

Notes from the Devon Churches Rural Forum Meeting

8th May at Tedburn St Mary

- 1 Present: Heather Sayle, Jane Lucas, Philip Wagstaff, Alison Ball, Nickie Johnson, Martyn Goss, Adrian Brook, Colin Smallacombe, John Wibberley, Marian Carson, Mark Butchers, Penny Dobbin
- 2 Apologies: Andy Jerrard, Joanne Jones, Annie Jefferies, David Ursell, Michael Winter, Stuart Wilson, Douglas Dettmer, Simon Franklin
- 3 The Archdeacon welcomed all and particularly our new members: Derek Baker (Faith Community Liaison from the Office of the Police Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall), Marian Carson (Project Manager Growing the Rural Church Project), Nickie Johnson (President Exeter diocese Mothers Union) and Heather Sayle (Three Rivers Mission Community) and opened the meeting with prayer.
- 4 The Notes from the last meeting were agreed.
- 5 Matters and actions arising not covered elsewhere
 - a. Contact with URC re working together to support the rural church: Mark has spoken to Ruth Whitehead – follow up needed. **Action: Mark**
 - b. Exploration of models of rural church support in other parts of the country: Penny spoke to the [notes received from Jill Hopkinson](#), which included a role description for a rural support officer. The DCRF seems to be acting effectively as a “corporate” rural officer covering the various roles through our members and different work strands, though we could think further about DCRF presence at the various agricultural shows. John raised the question of whether we could still have a “Rural Champion” in Devon – Penny is co-ordinating some of our activity and fielding some enquiries, but the corporate model seems to enable us to cover a wider remit. **Action closed.**
 - c. Rural Conference 8.10.16: outstanding actions re follow up and reports
 - i. The Bright Field Community Follow up day is planned for 15th May. There has been a good response and the day is now full.
 - ii. Joanne and Andy have met with those who volunteered to be more involved in pastoral care of our farming community. One or two have volunteered to work with the FCN and a follow up information sheet has been prepared.

- iii. Rural Ministry Training – Mark is arranging a meeting with Philip Sourbut and Alison Ball. **Action Mark**
 - iv. Environment and care for the land: Martyn is looking at combining various existing groups adding an additional strand of particular rural concerns. A good joint conference with Devon Wildlife Trust on “Living Churchyards” was held recently.
 - v. Social and economic issues: see update given as [paper 10d](#) under deemed items
 - vi. Models of ministry: We hope our November DCRF meeting can focus on what is emerging from the Bright Field community and other input from Simon Franklin’s Sabbatical research, Philip’s experience of the Cumbrian approach and the Truro diocesan conference on “oversight” ministry.
- d. Market Volunteer chaplain role description: now available on DCRF website [here](#)
- e. Other items raised under this heading:

A meeting brought together by Bishop Nick looking at life and ministry on Dartmoor (report [here](#)) echos similar issues affecting Exmoor. Families are moving off the moor and services are disappearing. Housing is moving well out of the affordable range for ordinary people. DCT is looking at housing issues on Exmoor.

DCT is looking for farms who are interested in diversification via its rural business support project. Elaine will send links to be added to the DCRF website. The Prince’s Countryside Trust also includes help for young people, including help with getting into farming. Germinate also offer Rural Entrepreneur courses – some training was offered at the Methodist Ministry Training Day in January – Alison has further information.

6 Communications

- a. Website: The DCRF website is now operational. It can be found at www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk

Martyn will make a press release for the diocesan magazine and website.
Action Martyn

- b. Newsletter: Our first Newsletter was published at the end of April. It was sent out to a wide range of people through Exeter Diocese, The Methodist District

and via CTD contacts. So far around 100 people have signed up to receive future individual mailings and feedback has been positive.

7 Rural Loneliness and Social Isolation and Church Involvement

- a. Introductory notes can be found [here](#)
- b. Input

Derek Baker spoke about the new scheme he has been involved in in Plymouth which was triggered by concern from “101” call handlers noticing frequent callers. One elderly widow was calling 101 around 50 times per month, but with no policing issues. Work has been done with local church volunteers to develop a closed referral process. The question is whether this idea could be transferred to a rural context.

Elaine spoke about the Community Unity project where DCT is working with the police, fire and rescue services, ambulance service and the Environment Agency. There are three pilot areas in north Devon – Holsworthy, Lynton and Lynmouth and South Molton. Working with parish councils, community groups, voluntary organisations and the statutory services the project is aiming to reduce demand on public services through better networking and community groups taking on some services. This approach started with snow wardens, flood wardens and pot-hole wardens and is now exploring whether volunteers may be able to take up more roles relating to public safety. It is about strengthening communities because the state will not be able to provide all the services it has done in the past, or will take longer to do them. Through this approach it is hoped that people who may be vulnerable can be identified and supported.

Martyn spoke about the Mental Health Round Table which Bishop Sarah has been instrumental in setting up. It is ecumenical and includes professional and experienced people from people working with depression to forensic psychiatry. It is focusing on three areas:

- Assist Training – for suicide prevention – through the FCN (dates available on our website [here](#))
- An October conference on Mental Health and Young People
- Loneliness Conference working with Healthwatch Devon – see report [here](#)

Colin spoke about loneliness leading into more serious mental health issues if not caught soon enough. Loneliness affects people of all ages in farming and

the FCN both provides direct support and receives referrals from other organisations. At Exeter market a group of retired farmers meet regularly. The markets play a major role in offering places for farmers to meet and support each other: can more be done to co-ordinate referrals to FCN from the market chaplains? FCN now also has an office at the new DYFC centre. The YFC are keen to link with the FCN, especially with regard to mental health issues for young people and young farmers. YFC to be asked if they would be able to be represented on the DCRF. **Action: Penny**

Penny spoke about the Barnstaple social care pilot work involving local churches. This is a Devon County Council initiative which has been slightly slower than hoped getting going due to the local elections. The aim is to see how the whole community can work together to support people who may need “low level” care or befriending. Contacts have been made with both the voluntary sector and the church. It will be an interesting pilot for churches working more closely with other agencies in this area. Two other rural parishes have expressed interest in working with the statutory agencies to receive referrals of people in their communities who may be lonely and Penny is following this up.

Nickie spoke about the new MU diocesan priorities, of which working to alleviate loneliness, particularly amongst rural and farming people is one, and she has been working with Joanne at FCN to explore the possibility of branch members becoming volunteers. The new set of priorities has still to be agreed with branches, but the outlook is positive.

Elaine spoke about Transforming Ageing, a Design Council sponsored project to look at the needs of older people and develop innovative solutions to help people stay longer in their own homes. DCT is delivering this project in Devon. The idea is that older people meet with social and health care professionals and social entrepreneurs to hear what is needed and innovate to develop new products and services.

Devon County Council has a new Communities Team which has been brought into the Public Health directorate. This gives the team a wider remit than before and they are able to connect people and ideas across our rural communities.

c. Discussion

Penny said that we hope the DCRF website will be able to record local social activities such as concerts, Lunch Clubs, Craft sessions, Coffee morning and

available Pastoral Care Teams. This will enable the statutory agencies to look up a parish and be able to refer someone who may be lonely to an existing village activity, without the need for starting a new project. The beginnings of this collection can be found [here](#).

We also hope to be able to develop our listings and links to organisations who can help those who need more specialist help, as a resource for churches.

There was a discussion about how the churches can work in partnership with other statutory agencies. In the past churches were very much involved in social issues, but stepped back as the state took on more responsibility. This situation is now reversing. There are strong differences in culture between the different organisations and trust needs to be built.

Jane spoke of experience in Halwill where TTVS (Torrige Council for Voluntary Services) has partnered with local churches and community groups to develop the Good Companions project, supporting older people in rural areas, and where the project has grown new volunteers.

It may be possible to develop a workshop bringing churches and statutory agencies together to explore how both can work together effectively, learning about each other's cultures and needs. **Action Penny to follow up**

Philip suggested we could usefully do some theological reflection on various social issues affecting our communities and the church's role. **Action Penny to convene a group of interested people.**

8 Training - please see the [website training](#) page for current opportunities

9 Growing the Rural Church

Marian gave a presentation which can be downloaded [here \(item 9a\)](#)

She explained that the project is not about closing churches, but rather about extending their role through finding more community uses and meeting more community needs. Even in the early stages of the project, themes are emerging which include issues of sharing governance across a wider group of churches, hopefully to release some energy from the demands of administration to serve the communities, and exploring models of extended lay ministry, working with Philip Sourbut.

The project is working with DCT in community consultation work and exploring links with the Churches Conservation Trust, in particular looking at taking on the “Champing” (camping in churches) initiative.

Marian is also working with a pilot mission community to explore the Creative Mosaics model of community development, similar to the Umoja concept experienced in Thika diocese, and also to ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) which helps communities identify the gifts they already have and how they can be used to meet existing needs.

The project has received many expressions of interest, and is initially working with one mission community in each of the four Anglican archdeaconries. Marian spoke of our buildings as both a blessing and a burden, and that there seems to be a positive way forward.

The ecumenical dimension and the need to preserve the sacred space of the church, amidst the additional community uses were discussed. Community use of buildings can be missional in many senses, as well as meeting community need. In some cases the church is the only community building and can be used to benefit the whole community. In one church there is a travelling post office, which now runs alongside a coffee morning and a Holy Communion service is held at the end of the morning. The whole is brought together. Relationships are developed and the morning has also developed into a clergy “surgery” where people know they can meet the vicar and book a baptism etc.

Marian said the Project is also looking at greater roles for “Friends” groups where the church remains a place of worship but responsibility for the building lies with The Friends.

- 10 Deemed Items – can all be found [here](#)
- 11 Notices and Events – An up to date list of events can be found [here](#)
- 12 AOB – there was no AOB
- 13 The date of the next meeting will be 16th November, 2.30 pm at Tedburn St Mary Village Hall. Penny will circulate some possible dates for 2018 before then **Action Penny**
- 14 The meeting closed with prayer