

## Devon Churches Rural Forum

### Notes of Meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018

#### 10 am to 12 noon Young Farmers Centre, Cheriton Bishop

1. Archdeacon Mark opened the meeting in prayer
2. **Present:** Archdeacon Mark Butchers (chair, Archdeacon of Barnstaple), Penny Dobbin (secretary), Kristian Tomblin (DCC Communities), Elaine Cook (Devon Communities Together), Dave Watson (Methodist Anglican Covenant Champion Southwest), Philip Wagstaff (Rural Officer PEMD), Danny Semorad (farmer, CW, Devon Historic Churches Trust), David Ursell (farmer, FCN), Simon Franklin (Rural minister, Bright Field Community), Susanna Metz (Rural minister, Farm Worker, Rural Ministry Lecturer), Graham Whalley (Tavistock Deanery), Stephen Derges (Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre Ambassador South West), Elizabeth Burke (Rural minister), Ruth Frampton (Rural minister), Heather Sayle (Rural church and MU), John Wibberley (Agriculturalist), Jane Lucas (Rural minister and farmer), Sylvia West (Deanery Secretary and WI Adviser), Jane Hayes (Rural Minister), Marisa Cockfield (Rural Minister and Interim Chair of Exeter Diocese Mental Health Round Table), Joanne Jones (FCN)
3. **Apologies :** Marian Carson, Bishop Nick, Nickie Johnson, Annie Jefferies (who has stood down and is replaced by Graham Whalley), Bishop Jackie, Stuart Wilson, Andy Jerrard, Colin Smallacombe, Martyn Goss.
4. **Notes from the last meeting** were agreed

<http://www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/content/pages/documents/1535299316.pdf>

5. **Matters and actions arising (not covered below)**

Dementia Actions – Pop-up memory café thoughts (Item 8 from May meeting).

Elaine said that there may be opportunities going forward for next year for funding for such projects if any churches are interested. DCT has some funding through Isolation project grants and is looking for venues to run activities. **Action:** Elaine to provide a briefing note on what is available.

6. **DCRF Conference – Re-imagining Rural Ministry: Moving Towards New Structures – feedback from the conference and follow on actions – led by Mark Butchers**

About 100 people attended the conference. The numbers showed the level of interest in the subject and need for ideas and input. The focus was on structures that would help support rural ministry and on releasing energy for mission. Bishop Robert and Graham Thompson both emphasised the strength of the rural church – that though it may feel fragile it is strong and embedded in the local community. The day highlighted the opportunities and need for lay ministry and the permission we have to experiment. The speakers' input was well received, but there was mixed feedback on the practical exercise which some found more helpful than others. It would also have been good to have been more ecumenically representative.

The main themes included:

- Using stipendiary resources differently and creatively, for example to resource youth workers, administration or various sessional posts to run different activities
- Releasing and empowering lay people – everyone has a role to play
- Crisis breeds creativity
- Permission giving and the need to think differently

Encouragement to experiment with new structures and the availability of new legislation to enable more flexibility.

For a full resume of the day please see the [conference proceedings](#)

### **Discussion**

Simon commented that it is difficult to help people to think really differently about the future, rather than finding new ways to support the old system. The conversation needs to be about something new and radical rather than thinking only functionally, and wider than whether there are enough clergy. More clergy reductions bring us to the point where we have to do church differently from the old model because existing clergy cannot be spread ever more thinly, but also because it is right to do so. In the Anglican church every deanery now has to produce a plan every three years – new models of ministry and church should be included in this process. Simon also commented that communities can see a reducing number of vicars as a withdrawal from the countryside. Mark affirmed a continuing commitment to rural areas in that though there may be less stipendiary clergy the church is still fully committed to and part of our rural

communities

Susanna said there was a lot of interest following the day, but it was quite far for many people in the north/west of our rural area to travel – could we have some opportunities to get people together locally to talk about these issues and ideas? She also commented that some of the ideas presented were really new and that there are people in our parishes – even in very rural areas - who really want to do something new and different as well as those who prefer to “tweak the old” – and this is very encouraging. We need to keep up the momentum.

Philip said he would reflect on why more Methodists had not attended and would try and encourage others to come in future. There is a growing recognition that the ecumenical working relationship is a part of the journey and this is happening on the ground.

Heather mentioned that isolation in rural ministry has risen as an issue. The conference conveyed a sense that people were not alone in trying to minister and find solutions in rural ministry. The conversations surrounding the conference were also very helpful.

John wondered whether deanery synods may be able to help take the agenda forward. He also referenced a 1996 report re-defining stewardship which may be helpful going forward. **Action:** John to forward report.

Elaine noted that through community consultations with the Growing the Rural Church project it has become clear that the wider community can often be unaware of the challenges faced by the church. These consultations have opened up opportunities to bring up new ideas by involving our communities – not only about buildings – but about what the church is “for” in the community.

Dave is also a parish councillor and said that Parish Councils are also looking “outside the box” to see how they can best serve their communities as they face some similar issues and he sees serving our communities as a common work – not only ecumenical but also partnership working between the churches and secular bodies.

Marisa also commented that one Growing the Rural Church project in her parishes is going forward together with the parish council and the village hall committee as all are fragile in this particular parish. She also cautioned that in the work of developing and growing lay ministry that hands on pastoral care needs not to be ignored in the role of the clergy as well as the laity. Pastoral Care

of the community needs to be re-visioned, but not divorced from the clergy's ministry.

### **Next steps**

The talks could be put onto the TEDx system. A tool kit based on the materials presented would be helpful to parishes working through new ideas. An on-line resource for churches and synods possibly with a roadshow element would also be useful. These actions will take significant resources to bring together. **Action:** Mark to organise a working group meeting to take forward. Volunteers included Simon, Susanna, Philip, Mark, Marian

## **7. Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre – Stephen Derges (Germinate South West Ambassador)**

Stephen talked about the work of Germinate as a whole, some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the rural church and the Germinate training resources Germinate Groups, Germinate Leadership and the various short courses and "Toolkits" for the rural church.

The work of Germinate is in three main areas: Church Life, Mission and Training. There are around 115 downloadable resources in the church life section, including worship resources with service templates for different occasions, discipleship courses and building resources – these can be accessed [here](#). In the [Mission section](#) you can find a toolkit for rural mission, an evangelism course, information about Rural Mission Sunday and Germinate Enterprise – resources aiming to support rural churches to meet the spiritual, physical and social needs of their communities. And in the [Training section](#) you will find links to the “Germinate Groups” learning community programme, the Germinate Leadership programme for both clergy and lay leaders, the Rural Ministry short course and the Germinate conference programme.

The Germinate Groups programme brings churches across an area together to talk about their context, how the world around is changing and what the implications of this are. It asks “who are our people”, what are our structures and systems and what needs to be kept or let go. It runs over a two year period looking at what is, what could be and what will be and results in an action plan. It works in teams of four to six people and includes four 2 day off site sessions. The cost for all participants is £500 plus the provision of facilitators and venues.

The Equipping for Rural Mission Resource is a free downloadable 4 session programme to be used locally. It covers appreciating what we already have; investigating what may be available to us, a reflection and move into action.

Germinate Leadership is an eighteen month programme that begins every October. Applications are now open for the 2019 programme and more information can be found [here](#).

Germinate also produces a monthly magazine "Country Way" for rural churches highlighting resources, mission and ministry.

Stephen said that he was willing to come and speak to deanery synods and Methodist circuit meetings etc. about Germinate and the resources available. He can be contacted as follows by email at [stephend@germinate.net](mailto:stephend@germinate.net)

Mark asked if a set of Germinate packs could be made available for the February diocesan Rural Deans meeting **Action:** Mark and Stephen to liaise

You can see Stephen's full presentation [here](#)

## 8. Farming - Follow up "Focus on Farming" actions – Item 7 from May meeting

- Rural Women – **Action:** Heather (MU), Nickie (MU), Joanne (FCN) and Sylvia (WI) will meet to discuss the support needs of rural women in particular and make any resulting recommendations to the next DCRF meeting.
- Farm Visits – David will organise a series of visits in different parts of the county and different farming types. We hope to invite our bishops to participate as they are able. **Action:** David

## 9. Mental Health

Marisa Cockfield spoke about the work of the Mental Health Round Table. Its aim is to raise awareness and promote training, understanding and links across the diocese about mental health issues. Most of the discussion we have about mental health revolves around mental health and well-being, including social prescribing, but on the ground people are facing more severe mental illnesses.

The recent Mental Health Round Table report can be downloaded [here](#)

The MH Round Table operates in different ways. There is a strategic alliance with ecumenical partners, the police and others which holds an overview and concentrates on strategic planning. There is also a group looking at local delivery of

training including basic mental health awareness training, mental health first aid and dementia awareness and possibly ASIST suicide prevention training. It is hoped that training will be organised at a deanery level in the Anglican church. There is also work in schools with a policy designed for church schools but which is transferable to others. Chaplains and carers can be supported by the work of the strategic group. It may be possible to have “deanery champions” for mental health issues – but people would need to be very clear that they are not qualified as mental health practitioners. Guidelines for the clergy, in how to help people in their parishes, are also needed. The mental health round table also links with the new Exeter diocese well-being forum looking at the support needs for clergy.

Joanne said that 10 volunteers from the FCN have now completed the ASIST suicide prevention course and have found it really helpful. FCN volunteers are not set up as mental health professionals, but having done the mental health first aid course, they have contacts to refer people on to. The FCN volunteers are also preparing a list of mental health support and organisations across the county. Penny will add resources to the DCRF website as they become available.

The FCN is running a joint initiative with the Devon YFC federation as part of their Rural Plus programme. This involves running sessions on mental health awareness and support available at Young Farmers Clubs across the county. Joanne said they could deliver this session to other organisations where staff are working with farmers. She also encouraged anyone who is aware of any struggling farming families to refer them to the FCN (with permission).

Elaine said that churches involved in the Growing the Rural Church project are entitled to discounts on training through Devon Communities Together. She will send details of an online mental health awareness course to Penny. **Action:** Elaine

Penny had attended a northern Devon networking meeting on the issue of mental health. Notes from the meeting are available [here](#).

## 10. Deemed Items

- Farming update - our October farming update can be found [here](#). David added that the main issue at the moment for farmers is fodder – farmers have low stocks because of the dry summer and buying in is very expensive. We are asked to pray for a short winter and an early spring.
- Directory of Social Activities – Linking church based community activities with those who need them - A progress report on this project can be found [here](#).

Progress in collecting information from churches across the county has been quite slow though feedback from “prescribers” has been very positive and this project is seen as a practical way to help bring those who may be lonely or socially isolated into contact with others. After discussion it was agreed that Penny and Mark would meet to decide how best to go forward. **Action:** Penny and Mark

- Reports from other networking meetings – see above report (combined)
- Recent environmental meetings report – Eco-Church Gathering – download [here](#)

## 11. Notices and Events

Jane Frost is leading a Quiet Day on 22<sup>nd</sup> November at Dartington Hall called “A Story to Tell”.

Please keep an eye on our [What’s On](#) pages for details of future events

## 12. AOB

Elaine said that the Healthwatch Devon Loneliness and Social Isolation report is now available. Many churches took part in the research and the report can be accessed [here](#). Elaine has now become CEO of Healthwatch Devon as well as DCT. Healthwatch Devon is also involved in mental health issues.

Sylvia spoke about the synergy between many of the WI campaigns and the work of our churches including work on loneliness and isolation and mental health awareness. In Devon there are 250 WI branches with around 7000 members. She hopes the churches and WI can link to work together more closely – as a team “everyone achieves more”.

Simon has suggested linking with Jill Hopkinson now at Sarum College to offer our diocese for placements for those training for rural ministry so that ordinands can see how good rural ministry can be, and to help link us into training for rural ministry. **Action:** Simon to liaise with Jill on behalf of DCRF. Jane H asked if someone could also enthuse about rural ministry in SWMTC.

There is some interest in running a workshop on rural liturgy. **Action:** Penny, Jane F and Ruth will look into this having first ascertained the scope of the work being led by Bishop Jackie on the subject.

**13. Dates and themes of next meetings:**

14th February, 2nd July, 16th October all from 10 am to 12 noon at YFC Centre,  
Cheriton Bishop

At the February meeting we will hear back from the group exploring the support needs for rural women and Elaine will speak about the results of the Community Unity projects that have been run in three towns in Devon. In July Michael Winter will speak about his report on [Farming and Food](#).

**14. Penny closed the meeting with prayer**