

Bishop of Leicester's Rural Commission Report 2018: Deep Wells and Green Pastures Executive Summary

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.

The WAGOLLS ('What a good one looks like') provide the building blocks of a vision for mission and ministry in our rural contexts. This will be achieved through the implementation of recommendations. We have categorised these as those pertaining to the rural church and they are designated by a ✱. Others relate more to diocesan structures or processes and are designated by a ▲.

There is a set of headline Key Recommendations and then a series of seven areas considered in much more detail.

Key Recommendations to the Diocese

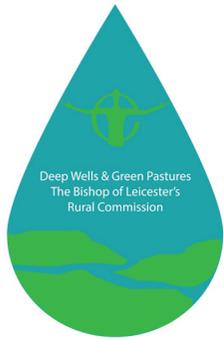
WAGOLL

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.

- 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



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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.

- G. 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.

Rural Contexts

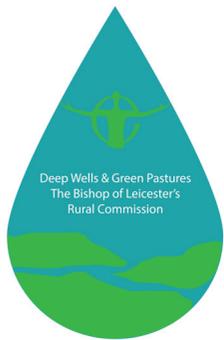
WAGOLL

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.



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Schools, Children and Young People

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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.'¹

The Commission encourages church and school to consider alignment where possible to do so.

- * 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.

Mission, Evangelism and Growth

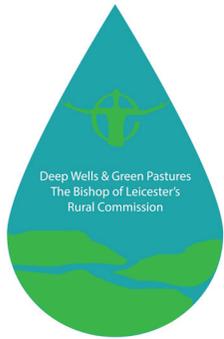
WAGOLL

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.



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- * 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.

Discipleship and Vocation

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'.

Leadership and Ministry

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?



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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.

Governance and Buildings

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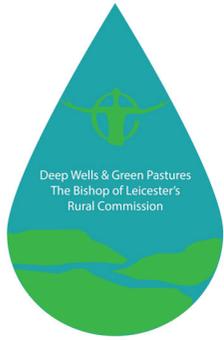
Governance is fleet of foot and is responsive to local needs and context, with a high degree of mutual trust and mutual support. The building is open and accessible to everyone. There is a sense of community ownership of the building and, as a result, the care and security is assured. The church is also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



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Finance and Giving

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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.