

Intro: This is a Renewal and Reform podcast from the Church of England. The Renewal and Reform programme is aimed at helping the Church of England become a growing Church for all people and for all places.

CAROLINE PASCOE: So, I'm Caroline Pascoe. I'm Mission Development Officer in Hereford diocese. So essentially my role is helping parishes to see how they can reach out into their communities, serve their communities in Christ's name, and help to spread the good news of God's love to people of all ages.

As a diocese, we're reaching new generations, particularly through messy church, café church, a whole range of different expressions of church, forest church is a great rural expression of church. Forest church is church out in the wilderness, people of all ages together, celebrating God's creation, sharing hospitality together, often a camp fire, eating together, giving thanks to God.

DAVID BALDWIN: My name is David Baldwin, I'm the team rector of the Beaminster area team, which is in the Diocese of Salisbury and in West Dorset.

Our team is made up of 14 parishes with 15 churches, of which the biggest is Beaminster itself. One of the biggest projects was set up by my colleague and that's called 'Walk-in Wednesday'. And it's a community project, where we turn Beaminster church into a café all day. So, we serve coffee and cake all morning, lunch at lunchtime, tea and cake all afternoon – no charge. A lot of elder folk use it. All kinds of activities go on there, we have a group that knit for a charity. And our biggest joy at the moment is that we've started to attract mums, dads, and babies.

We've had all kinds of responses, thanking us for just being there, thanking us for the fellowship, the friendship, the hospitality, and the welcome which is key to the project.

And we've just been astounded by how popular it is. But we still have communion taking place in the midst of it. And we can have up to 20 people sharing communion and the mums kind of now sit in the chancel, just outside where we are, and so in effect mums, dads and babies, by sitting just outside where we are, are taking part in worship, even if they don't know it, they're actually taking part.

JANE WILLIS: I'm Jane Willis and I'm Rector of Hurstpierpoint in Sussex.

I'm rector of a single parish which is quite unusual for rural ministry, but Sussex is heavily populated rural, and our villages are huge, so we've got a population of about 7,000.

Hurstpierpoint is a village with a strong sense of community and so much happening in it. We've got a huge church school, and so relationship with the school is really important. We ran prayer spaces, which was so exciting. One of our priorities as the church has been building our work with families and young people. We've got a lot of young families in the village, so we have re-thought how we do our children's work. We've tweaked our morning service, and our pattern of services, and what I'm seeing now is families coming in the door for the first time, and thinking, "yeah we can come here with our young children", and then becoming a part of the church community, so that's been exciting. And we've grown a core of families who are part of the church regularly, and perhaps a wider fringe as well. So, when we had a barbeque, last summer, I think about half of the families made it, and we had about 30 or 40 people there – which is pretty good, in three and half years - isn't it?

BARRY DOUGMORE: My name is Barry Dougmore, I'm the Diocesan Mission Enabler in Exeter diocese.

My role is to work with local churches, in any context rural or urban, to help them to raise confidence in growing new disciples, sharing their faith, planting new congregations, and trying fresh expressions of church.

One of our projects is mission resource hubs – called Mission Sheds – and these are learning communities that gather four times a year to grow in confidence to try new things. They're coordinated by lay leaders and ordained leaders, and we try and capture their learning needs, the things they want to help them to grow in mission together, and try and put all that into our learning agenda, and deliver that for them locally.

So far, we've had a number of people who've come to Mission Sheds who've actually had the confidence to try a new congregation, such as café church, or a messy church, or a church in a hall. Whereas before they would just feel isolated, and a bit sort of disempowered to try anything new, but talking to other people, and sharing our learning at the same venue has just given them that little bit of extra encouragement to take a risk and try something new.

ALISON MYERS: I'm Alison Myers, I'm a team rector in a multi-parish of benefice of 11 parishes, 11 villages, 14 or so worshipping communities.

There are a number of different things in different parishes. But one in particular that has now been running for about two years, is a community café. A lot of villages actually are quite short of space, where people can meet each other, meet friends, and for a thriving community you need that kind of space and opportunity to build relationships.

We worked in a three-way partnership with the other church in the village – an independent church – and the community association. And we open the community room, which is a small room attached to the school, once a month on a Saturday morning, and people make a point of going, it's buzzing, it didn't take long for it to grow.

There's a different team on every month, and families come, older people come, who just come on their own, but sit with someone so they can have a chat.

Another contrasting project – again it's based around a café space – but in a much smaller community, the church runs a pop-up café. One morning, every school holidays, the church is open and is beginning to develop a clientele of people who look for it. So, we invite families to come and bring their children, and the chancel is just filled with toys. We've begged and borrowed a lot of toys, so table football, giant Jenga, train set, cars, Lego, and the children have a whale of a time. And the feedback we've had in this new one that we're doing, in the village called Dry Drayton, is that it's a really valuable community space, and we've had lots of feedback saying yes do it again.

So, it's quite important to look at what you've got and what the community needs are and try and bring those two together.

KEN WATERS: Ken Waters, I'm the Priest-in-charge of the Wissey Valley benefice, which is a very rural benefice in Norfolk under Ely diocese.

We reach out to the community in numerous ways. We have three messy churches running. We have two adult messy churches running. We have a youth centre, we have a twice a month coffee morning,

which attracts lots of people in who are unchurched, but it's in a church building. And we just try and reach out in the community in every way we can.

I have a large team of lay helpers – licensed lay ministers, pioneer minister, full-time youth worker. And every opportunity we get, we go into the schools.

We get very good responses from the parents for the messy churches and the youth centre, because there's nowhere for the kids to go in the little villages. We've seen an increase in baptisms through them. We've even had adult baptisms through them. We have young adults, we get about 40 young adults between 15 and 18, meet on Thursday evenings. They sit through a boring talk by me, they have an exciting talk by somebody else, and then there's food involved, then they just sit and talk, and from that we've had a youth Alpha, which is brilliant.

Outro: For more information on Renewal and Reform, please visit the Church of England website. Thank you for listening.