

Devon Churches Rural Forum

Notes of Meeting held on 14th February 2019

10 am to 12 noon Young Farmers Centre, Cheriton Bishop

- 1 Philip Wagstaff opened the meeting in prayer

- 2 **Present:** Mark Butchers (chair, Archdeacon of Barnstaple), Penny Dobbin (secretary), Simon Franklin (Bright Field Community, Rural Minister), Sarah Cracknell (Growing the Rural Church), Elizabeth Burke (Rural Minister), David Ursell (Farmer, FCN, rural minister), Ruth Frampton (Rural Minister, Dementia Champion), Heather Sayle (Rural Church and MU), Sylvia West (WI, Deanery and PCC secretary), Jane Hayes (Rural Minister), Marisa Cockfield (Rural Minister, Police Chaplain, Mental Health Round Table), Philip Wagstaff (PEMD Rural Officer), Danny Semorad (Farmer, Devon Historic Churches Trust), Stephen Skinner (recently retired Rural Minister), Jane Skinner (Rural Minister), Stephen Derges (Free Church Leader and Germinate Ambassador), Dawn Eckhart (Devon Communities Together), Douglas Dettmer (Archdeacon of Totnes).

- 3 **Apologies:** Jane Frost, Nickie Johnson, Marian Carson, Elaine Cook, Maurie Webber, Dave Watson, Andy Jerrard, Joanne Jones, Graham Whalley, Kristian Tomblin, John Wibberley, Stuart Wilson, Richard Yarwood.

- 4 The notes from the last meeting were agreed.

<http://devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/content/pages/documents/1546707045.pdf>

- 5 **Matters and actions arising from the last meeting (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)**

a) **Memory cafés**

Dawn reported that Devon Senior Voice (part of DCT) run many good memory cafés. If churches wanted to set up any activities for rural dementia and carer support, they would be able to offer advice. DCT could also help identify sources of funding. The Devon Communities Foundation may also be a helpful route for funding.

It was noted that singing can also be very beneficial for older people. Dawn said that DCT have been working with a social enterprise called "Find Your Voice" who offer fully funded music and movement programmes for people over 65yrs or adults living with learning disabilities. She believes they are looking for further venues to run courses and this could be another "community use" opportunity

for churches. **Action:** Penny to investigate further.

Ruth has recently completed the training to become an Alzheimer's Society Dementia Champion.

The Transforming Ageing programme organised by DCT have recently made awards to a number of projects looking at carer support.

Action: Penny will put together an initial information sheet on the possibilities for advice, related organisations and funding opportunities for churches who may want to become more involved in offering activities for those living with dementia and their carers and will liaise with the new Exeter Diocese Church and Society Officer when in post.

b) DCRF conference follow up

The small group identified at our last meeting will meet to progress the "toolkit for churches" based on our conference material. **Action:** Mark

c) Rural Ministry Placements for Ordinands

Simon has talked with Jill Hopkinson of Sarum College resulting in some exciting opportunities for rural placements "with a difference" for ordinands. The basic idea would be to use the resources within our Forum to enthuse ordinands for rural ministry, offering them the opportunity to meet and work alongside a range of people from the Forum, all of whom are passionate about rural ministry in all its broadness and richness and who can offer a wide variety of perspectives and experience.

We have been asked to work up proposals for a long placement option of 100 hours and a short weekend placement of around 30 hours.

Philip said that there is an increasing awareness that "rural" is a distinct form of ministry, with its own theology for underpinning ministry and mission. The ecumenical dimension is very important on the ground in rural areas and there would be much scope for churches to work together on this initiative.

Other ideas included offering an evening for ordinands with Forum members – perhaps sharing a supper, with various members speaking about their work and inviting questions and discussion.

Jane (S) suggested that a DVD could be made of Forum members being interviewed about their different experiences of rural ministry, which could be shared with theological colleges and courses as a pre-cursor to enthusing ordinands to explore placements and future rural ministry. Sarah said that the Growing the Rural Church Communications officer may be able to help with preparing a DVD.

The placement offer could also be shared with other colleges and courses including SWMTC, St Mellitus and Trinity College Bristol. Once materials are in preparation we could make contact with other dioceses and colleges.

All agreed that this could be a very exciting new venture, made possible through the gifted people gathered through the Forum. A small group will meet to take this forward – initially Simon, Heather, Philip and Stephen. **Action:** Simon

d) **Mental Health**

Joanne Jones, with FCN colleagues, has prepared a very comprehensive list of mental health support resources – a vote of thanks is due. This has been added to our website page, along with other resources gathered from the Northern Devon Networking conference on the subject in October 2018. These resources can be found here.

<http://devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/rural-issues/mental-health/mental-health-organisations-and-resources.php>

The on-line mental health awareness course run by DCT mentioned at the last meeting can be accessed [here](#)

e) **Rural Worship Workshop**

Penny, Ruth and Jane (F) are progressing this. A further meeting is planned directly after the Forum meeting.

Post meeting note: The working group has developed a proposal for a workshop with the working title *“A Year of Rural Worship: God in Farmyard, Field and Village”*. The aims would include developing a seasonal calendar of worship, prayer and spirituality opportunities to complement the farming and community year, to share experience, develop ideas and share resources. The proposed date is 5th October 2019 and further details will be circulated to Forum members shortly.

f) **Partnership working between the churches and local WI groups**

Sylvia reported that she has identified 5 WI members in north Devon, 1 in East and central Devon and 4 in south and west Devon who are also connected with their local churches. Mental Health, Loneliness and rural isolation and dementia are all areas that the WI have been working on recently, and there is scope for local branches of the WI and churches to work together in some of these areas. For example, it may be possible for the WI and church to jointly host a community Dementia Friends session.

The WI will also be hosting a “Health Matters” day in the autumn (details nearer the time) and are considering how they can use existing WI activities to share resources from the FCN, for example (this also relates to the work to support rural women – see below).

6 Farming

a) Support needs for rural women

The FCN, Mothers Union (MU) and Women’s Institute (WI) have held a “familiarisation” meeting to get to know what each other do and share concerns and ideas about how we can better support rural women together. One idea is to write an “open letter” to reach out directly to rural women and help link them with support and friendship that would work around their busy but often very isolated working lives.

Post meeting note: The working group (Joanne Jones, Sylvia West and Heather Sayle) met again after the main Forum meeting today with the following outcomes:

- The joint open letter for rural women is being prepared (drafted by Jo) to let them know about opportunities available through the FCN, WI and MU.
- Joanne can contact Sylvia for WI and Heather or Nickie Johnson for MU for information on local WI or MU groups and to refer any ladies she becomes aware of who may like to come along to a MU or WI meeting. The MU or WI could offer home visits or arrange for people to accompany new members to meetings for the first few occasions so they don't have to walk in alone.
- Heather is well placed to link with the WI contacts Sylvia has identified for the South & West Devon area when organising joint WI and Church community Dementia Friends sessions.
- The WI has their Annual Spring Council Meeting in April and the joint letter will be available on their International & Public Affairs stand. Rural isolation, mental health and dementia all feature as WI campaigns at present. A supply of FCN Helpline brochures/cards will also be available on the stand. Joanne will send Sylvia and Heather information about FCN to go into their County Newsletters.
- The working group is considering putting on a joint event with a speaker with reference to an area ladies might find useful - perhaps something on computer skills. FCN would be happy to attend other meetings to talk about their work.

b) Farm Visits

David has organised two farm visits for this year. The first will be at Joanne Jones farm at Down St Mary on 30th April beginning at 1 pm with a soup lunch. Bishop Jackie will be joining this visit. The second will be at Dartington Hall Farm on 13th July with Bishop Nick (the times for this visit need to be confirmed).

So far 19 people are signed up for the April visit and four for the July one. The maximum number for each visit is 30 and places are being allocated on a first come first served basis. To book, people should send an email to Penny penelopedobbin@outlook.com

An invitation to either visit was in our latest newsletter and Bishops Jackie and Nick are inviting clergy in the suffragan areas. The visits are open to all – ecumenically and lay and ordained. **Action:** Philip to ensure the Methodist churches are aware of the invitation.

We agreed that two visits would be enough this year. Elizabeth has also received an offer from one of her local farmers to host a visit. **Action:** Elizabeth/Penny to follow up for 2020. The meeting hoped Bishop Robert would be able to join this visit.

Post meeting note: a visit has been organised for August 5th 2020 to Rhude Farm near Holsworthy, beginning at 2.30 pm. There will be an opportunity to see the first calves of the new season – a vital part of dairy farming. Bishop Robert will join this visit.

Penny suggested that it may also be helpful to arrange a visit to a related business, to help understand more of the food supply chain and other aspects of rural business. **Action:** Danny will investigate possibilities for a visit to one of the large dairies/cheese factories (e.g. Arla at North Tawton or Crediton Dairy) for October 2019.

7 Devon Communities Together - Community Unity Project

Dawn Eckhart of Devon Communities Together gave a presentation on the Community Unity Project which has been taking place for the last sixteen months as a partnership project between DCT and Devon and Cornwall Police.

DCT is a Devon charity that has supported our rural communities for more than 50 years. It employs professional workers with a range of specialist expertise. It is also involved in supporting parish and neighbourhood planning. You can find out more about DCT [here](#)

The aims of the Community Unity Project were to:

- Build capacity and connectivity within communities
- Raise awareness of potentially vulnerable or isolated groups of people and identify ways to reduce negative issues for people
- Raise awareness of the Devon and Cornwall “Citizens in Policing” programme and the volunteering opportunities it presents.

The communities chosen for the project were all in the north of Devon and represented a variety of contexts. They were: South Molton (urban – well it’s all relative!), Holsworthy (more remote rural) and Lynton and Lynmouth (remote and coastal).

The project used an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach – that is, not parachuting in new ideas and people but finding out who and what is already there and working well, and then building on these people and projects.

The work was launched in November 2017 and the practical phase ran until November 2018. The time since has been spent in post project evaluation and writing up. A final report is expected in March 2019.

The project involved activities such as awareness raising, ideas factories, assets mapping, training needs assessments - asking how groups could be helped by training to make their work easier - and discussing funding possibilities and mentoring for local groups. There were “connector events” to share ideas and resources. The “Know your Neighbour” campaign helped to address loneliness. Training courses run during the project included mental health awareness, first aid, recruiting and keeping volunteers, “Be safe on-line” and funding community projects.

Some of the main benefits involved improving the links between people and organisations who may not have all been aware of what each could offer and share, as well as people becoming much more in touch with their neighbours following the “Know your Neighbour” campaign – addressing the shocking statistic that 73% of people may not even know their neighbour’s name. The “asset maps” of all the communities developed during the project will also be a valuable tool for much time to come. Examples of some new initiatives which emerged include:

- In Holsworthy, the development of an intergenerational safe space café for all ages to meet up “out of hours” and in the evenings
- Also in Holsworthy, engagement with the Red Box scheme – providing sanitary materials to young girls at school – helping to address financial exclusion, embarrassment and stigma.
- In South Molton – supporting the South Molton meddlers offering “wild gardening” and turning identified “eye-sore” plots into gardens.
- Also in South Molton, working with the Friends of the library to develop outdoor meeting space and a sensory garden.

The cost of the project in three communities was £70,000. DCT hope to perhaps repeat the work in other communities if funding can become available.

Dawn's full presentation can be downloaded from our website [here](#).

8 Growing the Rural Church

Sarah Cracknell gave a presentation about the progress of the Growing the Rural Church Project (GtRCh).

This project has just entered the third year of its seven year programme. It is funded by the Diocese of Exeter and the Church of England national Strategic Development Fund to work with mission communities in the diocese. The project primarily helps churches to engage and partner with their local communities to help their church buildings become more useful to the wider communities and become more sustainable in the process. In seven years the target is to work with 100 rural churches – by the end of year two 25 churches have been involved.

Some examples include:

- Meshaw - a project in the feasibility stage. Meshaw is a small community of 36 residential dwellings. This particular project was not initiated by the church but by the parish council who approached the PCC to see if they could work together to provide some communal space in the village where currently there is none. In this case GtRCh is also working with DCT to facilitate the engagement process.

A project group called "Meshaw Together" has been formed and a feasibility study is underway to see if it is possible to re-order the church to create some usable space – this study includes looking at access, water and electricity supplies. A grant from the National Lottery for £10,000 has been awarded which is funding the architect and for the group to travel around to other churches to see what might be possible. This will be a six month study, after which a decision on how or whether to go forward will be made.

- In Parkham, the project began in the summer of 2018. The church is looking to develop their space and facilities to be more open for community activities. The church is already very active, but cannot grow their activities in the church building as it is, nor open up to new community activities.

The community consultation was launched at the village fete last summer and has been followed up with a survey which identified common themes. From this a questionnaire with specific ideas will be delivered to all homes. One of the ideas identified by the consultation was a desire for a permanent space for a community library and this is one of the ideas being followed up.

The consultation work is paused for the moment as the feasibility for the project is further examined and a grant is applied for to fund an architect.

- In Monkleigh, an initial consultation with the village produced no interest and even some antipathy. However, the community school has a pressing need for more space. A project team made up from the parish council, the church and the school are now looking at the needs and assets of the whole village and how the village can best be served. This project has highlighted the importance of discernment of the needs of the village and finding a purpose for the church in the community.

One of the common themes identified is how GtRCh can help churches to access additional funding to help with feasibility work, architect fees and community consultations, thus “multiplying the talents”.

As well as project work with individual churches, GtRCh has a number of overarching projects that are in their pilot stages.

- One of these is to develop the idea of “Festival Churches” and what they might look like in Devon. Arlington church, in the grounds of a National Trust property, is one of the churches exploring this idea. GtRCh are also piloting worship resources (with the diocesan worship group), exploring when it may be best to hold services and how the building can speak for itself when people may not be present.
- GtRCh is exploring the use of digital donation technology – even where there may be no mobile signal or internet available. If anyone is interested in exploring the digital donations equipment they should talk to Brigit Kiyaga, Mission Resources Assistant Adviser in the Diocesan Mission Resources team, telephone 01392 294964 and email brigit.kiyaga@exeter.anglican.org
- The Pilgrimage Project is developing two new routes – one – the Archangel’s Way – from Brent Tor to Chagford - developed from an idea at a Dartmoor churches day hosted last summer by Bishop Nick to explore more of the natural spirituality that Dartmoor offers. The second route will end at the cathedral and there is a possibility that this may involve a link up with other churches dedicated to St Peter in Devon. There is also a possibility of a cycling route pilgrimage beginning in north Devon that will be launched on Devon Churches Conservation Trust Ride and Stride day.

There will be a Devon Pilgrim website with information on routes, accommodation, churches, local services, news and events, guided pilgrimage days and contemplative worship opportunities. The project will also be looking at welcome, hospitality, the opportunity for encounter with God in self-guided and guided pilgrimage. There are also partnerships with local businesses such as pubs and accommodation providers being developed, so the project has the potential to help the local economy also.

The new Dartmoor pilgrimage route will be launched at the Dartmoor Walking Festival over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

A toolkit to help other churches develop their own pilgrimage routes will be developed and GtRCh may also be able to offer some support.

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

9 Deemed Items

- a) Contacts for new Church of England National Rural Officer Mark Betson mark.betson@churchofengland.org and direct contact number 07825 854952
- b) [Farming Update](#)
- c) [Directory of Social Activities – Progress](#)
- d) [Report from National Rural Officers Gathering November 2018 – Philip Wagstaff](#)

10 Notices and Events – all as per our [What's On page](#)

11 AOB

- a) A new Methodist District Lay Learning and Discipleship officer has been appointed to replace Alison Ball (who was previously a member of the Forum). Action: Philip to pass details to Penny and the new appointee to be invited to join the Forum.
- b) Philip spoke about the Diverse Regeneration Company (DR Company) of which he is a trustee director. The DR Company “works to help rural and coastal areas to be more sustainable, by helping local businesses to prosper and communities to thrive”. It is based in Okehampton. You can find more information [here](#)
- c) Douglas spoke briefly about the work of the national church in working with the government. The Rural Affairs group is chaired by the Bishop of Hereford and the lead member in the House of Lords is the Bishop of St Albans. Together with the clergy and lay members, the group supports the work of the national rural officer and aims to “rural proof” any legislation going through the General Synod. It also acts as a reference group for the Mission & Public Affairs Council, contributing to its thinking on issues around rural mission and rural public policy.
- d) Following the invitation to the Forum to attend the regional meeting of the Clewer Initiative on March 20th, Marisa Cockfield and Dave Watson will be attending on our behalf.

12 **Dates and themes of next meetings:**

2nd July with Michael Winter, speaking to his report "[Changing Food Cultures: Challenges and Opportunities for UK Agriculture](#)". We will also be joined by Rev'd Mark Betson (new C of E national Rural Officer). The meeting will be followed by an opportunity to continue conversation and fellowship over a pub lunch at The Old Thatch Inn, Cheriton Bishop.

16th October with Caroline Virgo of the Clewer Initiative speaking on Modern Slavery in a rural context.

all from 10 am to 12 noon at YFC Centre, Cheriton Bishop

13 Mark closed the meeting in prayer