

Devon Churches Rural Forum Meeting Notes 1st February 2022

Main meeting 10 am to 12 noon followed by Steering Group meeting

1 Archdeacon Verena opened the meeting with prayer.

2 **Welcome and introductions**

Present in person were: Verena Breed (Archdeacon of Barnstaple in the chair), Penny Body (Secretary), Danny Semorad (Farmer, Church Warden, Devon Historic Churches Trust), John Wibberley (Agronomist and Chair Devon FCN), Richard Yarwood (Professor of Human Geography, University of Plymouth), Stuart Wilson (Market Chaplain), Howard Wilson (Regional Learning and Development Coordinator (South West), Ruth Frampton (Team Rector), Elizabeth Burke (Team Rector), John Corrie (retired priest and lecturer in mission), Marisa Cockfield (Team Vicar, Police Chaplain, Exeter Diocese Mental Health Round Table), Janet May (Associate Priest), Nora Corkery (CEO Devon Communities Together), Lydia Perris (Social Justice and Environment Officer Diocese of Exeter), Dave Watson (Methodist Lay Minister), Jane Skinner (Team Rector), David Curry (Exeter Diocese Environment Adviser and Leader Plymouth Wild Church)

The chair welcomed everyone and invited them to introduce themselves and their special interests to the group.

3 **Apologies** were received from Andy Jerrard, Richard Taylor, Michael Winter, Simon Leigh, Sylvia West, Mark Betson, Mike Clark, David Ursell, Martin Beck, Jane Frost

4 [Notes from the last meeting](#) on 2nd November 2021 were agreed.

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

- The item is to keep “on the agenda” - the action to find a way to collect together case studies relating to the various social issues faced in our rural communities and feed these back to those in a position to influence policy in these areas – will be taken into the Rural Social Issues Task Group – see later.

6 **Main Item – New Task Groups**

Seven Task Groups, corresponding to our work streams have been agreed. These are:

- Farming
- Ministry Training Opportunities
- Models of Rural Ministry
- Rural Worship and Spirituality
- Rural Social Issues

- Environmental Issues
- Communications

Notes on Groups:

Because the members of the Rural Issues group and the Environmental issues group were almost the same, for the purposes of today's meeting, these two groups were combined. Also, because there were insufficient people available to meet in the Models of Rural Ministry Group this group will meet another time. No-one had expressed a particular interest in the Communications work stream so this group did not convene.

The meeting then broke into groups and each task group began a discussion on their priorities to take forward over the next year or so.

Please see the Appendix at the end of these notes for the full notes from each group meeting.

Plenary Discussions

For all groups we agreed the focus needs to be on first understanding the subject, and then deciding what we can actually do about it.

Farming

Various current issues were raised including succession planning, the changing nature of agricultural support with the Environmental Land Management Schemes and the need to raise awareness of farming issues including attitudes to cattle and other ruminants in a balanced way. Farm Visits and the Farming briefings are helpful in this and supporting the FCN, and Andy Jerrard, in their work in supporting farmers is also important.

The group also felt it would be helpful to have a young farmer at DCRF and for the DCRF to have a presence at our Devon rural shows.

John Wibberley spoke about the reflections he writes for Devon FCN once a fortnight – from the last reflection these are now also available on our website. They should be added at roughly fortnightly intervals in future so do check back to see the new ones. The current reflection is a prayerful reflection on hedges. You can find the link here:

<https://www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/farming/reflections/>

Please see item 7 for latest farming briefing and discussion on our next farm visit.

Ministry Training

Howard reported the need to keep pushing the benefits of curacies and placements in rural ministry and to help ministers in training to build their understanding of rural

life. This should be done through promoting our farm visits in the colleges and courses, developing contacts with the different training establishments and with the national rural officers. The group will meet again shortly to plan specific actions.

Rural Worship and Spirituality

Ruth reported back that the group wanted to prioritise sharing resources and collecting case studies and to work with GtRCh to help share these.

The Calendar of Rural Worship begun at our rural workshop in 2019 will be revived with a draft in place by the next DCRF meeting on 28th July.

The group had discussed a Quiet Day – in discussion David Curry suggested Tinhay retreat centre, near Lifton, as a possible venue where the manager is a URC pastor. A workshop exploring more forms of outdoor worship including wild and forest church would also be of interest.

Rural Social and Environmental Issues

Jane Hayes reported for the group saying that this is a huge area and so many issues are interconnected. Rural housing and health and social care are of particular concern.

The group focused on the need to identify what we can actually “do” as a faith group. The work of gathering local intelligence and case studies and feeding these through to other organisations, as discussed previously, will be important. Also, it would be helpful to develop working relationships with local councils.

Our previous project on developing the database of church activities to feed into social prescribers could also usefully be updated.

Jane Skinner felt a strategic way to connect rural issues across the diocese, PEMD and other denominations would be helpful, particularly in responding to county wide consultations.

Communications

Though there was not a group meeting for this subject, it was agreed that we do need to consider this subject at a future DCRF meeting.

John Wibberley highlighted the existence of the Village Link magazine published by Village Hope and you can access back copies via the link below
<https://villagehope.uk/village-link/>

Actions:

All groups will reconvene in the near future to work further on an action plan for the

next year.

Penny will do a “GDPR” check with all members regarding circulating email addresses to facilitate arranging meetings and sharing information.

7 **Farming**

You can find the Farming Update prepared for this meeting [here](#)

Danny proposed our next farm visit to be to Stuart Luxton’s beef farm and farm shop near Okehampton. This would give people an insight into a successful farm diversification, via the farm shop, and how such a business runs, as well as hearing about issues of the day and learning more about the livestock side of the farm.

We agreed a date of July 4th for this visit which will begin with lunch in the farm café. Penny will send around details to the DCRF membership list.

8 **Rural Crime Update**

Martin Beck was unable to come today but is very willing to support all our groups and is particularly interested in the farming group because of the issues of agricultural crime. If anyone has any issues relating to rural crime, then they are invited either to contact Martin direct or send via Penny who will pass any queries on.

9 **Feedback from meetings attended**

Douglas reported that the General Synod Rural Affairs Group has been dissolved, but the Rural Interest Group will be meeting shortly for the first time. This will have a focus on trying to rural proof legislation and keep “rural” at the heart of the agenda. Douglas will be taking issues that arise in DCRF forward to the new rural group.

9 **Notices and Events**

Howard has available some spaces on a Mental Health First Aid course that he would be able to open to DCRF members at a much discounted cost of £50. Dates are available in March, April, May and June. Details are as follows:

*Would you like to train as a Mental Health First Aider? This is a vital skill to support people in our churches and local communities during these challenging times. At present this is primarily an online course - with **four sessions** plus a need to complete self learning at home for which materials will be provided. You **must** attend all sessions to qualify.*

Maximum **16** per course.

Cost is **£50 per person** (payable with booking and non-refundable) - this is being heavily subsidised for Methodists from the £300 per person fee usually charged by MHFA England.

Course A - 15,17, 22,24 March 09:30-12:00 book [here](#)

Course B - 29,31 March, 5,7 April 12:30-15:00 book [here](#)

Course C - 26,28 April, 3,5 May 12:30-15:00 book [here](#)

Course D - 21,23,28,30 June 09:30-12:00 book [here](#)

Please note: Having booked via Eventbrite you **must** then use the link on the booking email to register your place on the MHFA website to receive your materials. Or please contact Howard wilson.howard@methodistchurch.org.uk

David Curry has been running Wild Church for many years. The new Plymouth Wild Church will meet for the first time on Sunday 6th February at St Budeaux Church, 2 pm, celebrating Candlemas and St Brigid. Helping to connect people to each other, to nature and to God.

10 **AOB**

Lydia is putting together a new diocesan group on Social Justice and the Environment. Penny will circulate details.

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

July 28th, November 29th. Times and venues to be confirmed.

12 **Closing Prayer led by Verena**

First Meeting of the DCRF Steering Group

Present: Verena Breed, Howard Wilson, Penny Body, David Curry, Jane Hayes, Danny Semorad

Discussion on the Purpose of the Steering Group

The Steering Group to be able to look at the overall work of the Forum and pick up actions from the main group meeting. Members of the Steering Group are part of a whole and also all have a particular interest and so would be able to pick up particular pieces of work with their task groups and report back into the main meeting.

The work streams are shaped by the expertise and interests of the membership at a given time. We do not specifically try to recruit members for work streams, but work on the interests of the groups at any one time. This means that over time the priorities and work streams are likely to change and that at times some work streams will not be worked on. In this way it is hoped we will not try and do too much with our very limited resources. Jane also commented that some of the work stream areas are so wide that we need very much to focus on what we can do, rather than trying to everything. Clear priorities and action plans will enable us to make a difference.

Verena will have a discussion with the diocesan Communications group to see what help may be available. She will need to have a clear idea of what we are asking for. Penny will work on this.

Themes for the future meeting

We should not do farming for July because this is a very busy time for farming. November would be a better time for this and some issues will be clearer.

Jane suggested that looking at worship and outdoor worship in particular in the summer – perhaps with some ideas for our harvest worship etc. Verena asked if David could provide some input on outdoor church, reconnecting with nature so on.

Verena also suggested we picked up the “Calendar of Rural Worship” as discussed in the main meeting, and to see whether we could share some templates for different rural services.

David also mentioned we have 24 dioceses with a coastal boundary – and Jane added that we need to incorporate fishing – and also beach church - as well as farming and also the tourism industry.

For July we agreed a focus on Worship – to ask people to contribute resources, ask people what their needs are, look at wild church and possibly ask someone to give some input on rural spirituality, and to produce at least a draft of the Calendar of Rural Worship. The rural worship task group will arrange a meeting and agree a programme for the July meeting. It would also be helpful to have a short act of worship at the beginning instead of an opening prayer.

As well as the main theme, we would aim to have a short written update for each work stream group to send around before the meeting so we can keep up with all the areas, even if that subject is not on a particular agenda.

In summary:

- July 2022 – Rural Worship and Spirituality
- November 2022 – Focus on Farming
- February 2023 – Rural Social Issues – perhaps Housing, rural crime, domestic abuse, mental health ...
- July 2023 – Tourism, Beach worship?

Next Meeting

We agreed to have another Steering Group before the July meeting for further planning. This will be 31st May at 2 pm by zoom.

Appendix - Notes from Breakout Groups

Worship and Spirituality – Notes from Ruth Frampton

Priorities

- Collecting & sharing resources – books, case studies, stories
- Communication of collected resources to wider audience – diocese and national church
 - Roots & Shoots
 - GtRC
- Complete the Calendar of Rural Worship begun in 2019 – RF to lead
- Quiet Day – Danny has volunteered his farm – central position with facilities and church
 - David & Jane to lead?
 - Date?
 - Theme?
 - Some form of outdoor worship – Wild/Forest/Muddy Church
- Penny to represent us on steering group

Farming Group – Notes from Marisa Cockfield

We touched on the following, recorded as bullet points:

- Food security - encourage eat local. Currently 64%
- FCN - succession planning a key issue - and one of the most complex and difficult
- Subsidies are being replaced with rewards: eg SFI. Participation encouraged
- Farmers and livestock: they combine expertise with compassion, but their stories are not often told effectively at national level in the vegan/CO2 debate.
- We need to pray into God's love for cattle
- Exmoor Ambition - hill farming network are conducting a survey into 'natural capital'
- Head Waters of the Exe steering group are mobilising improved farm management of headwaters land.
- Christian integration - stewardship, accountability, repentance...
- Food Waste - schemes to reduce, including 'what to do with leftovers', etc. Could we combine with a national chef??
- This is a critical time for change in the farming community - but not all farmers are on board
- Wide environmental/worldwide projects - including on cattle, soil sampling, etc
- Building a global platform on sustainable ruminant management
- Young farmers should be included in presentation and planning - they have the largest stake in the future.
- Farmers 'just need a good listening to...'

Ministry Training Opportunities – notes from Howard Wilson

Ministry Training Opportunities – Proposed Members: Ruth Frampton, Howard Wilson*, Jane Frost, Elizabeth Burke*, Stuart Wilson* (from a farming perspective), Richard Yarwood, Janet May

Present for Discussion: Janet May, Howard Wilson, Stuart Wilson.

Ministry Training Opportunities – Using the resources of the DCRF to

- enthuse ordinands and others about rural ministry
- preparation of a DVD featuring people from different walks of rural life and ministry talking about rural life and ministry
- an event where ordinands and others can come together to meet people from the DCRF and wider rural life
- working up a CME day in conjunction with Diocese/PEMD on aspects of rural ministry – perhaps connecting with theological reflection
- church responses to rural social issues
- organising rural placements with a difference to incorporate learning about rural life in as much breadth as possible ...

Need to push benefits of curacy/placement in rural settings - communication with Theological Courses.

Lay and ordained understanding of rural life.

Importance of ecumenism in approach.

Farm visits - chances to *listen* to farmers' experience of rural life and their work (link in with poss event on 4 July (Danny Semorad)

Contacts: SWMTC (Venerable Mark Butchers - Principal) John Fisher (Diocesan Director of Ordinands) Phillip Sourbutt (Diocesan Training Officer) Links to Queens (Barbara Glasson/Clive Marsh), Sarah Hulme (Methodist Rural Officer) - working on promoting rural with Queens etc...

Rural Colleges.

Actions

- Make contacts with various colleges
 - Invite Mark Butchers... (Stuart)
 - Invite Sarah Hulme... (Howard - Mention link with Stuart - talk about project with Queens)
 - Invite Phillip Sourbutt (Janet - see if interested in offering some training)
- Andy Jerrard to be approached about work in Holsworthy (Stuart)
- Howard to liaise with Penny to send GooglePoll for a next meeting soon as... **Ideally a Tuesday**

Rural/Environmental Issues Task Group. Initial discussion – notes from Jane Hayes

- Discussion began with housing. Both Dave and Nora are members of DALC (Devon Association of Local Councils) which has input into affordable housing issues.
- Discussion around identifying need and the way housing is structured, taking into consideration provision for local families and the balance required as to not exclude those who wanted to move to the area bringing new skills/diversity.

- Discussion around the need to ensure affordable housing quotas are adhered to in new developments.
- Discussion around inadequate rural transport and its knock-on affect on isolation and poor mental health and inaccessibility for jobs if one cannot drive/afford to run a car. How this affects the youth reliant on parental taxi service.

As this is a vast and interconnected area for discussion, we acknowledged that it's easy to get 'bogged down or side-tracked'. There is a need for the working group to drill down and identify areas in which we can actually have an impact.

1. Housing: How can the worshipping community help re available land. 2 strands of enquiry: Anglican – does the church have land stock available for development (Glebe land?) Methodist – redundant chapels, can these be put to use for conversion/selling/rebuilding for affordable housing/social housing?
2. Collecting 'intelligence'. Look at the report on Rural Health & Care. This will be available shortly from the government. How will this directly affect this area? What are the inequalities at local level that need to be addressed? Can we make/ build on our links with Parish Councils or establish links where there are none? Get questions out there about local need.
3. Transport. Investigate what's already available in local areas for transport/community transport. Look into the government funding available.

Because of such interconnectedness between the problems affecting rural communities, it would be desirable to take a holistic approach – faith communities bringing together the issues for raising awareness. It's always good to aim high, but for a working approach the first steps need to be fact finding (identifying need and what is already available) and then smaller areas to work on in 'bite-size', manageable tasks, supported by prayer.

Time constraint did not allow discussion on environmental issues.