. We expect all congregations/benefices/ deaneries to have discussed this together within the next year. The Commission were clear that we did not need a 'diocesan discipleship programme' as that would be too rigid. We are looking for a range of flexible context-based ideas that could be selected from.
- ▲ 4.3 Develop a pilot for rural vocational development. What happens if we put some intentional resource into this? Can we show a wider range of vocations than just the obvious ones?

- ▲ 4.4 Continue the work to agree the Vocation & Discipleship strategy and get started on implementing it. There may be ideas that can be started quickly before the whole strategy has been agreed. We recommend that those responsible for leading the Diocesan implementation of Setting God's People Free do so with a 'rural lens'.



5. Leadership and Ministry

“ Team identity and fellowship are growing. There is mutual support and encouragement especially for smaller churches. ”

Introducing the topic

Godly leaders don't put up obstacles to 'faith' (e.g. 2 Kings 15) and good leaders involve others in 'leadership' (e.g. 1 Chronicles 12). Great leaders understand the context of where they are. Good leadership is corporate and collaborative. Good Christian leadership has a growing and essential emphasis on the whole people of God contributing to mission, ministry and pastoral care. All these things with the right leadership organically grows people's gifts and skills and in turn this leads to growth. Leaders can be lay and ordained, formal and informal. We recognise that good leadership is as much required in rural contexts as in any other.

“ Visits to residential homes and home communions extend the church family. ”

Experience we have noted

Rural ministry is usually more stable, static and reliable than other contexts. Throughout the Diocese there are wonderful examples of teamwork, fellowship and collaboration between churches and leaders. There are places with strong team identity, growing fellowship and mutual support and there is encouragement including and especially for smaller churches.

There are examples of outreach activities in our church communities with a community spirit that seeks to respond. Also small elderly congregations who want to reach out but don't know how or don't have the energy. So sustainability may be an issue.

We noted that women very often lead in rural settings and that nationally there are more women clergy leading in rural multi-benefice contexts.

This is in contrast to new models of mission such as Resourcing Churches which are more focussed in urban settings and more often led by men. Therefore gender issues in leadership within the rural context may be of some importance.

What is going well?

2017 research conducted as part of the end of Phase 1 Report on the Diocesan Fresh Expressions work showed only 12 % of the new pioneering initiatives comes from the 19 largest churches in the Diocese, so 88 % of new pioneering fresh expressions are coming from the smaller church contexts. This is something significantly underestimated.

Although there has been a reduction in the number of stipendiary clergy in recent years across the Diocese (12 fewer than 2010) and a small reduction of Readers, there has also been 40 new paid lay ministry posts created and there are approximately 80 new fresh expressions of church which are predominantly lay led across the Diocese.

We heard of an excellent example in Gartree Deanery with an incumbent having particular skills that are organisational, collaborative, and enabling. Children and Young People are also encouraged to become leaders. We note a forward move when there is enough of such leadership to enable others, whereby a 'holding sacred space' is created wherein someone could come to identify themselves in Christ.

In Guthlaxton Deanery they are experimenting with collaboration of PCCs and DCCs. This is practically very important when there are large numbers of churches in one benefice.

In North West Leicestershire, there is a collaborative model offering chaplaincy and a 'hospital care' programme. Framland Deanery are creating specialisms and a pastoral plan recognising that in rural contexts, pastoral care still has a huge impact footprint which may be different to urban/sub-urban contexts. This is undertaken by both lay and ordained people.

What are the key challenges we are facing?

In the future we are likely to have fewer (stipendiary) clergy. Therefore both clergy and lay leadership need to reshape. Leadership needs to develop with different models. Rural priests often feel stretched particularly with no administrative help and still people assuming (including sometimes the clergy) that there are many 'things that only the Rector/Vicar can do.'

“The onerous responsibilities of operating a working church are falling on fewer and often older people.”

In the consultations we realised that the myth of single parish with its own clergyperson is dead but its remnants live on. With this we also saw that the independent school with its own head teacher is also largely dead. Therefore rural leadership in church and schools needs to be trained, mentored and supported appropriately particularly not to fall back into 'assumed patterns' but to have confidence built for new leadership approaches. Frustrations were expressed about the length of clergy vacancies which often seemed to have the impact of putting future mission plans on hold whilst local leadership concentrated on 'keeping the show on the road'.

Technology and shared administrative systems including the use of social media were generally under-utilised whilst we heard appetite from quite a number of people to explore such avenues.

The biggest challenge is to convince the laity and clergy that based on their baptismal mutuality, they are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship and equal partners in mission ready to evangelise and serve.



WAGOLL

Churches working together are served by collaborative teams. These teams have been created and agreed by local people. All of God's people lead in ways which are responsive to what God wants them to do in that place.

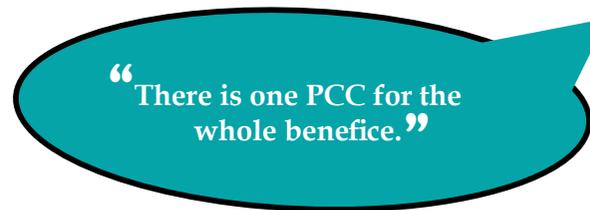
Recommendations

- * 5.1 Mind-set change: to enable a culture shift towards a more collaborative approach as our default mode of leadership. Where the multi-church benefice or group or team of parishes and fresh expressions and schools is the norm and resources are shared.
- * 5.2 We recommend that each community seeks to understand, articulate and sift out the different tasks required to lead our churches and who should best fulfil them. Churches are invited to audit themselves against the work they have identified for themselves.
- * 5.3 More exploration is required about patterns of ministry. There is a huge amount of lay ministry/leadership in rural contexts but it is not always recognised or valued. Local discernment is needed to identify both the leadership needed and the leadership already present within the people/places or more widely in the church. How can that be developed?

6. Governance and Buildings

We need new models to be explored including a Minster Model which will need to be bespoke according to our Diocesan vision and shaped by spiritual and relational connections, not just practical needs. Another model is offered by the experiment in Framland Deanery which will need careful assessment and review in the coming years.

- * 5.4 Deliberately liberate parish clergy from tasks that could be shared or delegated to others in order to more fully develop mission and ministry in their context through their involvement with their communities in faith sharing and service.
- ▲ 5.5 Links between urban and rural to be strengthened through a peer learning approach. Initiate a peer learning pilot across the different leadership practices taking place in the different contexts of ministry in the Diocese, ensuring that rural contexts are fully represented.



Introducing the topic

For the purposes of this report governance relates to the working relationships existing between the various tiers of the church at district, parish, deanery and Diocesan level, both statutory and non-statutory. The focus of buildings in this section is on the historic place of worship for each parish or district although it is appreciated that 'church' extends to schools, village halls and other locations.

Experience we have noted

- Issues of governance and buildings came up in every open consultation meeting and many church congregations and officers were reported as being worn down by 'red-tape' and the maintenance and repair of ancient buildings.
- The rural landscape of Leicestershire is partly defined by the towers and spires of its numerous ancient parish churches. Whilst a great joy to many, often used by the wider community at Christmas, Harvest and occasional offices, and in the best cases, a focus for mission, there are also challenges in finding the resources to maintain these historic buildings.

- In some communities, church councils feel they have to spend so much time on their building that the mission of the church is neglected. Other parishes have found more diverse uses for their buildings thus serving the community in different ways.
- The days of one vicar, one church are long gone in rural benefices but the mind-set lives on. Governance of multi-parish benefices can be time and energy consuming for clergy and church officers.
- Innovative methods of reducing the burdens of excessive administration and the management of historic buildings can liberate clergy and lay ministers to fulfil their calling for the benefit of all.

What is going well?

- A flexible approach to meetings to reduce the number of meetings in multi-parish benefices. One group of parishes has 11 separate PCCs which have been grouped into 3 clusters. Joint PCC meetings for each of the clusters are held 4 times a year. A typical meeting starts with coffee/tea at 7.15pm followed by a time of worship. A joint meeting with a mission focus lasts for an hour and then the separate PCCs split for 30 minutes to discuss business pertinent to that PCC, chaired by the vice-chairs, and the evening finishes at 9.00pm with prayer.



- Sharing resources and good practice with other benefices. One informal 'group' of 16 Anglican churches in 3 benefices employs a part-time administrator (2 mornings per week) and a part-time book-keeper (1 morning per week) who deals with fees and expenses and together they free up the clergy for mission and other ministerial duties. One safeguarding officer oversees safeguarding across these churches (plus some Methodist churches) by keeping individual churches up-to-date with developments and by training individuals across the group to comply with legislation and other directives. Each individual church has a safeguarding correspondent to receive, display and disseminate information.

“ Re-ordering has enabled the church building to be used for other activities including concerts, drop-in and school events.”

- One predominantly rural deanery of 65 churches, has recently recruited a full team of stipendiary clergy. The recently appointed clergy have cross-deanery specialist roles (2 days per week) in addition to their parochial responsibilities.

- This gives cross-benefice support and a more collegial approach by clergy working together across the deanery. In the future it is intended to also recruit lay people with specific skills to share across the deanery.
- In many rural parishes the church building is a focus of the community. Before village halls were introduced, the parish church was often used for social as well as religious purposes. Some medieval churches have been reordered with more efficient heating, lighting and sound systems and incorporate toilet and catering facilities to extend their use for worship-related and other activities. In one small village the parish church is the only meeting place and hosted a 21st birthday recently, even without these extra facilities. Toilet facilities at a neighbouring house were made available. In another rural community, the village hall is about to be condemned and there is a possibility that the church may be used as a village hall as well as a house of prayer.
- Each church building is important as a community's sacred space, a place of worship and a place for the community to gather in times of celebration and tragedy. Church buildings are often cherished by the wider community which not only supports the building in practical ways, e.g. cleaning, flower-arranging and mowing the churchyard, but in fundraising and regular giving.
- Friends' organisations spread the workload and fundraising responsibilities. Many buildings have a proud heritage. This is capitalised by providing added

attractions for tourists to the county. Open and welcoming churches abound in the Diocese. Churches are used as book exchanges and in other ways to keep them active throughout the week.

- We have noticed that a very significant amount of the Diocese's Capital Fund has been allocated to rural churches. The Diocesan Advisory Committee is extremely supportive of the adaptation of church buildings to make rural churches more useable and to meet expectations, whilst recognising the constraints of external statutory bodies particularly when the building is listed.

“ How do we free the people of God from the tyranny of buildings, for their primary Christ-given call to share the Gospel? ”

What are the key challenges we are facing?

- There is often a very small pool of parishioners to draw from to undertake all the necessary practical tasks, serve on church councils and hold office. Therefore, individuals are overloaded and succession planning is extremely difficult.
- Multi-parish benefices present challenges in governance especially when an incumbent is expected/chooses to attend all PCC (and DCC) meetings and undertake numerous administrative tasks.

- Buildings are expensive in terms of finance, time and energy to maintain and repair, plus to meet the huge volume of essential legal and insurance requirements. They can be a burden rather than a blessing and the time spent on them can frequently be detrimental to mission.
- Undertaking major restoration and reordering projects is increasingly complex, particularly in an increasingly competitive environment for funds. The prevalence of lead and copper thefts from church roofs has exacerbated the situation. There is a shortage of people available with the necessary skills and willingness to undertake project management and organise major fundraising campaigns. Some churches feel disconnected and vulnerable.



WAGOLL

Governance is fleet of foot and is responsive to local needs and context, with a high degree of mutual trust and mutual support. The building is open and accessible to everyone. There is a sense of community ownership of the building and, as a result, the care and security is assured. The church is also available for other Christian denominations.

Recommendations

- * 6.1 Investigate a much lighter touch, within the legal framework, to governance, possibly by combining PCCs in multi-parish benefices. This might be extended to other aspects of administration such as finances. We believe we can be much more permissive and radical and will need Archdeacons and Area Deans to assist and give confidence to those prepared to experiment.
- * 6.2 Consider how aspects of the roles of churchwardens can be delegated to make them less onerous, including the consideration of the appointment of a single set of wardens or officers to operate across an entire benefice, fulfilling minimum legal obligations and freeing others for other tasks and roles. Draw in community expertise from beyond the congregation to assume responsibility for e.g. fundraising. This may be through a Friends organisation or creating project committees from within and outside the PCC.

Some of the functions of churchwardens with regard to church buildings could be delegated to suitably qualified/experienced individuals outside the church family.

- ▲ 6.3 Following Taylor's recommendations, to form a Diocesan Buildings Team using existing and new resources, including someone with surveyor skills and sufficient capacity to visit every church in the Diocese and to develop it drawing on the existing wisdom and resources of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. The Commission is very supportive of the existing staff but encourages the development of a more coherent and strategic team to provide more services to parishes, constructed with the insights of those on the ground in rural contexts. This may include the introduction of a Maintenance Booker Scheme.
- * 6.4 Promote closer collaboration between different denominations within a village to share resources and give more effective use of personnel and church buildings including exploring alternative use of church buildings in addition to worship.



7. Finance and Giving

“ Fundraising is a way of building a community and strengthening the church community too.”

Introducing the topic

For the purposes of this report, finance relates to rural church in two ways. Firstly, the locally held parish accounts and related financial management and giving to the church. Secondly, the ways in which Diocesan finance is used to provide funding for ministry in rural churches and how the rural churches contribute to this through the Parish Contribution system.

Experience we have noted

- The theme of finance and giving was identified through the open consultation process and has featured in the written submissions received by the Rural Commission. The Commission has had specific conversations with the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance and the Diocesan Director of Finance and Support Services.
- Data related to Parish Contributions has been analysed in relation to the rural part of the Diocese. Across the Diocese as a whole, there is very limited data available regarding parish finances and giving data. This has meant we have been unable to undertake any statistical analysis of the financial situation of our rural churches.

The Commission also note that while there are areas of significant wealth across our rural communities, there are also pockets of deprivation and financial hardship.

- The proportion of Parish Contribution received by the Diocese that comes from rural churches is 36%, which reflects a similar proportion (39%) of our worshipping communities that are in rural churches. When we separate the contributions from rural and urban churches, we can see that in years when a large number of rural parishes decrease their contributions, albeit by small individual amounts, the cumulative effect of this has an impact on the Diocesan total. This contrasts with the urban group of churches, in which a small number of larger churches making a significant decrease in contribution has a significant impact on the Diocesan total.
- Diocesan wide analysis has been undertaken in the last 18 months looking at the trends in Parish Contributions within in each Deanery over the last 5 years. When this is divided between urban and rural benefices there is a significant difference. The proportion of majority rural benefices consistently increasing parish contributions is less than half that of majority urban benefices. However looking at individual parishes, the pattern in rural areas is similar to that seen in urban parishes but the size of the change is bigger. Rural parishes that increase their offer do so by an average of 10% (Diocesan average 7.6%) and those rural parishes that decrease their offer do so by an average of 25% (Diocesan average 21.5%).

- The Commission has noted that the external funding environment is increasingly constrained, which will affect the ability of churches to gain grant funding especially in relation to buildings projects

What is going well?

- A consistent theme from our consultations is the depth of support that rural churches receive from their local community, particularly when trying to raise money for repairs to the building. Some churches have commented on how this provides a wonderful opportunity to build and strengthen the relationship between church and community. This is also often seen in the parish accounts, where many rural churches receive committed financial giving from members of the local community who are not regular church-goers.

“ People are generous with time, talent and financially ”

- Parishes that have received support from the Generous Giving team, Growth Fund, and Diocesan Finance team were appreciative and found it had a positive impact on their finances and capacity for financial management. There are examples of rural churches that are greatly benefitting from being part of the Parish Giving Scheme, with Holy Rood Church, Packington being one of the leading churches using PGS in our Diocese.

A significant proportion of Growth Fund Tier 1 (small) and Capital Fund Grants have been received by rural churches.

What are the key challenges we are facing?

- Many people commented in the consultations that financial pressures are felt acutely in their small rural contexts. Parish finances are often dependent on a very small number of, often elderly, generous givers.
- The financial burden of repair and upkeep of their building seems to dominate and drown out the conversation about how to fund mission or outreach, and for many the prospect of undertaking a basic reordering project to put in toilets and a servery requires more capacity in time and skills than feels possible.
- With heavy hearts, a question regarding the medium to long term sustainability of some of our rural churches was raised, alongside a recognition that future sustainability is going to require change of some sort.

“The church is always asking for money.”

WAGOLL

Rural churches have a vivid awareness of the generosity of God. From this the default narrative is of abundance, not scarcity; recognising the deep wells from which rural churches can draw upon from within their midst. A profound understanding of God as the source of all life, rooted in the experience of preparing, planting, nurturing and harvesting, leads to generosity of time, talents and treasure. Groups of rural churches develop a greater degree of trust, including trust with money, and support each other in crisis.

Recommendations

- ▲ 7.1 Promote a series of ways in which rural parishes can be supported to manage their finances. This will include encouraging and enabling local collaboration and skills sharing across groups of churches. A pilot of surgery-style advice sessions will be explored and facilitated by the Finance and Generous Giving teams.
- * 7.2 Encourage churches to develop their understanding of how generous giving grows out of Christian discipleship and supports the active mission of each church in its context, drawing on support and resources from the Generous Giving team.
- ▲ 7.3 Explore options for a pilot scheme where churches can buy into a third party service, e.g. book keeping.

- * 7.4 Drawing upon strong church-school partnerships, look for a pilot where a book keeping function could be offered from a school to their local church.



Key documents and resources include:

Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre – Helping Rural Churches and Communities Flourish
<http://germinate.net/>

Diocese of Carlisle
<https://www.carlislediocese.org.uk/our-vision/vision-detail/ministry-strategy.html>

Diocese of Exeter, Growing the Rural Church
<http://exeter.anglican.org/resources/growing-rural-church/>

Diocese of Hereford – A Vicar’s Life
<https://www.hereford.anglican.org/AVicarsLife/RuralMinistry/>

Diocese of Norwich Churches Trust
<https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/trust/>

Diocese of Oxford – Enhancing the Rural Church
<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Enhancing-and-Resourcing-the-Rural-Church-final-report-1.pdf>

Diocese of Salisbury – Renewing Hope through Rural Ministry and Mission
<http://www.salisbury.anglican.org/ministry/rhrmm>

Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools. The Church of England Education Office March 2018

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/Rural%20Schools%20-%20Embracing%20Change%20WEB%20FINAL.pdf>

Working Together the Future of Rural Church of England Schools October 2014

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2014_working_together_the_future_of_rural_schools_web_final.pdf

The Taylor review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals December 2017

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/669667/Taylor_Review_Final.pdf

Fresh Expressions Rural Hub

<http://freshexpressions.org.uk/connect/rural-hub/dying-to-live-rural-fx-conference-may-2017/>

Pioneering

<http://www.ruralexpression.org.uk/drupal/>

Setting God's People Free: The Archbishop's Council Report on lay ministry

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%202056%20Setting%20God%27s%20People%20Free.pdf>

A Discipling Presence: The United Reformed Church and The Methodist Church, 2017

“He makes me lie down in green pastures”

Psalm 23:2a



