

## **Enabling Mission and Growth in Rural Churches: a guide for PCCs and congregations**

*The resource is intended to be used by congregations, PCCs, benefice councils, clergy and deaneries. Each section should provide enough information to stimulate discussion in a prayer group, church council, and mission or ministry team. It will enable participants to:*

- *be more informed on a topic*
- *locate where further information, resources or support can be found*
- *reflect prayerfully on what God may already be doing*
- *prompt action.*

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## Introduction

*Released for Mission: growing the rural church*, received to great acclaim by General Synod, was the first publication for a generation to make an accurate assessment of the state of the rural Church of England. It made important recommendations to support the church's mission and growth. That and subsequent research has indicated that the narrative of the rural church is far from one of decline and failure, but one offering signs of new life and hope for the future.

This publication aims to provide information, ideas, reflection and resources to be used by lay and ordained together in parishes, benefices and deaneries to help you think about what mission looks like in your own situation and to put your ideas into practice.

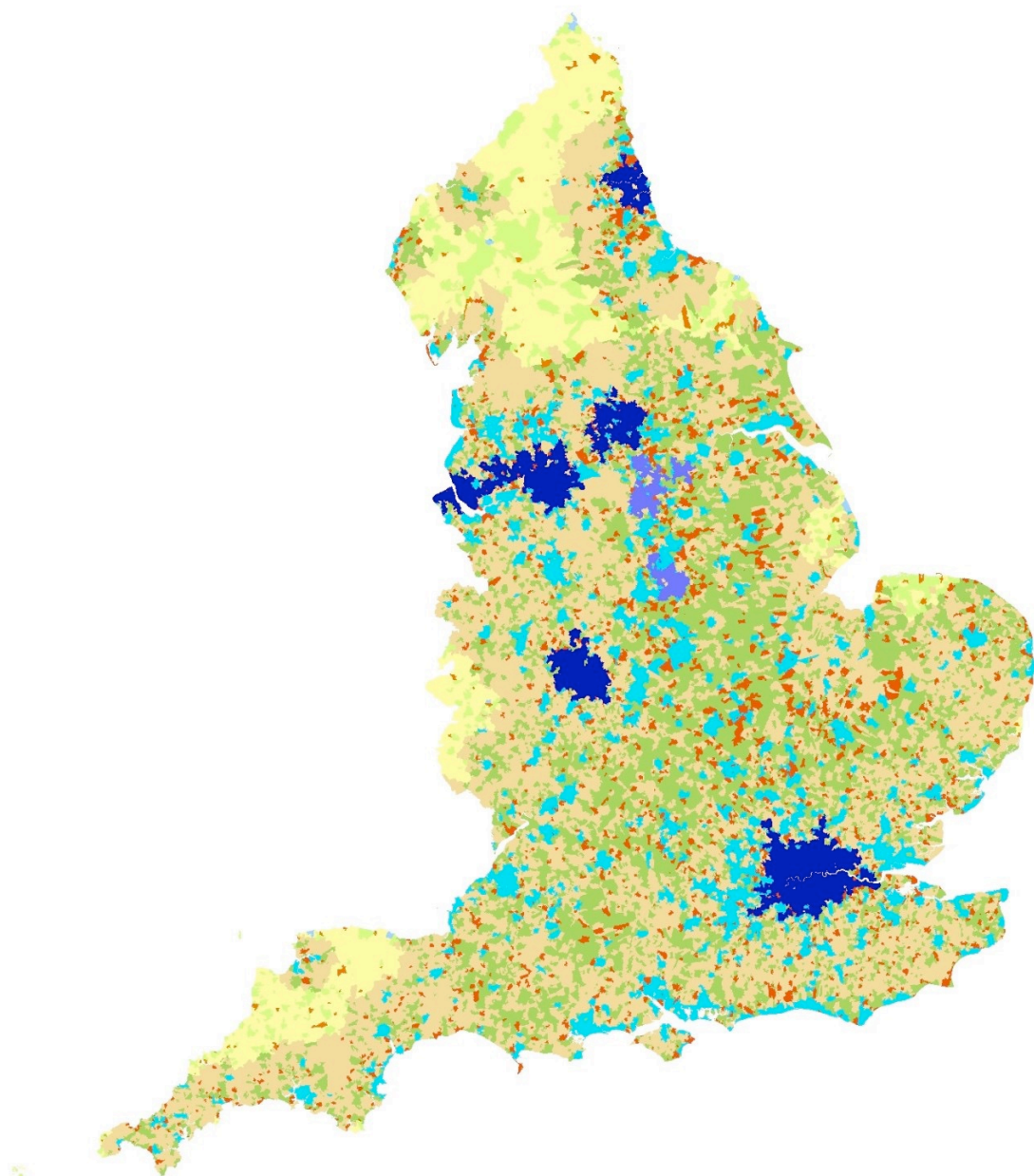
### *What is rural?*

There are many different ways of defining and understanding the English countryside, which is very diverse with many different types of community. Rural England encompasses very small, remote communities, much larger commuter based settlements close to larger towns and cities, coastal communities which are different again, ex-industrial communities and much in between. Hence it is better to talk about rural contexts than context. The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) uses a classification that defines a place as rural if it has a population of 10,000 people or fewer.<sup>1</sup> Rural areas are then further categorised based on population density. *Less sparse* areas are more accessible rural communities largely around major conurbations and this definition covers the vast majority of rural England. *Sparse* rural areas are found mainly in parts of Cumbria, Northumberland and Yorkshire, areas around the Wash in Lincolnshire and North Norfolk, parts of the north coast of the south-west and Herefordshire. These two different areas are then further subdivided into three classifications: towns and fringe communities; villages; hamlets and isolated dwellings.

Map of rural and urban England (from *Defining Rural Areas* March 2017, Defra).

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2017) *Defining Rural Areas*, p. 1  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/defining-rural-areas>



### Rural / Urban classification 2011

	Rural hamlet & isolated dwelling
	Rural hamlet & isolated dwelling in a sparse setting
	Rural village
	Rural village in a sparse setting
	Rural town & fringe
	Rural town & fringe in a sparse setting
	Urban city & town
	Urban city & town in a sparse setting
	Urban minor conurbation
	Urban major conurbation

### *Rural Churches*

Based on this definition, 10,199 churches (65% of the total) and 8394 (66% of parishes), , are in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Rural areas have six to seven times more church buildings per head of population than urban and suburban areas and so have on average much smaller congregations but church attendance per capita is around twice as high in rural areas.<sup>3</sup> 40% of total average weekly attendance is in rural parishes.<sup>4</sup> 75% of rural churches have attendance of fewer than 37 people, half fewer than 19, and a quarter fewer than 10.<sup>5</sup> These comparatively small numbers may, however, represent a significant proportion of the population of the community. Expressing numerical attendance at services, fresh expressions of church, events and other activities as a percentage of total population, or the number of young people, families with children, older people etc., can help change perceptions of the health and value of the rural church.

### *Healthy Churches*

Though there are challenges in rural areas, there are also opportunities to flourish. This flourishing will come through deep engagement with the local community, in service, depth of faith and making new disciples. Growth is unlikely to come through a sole focus on Sunday worship, but through developing new activities and events that reach out to and engage with those who are not currently involved in the church. To do this effectively we need to work in partnership with lay and ordained together, with other churches in the benefice or deanery, and ecumenically wherever possible.

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<sup>2</sup> Archbishops' Council (2015) *Released for Mission: growing the rural church*, p. 7

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2148423/gs%20misc%201092%20-%20rural%20multi%20parish%20benefices.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Archbishops' Council (2015) *Report of the Church Buildings Review Group*, p. 6

[https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2383717/church\\_buildings\\_review\\_report\\_2015.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2383717/church_buildings_review_report_2015.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Released for Mission: growing the rural church*, p. 9

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Church Buildings Review Group*, p. 7

The church in our generation is being called afresh to evangelization, a word that is used ‘to describe the entire calling and nature of the Church.’<sup>6</sup> Bishop David Jenkins once wrote, ‘Our tireless concern should be to make the reality of God and therefore the offer of hope accessible to anyone and everyone.’<sup>7</sup>

Alongside that affirmation it is perhaps helpful to affirm the local, social, ecumenical and human character of evangelization, and to remember that “the Gospel does not flourish in contexts of prosperity.”<sup>8</sup> Very many of our contemporaries do not know any need of God. Their lives are filled with stuff. It is good to remember that Jesus expressed his own sense of vocation in a quotation from Isaiah, often called the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:18-19): “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” The Beatitudes begin with “Blessed are the poor” (Luke’s Gospel); “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew’s Gospel). Poverty takes many forms: material, which is present in our own society (witness the proliferation of food banks); social (isolation is an issue even in rural communities); personal (for example, through the loss of loved ones) and spiritual (there are those searching for meaning, for something *more* than all the stuff). The church has a ministry – a service to offer – in all these areas of poverty, through its daily life and work.

The information, ideas and reflections are presented in alphabetical order to make it easy to find things, though not every letter is covered and some items are grouped. Each section has some explanatory text with a list of resources, ideas or further reading to get more information.

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<sup>6</sup> Paula Gooder (2015) *The Joy of the Gospel: a six session study course in sharing faith*, Church House Publishing, p. 50

<sup>7</sup> James Bell (2016) ‘Sermon: the Funeral of Bishop David Jenkins’, taken from the conclusion of *Evangelisation and Culture*, by David Jenkins for the 1988 Lambeth Conference <https://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/worshipandmusic/sermon-archive/the-funeral-of-bishop-david-jenkins>

<sup>8</sup> An observation by Professor Kenneth Boyd in the course of a conversation about mission.

## **Administration**

According to St. Paul, administration is a gift of the Spirit; it can also feel like a significant burden which falls on ordained and lay alike. A deanery in Carlisle Diocese has recently appointed an Office Manager to manage the process for the many marriages in the area, both local and those brought in by the presence of popular wedding venues. Her role is already expanding to reduce the burdens of administration for funerals, baptisms, service rotas and minutes of meetings. Every parish and multi-church group should ideally have access to an administrator who can deal with some of the many forms, notices, applications and other tasks that clergy, churchwardens and others carry out currently. A skilled administrator is likely to be able to carry out these tasks much more effectively, particularly as they gain experience and knowledge. An administrator could be employed to cover a single parish, a whole multi-church group, several multi-church groups or a deanery. It is possible to construct a full-time post by different multi-church groups working together to offer employment. The post-holder can be employed through a legal body such as a PCC or by the diocese. You may find that other denominations working in a similar area are also interested in employing an administrator. The Parish Resources website has some useful advice on recruitment and employment particulars.<sup>9</sup>

Experience indicates that administrator posts work best when they are integrated into the ministry team working across the parish or multi-church group. Even where posts are for only a few hours a week, the administrator is a key post for mission and growth and benefits from knowing and understanding what is happening and any wider strategy. Not all administrators are used effectively, and it is essential that job descriptions are in place, key tasks are understood, and expectations are clear of both the administrator and the line manager, who is most likely to be the incumbent.

Tasks that could be carried out by an administrator include: weekly notice sheets, monthly magazines, keeping a website up-to-date, managing arrangements for occasional offices,

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/people/employing-staff/>

keeping registers up-to-date, dealing with enquiries, organising events and activities, assisting with faculty applications and helping to manage open churchyards.

Good administration also includes good management of finances, so that accounts are kept up to date and monies available for new initiatives or expected shortfalls in income are handled wisely. The Parish Resources website provides a wide range of advice and support to help with recording income and expenditure, dealing with gift aid and reporting.<sup>10</sup> One approach might be to consider employing a bookkeeper or other skilled person who can keep the accounts and act as treasurer for a whole multi-church group or deanery, with appropriate oversight by PCCs or benefice council or equivalent. Whilst this will incur additional costs it might well end up saving time and money and assist smaller parishes where it may be difficult to recruit a treasurer.

### *Resources*

The Parish Resources website has a wide range of materials, guidance notes and sources of further support on a wide range of issues from administration and employment of staff, to GDPR, Gift Aid and parish finances. Find out more at: <https://www.parishresources.org.uk/>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/resources-for-treasurers/>



## **Benefice (Multi-church)**

The multi-church group is now the standard method of pastoral organisation for rural England. Whilst there have in reality been few periods in history when clergy numbers have been sufficient for a priest for every church, multi-church groups have been increasing in number over the last five to six decades as a response to the significant reduction in numbers of stipendiary clergy and a desire to retain a church in every community. Whatever happens in the future clergy will have a vital role in the life of the rural church, but their purpose will be re-imagined to primarily to facilitate worship, mission and growth in the communities they cover. Has your parish, benefice or team (multi-church group), or deanery taken time out to think about the future for the churches and what it might be like? This should be a priority if it has not happened for a while or even at all.

### *Growth in multi-church groups*

There is a good deal of talk about church growth and it may be helpful to reflect on that in the context of multi-church groups. Recent research has confirmed that it is possible for churches in multi-church groups to grow, irrespective of the number of churches.<sup>11</sup> Mission and ministry in multi-church groups can have a great many joys and opportunities, but there is also complexity and multiplication that is stressful for ordained and lay alike. There may also be an assumption that no matter how many churches in the group, the priest or priests will be able to do pretty much everything themselves. In some places a dangerous collusion ensues between priest and people, damaging for all, particularly when activity is then cut back so that the priest can still do it all. Mission and growth are threatened as a result. Multi-church groups, benefices or teams, have the potential to see each church within them thrive when there is a focus on the development of the ministry of lay people and a willingness for each church to work with others in the group, seeing each other's gifts and charisms as complementary.

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<sup>11</sup> Tweedie, Fiona (2016) *Going Deeper: church attendance statistics and clergy deployment*, p. 12 , [http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/going\\_deeper](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/going_deeper)

### *Working with others*

Not every church finds it easy to work with other churches. A fear of change or threat of closure may be part of a reluctance to participate in the benefice. Bringing disparate groups of churches together may often take several years, but can start with shared services, social events, collective quiet days and prayer for each other. Engaging all the members of the congregations in a conversation and in prayer about the challenges and their aspirations for the development of worship and mission in the multi-church group is essential. This enables people to have a sense of participation and therefore responsibility for the life and witness of the church in the parish and the multi-church groups. Themed working groups may be helpful as may be encouraging particular churches to play to their strengths. However, there may well remain a tension between the parish and the benefice. The local church congregation is often the best place to create and extend relationships with the wider community, to start new activities and events and to provide pastoral care. Yet a larger multi-church group, will often create the space to generate a critical mass of volunteers and potential participants for activities, events or training. In many situations congregations will remain separate, but creating a sense of common purpose and shared endeavour across the multi-church group, through mission or growth action planning can assist greatly in enabling joint vision and working.

At the time of writing the Church Representation Rules are in the process of being revised and simplified to allow the creation of bodies such as a benefice council without having to retain parochial church councils as well. This will prevent the need for large-scale pastoral reorganisation, whilst this method of working is explored. This approach will also help support smaller congregations struggling to recruit two churchwardens, a treasurer or PCC secretary.

### *Resources*

The most up to date information on the Church Representation Rules can be found via <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/church-representation-rules>  
*Managing Change: Practical Tools for Good Change in Churches* by Alison Myers, Grove Books L 26, <https://grovebooks.co.uk/collections/leadership/products/l-26-managing-change-practical-tools-for-good-change-in-churches>

*The Power of Story to Change a Church* by Vaughn S Roberts, Grove Books L 29,  
<https://grovebooks.co.uk/collections/leadership/products/l-29-the-power-of-story-to-change-a-church>

*Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations* by Patrick Keifert and Nigel Rooms, Grove Books P 139, <https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/p-139-forming-the-missional-church-creating-deep-cultural-change-in-congregations>

## Being the Body of Christ

With the challenges we face, the powerful New Testament image of the church as the body of Christ is vital for the future, not least because it affirms that the whole people of God need to take responsibility for the ministry and mission of the church. We all give thanks for the service of all those who contribute to sustaining the welcome, worship and witness of the parish church: Churchwardens, Treasurers, Secretaries, Administrators, Musicians, leaders of children's activities, to name a few. This needs to grow so that all take responsibility for being the church in that place. This must, of course, include the young. Just one possible way of doing this is suggested by the story of the Churchwarden who introduced a young person being prepared for Confirmation: "Bishop, this is Guy; he is the deputy churchwarden." It is also now possible for young people to have permission to administer communion.<sup>12</sup> Giving roles to the young affirms their value in the life of the church. Perhaps an important part of Confirmation preparation should be identifying the gifts that people have and how they are to play their part in the life of the church?

### *Look again at the New Testament model*

Rural churches need to claim the model of the body of Christ in their worshipping life and practice in a very intentional way. The New Testament passages of 1 Corinthians 12–13; Ephesians 3.14–4.16; Romans 12.4–13 speak of church as the body of Christ. Paul asserts: 'We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us' (Romans 12.6). In 1 Corinthians 12.7 he states that 'in each there is a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.' In Ephesians 4.7, he says 'each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.' Individual churches and multi-church groups need to take time and prayer to discover and act on the communal calling to be the body of Christ in that place, welcoming everyone to take part, to discern and offer their gifts and skills. "God has given us all that we need,"<sup>13</sup> says Sam Wells: discovering that to be true and recovering that confidence is crucial. The mission of God's church in rural communities is a corporate undertaking requiring the whole

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<sup>12</sup> The Liturgical Commission, *Guidance on Celebrating the Eucharist with Children* <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion//additional-eucharistic-prayers/guidance-on-celebrating-the-eucharist-with-children>

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Wells (2006) *God's Companions*, Blackwell Publishing, p. 1 and throughout

congregation to be involved. Robin Greenwood's recent book, *Sharing God's Blessing: How to Renew the Local Church* offers a great approach to enable that.<sup>14</sup>

### *Practising the model*

Archbishop Justin Welby said recently: 'Any church that leaves things to the 'professionals' is committing missionary suicide... The responsibility of demonstrating in word and works the love of Jesus Christ, in a way that is deeply attractive is the responsibility of every single Christian. Always. Everywhere.'<sup>15</sup> He went on to say: 'What draws people in, above all, is community. It's the fact that they belong. They discover they belong, they're part of the family of Christ, they're children of God. They are loved by others, they are accepted, they're welcomed.'

Seeking to realize all this has major implications for the role of those who are ordained. That role needs to be about enabling the body to grow in each place and exercising oversight so that it functions well. That means discerning and releasing the gifts given in the body, giving authority according to gifting and encouraging collaboration and valuing all contributions to life and work of the church in those places. This will be helped by working creatively within and between multi-church groups, in fellowship with other Christian traditions and in partnership with community organisations.

### *The character of the body*

All three of the body of Christ passages referred to above speak of love as the defining character of the Christian community. It follows that the role of enabling the body to function in each place also means ensuring that the community has owned love (agape) as its principal value/virtue and has identified how that works out in practice and is prepared to hold itself accountable for its practice. Our church schools offer great examples at identifying the values that make for a Christian ethos and helping the children to see how these work out! We all know that there are too many examples of a want of love in our churches. This could be helped by working on shared values. You could call this corporate discipleship: it is

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<sup>14</sup> Robin Greenwood (2016) *Sharing God's Blessing: How to Renew the Local Church*, SPCK

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Justin-Welby-Leaving-evangelism-to-professionals-is-missionary-suicide>

about how we are together, about relationships, as much as it is our personal walk with God. The New Testament puts far more emphasis on the corporate than on the personal – though, of course, the personal is inevitably shaped by the corporate.

#### *Resources*

*Sharing God's Blessing: How to Renew the Local Church*, by Robin Greenwood (2016, SPCK)

*Participation: Paul's Vision of Life in Christ*, by Michael Gorman, Grove Books B 88,

<https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/b-88-participation-paul-s-vision-of-life-in-christ>

*Waiting on God: Seeking God's Calling Together in Small Groups*, by Brian Bridge, Grove

Books, S 126 [https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/s-126-waiting-on-god-seeking-god-s-](https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/s-126-waiting-on-god-seeking-god-s-calling-together-in-small-groups)

[calling-together-in-small-groups](https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/s-126-waiting-on-god-seeking-god-s-calling-together-in-small-groups)

## Buildings

There are over 3200 Grade I listed and more than 3100 Grade II\* listed churches in rural England, over 60% of the total number.<sup>16</sup> Three quarters of all Grade I listed church buildings are in rural areas. A further 1900 are Grade II listed, meaning that most rural congregations are responsible for the maintenance, repair and creative use of a listed historic building.

The church building can be both a blessing and a burden. As a blessing, it can speak of God to those in the wider community as well as visitors from elsewhere. As a burden it can become the sole focus of a congregation.

The prevailing narrative regarding church buildings is these days couched in largely negative terms. People speak of energy being given to maintenance rather than mission, for example. Buildings can however, serve mission especially when our communities feel at home in their church buildings, whether it is for public worship, private prayer or community action.

Wherever possible, a church building should be open during the day, allowing members of the local community, passers-by or tourists to come into the building.<sup>17</sup> 'Welcome to your church,' rather than 'welcome to our church' is an important message to communicate. Research has shown that people often come into a church building for silence, space to reflect and pray and to find a sense of peace. Is your church open every day? Is it clearly a place of prayer, for example with simple resources and an invitation for visitors to offer prayer? Are there materials which say something about the Christian faith and how to find out more? Is there a kettle with coffee and tea and milk with an invitation to help yourself?

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<sup>16</sup> Figures from the Church Buildings Review (2015)

[https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2383717/church\\_buildings\\_review\\_report\\_2015.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2383717/church_buildings_review_report_2015.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiastical Insurance provides guidance on how to do this safely

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/churchmatters/churchguidance/churchsecurity/keeping-your-church-open/index.aspx>

See also *Open Welcome* from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre,

<http://germinate.net/mission/open-welcome/> and Open and Sustainable Churches from ChurchCare <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/open-sustainable>

‘Many outside the church view our buildings, often the oldest and most prominent in the area, as powerful symbols of stability. The building is seen as a key part of community stories and traditions, and is providing a sense of the spiritual,’<sup>18</sup> in that place. Many of our church buildings are under-utilised, particularly by the wider community, and they have an important role to play in mission. Extended use of a church building, for example to host a post office, community shop, café, meeting space, farmers market, library or children’s groups, will enable the church to continue to remain open as a place for regular public worship. This welcome and hospitality to the needs of others is particularly important where the church building is the last remaining open public building in that place.

Some projects and plans will involve minimal changes to the building, others will involve major adaptation and large-scale building work; both however, need to be done in partnership with the local community, in order to serve the needs of the people who will actually use the building and the service it is providing. There are lots of resources available to help you explore how your building can be reordered for community use.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Resources*

Church of England Churchcare website [www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)

Crossing the Threshold Toolkit

<https://www.hereford.anglican.org/Crossingthethresholdtoolkit>

Guidance on managing risk for the church building and congregation

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/churchmatters/churchguidance/index.aspx>

Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/>

*Open Welcome* from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre, <http://germinate.net/mission/open-welcome/>

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<sup>18</sup> Becky Payne (2015) ‘Church buildings: serving the community and ministry to visitors’, in *Resourcing Rural Ministry: practical insights for mission*, ed. by Jill Hopkinson (BRF), p. 179

<sup>19</sup> See [www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk); The Crossing the Threshold Toolkit, <https://www.hereford.anglican.org/Crossingthethresholdtoolkit/>; [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk); [www.nationalchurchestrust.org](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org)



Rural Church Buildings A comprehensive information hub covers every aspect of rural places of worship, including information for listed places of worship; how to look after your church; advice on building issues, such as maintenance and metal theft, funding, opening to visitors and energy efficiency. <http://germinate.net/church-life/rural-church-buildings/>

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings – Maintenance Co-operatives Project  
<https://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/maintenance-co-operatives-project>

## Calling

What are we called to be and do at this time, in this place? This is an important question for each church to ask. To give priority to the calling of God is vital, rather than to what could be characterised as the demands of consumers. Growth in faithfulness is prior to growth in numbers, so discerning God's calling must come first. The priority given to it should, for example, be reflected by its prominence on the agenda of the PCC. Alongside prayer, one way of discerning God's call on your church or churches is to address questions like:

- Is there a passage of Scripture which may speak into our calling? Pray for one and then work with it for a good period of time so that it shapes the thinking and planning of the church.
- What gifts, skills, experience and expertise are available to us in the church and the wider community?
- What are the opportunities for service in the parish(es)?
- What is the special thing (charism) of our church(es)?
- What is it that would make people want to join us/be part of what we are about?
- What do we want to be known for?

In addressing such questions as a way into discerning God's call, it is always good to affirm the Church of England's call to be the church for the parish. No matter how small a church is in numbers, it needs to think of itself as reaching out into the community in prayer, in love and therefore in action for others, in care and celebration for all that promotes human flourishing. We also need to recognise that, whilst the gathering of the Eucharistic community is vital, church is also taking place in the school, the house group, the fresh expression. All of these different approaches represent the calling to be church for and in the community, and all must be part of our praying, thinking and planning.

## Resources

*Equipping for Rural Mission* a toolkit to help you engage with and listen to your community and plan for mission, from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre

<http://germinate.net/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/>

*Sharing God's Blessing: How to Renew the Local Church*, by Robin Greenwood (2016, SPCK)

## Children

*Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'<sup>20</sup>*

Rural areas often have similar proportions of resident children (under the age of 16) as urban areas, but the actual numbers are obviously much smaller. Rural places that have a school can have a large number of families with children living there. However, some rural settlements may have very small numbers of children, particularly where house prices are high, there are no community facilities such as a shop or there is no school. Providing regular activities and events for children can be difficult, but working with others particularly ecumenically within a community, across a benefice or a deanery, or catchment areas for local primary or secondary schools, may well enable a critical mass of volunteers and potential participants to be recruited.

Ministry with children in the Church can take many forms. Historically, this usually meant Sunday School at the same time as morning worship in the parish church, but this is rarer now, and may not be the most effective way of enabling children and families to encounter the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ. There are lots of different ways of supporting and engaging children and young families. Here are just a few:

- all-age Worship
- mid-week groups based in schools, churches or another venue
- carer and toddler activities / services
- Messy Church
- Who Let the Dads Out
- Godly Play
- holiday clubs and fun days
- praise parties
- quiet days
- early years groups

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<sup>20</sup> Mark 9.36-37

- Open the Book
- creative prayer / Prayer Spaces in Schools

Different approaches will suit different groups of children and families, and meeting with and listening to the interests and needs of the children and their carers will be very helpful in deciding which is the most appropriate sort of activity or event. For example, some benefices offer regular all age worship on a weekly or monthly basis. This really must be child friendly, with a very strong element of hospitality and welcome so that families feel comfortable in participating in the service. Other parishes offer seasonal activity times or fun days, usually associated with Christmas, Easter or summer holidays. This may often be a suitable way of making contact with families and be the start of more regular engagement.

Another approach is to offer something for carers and toddlers either just after the morning school run or just before collection from school in the afternoon. One rural church started offering 'tea and toast' to the mums talking at the school gate and over a couple of years this has grown into a group where faith is explored and worship takes place. One rural benefice offers a monthly Messy Church on a Wednesday after school, in the village hall adjacent to the primary school that serves most of the villages in the benefice. It is also near the bus stop where the older children are dropped off. The location and timing makes it easier for families to participate. The Messy Church is run by older people, most of whom are in their 70s. Holiday clubs are often complex and time-consuming activities to run, so why not work ecumenically or across part of a deanery to offer a holiday club?

Many parishes have decided to adopt Communion before Confirmation for children or others who may wish to consider this. There are lots of different resources available to help you think carefully about this and to help children and their families understand what they are participating in, operating within the guidelines issued by the House of Bishops.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Resources for Communion before Confirmation

[http://www.going4growth.com/growth in faith and worship/sacraments/holy communion](http://www.going4growth.com/growth%20in%20faith%20and%20worship/sacraments/holy%20communion)  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-worship/planning-worship/children-worship>

Children have as much, if not more, to offer adults than adults have to give to them. A childlike exploration of faith and encounter with Jesus Christ can offer refreshing and enlightening perspectives for everyone. Children that are included in the life of the church, are encouraged to take responsibility and whose participation is valued are much more likely to want to explore faith more deeply and continue to be involved in church as they grow up.

The church building also needs to be welcoming for the children who come either regularly or only occasionally to a church service. Having an area in the church that is comfortable, with carpeting, and child-sized table and chairs, with toys, books and activities that can be easily completed, is a good start. However, beware the 'dead teddy corner' that suggests neglect and a lack of care. The Spiritual Child Network has lots of useful ideas. If the church is too small or space can't be created for a children's area, then it is straightforward to create story/play bags for a range of ages, that contain books playthings and things to do that can be given out and used in the pew.

### *Resources*

You can find out much more information, explore links to other organisations and access seasonal resources via [www.going4growth.com](http://www.going4growth.com) The Church of England's resource for working with children and young people

Barnabas in Churches from the Bible Reading Fellowship [www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk](http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk)

Godly Play [www.godlyplay.uk](http://www.godlyplay.uk)

Messy Church [www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)

Open the Book <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book>

Prayer Spaces in Schools [www.prayerspacesinschools.com](http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com)

Spiritual Child Network [www.spiritualchild.co.uk](http://www.spiritualchild.co.uk)

Worshipping with Children <http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk>

*Rooted in the Church* offers a snapshot of what has helped the seeds of faith take root and grow in young people within the Church of England. It also signposts how congregations can make churches a more fertile place for the growth and flourishing of young Christians.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Rooted%20in%20the%20Church%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

## Clergy

If you ask people about the role or roles of clergy, you will get a pretty awesome list, focusing on their liturgical, pastoral, administrative and public representative functions. All of these are important, but perhaps in these times, most importantly clergy are leaders for mission and growth. In rural multi-church groups clergy will work in partnership with congregations to provide vision and direction for social action, outreach and making new disciples, often working to an agreed Mission Action Plan.

In *Making God Possible*, Alan Billings<sup>22</sup> reflects on how the world has changed and how this has impacted on the roles of the clergy. His conclusion is that: 'we need to work at what the new priorities for ordained ministry need to be for the contemporary situation, and that involves us first of all taking stock of where we are and whence we have come.' He refers to work by other writers including Frank Wright who asks 'what are clergy for' and comments that:

'if the question has not been asked and answered, ordained ministers find themselves responding indiscriminately to every demand: a ministry of ad hocery. There is no sense of priorities with the result that no task can ever be given up – or rather, if we do refuse some request or fail to take up some initiative, we feel as if we have failed. We add; we cannot take away. The burden becomes intolerable.'

The approach from the Healthy Churches initiative is relevant here: do fewer things and do them better – in other words, the healthy church (like the healthy minister) prioritises.

We do, however, need to face the reality of the numbers of stipendiary clergy available into the future: 40% of stipendiary clergy will retire by 2027. The aspiration to grow vocations by 50% by 2020 will not replace them all. If the aspiration is fulfilled, 25% of available stipendiary clergy will be curates in training. We need to be planning for these realities, and involve all the people of God in the conversation about resourcing the future. Questions such as the following could help that conversation develop:

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<sup>22</sup> *Making God Possible - The Task of Ordained Ministry Present and Future*, Alan Billings, SPCK (2010)

- What is our bigger vision?
- How are we to be a flourishing Christian presence in every community?
- What will the role(s) of the laity look like in 15 years' time and how are we to develop people towards that?
- How are we to understand the role of the ordained and what will this look like in 15 years' time?

Answers to these or similar questions begin to shape the way forward for the rural church.

Clergy are the focus in this section, and responses to the last question which is about re-thinking (or re-imagining) the role(s) of the ordained (particularly stipendiary clergy) might include:

- to exercise oversight for a number of churches
- to provide the ministry of word and sacrament so that each community is formed and nurtured in the life of Christ
- to build leadership teams, praying together, planning together, calling out vocations, discerning gifts, enabling worship which attracts and connects to happen in each community, creating ministry teams to offer pastoral care
- to work well with colleagues, lay and ordained. It has been observed that overcoming the 'lone wolf' model of ministry has been a priority in ministerial training for years – we need to know why it has or hasn't altogether happened so we can do better.

The crucial thing is that, having had the conversation and begun to shape the way of resourcing the future, new models are tried, expectations of congregations and clergy themselves are adjusted. This can be done in the confidence that partnership and collaborative ministry make a significant contribution to growth in rural churches.

### *Resources*

Robin Greenwood, *Sharing God's Blessing: how to renew the local church* (SPCK, 2016)

Sally Nash, Jo Pimlott and Paul Nash, *Skills for Collaborative Ministry* (SPCK, 2008)

Robert Warren, *Developing Healthy Churches* (Church House Publishing, 2012)

## **Communication**

### *How to market your church in the digital age*

In ages past the Church of England and the local parish church was seen as an integral part of the local community, it was a place that did not need to communicate and promote who they were and what they did. We now find ourselves in a secular society and in a culture where the norm is not to regularly attend our local churches, the only time the majority of people attend are for regular parish offices; baptisms, weddings and funerals.

It is important therefore that each parish forms a communication plan that reaches further than their main congregation. One way to do this easily is to make sure that your offline marketing material matches your online offering. Your pew sheet will only reach those who attend each week. To produce your parish magazine or maybe your Christmas service flyer takes effort, money and lots of people to deliver to every house in your parish. You cannot pastorally visit every parishioner, know what is worrying them, keep track of their lives face to face and importantly share the gospel. But digitally you can.

Digital communication should be at the heart of any communication strategy as using the right platform, creating the right timely content will help the mission and growth of your church.

The three main areas that need consideration are: - your main church website, to choose the appropriate social media platforms and social engagement.

### *Main Church Website*

Each church regardless of size, location or demographic needs to have a web presence so that anyone who searches the web for your church can find out about what you have on offer.

The website should act as a brochure to your church showing static information, who you are, where you are, what your traditions are, services you hold, and up to date contact details.

You need to promote your church with the best images of the church both inside and out.



Your church needs to look attractive, appealing and not just as an afterthought. People like to see pictures of people so key members of your church need to be seen in the images used.

Creating a website does not need to be expensive, you can create a simple website using a creation tool such as Wordpress (<https://wordpress.org/>) If you don't feel confident there are digital agencies who can help you set your website up. An example is The "Django Church" creation tool that has been set up by Blanc Digital to enable small and large churches to set up a website easily. They have a variety of set templates that can quickly be adapted for your church and is very cost affective. <http://www.djangochurch.org/> Importantly make sure your website is linked from the main church digital directory - A Church near you - <http://www.achurchnearyou.com/>

### *Social Media Platforms*

A decision needs to be made on which platforms to engage with. You do not need to be on all platforms some will not be appropriate due to the people who use them, for example unless you have a youth worker you would need to steer clear of Snapchat as this is predominately a peer to peer channel for the under 25's. However, the same age group use Instagram (a social sharing site based around pictures) so this is one that you could decide to use.

A Facebook page is a must as most generations will have a profile on this. Some will be actively posting photos, videos, sharing content and communicating by using Facebook's Messenger App.

Twitter is a micro blogging platform it can be very successful and gain extensive audience reach but you would need to ensure that you are going to post a few times a day.

Pinterest is a social site that is about discovery, where users pin pictures of their interests. It is probably not worth considering as a main account but interest groups within your church may find it useful to get inspiration for flower arrangements or maybe crafts for messy church.

Having a website and setting up social accounts is only the start of your digital mission you now need to engage and actively post timely content to them.

### *Social Engagement*

Social media enables you to continue to connect to your congregation and wider community. It can be a great evangelistic tool by reaching people you would not usually be in contact with. It also enables digital fellowship for housebound members of the congregation, for people that you may only see occasionally or if you're part of a rural benefice it's a great way to stay in touch with one another.

Before you can do this you need to build your digital audience, you will need to get all your church members to follow your accounts in an attempt to start an online community. You will need to appoint admins who will be responsible for managing your digital presence.

To drive traffic to your website the URL (website address) needs to be on all your church literature and maybe on your noticeboard outside the church. On your website you need to have social media icons linking to your accounts.

The offline publicity of your church should match your online. For example, if you produce a pew sheet each week this should automatically be put on your website and sign-posted from your social accounts. If you're creating a poster for your Christmas Fair you need to create a digital version too that can be posted on your social accounts and create an event in Facebook.

When a sermon has been particularly helpful, it could be posted on your website or some churches are even using Facebook Live to video and stream their sermons. Social media is a great way to share our faith and message with people who are not necessarily sitting in the church when it is preached. They can watch and listen from the comfort of their own home. Think about creating a closed group on Facebook or What's App group for regular groups that meet in your church. These are a great way of communicating when you can't meet face to face. For example, set one up for your toddler group, you can publicise what craft you are making at this week's session, post useful parenting tips, create a safe place to talk to one

another. You can share inspirational quotes, photos, videos and other web content that make you laugh or are interested in. Set up a closed group for prayers rather than using the traditional telephone prayer chain. The housebound are great prayer warriors!

Content on your social networks need to be topical, relevant and timely. We have a seasonal lectionary and this should provide lots of content: Christmas, Easter, Lent, Advent and Harvest are key times when the church has lots to offer.

If you are using Twitter and Instagram use relevant hashtags # so your content can be found #MotivationMonday #ThrowbackThursday #humpday #FollowFriday

Create relevant content for national awareness days even if it is just a prayer posting for the cause.

<https://www.awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/>

Share content from the main Church of England social accounts and your local Diocesan accounts. These accounts are great at producing prayers in time of national tragedy and posting national initiatives.

<https://twitter.com/churchofengland>

<https://www.facebook.com/thechurchofengland/>

Become a member of other digital community groups in your area and start to post your church content on these. This is a good example of a community site:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/wellesb/>

Social media and your churches digital space should be a fun, engaging environment that encourages fellowship and spiritual growth.

For further information see the series of books by Laura Treneer *Reach Out Church Communications*

<https://www.brfonline.org.uk/>

*Helping others to understand what we believe (and why)*

“You don’t believe all that stuff, do you?” That’s a question put to a churchgoer in a small rural village recently; it maybe an increasingly familiar challenge to Christians even in rural communities. The First Letter of Peter says, “. . . in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always

be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”<sup>23</sup> It will be good to consider how we resource our church members to be able to provide a response to the big questions, such as: “if there is a God, why does he allow suffering?” It is, after all, the people of the church who are the first line in communicating with a questioning and challenging and sometimes avowedly agnostic or atheist population. It may be a good idea to include on the website a section on what Christians believe and how they would answer some of the reasons people advance for not believing. You can also make a link to websites that do this for you, such as the Church of England website. As the section on Evangelism points out, the *Talking Jesus* research identified that: “36% of people have cited conversations with Christians they know as an important part of their coming to faith. Of those who felt talking to a Christian they knew was key to their conversion, for 44% that conversation was with a friend.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Resources*

The Church of England website is full of useful resources to help you explore and understand more about the Christian faith.

What We Believe <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe>

Going to Church and Praying <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/going-church-and-praying>

Living Out Our Faith <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/living-out-our-faith>

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 3. 15-16

<sup>24</sup> <http://talkingjesus.org/research/>

## Community

Rural communities can be wonderful places to live, with a strong sense of community life and care for others; they can also be self-serving, closed and exclusive. The population of rural England continues to grow with net migration from towns and cities. Some new residents relish the opportunities to become involved, whilst others want nothing to do with the community. Many villages do retain a sense of good neighbourliness and community spirit, with networks of friendships and families providing strong links and roots. The challenge often remains though, to build community and not least to address the question: are rural communities places where people 'who are not like us' are easily integrated?

The knowing and being known of many rural settlements contributes to the vibrancy of the place and provides effective opportunities for churches to work in partnership with other organisations and activities to address the needs and aspirations of the community. In addition, members of rural congregations are often deeply involved in a wide range of community organisations, activities and events. This diverse engagement with community, often with some people having multiple roles, again offers the potential for the church to be salt and light in everyday life. As rural congregations usually have porous edges, with many people on the fringes of church life, these relationships provide opportunity for outreach and the appropriate sharing of faith in word and deed.

For help to understand more about your local community see *Equipping for Rural Mission* from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre. This is designed for any rural church, however small or remote, to help congregations to understand the needs of their local community and work in partnership with others in the community to, recognise and celebrate the existing gifts, community activities and organisations, and to effect change where it is needed. It is designed to run over a period of 6 weeks or more, resulting in specific priorities for community action.

## Resources

*Equipping for Rural Mission* from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre

<http://germinate.net/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/>

Mosaic Creative: creativity in learning and transformation in community development

<http://www.mosaiccreative.co.uk/>

## Discipleship

A disciple of Jesus is called to live a distinctive life of witness and service, sent into the world to follow God's call, a call which embraces everyday occupations as well as ministry through the church. This is an active description, one that emphasises participation, engagement and commitment.

'We maintain that the creation of a culture of forming disciples is the foundation and enabler of lay leadership.' That is a quote from *Setting God's People Free: A Report from the Archbishops' Council*, presented to General Synod in 2017. That is extremely pertinent in a context – or contexts – where lay leadership is the only way for the mission of the rural church to flourish. The call for a culture change is the main – and constantly repeated – theme of the Report, which asks:

How does what we do as a church, ordained and lay together, enable God's people to grow in their capacity to live out the Good News of Jesus in all of life – in service in the church and in the world?<sup>25</sup>

The report stresses both the importance of forming and equipping lay people as disciples – people living out the Good News of Jesus in every sphere of life – *and* laity and clergy reaching the conviction that they are of equal worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation as the basis for forming Christian communities that can evangelise the nation. Embedded in that is an important insight, perhaps especially for the rural church, that discipleship is a corporate affair; it is about being formed in community and forming communities displaying virtues and behaviours that attract others. It is imperative for us to recognise that we need to live the message that we are proclaiming!

Somehow, we have not yet managed to extract ourselves from all the attitudes and practices of a clerical church; hence the emphasis on a change of culture, involving the restoration of right and healthy relationship between lay people and clergy. However, the Report observes that:

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<sup>25</sup> *Setting God's People Free*, p. 2

few churches have developed the kind of learning culture that would illuminate the resource and support what is required to develop lay people. Few churches are equipped with the kind of ‘action learning’ approaches that we see in Jesus’ disciple-making and in best practice adult learning models in wider society.<sup>26</sup>

The Saltley Trust has recently published two pieces of research that could be helpful in supporting discipleship in your congregation and building on existing community participation and service: *What Helps Disciples Grow?*<sup>27</sup> and *Christians in Practice: connecting discipleship and community engagement*.<sup>28</sup>

*Setting God’s People Free* makes one call for action that is essential for the rural church. ‘We recommend that Parishes and Dioceses work together to recover worship as the work of all God’s people, incorporating Monday to Saturday lives, and rediscover the shape of the liturgical year to connect worship and discipleship.’ What shape that might take would be a good issue for discussion in PCCs or wider congregation and benefice.

### *Small Groups*

Alongside worship, small groups are good places for people to make connections between the stories of Jesus (in the Gospels) and their own stories, between faith and daily life, between prayer and service. Many rural congregations are the size of a small group, and this suggests possibilities of seasons of learning, with all the teachers and preachers in a benefice following a common curriculum in Sunday and weekday services, as an alternative to or through the lectionary. There could be materials to use during the week, at home or in church, which includes a simple and short form of prayer. Wherever it takes place, forming and equipping people as disciples is at the heart of the church’s mission. ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Setting God’s People Free*, p. 18

<sup>27</sup> *What Helps Disciples Grow?* <http://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/whdg/>

<sup>28</sup> *Christians in Practice: connecting discipleship and community engagement* <http://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/publications/>

<sup>29</sup> Mark 1.17



It is particularly important for the rural church to prioritise forming and equipping disciples. That is because of the complexity of the organisation and patterns of services and irregularity of confirmations may mean that establishing learning communities is quite challenging. Yet it is a priority because of the absolute reliance of the rural church on the ministry of lay people if it is to flourish.

### *Resources*

There are abundant resources available.

*Confirmation preparation* itself should perhaps include not only reflection on the faith and on sharing in Holy Communion, but also work on identifying people's gifts and the roles that they might exercise as service in the church and wider community.

*Growing Leaders* (CPAS) combines reflecting on discipleship with taking responsibility for the church.

You can find lots of up-to-date resources and information for use in congregations and benefice groups at <http://www.disciplekit.org/>

Pilgrim Course <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/pilgrim-way>

Setting God's People Free

<https://www.churchofengland.org/SGPF>

## **Ecumenism**

Working together with other denominations can be fun, and it can be very fruitful! This is an opportunity to pool skills and expertise and so better serve our communities. Good partnerships exist especially when they are local and often informal: we don't need complex rules and regulations to serve God together. For example: if you are raising money for a charity joint events and activities could well increase the amount raised; carols in the pub, coffee mornings or lunch clubs can be done together; or a seekers course such as Alpha could be supported by the different congregations.

For many congregations, clergy and the wider Anglican structures, working ecumenically can be seen as an optional extra if there is time when everything else has been done. Actually, working ecumenically in partnership with our colleagues in other denominations is a mission imperative for the 21st century. We no longer have the option of trying to go it alone as Anglicans: we are so much better and stronger when we try to do things together than when we try to plough our own furrow.

Even in larger rural communities working ecumenically together is essential. One community of a few thousand people that has two or three different places of worship that are effectively in competition with each other makes no sense at all. The needs of rural communities can often be met more effectively when Christians work together, recognising mutual strengths and weaknesses. For example, the village Methodist Church may provide a really good youth group with effective ministry to young people, the Anglican church engage well with primary school aged children, and the Baptist Church work well with older people. Setting something up in competition will not be helpful for anyone, least of all the kingdom of God. Another way to encourage ecumenical partnership is to share engagement with the local school (whether a church school or not) with other ministers and congregation members. This could be through leading collective worship, providing volunteers in the school or together running an after-school club or activity during the week.

Good quality ecumenical partnerships start by praying together. Clergy, lay leaders and congregations are helped to recognise the value of each other's contribution to the Christian life of the community by learning to pray together. Small steps move from socialising

together to occasional special services, to particular activities, outreach or social action projects and then more regular worship together. These are way-markers in the pathway of ecumenical partnership working without needing formal ecumenical agreements. Spending time investing in relationships is key.

If the parish church is the only place of worship in a particular settlement it is quite likely that the congregation will include people who were originally part of other denominations. The Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome will help you think through how to make the most of this, and how to be a place that all Christians feel that they are welcome.

### *Resources*

Local Ecumenism resources from Churches Together in England

[http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/235060/Home/Resources/Local Ecumenism/Local Ecumenism.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/235060/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/Local_Ecumenism.aspx)

The Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome

[https://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/234975/Home/Resources/Local Ecumenism/Single Church in/Declaration of Ecumenical/Declaration of Ecumenical.aspx](https://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/234975/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/Single_Church_in/Declaration_of_Ecumenical/Declaration_of_Ecumenical.aspx)

## Evangelism

*As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.<sup>30</sup>*

Everyone can be engaged in making new disciples by regularly praying that others may be drawn by the Father to faith in Jesus Christ. It is something that everyone can do either for specific people or generally. There are stories of where people have been prayed for consistently for over many years who have then come to faith. Even for very small congregations who may not be physically equipped for outreach, prayer is the most important thing that contributes to making new disciples.

For those churches that have caught the vision of evangelism, high quality hospitality and welcome is essential and is everyone’s responsibility. Many members of rural congregations are deeply embedded in rural community life and as such have both obligation and opportunity to take the gospel with them as they go about their lives. Evangelism can be a real challenge in rural communities where everyone knows everyone else’s business. But those who go to church are usually well known in the wider community, so that Christians cannot hide their faith in villages: “I know you, you go to church...”. Christians are likely to be known by their words and actions as much by their faith: ‘you will know them by their fruits’.<sup>31</sup> Hence it is important that our behaviours as well as our words are worthy of gospel.

It is important to understand the context in which we are seeking to share faith. Research published as *Talking Jesus*<sup>32</sup>, explored the understanding of Jesus by the wider population and the thoughts and understanding of evangelism by Christians. Here are a few headlines:

- 60% of adults in England believe that Jesus was a real person who actually lived, a quarter of 18 to 34-year-olds think he is fictional

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew 4.18-20

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 7. 20

<sup>32</sup> *Talking Jesus* <http://www.talkingjesus.org/>

- Many people, roughly a third, think that Jesus was a prophet or spiritual leader but not God, about one fifth think that he was God
- 43% of adults in England believe in the resurrection of Jesus
- 95% of practising Christians believe that 'it is every Christian's responsibility to talk to non-Christians about Jesus Christ'
- 72% of practising Christians feel comfortable talking about their faith, but 35% feel others are better equipped to do it than them and 33% are afraid of causing offence.

The *Talking Jesus* research identified that:

"36% of people have cited conversations with Christians they know as an important part of their coming to faith. Of those who felt talking to a Christian they knew was key to their conversion, for 44% that conversation was with a friend."

This underlines the importance of personal relationships, friendships and networks of trust that help nurture and develop belief and create opportunities for faith to be shared in ways that are relevant and accessible, often through an outworking love. However, evangelism will not be about asking people to make a decision at a single point in time but will be part of a journey, a process over time with what the Holy Spirit is doing in a person's life.

Encouraging people to share faith with friends and family, that they will see every day is very difficult. There is nowhere to hide if things go wrong. However, there are small steps of evangelism such as:

- asking how we can serve the people we have contact with in such a way that the gospel becomes intriguing, challenging and appealing
- providing steppingstone events<sup>33</sup>, easy things to participate in, that don't involve people being preached at, but provide opportunities to build community, to start new relationships and friendships, a place to ask questions, space to reflect
- encouraging families to do things together, when you're talking to the children you're talking to the parents too, probably in a language that is easy to understand and engage with as much of the child as with the parent

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<sup>33</sup> See *From the Abundance of the Heart: Catholic Evangelism for all Christians*, Stephen Cottrell, p.75

- always making sure that after targeted outreach there is something else coming up for people to consider participating in. Things like Table Talk in the back room of a local pub is a good low stakes way of starting to get people thinking about bigger issues of faith.

We need also to remember that in rural contexts this is slow patient work. Everyone will have a different experience in how they came to believe in God. Some were brought up in the faith and continued to believe, others have made a decision to become a Christian as a teenager or adult. It might be helpful to think about Bens and Anns.<sup>34</sup>

BEN

- Before
- Encounter
- Now

There has been a clear moment or period of conversion, the person concerned can look and see a time before they had faith, a key encounter followed by the knowledge that they are moving into a growing faith. Think for example of St Paul or John Newton famous people with a distinct before and after, and consequently an easy story to tell or maybe that is your own experience.

ANN

- Always known God
- Needing to develop an Owned Faith
- Now

For Anns God has always been present (as one American pastor put it, they have grown up on the lap of God) there has been a gradual deepening of faith as it is shaped by life events but no sense of before and after. For Anns perhaps, faith though deeply held, is an implicit rather than explicit part of their lives. It would be true to say that there are more Anns than

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<sup>34</sup> See *Journey to Faith* <http://germinate.net/mission/journey-to-faith/>

Bens in rural congregations. Whether a Ben or an Ann understanding your own journey of faith is very helpful in order to share it.

Sharing faith with other people can be quite hard, but telling our own stories is easier, and easiest of all to start by sharing your story with fellow Christians. There are several useful resources that will help you to develop confidence to find the right words, at the right time, in the right place.

### *Resources*

Evangelism Resources from the Church of England and Partners

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/evangelism>

*Faith Pictures: a fresh way to talk about things that matter* an online resource by the Church Army

[http://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/266913/Church\\_Army/ms/Faith\\_Pictures/Faith\\_Pictures.aspx](http://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/266913/Church_Army/ms/Faith_Pictures/Faith_Pictures.aspx)

*Why on Earth? a fresh way to talk about life's big questions* from the Church Army

<https://churcharmy.org/Groups/307483/Home.aspx>

*Journey to Faith* a unique training programme on rural evangelism helps members of rural congregations share their faith with others and can be run by any church or group of churches over two half-days. <http://germinate.net/mission/journey-to-faith/>

*Sowing, reaping, keeping: People-Sensitive Evangelism* by Laurence Singlehurst (2006)

## Fresh Expressions of Church

Fresh expressions of church (FXs) are a great way to reach out to people who are not currently involved in the church. On average fresh expressions of church make up around 15% of a diocese's churches, and make up roughly 6 – 10% of average weekly attendance. This is equivalent to the attendance of two whole dioceses.<sup>35</sup>

Fresh expressions of church bring new life and growth in both depth of discipleship and numbers as part of a mixed economy of traditional and new styles of church. They often provide a low-key way to encourage people to explore faith, and are based on welcome, hospitality, the sharing of food and drink, understanding and openness. Fresh expressions of church are part of the rich tapestry of worship in rural areas and useful approaches include: men's discussion groups in a pub, Café church, midweek 'coffee, chat and worship', cell church, parent and toddler groups/services, youth congregations, and forest church. They are often led by a team of lay people who have, through careful listening, prayer and reflection, identified a need or opportunity within the community and have sought to respond to it in a way that allows people to find it easy to join in.

### Resources

A short course *mission shaped intro (msi)* helps people to reconnect with the communities they are called to serve and to re-imagine the forms of church that are needed for the 21st century. <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/resources-3/mission-shaped-introduction/>

*Mission shaped ministry* is a one-year, part-time ecumenical course for ministry in fresh expressions of church <http://www.missionshapedministry.org/>

There are lots of good resources on fresh expressions of church, see:

<https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/>

Fresh Expressions Rural Hub <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/connect/rural-hub/>

*Forest Church: A Field Guide to Nature Connection for Groups and Individuals* by Bruce Stanley (2013)

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<sup>35</sup> See the Day of Small Things from the Church Army  
[https://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/286719/Church\\_Army/Church\\_Army/Our\\_work/Research/The\\_Day\\_of/The\\_Day\\_of.aspx](https://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/286719/Church_Army/Church_Army/Our_work/Research/The_Day_of/The_Day_of.aspx)



*Outdoor Church: 20 Sessions to Take Church Outside the Building for Children and Families* by Sally Welch (2016)

*Reproducing Churches* by George Lings (2017, BRF)

### **Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre**

Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre is an independent ecumenical charity that helps UK rural communities to flourish by inspiring, encouraging and equipping local churches. It does this in three distinct but overlapping ways:

- Church Life: supporting congregations with resources for worship, discipleship and the maintenance and creative use of buildings
- Mission: helping communities flourish by equipping rural churches to identify and meet local physical, social and spiritual needs
- Training: developing leaders and church members through training programmes, events, conferences and learning communities

Take a look at the wide range of materials designed to support, inspire and help rural churches bring transformation to their communities by visiting [www.germinate.net](http://www.germinate.net)  
Sign up to the monthly e-news for details of the latest resources and sources of funding  
[Germinate News](#)

You can also sign up for a subscription to Country Way magazine, published three times a year, which is packed full of real life stories, resources and practical support for rural congregations and clergy [Country Way](#)

## Growth

Growth happens when we get other things right, and at its heart is the longing for other people to experience the healing, help and hope which Jesus Christ offers. This means that we do not just mean an increase in the number of people coming to regular worship, important though that is. We are actually talking about making new disciples, enabling those who have not yet encountered the overflowing and life transforming love of God in their lives to do so. We are also talking about deepening our own relationships with God and working to transform the communities around us.

The statistics in *Released for Mission*<sup>36</sup> and subsequent work carried out by the Church Growth Research Programme, published most recently as *Going Deeper*,<sup>37</sup> confirm that rural churches can and do grow. In fact roughly the same proportion of rural parishes as urban parishes grow. Overall around 10% of all churches are growing, 20% declining and 70% are stable.<sup>38</sup>

The more rural a parish is, the more likely it is to be in a multi-church group that will have more than three churches within it. 70% of urban parishes are single parishes, whereas 75% of parishes in rural villages and hamlets are in multi-church groups with three or more churches. Growth is highest in an urban conurbation, irrespective of the size of multi-church group, but rural villages and hamlets also show very similar proportions of growth. Parishes in city and larger town centres and in rural towns show significantly greater decline than parishes in other areas. The analysis showed that the different sizes of multi-church group show no statistical difference in growth, stability or decline. The geographical location of the parish has a significant impact on growth or decline, but benefice size and structure does not.

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<sup>36</sup> Archbishops' Council (2015) *Released for Mission: growing the rural church*, p. 7  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2148423/gs%20misc%201092%20-%20rural%20multi%20parish%20benefices.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Tweedie, Fiona (2016) *Going Deeper: church attendance statistics and clergy deployment*, p. 12 [http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Going\\_Deeper\\_Final.pdf](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Going_Deeper_Final.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> *Going Deeper*, p. 9

Growth is possible in rural multi-church groups where the right conditions are in place.

Growth in rural churches is associated with six particular characteristics:

- an intentional focus on mission and evangelism, beyond a focus on Sunday worship;
- a culture of personal and corporate discipleship within congregations;
- a committed group of lay people leading a range of activities and events, with easily accessible training and support available;
- a redirection of time and energy, particularly but not exclusively for clergy, from administration and building maintenance to outreach, service and evangelism;
- an approach to ordained ministry in which discerning, nurturing and equipping the ministry of lay people within the body of Christ is one of the highest-priority areas of work for the clergy, backed up by appropriate training and support;
- co-operation and collaboration within and between different multi-church groups, and ecumenically wherever possible.<sup>39</sup>

Rural churches have many of the factors that contribute to growth, but what might be some of the issues that are preventing it? A recent study by George Lings of the Church Army Research Unit<sup>40</sup> offers the idea of describing a parish church as a box that may be limited by factors such as:

- an expectation that the priest will do everything
- difficulty in crossing parish, benefice and even deanery boundaries
- limitations of the church building for whatever reason
- suspicion of the involvement of lay people in mission and ministry
- a focus on Sunday worship as the only means of expression of worshipping presence in a place
- an expectation that people will continue to come to us and want to join in, even though that is very rare nowadays.

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<sup>39</sup> Archbishops' Council (2017) *Shaping Strategies for Mission and Growth in rural multi-church groups*

<sup>40</sup> Lings, George, A Case for Multiplying the Type and Number of Churches, *Rural Theology*, 14 (2), November 2016, 112-133

<http://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14704994.2016.1234858>



George suggests that this box needs to become porous to let other approaches flourish alongside existing services and approaches. The porous box could allow for: a weekly cafe style service midweek; monthly Messy Church after school or on a Sunday afternoon. There could be different styles of worship at different times of the day and week and lots of other things, that would make up the mixed economy of traditional, inherited church sitting alongside fresh expressions, new ways of being church. Sharing faith, which is what we are aiming to do when we grow churches, is not about growing ‘bigger brighter boxes’ says Lings, but about allowing a diverse ‘reproduction’ of different types of churches. In other words he says: ‘the church must dare to have church children, who are related to us but not the same as the parent body.’ In order to grow, rural churches need to become more internally diverse, with different ways to be a church. The Network Youth Church<sup>41</sup> in Carlisle Diocese is a good example of the sort of creativity that is needed in a rural context. This might also include meetings in the evening, worshipping God outdoors through Forest Church, or tea and toast straight after the morning school run. The important thing is that these new churches, or church children, need to exist together, alongside, traditional forms

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.thenetworkchurch.org.uk/>

of church, and both need to be equally valued and affirmed within the parish or benefice. This is where there is potential for strength within a multi-church group where each church can play to its gifts and calling and smaller congregations can work with and be supported by others to reproduce. We need to be honest and say that growth is unlikely to come through trying to grow existing Sunday morning congregations (though it might), but from allowing new things to develop, so that encouraging growth should not just be about strategies which aim to increase the size of existing congregations.

To allow churches to reproduce as part of growth in rural multi-church groups means creating space for the new to grow alongside existing congregations. Church growth will increasingly mean pioneering and developing new approaches to church, including fresh expressions of church, that take place across the week, not necessarily on a Sunday morning. This is a key issue in terms of how the time and skills of clergy, lay leaders and congregations are used to best effect to create space for this to happen. The challenge for local practice in developing this dual approach is about actually freeing up time to develop the new.

Other sections in this document will help you consider what might be most helpful in your situation. Take a look at the sections on discipleship, hospitality, fresh expressions of church, Messy Church, the mixed economy, lay ministry, strategy, vision and Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre. Your diocese is likely to have mission support staff, strategies and resources to help you.

### *Resources*

*Developing Healthy Churches* by Robert Warren, (Church House Publishing, 2012)  
*mission shaped intro (msi)* helps people to reconnect with the communities they are called to serve and to re-imagine the forms of church that are needed for the 21st century.

<http://freshexpressions.org.uk/resources-3/mission-shaped-introduction/>

*Released for Mission: growing the rural church* (2015)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%201092%20Released%20for%20Mission%20-%20growing%20the%20rural%20church.pdf>.

*Shaping Strategies for Mission and Growth in rural multi-church groups* published by the Archbishops' Council in 2017, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Shaping%20strategies%20for%20mission%20and%20growth%20in%20rural%20multi-church%20groups.pdf>

Leading your church into Growth is a very helpful course to help focus on mission and growth. [www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk/](http://www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk/)

## Hospitality

‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.’<sup>42</sup>

The Christian practice of hospitality goes far beyond a warm welcome when you come to church for a service, very important though that is. Christian hospitality is about making space for people in our hearts. The outcome may be a caring act of welcome at church or visiting at home for those who may be strangers or be in trouble or indeed even be enemies. Extending this depth of hospitality challenges us to see others through God’s eyes, respond as Jesus would and enables us to meet with God ourselves.<sup>43</sup>

For someone who is not familiar with a church building or Christian worship it can be very intimidating to come into what for us is a familiar space. That first encounter with the people giving out hymn books and service sheets is key. A genuine welcome with words and a smile all help, as does helping newcomers find a place to sit. Many churches now provide training for welcome is to help give confidence when meeting people for the first time. It also helps to identify congregation members who will make a point of talking to and including new people in conversations during refreshments after a service. Even the smallest rural congregations can do this, you just need to remember to do it and be mindful of the feelings of exclusion and rejection that may result if it is done badly or not at all. Resources like *Everybody Welcome* greatly help this sort of culture to develop.

The church should be the place where everyone is included knowing that they are welcome and valued. This is particularly important for minority groups and those who find themselves to be on the margin, whether for cultural, societal or economic reasons. Creating a space where all are welcome and included is greatly helped by developing a culture of invitation and hospitality. Personal invitation is the best way of encouraging people to join in with events and services rather than simply expecting people to come to us through posters on

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<sup>42</sup> Hebrews 13. 2

<sup>43</sup> For more on this theme see Rural Mission Sunday 2017 <http://germinate.net/mission/rural-mission-sunday/rural-mission-sunday-2017/> and *Open Welcome* <http://germinate.net/mission/open-welcome/>



notice boards or Facebook postings. If we ourselves are asked by a friend or neighbour to do something or go somewhere, we are much more likely to do it than if we get a flyer through the letterbox. This emphasises the importance of developing new personal relationships and friendships, rather than just sticking to the people we know already.

It is often said that an army marches on its stomach – this statement could equally apply to rural congregations! There is no better way of showing hospitality than by providing lovely food and drink to all comers. One church in a large village does weekly afternoon tea in the church. The tea and home-made cakes are free and it has become a place of meeting for lots of different people and generations who would not normally encounter each other. This freely given hospitality means that many more people use the building than would otherwise and it allows people of all incomes to come. It also raises money through donations. Food is a great tool to make people feel comfortable and included.

Social isolation is now a real problem for our society as a whole, but the challenges can be even more significant in rural areas. It is not just a problem faced by older people. Who might feel isolated in your community? Could you make your church building available for those wanting to start a new group? Could your church community start an activity for those who are isolated?

### *Resources*

You can find more information on rural isolation, and ideas for tackling isolation in rural communities, by visiting [germinate.net](http://germinate.net) and searching 'rural isolation'.

Everybody Welcome is a great resource for rural churches that helps congregations to understand what welcome really means and how to do it. Take a look at

<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/features/everybody-welcome>

Open Welcome: A toolkit for rural churches <http://germinate.net/mission/open-welcome/>

Rural Mission Sunday <https://germinate.net/rural-mission-sunday>

## Joyful

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*<sup>44</sup>

In much of the busyness and difficulties we have often forgotten that being a Christian should be a joy filled experience. Jesus's first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding feast.<sup>45</sup> The joy of Christ is so deep seated that it is something to be experienced even in circumstances of adversity.

Joy may also be shown in having fun together. In all the seriousness we sometimes seem to have lost touch with the importance of having fun as part of the life of the church. What opportunities can you introduce for congregation and community to have fun together? A pancake party on Shrove Tuesday, a Rogation walk and lunch, harvest supper, a cream tea in the summer, children's party at Christmas, Easter egg hunt, are just a few ideas amongst many others.

The abundance of life is provided through Jesus and there are abundant ideas for having fun with a purpose with your community in Rhona Orme's books: *Creative Mission* and *More Creative Mission*.<sup>46</sup>

The parish church is a place where the community can mark events of significance: remembrance, thanksgiving and celebration. These can be both local and national, personal and communal. Such events may include or focus around an act of worship in the church building, or more likely, that the congregation become deeply involved in events in the community. Either way these moments of thanksgiving and celebration provide a good

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<sup>44</sup> John 15. 9-11

<sup>45</sup> John 2. 1-11

<sup>46</sup> Look for second hand copies of *Creative Mission* and *More Creative Mission* by Rhona Orme (published by BRF). They detail all sorts of fun and participative ways of sharing the gospel with your community.

opportunity to continue to build relationships with the people who are not part of the regular congregation and show that the church is able to have fun as part of wider community celebrations.

#### *Resources*

Look for second hand copies of *Creative Mission* and *More Creative Mission* by Rhona Orme (published by BRF). They detail all sorts of fun and participative ways of sharing the gospel with your community.

Make use of the Rhythm of Mission from HOPE

[https://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/256542/Rhythm\\_of\\_Mission.aspx](https://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/256542/Rhythm_of_Mission.aspx)

## Kairos

*Kairos* (from the Greek) means the right or most opportune time. A '*kairos* moment' is a point at which it becomes clear that things should and can be different. Change should never be for the sake of changing, but for good reasons. However, the church is called upon to proclaim a fresh the good news of Jesus Christ in each generation, so a reluctance to change when it is necessary to do things differently means that the message of the gospel suffers. The Church of England in the countryside has reached a *kairos* moment – as the rural church will inevitably look very different in 10 to 15 years' time. It is our responsibility now to ensure that there will be an active and effective Christian community in every rural settlement. What needs to change now, in order for this to happen?

*Kairos* in the context of the rural church is about being able to discern when the time is right for specific things to happen. Being open to God's call to identify this *kairos* moment comes with prayer and reflection, thinking and discussion. A *kairos* moment may mean that we need to think creatively about lots of different things and be open to the challenge of the Holy Spirit in our personal, congregational and community life.

A *kairos* moment of change may lead us to reconsider:

- how new things can be developed
- how we work in partnership with others for outreach, social action and evangelism
- the approach to regular prayer and worship
- whether the things we do actually serve the needs of the people they are intended for
- which things need to come to an end and stop
- the structures and approaches to governance in parish and multi-church group.

## Resources

*mission shaped intro (msi)* helps people to reconnect with the communities they are called to serve and to re-imagine the forms of church that are needed for the 21st century.

<http://freshexpressions.org.uk/resources-3/mission-shaped-introduction/>

*Equipping for Rural Mission* a toolkit to help you engage with and listen to your community and plan for mission, from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre  
<http://germinate.net/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/>

## Lay Ministry

The ministry of lay people is essential to the current and future existence and active life of rural churches. Within the Body of Christ, every member has gifts, skills and abilities that contribute to the Kingdom of God. The ministry of lay people should be seen and encouraged as an important ministry in itself, and not as second-best in relation to ordained ministry. Nor are lay people the 'vicar's helpers' but are gifted and graced co-workers in the ministry and mission of the church. The development of the ministry of lay people is a key part of the strategy and practice for the rural church. Everyone has the responsibility to identify and encourage vocations to specific roles and activities. We need to value the gifts and abilities of all lay people for tasks and roles both for the church and for the wider community. Research has shown that where lay people are deeply and actively engaged in mission activities, growth is more likely.<sup>47</sup>

Lay people are already deeply involved in many aspects of church life including: pastoral care, formal and informal visiting, working with children and young people, home communion, administration, finance, fundraising, leading study/home groups, outreach activities, social events, leading worship and looking after the church building, in addition to any roles they may have in wider community groups. For many centuries, the Churchwarden has been an important lay leader in parishes, with responsibility not only for the building and many other legal requirements, but also for leading worship in the absence of a priest. Nowadays some churchwardens operate a ministry of oversight within their own parish, supporting the ministry of lay and ordained alike, acting as eyes and ears for pastoral care and contributing to strategies for mission.

Reader ministry has been an essential part of providing regular Sunday worship over many decades. Readers are theologically trained for preaching and teaching ministry that complements both the role of clergy and that of other lay people. Readers will take a service of the Word, and often now conduct funerals, contribute to leading fresh expressions of church or Messy Church and occasionally become Reader in Charge of a rural multi-church

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<sup>47</sup> *From Anecdote to Evidence* p. 12 [www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report)

group. Reader ministry is effective where it is part of a collaborative approach that involves ordained and lay together. Alongside this ministry, newer formalised roles have been created with various titles such as 'worship leader' or 'lay pastoral assistant,' with training provided and ongoing support and supervision expected. These roles often enable the day-to-day work of the church to continue in many rural communities, providing pastoral care, offering regular prayer for the community and church and leading worship.

As a congregation explore what it is to be the Body of Christ in that community, a diverse range of ideas, calling and vocation may develop. For example: one person may be called to get more involved in a community group or contribute to an event or campaign; another person may discover that they want to work with children or young people, older people or another group; a third person may feel that they are being asked by God to take a greater part in leading worship (leading intercessions, being part of a team for lay led worship); another to help people deepen their discipleship by leading a Bible study or home group. The priest or church leader may well then operate an apprentice model approach encouraging the person to get involved and start doing things, but with some careful supervision and oversight. For lay ministry to flourish we need both high levels of permission giving and accountability.

Local Ministry teams / groups have been developed in some places to act as a focus for mission and ministry in the local church, with ordained and lay working together. Ideally, the team then becomes a coordinating point for mission in the parish or multi-church group, encourages everyone to use their gifts for God, and ensures that new ideas and approaches are implemented. A team or group acting in this way provides a place where the communal vocation of the congregation and its mission to the wider community can be discerned and implemented. A local ministry team will also benefit from being a dynamic group whose membership is not fixed, but seeks to draw in different people at particular times for specific tasks or roles, and so that there is planning for future succession.

It is useful to meet regularly as a group of lay leaders of any description, either by parish or more usefully, across a benefice or a deanery. This helps to encourage and resource lay leaders as well as creating a forum for prayer, worship, mutual support and accountability.

Cell groups have been found to be a great way to encourage and develop new lay leaders, focusing as they do on prayer, worship and building community.

Ultimately the rural church will be led by lay people with the assistance of a priest who probably lives somewhere else. The ministry of lay people will therefore extend to the whole congregation and make use of the gifts and expertise of everyone for God's Kingdom.

### *Resources*

Your diocese will be able to tell you about different types of lay ministry and whether formal local ministry schemes exist that you can make use of in your parish or benefice.

For information on good practice with volunteers see <http://www2.cuf.org.uk/working-volunteers>



## Leadership

‘The only thing that leaders do of real importance is to create and manage culture.’ That is from Edgar Schein, an American leadership and management expert, and was displayed prominently on the office wall of a headteacher of a school rated by Ofsted ‘outstanding in every category.’ The leadership of the head clearly had something to do with the Ofsted judgement and the quote indicated his understanding of his role as a leader. If you set alongside that Alan Roxborough’s suggestion that the role of the ‘missional leader’ is to cultivate the culture in which the people of God can re-imagine their future, it brings an even greater dynamic into the role.<sup>48</sup>

A culture of valuing everyone, recognizing the contribution of each person, of working well together, of common purpose, of good communication will make for a thriving church, and the leadership is critical in creating and managing such a culture. Leaders who seek to establish vision and produce plans before investing in good relationships and building trust do well to remember the phrase originated by Peter Drucker: ‘Culture eats strategy for breakfast (lunch and dinner).’

St. Paul was continually seeking to create and manage culture (relying on the grace of the Spirit of Christ, of course). Any reference to being the body of Christ is accompanied by Paul identifying the values or virtues - the culture - of the body. We can learn from Paul that Christian leaders pray for and promote a Christ-like culture, a culture of grace and generosity, gratitude and graciousness. One of the ways of doing this, as Roxborough describes, is by enabling the community to be formed by the word of Scripture and by enabling the people to share in a conversation about their calling.

Good leadership provides effective oversight. Where authority is given to take responsibility and exercise gifts, there needs to be good supervision so that good practice is affirmed and lessons are learned and development is reinforced. Sometimes, that oversight means suggesting that what someone is doing might not be the best use of their gifts. Sometimes,

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<sup>48</sup> The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World. Alan J Roxborough, Fred Romanuk. A Leadership Network Publication. See especially pages 23 and following.

oversight means removing power from where it has been inappropriately accumulated. This is vital for the health of the body, but it is one of the hardest tasks of leaders and requires skills of managing change (including the proper and careful use of the rules of the Church), together with resilience and forbearance.

Leadership creates and manages the culture in which everyone makes their contribution, so perhaps the most effective leadership for rural multi-church groups isn't over-ready to adopt the language of 'a leader' and 'the led'. Jesus, after all, repeatedly affirms and practices a model of servant leadership.<sup>49</sup> In a similar vein, if the word leader has been used in the singular, it is good to reaffirm the collegial nature of Christian leadership, fostering the culture of collaboration and complementarity referred to earlier. Praying together and listening to one another introduce measures of accountability and mutual attention that can only enrich the purpose of leadership.

Christian leaders are always seeking to grow leadership, whether it is by discerning vocations to lay or ordained ministry or by inviting people to take responsibility for aspects of the church's mission. Resources like *Growing Leaders* have a proven track record in deepening discipleship and enabling people to take a lead in the church. *Step Up* is an example of another programme (from the Diocese of Leeds): people are identified who have potential to take a lead and spend a year being mentored by leaders and taking part in study and reflection with others. It is a significant investment, but one which is bearing significant fruit.

### *Resources*

*Re-Sharing Rural Ministry*, edited by James Bell, Jill Hopkinson and Trevor Willmott (SCM, 2009): see especially chapter 3 by Amiel Osmaston

*Managing Change: Practical Tools for Good Change in Churches* by Alison Myers, Grove Books L 26 <https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/l-26-managing-change-practical-tools-for-good-change-in-churches>

Germinate Leadership <http://germinate.net/training/germinate-leadership/>

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<sup>49</sup> See for example Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:12-17

Growing Leaders Course <https://www.cpas.org.uk/church-resources/growing-leaders-suite/growing-leaders>

Step Up

<http://www.leeds.anglican.org/content/step-ripon-area-discipleship-programme-seeks-new-churches>

## Messy Church

Messy Church is a form of church for children and adults that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality. It's primarily for people who don't already belong to another form of church. It meets at a time (and sometimes in a place) that suits people who don't come on a Sunday. It typically includes a welcome, a long creative time to explore the biblical theme through getting messy; a short celebration time involving story, prayer, song, games and similar; and a sit-down meal together at tables. All elements are for, and should include, people of all ages, adults and children.<sup>50</sup> Messy Churches come in all shapes and sizes. A Messy Church might take place on a weekday after school finishes, or in the early evening. Others happen on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and others still take place on a Sunday morning as part of a regular monthly cycle of different worship services. The right time for you is the one that best suits the children and families who will come.

Research by the Church Army<sup>51</sup> has shown that a large proportion of people who attend Messy Church don't normally go to any other church, and often have not attended church before. In a small remote community in the north of England, one church provides a Messy Church for the few young people in the village. They meet on a Saturday due to travel times for school, and use their beautiful outdoor environment for some of the sessions. One church in a middle-sized village in a six parish multi-church group has developed a monthly Messy Church at 10.30am on a Sunday morning. It starts with breakfast, continues with activities and concludes with a celebration. It is led by a group from the congregation, with the assistance of the incumbent. Up to 40 children and adults participate and it has become a new and growing congregation.

Every benefice, deanery or ecumenical group of churches can run a Messy Church when the churches work together. It is ideally suited to rural churches as it is relatively straightforward to put on, and group of churches will have people who are good at welcome, putting on interesting children's activities, and serving food. There are lots of useful resources available

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.messychurch.org.uk/what-messy-church-and-isnt>

<sup>51</sup> *The Day of Small Things*  
[https://www.churcharmy.org/Articles/516318/What we do/Research Unit/Fresh expressions of.aspx](https://www.churcharmy.org/Articles/516318/What_we_do/Research_Unit/Fresh_expressions_of.aspx)

including: identifying the need and checking that Messy Church is the solution, how to start a Messy Church, the things you have to do such as safeguarding and good communications, and ready-made programmes for regular sessions. Find out more and access a huge range of resources at: [www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)

## Ministry

*So let us learn how to serve, and in our hearts enthrone him, each other's needs to prefer, because it is Christ we're serving.*<sup>52</sup>

Graham Kendrick's popular hymn, "The Servant King" takes us to the foundation for ministry, which isn't for oneself but for Christ and therefore for others as he was the man for others. Jesus says, 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.'<sup>53</sup>

It has been argued that 'service' here has the sense of being sent for a purpose.<sup>54</sup> If so, we recognise specifically that we are here to serve another's purpose – God's purpose – and that is the foundational understanding and practice of Christian ministry.

Embedding that attitude of service and the practice that flows from it was a priority for Jesus. Having washed the disciples' feet, Jesus told them that they were to do for one another as he had done for them.<sup>55</sup> Paul developed the same theme, not least in the well-known passage in Philippians, when he urges the Christian community: 'Let this mind be among you which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and took the form of a servant.'<sup>56</sup> This is an attitude and an aspiration that has to be embedded in the heart, mind and soul of each church.

This is how ministry developed within the life of the Church. It began with Christians simply imitating Jesus' servant ministry together as the people of God ('Laos' or laity). Then, the Church began to recognise some people as examples to encourage others and to represent

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<sup>52</sup> The Servant King (From Heaven you came) by Graham Kendrick, <http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/songs/graham-kendrick-songs/let-god-arise/the-servant-king-from-heaven-you-came>

<sup>53</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>54</sup> See *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, John N. Collins, Oxford 1990 See, in particular Chapter 14, p. 245.

<sup>55</sup> John 13:14

<sup>56</sup> Philippians 2: 5–11

the Church to the wider world. They were set aside with prayer and laying on of hands (what we would now call 'ordained') to that ministry on a life-long basis. In the early Church, the most common form of ministry was the deacon (servant), but some were also set aside to preside over the body of Christ in a particular congregation. These were 'presbuteroi' – which we translate as priests, presbyters or elders. These too, were 'ordained' by being set aside with prayer and laying on of hands. However, the base unit of ministry remained that of the laity. Baptism, not ordination, has always been the primary authority for Christian ministry and the role of the ordained was to support, encourage and enable the ministry of the laity, the whole people of God. Ministry is intended to be a collaborative approach between laity and clergy by which we all serve Christ in such a way that we become his body here on earth - the Body of Christ.

Ministry is how we live out our vocation, the life Jesus calls us to. It is, therefore, also the way we all fulfil God's mission for the world. At its heart is the incarnational principle of *being with* people in their context. This is the calling of every disciple of Christ. From *being with* flows *working with*: working with other Christians, working with people of good will.

Ministry is also how we talk about the role of the ordained, to which all of the above equally applies. It is an essential aspect of the role of the ordained to call out and enable and supervise ministry by others. The ministry of a priest in a multi-church group can be particularly demanding, especially where attempts are made to fulfil the expectations of the 'traditional' role of the Vicar. However, the 'traditional' role of the Vicar is a relatively recent idea, formed over the last 100 years or so. It was a way of expressing ministry appropriate to its time. It is no longer an appropriate model and, in any event, we simply cannot practice parochial ministry any longer through an ordained minister who seeks to operate a traditional approach to the cure of souls in every one of the communities in a multi-church group: the pressures of multiplication and complexity make this impossible. So, for example, maintaining the expectation of services (probably Eucharistic) being led only by the Vicar in a benefice is not sustainable, both because of the workload, which leaves little time of anything else and because dashing from one place to another leaves no space for pastoral encounter and development of relationships. A Eucharist should clearly be available to those who wish to receive Communion within the multi-church group, but does not have to be in

every church every week. A service of worship should, wherever possible, be available weekly to parishioners in their parish church. This worship will be led by lay people, whether licensed Readers or authorised lay leaders (which includes churchwardens).

The bigger question is how the role of ordained clergy will adapt and change as the congregation respond to an understanding of themselves as the body of Christ and so become more involved in mission and ministry. It is likely that clergy will need to have more of an oversight role for the vision and work in the multi-church group and its individual parishes. The role of clergy will include prayer, the sacraments, theological insight and teaching, enabling others to flourish in their vocations, providing training where necessary. They will need a participatory and collaborative approach to decision making and leadership. The ministries of the whole people of God need to be released.

Some recent developments in ministry practice may be particularly helpful for rural multi-church groups.

#### *Pioneer ministry*

‘Pioneers are people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit’s initiatives with those outside the church; gathering others around them as they seek to establish new contextual Christian community.’<sup>57</sup>

This means that those called to be Pioneers (who can be lay or ordained) are first of all called to listen to God for grace and guidance. Secondly, they are called to listen to the context(s) in which they are placed, to the joy and opportunities, problems and challenges. Out of that careful attention, when the time is right, may come something that serves the needs of those who are not already engaged in the Christian faith: that ‘new contextual Christian community.’ It is important to encourage Pioneers and to create space for this deep listening. This role needs to be seen as a key part of a team for mission and ministry, not least in rural England as we recognize that we are out of touch with significant sections of the population.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.cofepioneer.org/essential/>



## ***The Beaminster Pioneer – Revd Jo Neary***

### Patient Pioneer Mission

A team of rural churches in West Dorset with 12 parishes, 15 church buildings, 6 schools, 1 town, 15 villages, and a population of approximately 6000. We are trying to grow, flourish, bring people to know Christ, deepen relationships and create community.

Following the departure of the previous Team Vicar, a group was gathered to pray for a vision for the new Team Vicar role, discerning a commitment to the mixed economy, maintaining the old and introducing new. In April 2012 a Pioneer Team Vicar was licensed. The work began with prayer. A weekly 'Café Prayer' was introduced to focus prayer on doing new things in the team. Everyone was welcome, and usually a dozen people met prayer and silence to listen to God. This prayer continued for a year before setting up anything new. Alongside the commitment to prayer, we prioritised learning, with preaching focused on discipleship, set up training courses and small groups to explore fresh expressions of church. We encouraged people to share their story of faith and this culminated in a vocations day asking the question: "What are we called to do?"

### *How we set up a project*

Initially we prayed that God would lead us to the correct project. We prayed about the areas of our church life which were currently failing or had little going on: schools, children and young people, connecting with our communities. We prioritised silence alongside prayer to try to hear and listen to God's prompting. We encouraged people to speak about what God might be saying. And then we tested these ideas by praying about them further. This led to a slow period of discernment – we committed to a year of prayer before any new projects, but we felt the listening and discernment was an absolute priority, and the Holy Spirit guided us. Once we had a sense of the focus for a project we visited other people doing similar things or we researched via books or internet, talking to colleagues or using our networks.

We do not do anything without a team. Once we have identified, through prayer and discernment, the project we start gathering a project team, identifying even at this early

stage who the leaders might be for the future. We would only start something if at least two other people were working alongside us, who would eventually take over.

Our first project was in Lent 2013. We trialled for four weeks an after-school club in one of the church schools. The children joined us straight after school for activities based around a bible story, culminating in worship together with parents and children. After four weeks we asked them: do we carry on? The resounding yes came from children, parents and volunteer team. This project still flourishes five years on. It is the biggest congregation in that village, 25% of the school attend the club. Volunteers come from both local church and the village, people have come to faith through volunteering and the team is now at the point where it can run without clergy being present.

Our second project, Walk in Wednesday, was a much larger scale community outreach. We committed initially for a year and said we would review then. We also promised clergy attendance for a year to ensure a pastoral presence and to show how much value we placed on the project, committing our time demonstrated this. Over the last two years we have maintained a chaplaincy approach to the project, with lay and clergy part of the chaplaincy team, but it doesn't need all of us there all the time, thus releasing time for new things. Trialling is a great way of testing whether the vision is correct. We believe that if projects flourish then presumably that is what God wants us to do. If we are faithful to his call we believe God is faithful to the projects we begin. However, if after the trial period it seems or feels wrong, we can easily shut down, re-evaluate and pray more. Following the trial period, we reflect with the leadership team, project leaders, people who attend about how the project is going. We usually do this through conversation or informal questionnaire. We invite honest feedback and will make changes if necessary. We listen to the those who attend the projects too. We try to keep this process of reflecting and revising a constant feature of the ongoing projects.

### *Working across boundaries*

Most of our mission work is for the whole team. It will have a geographical base, but it is financed, staffed and promoted teamwide. This can be challenging, particularly with oversight responsibilities. Some PCC's take oversight of a project, e.g. an after-school club has oversight from the PCC in whose village it takes place. Other things, e.g. Messy Church,

is overseen by the Pioneer Priest and Rector yet is run by a lay team. Finance can be tricky, we have finally set up a Mission Fund, but this has taken six years to help PCC's and people take financial responsibility for mission. God has provided, often through the generosity of individuals or PCC's being prepared to underwrite projects. We do not charge for anything; every project is free at point of access. No-one is excluded on grounds of cost although we provide the opportunity for donations. Having said that – most of our projects are cheap and some even make money.

### *Schools*

We value relationships with our schools highly and invest much time in them. Relationships have grown through regular participation in the schools [through collective worship, Prayer Spaces in Schools, Christian identity and helping to recruit foundation governors] and have borne fruit through parents and children coming to other outreach or mission events. An after-school club has produced people who attend Messy Church and have decided to be confirmed, and in another village the family service has developed from school-based relationships

### *Community of the Annunciation*

As our projects became established and flourished our attention towards praying for new things was diverted, mainly because we were busy and focused on what was going on. However, we were surprised that despite outward success the spiritual energy slowed down, enthusiasm waned, and things felt harder. When we reviewed we realised our prayer life had diminished so we began again and thankfully, God faithfully answered our prayer. The answer was a new community with a focus on prayer and a common rule of life. The Community of the Annunciation arose out of direct revelation / leading of the Holy Spirit and was hugely influenced by Simon Reed's book, *Creating Community: Ancient Ways for Modern Churches*. We knew everything we did must be led by, sustained and rooted in prayer but we had neglected this. "When we prayed things happened" It was a wakeup call to us things stopped growing when we didn't pray.

### *Mixed Economy*

In the Beaminster Team God is calling us to develop Christian community whilst maintaining traditional church. Our energy goes into new not the old – and is starting to cause concern amongst traditional members of our church. Across the Team we have seen stagnation although not decline in Sunday attendance. In the church in Beaminster we have noticed some growth and certain services in villages are better attended. Our theology of growth has evolved from ‘bums on seats, money on the plate’ to ‘deepening relationships with God and growing community – wherever God wants.’

There are a variety of ways in which people have responded and are participating, reflecting spiritual growth as well as some numerical growth. It is our experience that through work in developing community and investment in building relationships we are growing new communities of faith. Around 250 people of all ages are now involved in the wider life of the church and in worship, through this approach, although not on a Sunday. We have also noticed that this means more people are now involved in social and fundraising aspects of church life too. Significantly, a small number of these new attenders have made a profession of faith and now worship regularly in our new congregations.

### *Challenges*

Only one project has failed, probably as we didn’t follow the structure of pray, recruit a team, trial, feedback, then establish the project. Other challenges reflect the time it takes for new initiatives to develop. Walk in Wednesday was an immediate success with older isolated people, but it has taken sustained work and effort to attract parents with preschool children. Many people felt it was a failure because it did not instantly attract lots of families. Instead it met the need that initially presented and through building relationships and trust, other things came to grow.

Maintaining tradition whilst starting new things alongside is time consuming and creates more work. Some feel that these approaches are not ‘proper church’ as it is not on a Sunday, others feel resentful about the time and effort focused on new things. Yet it has been energising as we meet and establish relationships with new people who previous had no contact with church and no experience of faith.

We feel that a programme centred approach to discipleship such as Start, Alpha or Pilgrim is only part of the solution for new faith and existing congregations. Finding time to walk alongside individuals and help them discover God is also part of the answer, which takes time.

We have been partially successful in raising up teams and enabling people to lead. Yet we still have some way to go in building confidence for people to manage without clergy support, and we also need to work on building relationships of accountability.

### **Learning Points from pioneering in rural multi parish context**

- Don't go too fast and pray and plan and then pray some more.
- Assemble and equip your team before you start anything.
- Trial things if you can, then look for feedback and react to it.
- Do one thing and do it well – don't overstretch volunteers.
- Build up community partners and connections.
- Good relationships with school bear fruit.
- Presence and visibility help things happen.
- It takes time to build trust, but once people trust you they will come with you.
- Don't be afraid to dream and don't be afraid to fail and don't be afraid.

Jo Neary Pioneer Team Vicar

### **Learning Points from the Team Rector**

- Rural ministry is not a second class ministry
- Multi parish ministry demands lots of us – working hard and sacrificially as a team is essential
- We must enable everyone to be involved (if they want to) and help discern their particular God given calling
- Don't feel a failure if traditional church is declining
- Be encouraged by small growth
- Share the good stuff with others
- Don't be afraid to take risks

David Baldwin Team Rector

## Resources

<https://churchofenglandfunerals.org/gravetalk/>

<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/>

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk/> (used a lot for resources for After School Club)

<http://www.pilgrimcourse.org/>

Mission Shaped Introduction (MSI) <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/resources-3/mission-shaped-introduction/>

Robert Warren, Developing Healthy Churches: Returning to the Heart of Mission and Ministry

Simon Reed, Creating Community: Ancient Ways for Modern Churches (informed much of our thinking for the Community of the Annunciation)

Paula Gooder and Michael Perham, Echoing the Word: The Bible in the Eucharist (underpinned the theology for Lord's Supper service).

Mission Shaped Church including Mission Shaped Parish and Mission Shaped and Rural.

## *Focal ministry*

Focal ministry means identifying particular people as the point of contact for the parish church in a given community. The people may be Churchwardens, Readers or people who are recognised by the community as representing the church in that place. The purpose of the role is to help ensure pastoral care is available and to aid wider communication. The terminology might be better expressed as a 'local ministers.' There should be no expectation of those people carrying out roles associated with a traditional understanding of a parish priest. The advantage is clear in that the face of the church is easily known by people who are not congregation members. The danger is that, unless the role is intentionally collaborative, ministering as part of a local team, this might perpetuate an individualistic clerical model of ministry where a single person is in charge and does most things. Where this role is shared with other people, the value of a team of people carrying it should not be underestimated, not just to share the task but to model collaborative working to others. It can also allow greater diversity within benefice groups, honouring theological traditions and

ensuring that mission is fully encultured within the characteristic of the local community. Such a practice would need to be agreed by the local community and understood as just one function within the wider body of Christ.

### *Interim ministry*

The period between stipendiary clergy being licensed to a benefice can be a time for congregations to take responsibility for different aspects of the church's life and work. It is a time when people can explore new areas of Christian life and witness. Many of the tasks of mission and ministry can be done by congregations and on the appointment of a new minister, should not automatically be handed back to them. A greater variety of styles of leading worship and preaching can also be a helpful tool for congregational development in experiencing new approaches. However, there are situations where Interim Ministry can be helpful to manage a transition in the organisation of parishes and benefice, or after a crisis of some sort, or another issue. Interim Ministers are strategic appointments to parishes to help a parish or group of parishes move through a process of re-thinking who they are, what they are about, and how they are going to go forward.

### *Resources*

Ministry <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/diocesan-resources/ministry-division>

Interim Ministry <http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/interim-ministry> and Church of Scotland who have been working on interim ministries for over 20 years

[http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/ministries\\_council/partnership\\_development/interim\\_ministry](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/ministries_council/partnership_development/interim_ministry)

Pioneer Ministry <https://www.cofepioneer.org/>

## Mission

Archbishop Rowan Williams said: mission is about finding out what God is doing and joining in.<sup>58</sup> The key to effective mission is therefore taking the time to listen, pray and discern where and how God is already active. This could be the work of an away day for a congregation or of a small task group.

‘The Church’s mission is to be the body of people which, through the grace of God, participates in the initiatives which God takes in this world.’<sup>59</sup> Unlocking the potential of the rural church for such mission might include:

- developing a culture of envisioning, enabling and equipping in the congregation so that members know what they are working towards, that they have a part to play and the skills to do it.
- understanding that affirming and developing creative and supportive relationships within church and community is fundamental to Christ-shaped mission.
- welcoming the fuzzy edges of many congregations which mean that no one is outside – the church exists for the whole community
- congregation members being involved in a range of community activities and events.

Mission is often described as having five ‘marks’, which can be summarised as: tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure. In full these are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Whilst Archbishop Rowan was not the first to say this, he brought it back into contemporary conversations to make us think creatively about God’s action in the world.

<sup>59</sup> Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan*, p. 2

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx>



It might be good to check out the local churches activities to see if they include:

- sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who are yet to hear it
- deepening and developing our relationship with God through our own discipleship
- pastoral care, serving the needs of others and transforming communities
- seeking justice and equitable treatment for everyone, which may include actively campaigning for change, as well as reconciliation and peace
- practising environmental responsibility.

Mission can be simple and straightforward, drawing on things that come naturally such as welcome and hospitality. In a rural west Yorkshire community, a small act of hospitality – providing a cup of tea and a slice of toast to mums who would otherwise be standing in the rain at the school gate – grew into an amazing example of transformational engagement with a whole community that led to a new worship community on a weekday morning.<sup>61</sup>

Mission is therefore about responding to God's call in our lives, being a Christian throughout the whole of life and sharing faith through deed and word. It is not difficult to take small steps to do this well, and there are lots of resources to help you, particularly to reach out in service to the whole community and to make new disciples.

### *Resources*

HOPE Together: words and actions to make Jesus known <https://www.hopetogether.org.uk/>  
Take a look at the free resources for use in rural communities for Easter and Christmas, Remembrance, ideas for events and an annual Rhythm of Mission.<sup>62</sup>

*Equipping for Rural Mission* from Germinate: ARC <http://germinate.net/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/>

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<sup>61</sup> See <http://germinate.net/resources/cw74tea-and-toast/>

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/256542/Rhythm\\_of\\_Mission.aspx](https://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/256542/Rhythm_of_Mission.aspx)

You may find that a specific planning tool such as a Mission Action Plan or Growth Action Plan will be helpful in developing your ideas. Your diocese may already have lots of resources to support this or something similar, but you may also find the following useful:

*How to do Mission Action Planning* by Mark Ireland and Mike Chew (SPCK 2016)

Dedicated resources from the Diocese of Manchester [www.manchester.anglican.org/map/](http://www.manchester.anglican.org/map/)

The value of groups and events aimed at men of different ages see Christian Vision for Men (CVM) <http://cvm.org.uk/> and Who Let the Dads Out [www.wholetthedadsout.org.uk/](http://www.wholetthedadsout.org.uk/)

## **Mixed economy**

The term mixed economy was first used by Archbishop Rowan Williams to refer to fresh expressions and inherited (traditional) forms of church existing alongside each other, within the same denomination, in relationships of mutual respect and support. He envisaged fresh expressions of church and more traditional forms of church having a mutual, symbiotic relationship with a 'flow of communication, good news and challenge between different styles of church life that may respond to different personalities and different stages on the journey.'<sup>63</sup> The two are complementary and should not operate in opposition to each other.

The mixed economy is about recognising that church is not just what happens for an hour on a Sunday morning but a gathering of people for prayer and worship in lots of different forms and across the whole week. The body of Christ in that place then becomes a community that is both gathered and dispersed, present in the school assembly, the prayer group, Messy Church, after school club, early morning Book of Common Prayer services, Common Worship Holy Communion, forest church, youth group or informal men's group etc..

For more information see:

<http://freshexpressions.org.uk/guide-me/going-deep-1-the-mixed-economy/>

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<sup>63</sup> Williams, Rowan, *Making the mixed economy work* (2011)

<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2044/making-the-mixed-economy-work>

## Occasional offices

Baptisms, weddings and funerals are known as occasional offices and are important opportunities for outreach and mission. Everyone who lives in the parish is able to have a christening, wedding or funeral in their parish church. These *life events* are important to people of all ages even if they do not regularly come to church, and create opportunities for congregation members and the priest to develop a continuing relationship with the family or individuals involved. This continuing relationship is part of high quality pastoral care and outreach at the happiest or most traumatic times of life. This might come through visits to baptism families before and after the service, good quality marriage preparation, and bereavement visiting and annual services of remembrance. The continuing relationship creates opportunities to invite people and families to church and social events and allows prayer an ongoing support to be offered. Many rural congregations have experienced newly married couples or the bereaved becoming more involved in church life and regular worship after a positive experience of an occasional office. Paying attention to the opportunities afforded by life events is an important part of planning for mission.

There has been extensive research carried out on baptism, weddings and funerals in the Church of England and information can be found here to help you and to help people asking for more information on each of them.

Christenings <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/christenings>

Adult Baptism <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/adult-baptism>

Confirmation <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/confirmation>

Funerals <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals>

Weddings <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/weddings>

## Pastoral Care

‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,’<sup>64</sup> says Jesus, who calls himself the good – or ideal – shepherd. The pastoral care that we seek to offer will share in the purpose of Jesus to enable people to grow in a life-giving relationship with God through prayer and reflection on the Scriptures.

Linked to that, good pastoral care will have the focus of enabling people to participate in the body of Christ, even if they are unable to attend church. This is about giving a person the sense of being known, named, valued and prayed for and of being able to contribute fully to the life of the church. The pastoral care of the church extends to all those (parishioners) within the ecclesiastical parish, and through the extent and quality of relationships by clergy and congregation alike, this is a practical possibility in many rural communities. The church should have a particular care for the isolated, infirm and the bereaved, shown through the regular intercessions of the Sunday service, personal prayer and contact and, where appropriate, the ministry of healing. Providing good pastoral care may well involve partnership with other churches in the benefice or deanery, with ecumenical colleagues and other organisations. Rural churches have the ability to work creatively with others so that needs are addressed, precisely because the community is small and people’s needs may be well known. However, this strength can also be a weakness, and observant people and good communication is essential to ensure that no one is left behind.

The ordained clergy have an important role in exercising pastoral care, but this ministry of pastoral care belongs to the whole church and is a responsibility of each member of the body of Christ. This responsibility is both formal and informal, showing care for neighbour as well as for those who may need planned visits. Visiting also extends to inviting people to be part of a life-giving, wholeness-offering community of living faith: the church.

A rural church could identify those with particular gifts and time to offer and invite them to form a ministry team of pastoral visitors, bereavement visitors, prayer for healing, and

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<sup>64</sup> John 10.10

Eucharistic ministers for home communions (ideally with neighbours and friends gathered for the purpose). A pastoral care team of course requires careful preparation, training, including safeguarding and ongoing supervision as well as mutual support and encouragement.

Whilst lingering expectations of visiting (the church has only visited if the vicar has been) need to be managed not least by a renewed model of being church, given their public representative role, clergy also need to reflect on their visibility in the communities for which they care. Research from the Weddings Project has shown that people feel more able to contact clergy (and even enter a church building) when clergy have been seen and look approachable! Spending the first year of a new ministry listening, being seen (at the school, at village gatherings and events, for instance) and getting to know and be known in the communities gives a secure foundation for everything that follows.

*Growing Pastoral Care* by Robert Warren

<https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/documents/robert-warren-growing-pastoral-care/>

Pastoral Care UK offer some helpful guidelines for offering pastoral care

<https://www.pastoralcareuk.org/pastoral-care/framework-for-good-practice.html>

## Prayer

Prayer is the basis for all that we do. It is the foundation on which everything else is built and needs to be central to all thinking and planning regarding mission and growth. Prayer is for everyone, not just clergy or lay leaders. The smallest, oldest congregations can have a powerful ministry of prayer by praying regularly for the whole community, those in need and for the future of the church in that place. You can provide a simple set of prayers for people to say at home or when they meet up with friends. Perhaps establishing a 'prayer hub' in each community could be the start of new developments?

Intercessory prayer during regular Sunday worship should be used to pray for local needs and concerns as much as for international issues, healthcare professionals and the church, important though those prayers are. Take some time as a PCC or worship group to draw up a cycle of prayer for local issues such as schools, children and young people, local businesses, events and activities in the community, as well as individuals who have asked for public prayer. Work through this cycle and review it regularly, at least once a year. You can also invite the community to ask for specific items for prayer through a village news sheet or parish magazine, via social media or organisations such as the Parish Council. You can also regularly pray for different parts of the community, by road or area and let people know when this is taking place. Social media would be great for doing this.

Prayer is also the work of evangelism that everyone can contribute to by praying for God to draw people to Jesus. The Thy Kingdom Come<sup>65</sup> initiative from the Archbishop of Canterbury encourages prayer for people to come to know Christ in their lives. Congregations and groups are asked to pray from Ascension Day to Pentecost. As an individual, family or church you can pledge to pray for five people. Once this ten day period is over though – keep going and get into the habit of praying for new people to find faith in God.

Wherever possible the church building should be open during the day. It is important to remember that people will just drop in for a quiet time. You can provide some simple

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

resources to help people explore prayer such as Try Praying<sup>66</sup> or the wide range of resources from the Christian Enquiry Agency.<sup>67</sup>

### *Resources*

Christian Enquiry Agency <https://christianenquiryagency.org.uk/>

CPO [was Christian Publishing Organisation] <https://www.cpo.org.uk/> for a wide range of materials on prayer and many other things

Thy Kingdom Come <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

Try Praying <http://www.trypraying.co.uk/>

The Iona Community <https://www.ionabooks.com/>

Books on prayer by John Pritchard include: *How to Pray*, *The Intercessions Handbook*, *Pocket Prayers for Troubled Times*

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<sup>66</sup> <http://www.trypraying.co.uk/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://christianenquiryagency.org.uk/>



## **Safeguarding**

It is vitally important that whatever you are doing everyone who needs to be should be checked, trained and equipped for Safeguarding. Safeguarding needs to be at the top of every list for church activities and events. There is lots of help and advice available from your diocese or from the National Safeguarding Team. Whilst it might appear to be time consuming and require a lot of administration it is an essential part of mission as we are creating a safe space for people to be welcome and engage with the life changing love of God through Jesus Christ.

See:

Your diocesan website or <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding/diocesan-safeguarding>

Church of England National Safeguarding Team

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding>

Resources for Parishes from the National Safeguarding Team

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding/policy-practice-guidance>

## Schools

Children are not just the future but an essential part of the present for the whole community including the church. When a school is present in a rural parish, whether primary, middle or secondary, a church school or not, it is an opportunity for the local church(es), including ecumenical partners, to develop creative relationships for mutual support, learning and sharing faith. Rural congregations can benefit greatly from participation in the life of the school, its children, teachers and families, as much if not more than the school benefits from involvement with the church. There is so much more to relationships with schools than participation by the priest and members of the congregation in the governing body, important though that is.

The first and most important thing a congregation can do for the local school is to pray for it. Pray for the children and their families, the head, teachers, staff and governors and for the day to day life of the school. Pray regularly as part of Sunday worship and consider asking some members of the congregation to pray for the school regularly through the week.

*Pray.Bake.Read* is a very simple way of connecting with your local school. Libby Leach from the Diocese of Lichfield started this initiative which says:

PRAY... intentionally for your local school

BAKE... a cake for the staff each half term

READ... 1:1 with a student once a week

This a starting point in offering service to your local school. Could you provide food for the staff who are working late for a parents' evening or Ofsted inspection? Can you provide people to assist with school trips, after school activities or clubs or help in other ways? Can you make use of skills in local congregations and community to provide enrichment for the children? For example through music, computer skills including programming, cooking, sewing, gardening or sports all of which contribute to helping children flourish. *Open the Book* is a great resource to help with leading assemblies and can be done by a small group of lay people. Remember that everyone will need to be checked, trained and equipped for Safeguarding.

School governors nowadays have complex and demanding roles that require training and support. Finding the right person within a congregation to take on this role can be challenging, however being a school governor can be very much about fulfilling God's call in your life (see V for vocation). You do not have to have had direct experience of teaching or working in a school. Lots of other jobs and life experiences equip you for this role, including having been a parent! If there is no one in the congregation who is able or willing, is there someone in the community who could take on this role on behalf of the church?

### *Resources*

For more information on working with your local rural church school see:

*Working Together: the Future of Rural Church of England Schools*

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2014\\_working\\_together-the\\_future\\_of\\_rural\\_schools\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/2014_working_together-the_future_of_rural_schools_web_final.pdf)

*Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools* (2018)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications>

Pray. Bake. Read

<https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/pray-bake-read/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pray.bake.read/>

Open the Book <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book>

Prayer Spaces in Schools [www.prayerspacesinschools.com](http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com)

## Service

Rural churches can be good at mission if congregation members are deeply involved in wider community life and are able to make the link between faith and action. The things you do in, for, and with other community groups, events and activities, formal and informal all contribute to God's mission.

Serving other people starts with helping out friends, neighbours and people who are not like us. Taking someone shopping or to a medical appointment, visiting someone who is on their own at home or helping out in practical ways are the foundations of a caring community both inside and outside the church congregation. Serving others also includes getting involved in other local organisations that help bring people together or benefit others. For example, the scouts and guides, the WI, sports clubs, a stroke club or dementia café. What can the congregation get together to do? Hospitality is always a good starting point: every congregation can make hot drinks and serve cake! Regular teas one afternoon during the week have created a space for people to socialise and get to know each other in a village. Held in church, parents picking up children from school join in too making it a good place for people of different generations to meet each other. Coffee mornings, community breakfasts, harvest supper or lunch are all good ways to serve the community through hospitality.

Who else is in the community who you could work in partnership with? There could be other Christian denominations, community groups and charities or the parish council. Does the local authority have any projects that need a venue to run from? Contact your local Community and Voluntary Action organisation to see if particular projects are looking for volunteers.<sup>68</sup>

Research suggests that churches that are engaged with their community and responding to its needs are much more likely to experience a greater interest and engagement with Christianity and a growing church.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Find your local Community and Voluntary action group via <https://www.navca.org.uk/members/members-directory>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www2.cuf.org.uk/research/growing-church-through-social-action>

### *Resources*

Working with other people and organisations in the community is important. There are several community audit tools available that help you identify the needs and aspirations of the local community and church and start to work on them together.

Equipping for Rural Mission Germinate: ARC <http://germinate.net/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/>

Mosaic Creative <http://www.mosaiccreative.co.uk/>

## **Stewardship**

Christians are called to be responsible with all of the things God has given us, often referred to as Stewardship. It includes time, money, gifts and skills and about how we care for others and the environment.

Giving is about how we use time and talents as well as money for God's mission. It is important not to see stewardship as just about paying the bills, contributing to the parish share or common fund; nor is just about keeping the building up and open, important though all these things are. Stewardship is part of our discipleship: how we use the gifts given us to deepen our relationship with God and with other people.

We may not always be as good as we think we are at saying 'thank you'. How often do we use these words in life, home, shops, work or schools and especially in church? We may all too often take people's gifts and contributions for granted. Saying thank you is an important part of stewardship. Take a moment to think about when and how to say thank you. It might be as part of a celebration service to thank people giving their time and talents in church and community, or by letter to regular financial donors. Most importantly try to start to weave the saying of 'thank you' to everyone as a normal part of church life. We may think we do this – but do we really?

Mission and stewardship are intimately linked. Often what people give, whether it is a home-made cake, bric-a-brac or money, is part of themselves. What is given often has sacrificial meaning, value and purpose. In the story of the widow's mite (Mark 12. 41-44) Jesus notes that the widow gave all she had, and in doing so she diminished herself and went without. Such sacrificial generosity deserves acknowledgement and respect. Stewardship demands the responsibility of care towards those who give regardless of size of gift, helping them to have confidence and belief in God's mission. Churches and charities have recognised the need for those giving to have a sense of ownership and participation. This means making the fruits of generosity real for the people who give, whether it is money, time or other things. Donations should not be understood purely in financial terms, otherwise we

lose sight of the generosity, hospitality and respect which are integral to good stewardship.<sup>70</sup>

Many rural congregations find themselves needing to fund raise outside the congregation just to keep going: to pay the utility bills and insurance, the parish share (quota) or to maintain the building. In these difficult circumstances it becomes even more important to be clear that these donations contribute to God's mission. It is also important to be honest about the viability of the church in these circumstances. It might be helpful to start by reviewing giving from within the existing congregation and then start to engage with the wider local community in a much more strategic way, rather than just asking for money. This could include how the building could be used by others, and what other organisations could offer ongoing support (for example a friends group). Talk to your diocesan stewardship adviser (or equivalent) as soon as possible for more help.

#### *Resources*

Link to Anne Richards, 'Mission and Stewardship', *Country Way*, 73 pp.20-21

A simple giving programme for smaller churches <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/sgp/>

Finance, Giving and Christian Stewardship:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/finance-giving-and-christian-stewardship>

#### ***Mission and Stewardship in Rural Churches – article by Anne Richards***

*Country Way Issue 73 (2016)*

I remember being part of the congregation at a church where the choir revolted. Basically, the choir members decided that they would not give money to the rest of the church's needs; they would keep their donations ring-fenced for sheet music, new choir robes, paying the organist and such like. There was an argument in the Parochial Church Council about this – whether it was right that the choir could just 'decide' where their giving could go; whether this was just to make the choir more elitist; whether the choir was being

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<sup>70</sup> Edited extract from Anne Richards, 'Mission and Stewardship', *Country Way*, 73 pp.20-21

unchristian in not 'allowing' their money to be given to the diocese or to charities supported by the church; or whether the choir was merely responding to a feeling that they came off badly in the distribution of funds dedicated to the upkeep of the church and its functions.

The whole issue felt uncomfortable and strange, but, being part of it, I was also very aware that there was a nervousness in that church about the relationship between giving, funding and stewardship. The choir members did have a very strong sense of their gifts to the church, not just their money, but their time and talents in providing the music for which the church was well known. From their point of view, the church's music was a major attraction to non-Christians; it was the reason why the church was growing. The choir was, they thought, perhaps *the* focus for the church's mission, so ring-fencing their giving made sense. Why bother to think about supporting charities, overseas missions and the diocese when the choir was pulling in new people into the congregation who would themselves put money in the plate? Surely it made sense to finance mission this way, by people who knew how to support and enhance the choir?

I've thought about this choir a lot since and one of the things that occurs to me is that giving, stewardship and outcome are related. We have a basic human need to know what becomes of what we give, to find out what God thinks of, and can do with, our gift.

Mission and stewardship are intimately linked, but we are often quite bad at working out what that means in practice. On the stewardship side of things, we can forget that often what people give, even if it's just bric-a-brac to the church bazaar, is not just faceless 'stuff' but part of themselves. What is given often has sacrificial meaning, value and purpose. In the story of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4), Jesus notes that the widow gave all she had. In giving to others she diminished herself and went without. Such sacrificial generosity deserves acknowledgement and respect. Stewardship demands a responsibility of care towards those who give, regardless of the size of the gift. It was that aspect of stewardship in which the choir had lost confidence, because they had been taken for granted.



I recently sat with a widow who was upset because she wanted to give an unworn pair of her husband's shoes to a charity. It was painful to part with them because she felt like she was 'throwing him away', but she had a good picture in her head of the benefit those shoes might bring to others. But she was horrified that as she donated the shoes the charity worker responded, 'Sorry, but these are not in fashion anymore; no one will want them', and put them in a bin for 'useless' articles. Stewardship means respecting the story of the gift, inspiring in the giver confidence and belief in God's mission.

You see fund-raising thermometers outside churches, inching slowly upward, but this limits opportunities for givers to recognise, 'I did that, I am part of that, I made that happen!' Charities which have recognised this need for a sense of 'ownership' provide responses and feedback as well as expressions of gratitude.

But what will really satisfy our need to feel that God's mission is being realised by what we have given?

I think there is an onus on all of us to make the fruits of people's generosity real for them. I'm not just talking about money, but about the sacrifice of time and energy as well. I think the choir would not have revolted if they had felt more appreciated, not just for the time and effort they spent in producing the best music they could, but for the real contribution they made to the church's mission, the role the choir had in attracting new people, especially the young, and its careful nurture of new members within the church body. They were taken for granted, and their gifts of time and energy went unacknowledged and unrewarded.

We can be lazy about our expectations of Christians. We ask; they give. But this is not a good reflection of how God works. God's mission is an overflowing of love into the world (*pleroma*) which has its culmination and focus in the person of Jesus. Everything which is given has a story from the giver, even 10p in an envelope; if we buy into a commercial mind set in which a donation is understood in purely financial terms – its purchasing power – then we have lost sight of the generosity, hospitality and respect which are integral to good stewardship. If that had been present in my long-ago church, the choir would never have

turned inwards and would (I hope) have been able to express the outward-facing, generous Christian desire to help others in need.

Anne Richards

Mission Theology Adviser for the Church of England

## Strategy

‘If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time,’ (Zig Ziglar)

Strategy, the discernment of priorities and the formulation of an agreed plan can contribute significantly to effective mission and growth. You sometimes hear clergy say that they are too busy to do planning or involve others in the planning. This may be a case of the urgent taking precedence over the important. The prayerful discernment of priorities, approaches and tasks will focus time and energy and gifts. This needs to be done not just by clergy or a small group, but by the whole body of Christ. A strategy that is not owned by most people has a much greater potential for failure. In the context of rural multi-church groups, agreeing the strategic direction can be complex and time-consuming, but the more the strategy is a shared approach the more likely it is to be delivered effectively.

There are plenty of resources out there to help. Here is one model<sup>71</sup> for organisational development:

### Approach to shaping strategic direction.....

Model for successful organisations:

VISION	WHERE ARE WE GOING
ROLES	WHO IS DOING WHAT
CULTURE-VALUES	WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT
SKILLS & RESOURCES	WHAT DO WE NEED
BUSINESSACTIVITIES	WHAT WE DO ON A DAILY BASIS
ENVIRONMENT	WHERE WE WORK, WITH WHAT, TO WHOM

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<sup>71</sup> Power point presentation by John Tuckett, Programme Director for the transition process to the new Diocese of Leeds, created November 2012.

Though this comes from the business world, it may be a helpful model, not least because many PCCs will spend most of their time and energy on the “business activities,” or somewhere else low down the list. The key in this model is to agree the vision and to know why we are doing things. Then identify who is doing what, so that culture and values come second.

Appreciative inquiry is another great tool for planning. At its heart, it is a matter of asking what is going well (“How have we been blessed; how are we being blessed?”) and working from that. This sets a positive tone rather than the negative feel created when we start with the problems, the challenges, the deficiencies and the inadequacies. Sam Wells repeats his theme that “God has given us all that we need.” Starting by identifying all that God has given us builds confidence in what we can do to serve his purposes.

### *Process*

The Report *Setting God’s People Free* suggests that why the aspirations identified in so many previous reports on lay ministry had failed to deliver the significant changes that were called for was the neglect of *process*. We have all been in meetings where great hopes and aspirations have been expressed and heartily agreed and then nothing has happened – because no process has been identified by which change will take place. So after a brilliant meeting or wonderful away day, someone or a small group needs to address the issue of *how* the aspirations will effect change. Robin Greenwood’s book is helpful in the area too.

### *Resources*

Mission Action Planning

*How to do Mission Action Planning* by Mark Ireland and Mike Chew (SPCK 2016)

Dedicated resources from the Diocese of Manchester [www.manchester.anglican.org/map/](http://www.manchester.anglican.org/map/)

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry for churches <http://appreciating.church/>

Nigel Pegram, *Appreciative Inquiry - A Strategy for Being a Healthy Church*, Journal of Contemporary Ministry No.3 2017

[www.journalofcontemporaryministry.com/index.php/jcm/article/download/108/101](http://www.journalofcontemporaryministry.com/index.php/jcm/article/download/108/101)

Robin Greenwood, *Sharing God's Blessing: how to renew the local church* (SPCK, 2016)

Leading Your Church into Growth <http://www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk/>

## **Training**

As in all walks of life it is helpful to keep our skills and knowledge up to date, being involved in the church is no exception. Training is not just about learning new things, important though that is, but is also about exploring and deepening our relationship with God. It should also be about enjoying ourselves and even having fun as we develop new skills or knowledge.

Barriers to participation in training can be many for those in rural communities, not just travel times and distances, but also frequency and seasonality (it is much easier to travel in light summer nights than during poor winter weather). Poor access to broadband can also pose problems as can a lack of time to participate at all. If someone has not been in formal education for a long time or had a bad experience, they may be reluctant to get involved. Do encourage the person concerned to talk to the minister or trainer about this, there will be lots of help available for them.

If you decide to take on a new role such as leading children's activities, helping to lead prayers or worship, you are likely to be offered some formal or informal training either as a course, through mentoring or supervision, and which will include safeguarding. Local courses may be provided by your benefice or deanery that are easier to get to and are likely to be directly relevant to you. Some dioceses have formal schemes for supporting lay people in their calling to particular roles, such as a pastoral assistant or worship leader. Talk to your incumbent about what might be available locally or from the diocese.

It is always helpful for ordained ministers to learn alongside congregations. Can you together identify how you might want to develop and what training and support will be needed for that to happen?

*Resources* for training relevant to rural multi-church groups:

Your diocese

[www.germinate.net](http://www.germinate.net)

[www.cpas.org.uk](http://www.cpas.org.uk)

[www.churcharmy.org.uk](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk)

## Vision

Having a vision for the future, a vision of what might be possible is what will be most likely to capture the imagination and direct energy. 'Money follows vision' is perhaps a fairly basic way of saying that people will contribute to that which inspires, captures the imagination or serves a purpose. In Christian understanding, vision is something that is received rather than achieved. The overriding vision which Jesus gave us is that of the coming Kingdom of God. The kingdom brings healing and wholeness, peace and justice. It is that we pray for and strive for. It is within the vision of the coming kingdom that we seek to receive a vision for the local church. So prayer is fundamental to developing vision as to everything else: listening to God patiently and faithfully. Listen also, patiently and faithfully, to the community, to the needs and aspirations of the people the church is there to serve.

Appreciative Inquiry offers a helpful approach to discerning and receiving vision. We might begin by asking: how have we been blessed, how are we being blessed, how might we be a blessing? This has the advantage of setting a positive tone from the outset, instead of framing the question in terms of needs or lacks or wants. Robin Greenwood has an excellent exposition of this approach and great examples in *Sharing God's Blessing*.

Questions to stimulate conversations might be along the lines of:

What is our bigger vision?

What would be most important for us should everything else be stripped away?

How are we to be a flourishing Christian presence in every community?

How are we to communicate our vision?

How are we to work together to accomplish our vision?

## Resources

Appreciative Inquiry for churches <http://appreciating.church/>

*Equipping for Rural Mission* from Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre

<http://germinate.net/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/>

*Sharing God's Blessing: How to Renew the Local Church* Robin Greenwood SPCK 2016

## **Vocation**

Vocation means what you are called by God to be and do. Every Christian is called to serve God according to their given gifts and context. Every Christian has a vocation. It is part of who God wants you to be.

Vocation is very often associated with a calling to ordained ministry or another formal ministry such as Reader / licensed lay minister / youth or children's and families' worker. However, vocation is actually about exploring what God might be calling us to do in every aspect of our life: at home, school or work, in the community or within the church. We might feel that our calling is to something inconsequential. In fact it is anything but as we all have a part to play in the Body of Christ, to serve God where he has placed us in the world. Every day, millions of Christians worldwide are living out their faith, striving to be obedient disciples of Christ. This means putting our faith into action. We have the privilege and opportunity to serve Christ in every task we do, in every encounter we have, and every place we find ourselves. You might find this short bible study and reflection useful for a discussion with a church council meeting, home group or other group.

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/vocation\\_bible\\_study\\_-\\_how\\_does\\_god\\_call\\_people.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/vocation_bible_study_-_how_does_god_call_people.pdf)

Finding your vocation starts with prayer and listening to God and to the prompting of other people. Vocation emerges, and continues to emerge, throughout life. Coaxed out by prayer and conversation, shaped by God and confirmed by the Church community. You can find some useful prayers via <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations/your-calling>

For more information on vocations see:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations>



## **Worship**

We have the privilege of maintaining and developing a place of worship for everyone in the parish. Given that, the question for PCCs and congregations becomes one of accessibility. How accessible is the worship?

One answer to that question is a regular act of worship in a place of worship, wherever possible at the same time each Sunday. In seeking to make that possible, one area has launched a scheme to train lay worship leaders with a vision (if a benefice adopts it) of offering a service every week at the same time. There is experience to suggest that where that happens, numbers increase, not least because people know where and when the service is and it is for them. (The scheme has the added advantage of stimulating people to explore what God is calling them to do, with a related increase in vocations to licensed, Reader and ordained ministry.)

The worship has, of course, to be meaningful: connecting with people's lives, and inspiring people to connect their lives with God. Lay-led, it will not be Eucharistic worship, but may therefore be more accessible to the many people who are not yet members of the church. We need urgently to consider what gives access to worship to those who are not yet members as well as responding to the needs of those who are. Examples abound of accessible worship which is by no means lacking a spirituality of awe and wonder. Some churches have invested in data projectors and screens, both reducing the paper used and making possible the use of video clips like You-Tube: good media to use in a visual culture. If the existing congregation lacks the resources to manage such media, maybe they are there in the community, not least amongst the young people?

Connecting with people's lives and the life of the community may well be enriched by using the cycle of the church's year as a template for outreach and evangelism. That will involve making the most of rural festivals such as Harvest, Rogation and Plough Sunday. It may also mean recognising the local festivals or features, including the presence of tourists, that can be celebrated and having the courage to do it out of church e.g. pub, barn, village green, field etc. In planning such worship events, it is helpful to have thought about planning progression possibilities. An example would be to follow up a Christingle service with a Food

for Thought evening (invitations handed out to people as they leave the Christingle Service) and then follow up the Food for Thought with an Alpha or other basics course (invitations handed to each person at the Food for Thought and a reminder sent out a week before). This is about creating routes for people into greater belonging or exploring discipleship.

Thinking of giving people access to worship means thinking about a website with current information, and about good personal invitation. In one small village in North Yorkshire, the PCC decided to visit every home twice a year; the result was an increase in attendance because people felt personally invited.

The quality of welcome needs to be excellent (and that includes the signage, which is both about how to get in and about inclusive language, such as “welcome to your church” rather than “welcome to our church.”) It is said that if you conduct worship on the basis that there are never any newcomers, there never will be, and if you conduct worship on the basis that there may always be newcomers, there will!

Enabling participation in worship is crucial. That may well begin with the basics of what page you are on, through to varied and imaginative ways of introducing what is happening, including the singing of a hymn. For example, introduce the hymn by its title first, then the number and use it as an opportunity to explain more about the theme of the service. Smaller rural churches offer greater possibilities of discovering and deploying the gifts of those who are there. Enabling participation might also mean a greater degree of interaction than would be possible in a church with larger numbers. One congregation was at first resistant to interactive reflection on the Bible readings, but after three years of persistence decided that they preferred to reflect together on the passage than to be given a sermon! Even where open prayer might not be an option, asking people before the prayers what concerns and thanks they have brought with them and then offering those can work well.

Relationships are of paramount importance in a small church; the presence and practice of genuine love, hospitality, service, will be attractive. How is this reflected in your congregation? It is helpful if there is continuous and consistent teaching on this theme and if

the people have given attention to their shared values. Do you review this at your PCC meetings?

It is crucial that one of those values should be the inclusion of children with all their energy and noise and exuberance. Parents need affirmation and reassurance that they are welcome, but the issue is even more profound since the voices of the children are part of the praises of the church. A church that welcomes children welcomes everyone. 'Anyone who welcomes such a child, welcomes me.'<sup>72</sup>

When people come out of church saying that they have enjoyed an act of worship, they sometimes add (especially if they are older) "we heard every word". They mean, of course, that the words were projected so that they heard, that the articulation was satisfactory, but also, maybe, that the voice(s) were interesting, sounded interested, even caught up in the wonders of which it spoke.

In rural benefices there is a particular issue of clergy having to lead several services on a Sunday and so arriving with few minutes to spare and leaving directly the service has ended. Even if the body is exercising ministries, this is not helpful for the body or for the minister. PCCs would do well to give time to reflect on a viable pattern of worship and the possibilities of lay led worship so that worship clergy are able to participate in the regular meetings of the body of Christ (the congregation).

There are innumerable resources for worship, including multi-sensory worship. Given that people have different learning styles and different personalities, a variety of offer is important. As important as variety and fresh ideas and fresh words is the space to allow the Word himself to be present and to touch minds and hearts and souls. The focus must be on Jesus, and reliance placed on the Spirit rather than on everything being right, or the perfect liturgy or the precise timings. Creating a sense of expectation, wonder, awe and even a desire, is vital to life-giving worship.

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<sup>72</sup> Matthew 18:5

### *Resources*

Common Worship for the Church of England <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship>

Going For Growth: transformation for children, young people and the church  
<http://www.going4growth.com/home>

Iona Community have a wide range of service outlines, prayers and liturgies to help you rediscover worship, especially in small groups <https://www.ionabooks.com/>

Multi-sensory Worship – from the Scripture Union  
<http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Multi-Sensory%20Worship.pdf>

Roots – Weekly resources to enrich worship and learning all week every week  
<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/>

## Young People

‘Oh we haven’t got any teenagers!’ ‘Why don’t they want to come?’ Stereotypical statements perhaps but one many of us in rural churches will have heard or even said ourselves. Rural churches don’t often have young people involved in their regular life. This can be for many reasons, not least that there may not be many or indeed any resident in the parish, but many rural places do have young people living in them. However, engaging with young people who are part of ‘what must now be considered a “post-Christian” and “post-secular”’ generation is difficult.<sup>73</sup> This means that although young people no longer automatically identify as having a particular faith it does not mean they are not interested in religion or belief. ‘In fact, beliefs are perhaps less important than the meaning being generated by belonging, [... so that] believing is belonging. Formation of values and world views is set within the close ties of family and friends.’<sup>74</sup> For young people it is a case of finding the place where they can participate and find identity in Christian community. It is difficult for the church to make these connections but we need to try.

Young people might well be isolated or lonely when at home, observing at a distance through social media, the lives of their friends who live geographically close to each other. Helpful though social media can be it does not replace meeting in person. Whilst the challenges facing young people in rural communities are complex, responses by local churches need not be. Young people crave to be acknowledged for who they really are, so creating a safe space where young people can play, be themselves without judgement and be listened to is key.

It is not easy to start anything for young people from scratch. The first question to ask is what provision for young people already exists and how can it be supported? Are there active Scout or Guide groups in the area that would welcome additional helpers, or an existing local youth club? Is it possible to work with ecumenical partners in the area, with other churches in the benefice or deanery, or through a local secondary school? The second

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<sup>73</sup> Nick Shepherd, ‘Caring, curious, and seeking connection: meet Generation Z’, *Church Times* No. 8078, 12 January 2018, p.24

<sup>74</sup> Nick Shepherd (2018)

is to ask what the young people themselves might like rather than offer them what you think they would like.

What could be started for children in primary school that might lead onto to support for young people? Churches often work well with primary school age children and then loose contact with them at age 11 as they move to secondary schools. Making meaningful contact with children at primary school and providing something that this age group can grow into is one way of continuing contact and helping support teenagers, many of whom struggle at this age.

One rural priest holds a 'worship workshop' during lunchtime in a local primary school. The workshop creates a spiritual space in which the children are enabled to pray and worship. Each session lasts for about half an hour with 15 minutes for prayer, the children take it in turns to pray quietly or out-loud using a holding cross. There is then an activity related to worship or time to prepare a forthcoming assembly for the school. The group always eats together and has a time to chat – it is intended to be fun and attracts about 14 children each time. This is open to children aged 9, 10 and 11 and is part of encouraging children to consider confirmation in Year 6 (which is open to all in the school not just those who voluntarily come to the workshop).

Once children go to secondary school then a different approach is needed. Some areas may have a Youth Bus either owned and run by a local authority or by a local Christian project. In one area 15-30 young people aged between 11 and 18 come each week, making use of the facilities on the bus to play computer games, listen to music or just hang out together. The last half hour of the time is spent in the church (the bus parks in its car park). There is a rolling presentation of images and video clips with a different theme each week, which creates a space to talk and explore faith. This helps the children to form their own identity in Christ and the young people feel they can play with the ideas and with the church building itself, which they have come to think of as their own. This approach helps to develop young leaders and who can be part of leading this in the future.

The Network Youth Church in Cumbria (NYC) was set up as so few young people were involved in the life of the predominantly rural churches. It runs across parish and benefice boundaries in a single or group of deaneries. NYC has a series of small youth groups or youth cells meeting weekly or fortnightly, in a place near to where the participants live. There is then a much larger monthly gathering in the deanery, so that young people can meet other people and worship in larger numbers. The meetings seek to help the young people grow in a deepening relationship with each other and God and usually include food, fun and worship and involve a focus on serving God.

Taking groups of young people out of their local context can be very helpful in developing faith. For example large scale Christian festivals such as Soul Survivor are very popular, as are residential weekends and taking part in mission activity locally and across the deanery or dioceses.

In some rural communities, confirmations are quite rare for young people or adults; in others they are regular features of church life. Where they are regular, perhaps because it is still regarded as a rite of passage or because of the proximity of a Church of England secondary school, a big effort has been made to retain the young people. Confirmation preparation could be on a Deanery or sub Deanery basis so that there is a larger group meeting together for mutual support and friendship and more people and resources available to support them.

Today's young people want to be involved and participate in the things they do, for those already involved in church life that is no exception. The gifts of young people (and children) can be discerned, developed and used for mission and worship just as they are in adults, so that the young person sees that their contribution is valued by others. This encourages commitment and gives joint responsibility for the mission of the church.

### *Resources*

Going For Growth: transformation for children, young people and the church

<http://www.going4growth.com/home>

Network Youth Church <http://www.networkyouthchurch.org.uk/>

Youth for Christ <https://yfc.co.uk/>

Thoughts from Jimmy Dale, National Youth Evangelism Adviser

<https://greatcommission.co.uk/the-power-of-prayer-story>



## **Z – Omega Ω**

Jesus Christ is the end as he is the beginning of all that we are about. “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one.” (Revelation 1:17) Those words are part of the introduction to the letters to the churches, which picture the risen Christ aware of both how the churches are and how they should be. The words, “Do not be afraid,” so often on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels, need to be heard by his people now as then, especially when few in number and in challenging circumstances. Fear, not doubt, is the enemy of faith and our greatest need is to be renewed in confidence in the provision of God (who has given us all that we need); in the presence and promise and purpose of Jesus.

If the Church’s commission is held in the words ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you,’<sup>75</sup> we need to ask ourselves always, how did the Father send the Son? To put it another way we need to seek a Christ-shape for the ministry and mission to which we are called – a Christ shape and a Christ-energy. As one member of the Rural Affairs Group put it, “Relax! It’s God’s church, not yours. Don’t bear the weight of it yourself!” And as Archbishop Rowan Williams expressed it:

‘The "strength" of the Church is never anything other than the strength of the presence of the Risen Jesus. And one thing this means is that, once we are convinced that God in Jesus Christ is indeed committed to us and present with us, there is a certain freedom to risk everything except those things that hold us to the truth of his presence – Word and sacrament and the journey into holiness. These will survive, whatever happens to this or that style of worship, this or that bit of local Christian culture, because the presence of Jesus in the community will survive.’<sup>76</sup>

Rural congregations are often small in number (though still having a greater proportion of the population attending than many urban and suburban churches); they need to be reminded that two or three coming together suffices for Jesus to be present and that it is his presence and promise and purpose that we are about. Retaining the focus on him is the key to being released for mission.

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<sup>75</sup> John 20: 21

<sup>76</sup> Is it really Church? (Rowan Williams) 2008 <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/views/is-it-really-church>