

RENEWING FAITH IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

A REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF MISSION

Introduction

1. This year is the tenth anniversary of the publication of the report *Faith in the Countryside*. The Board of Mission had intended to sponsor a debate in General Synod to celebrate that anniversary, to affirm the ministry and mission of the rural Church and to look to the future. The publication of the last government's Rural White Paper, *Our Countryside: the future*, in November 2000 and more significantly the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in February have substantially altered the context for this July's debate.

2. In February 2000 Synod debated the crisis in farming. This debate in July 2001 provides opportunity to consider rural issues more broadly and particularly to renew commitment to the mission and ministry of the Church of England in rural areas. This brief introductory report is intended to provide background to the elements of the motion to be debated, highlighting a number of the issues and mapping out some of the actions taken by the Church at local and national level. The May issue of *Country Way*, accompanying this report, assesses in detail the government White Paper and suggests action that the Church can take. It is an integral supplement to this report.

The Foot and Mouth Epidemic

3. This section does not explore questions about the causes or the spread of the infection, nor the appropriateness of the control systems that have been used in efforts to eradicate

the disease. It is too early to provide a considered view. In due course this should be provided by a national enquiry into the causes, handling and consequences of the epidemic. The report aims rather to share something of the way that local churches and Christians were able to mount a human response to the human tragedy of a seriously damaged rural economy.

4. **Parishes and clergy.** It is widely recognised that local church people and clergy have played a most important part in providing imaginative and concerned pastoral support to farmers and communities caught up in the cull of animals. The prayers, presence and support of clergy and people have received many tributes. In many places the role that they have played will be long remembered as an example of the pastoral mission of the Church of England. The network of rural officers and agricultural chaplains has proved its value in providing a network of informed support and action. Bishops have also played an important role as leaders within the wider community. It is significant that most Church of England dioceses cover both rural and urban areas. Local initiatives have also been assisted by national action, particularly the ARC Addington Fund.

5. **The ARC Addington Fund.** At the early initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury the National Rural Officer, with colleagues at the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC), took over an earlier fund initiated in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich (the Addington Fund formed to provide rapid financial support to those affected by last year's outbreak of swine fever in East Anglia) to create the ARC Addington Fund. Sustained support from the Royal Agricultural Society of England, the Ernest Cook Trust, and Lord Iliffe, provided staff to ensure that grant requests could be rapidly processed. Generally they have been made within 6 days of receiving the first call for help.

First HRH The Prince of Wales, then *The Daily Mail*, *The Western Morning News*, dioceses and individual churches, Sheikh Maktoum of Dubai and many others provided substantial donations. The government has matched money for all but corporate donations. About £900,000 has come from church collections.

6. By the end of May a Fund totalling over £6.5m had been collected. Over £5.5m in grants has been made to more than 10,000 businesses dependent on agriculture. Many of these were ineligible for help from the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institutions (RABI), which is restricted by charity law to helping farmers and farm workers. The typical support has been for animal feed for animals caught in the wrong place, and often on farms unable to pay for additional feed. What has been clearly demonstrated is the large number of farm businesses that have not been viable for some time.

7. Agricultural chaplains, members of Farm Crisis Network groups and others have acted as third parties in bringing applications to the Fund Trustees. This system relying on third parties has proved vital, for it has helped to ensure that those asking for financial help have been made aware of the range of people and support systems that have been available and might be drawn on. In the most seriously affected areas agricultural chaplains have played a major part in mustering a fuller response, such as the Cumbria Recovery Plan.

8. **Wider effects.** It became clear after only a few weeks that the effect of footpath closures and the way the media, both in this country and abroad, reported the crisis that the whole UK tourism industry was going to be severely affected by the epidemic. Further consequential effects have been felt throughout the rural economy as large numbers of jobs have

been lost, business income halted. Sometimes banks have proved unwilling to provide continuing cost-free support. There is a risk of much resentment against the agricultural sector, for which so much seems to have been done, from the non farming sector which has suffered so much in consequence of the collapse of confidence amongst visitors. Local churches may also be hard pressed financially because of the damage to rural incomes. Clergy and others will be challenged in their role as reconcilers within fractured communities.

9. **National level responses.** The Bishop of Blackburn and the National Rural Officer have played a part in the Government's Rural Task Force. The Task Force has taken a number of actions including the following - Increasing the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme; providing business rate relief through local authorities; instructing Job Centres to be as sympathetic and helpful to the self-employed, temporarily without business income, as to the temporarily laid-off employed person; providing additional finance from the nation's reserves to businesses in need through the Regional Development Agencies. There are varied views on the effectiveness of a number of these schemes and concern about the length of time it has taken to implement some of them. The new Government will need to provide significant new support if "innocent" businesses are not to be lost to the rural economy.

10. The scale of the epidemic, the response to it and what has been revealed both about the state of the rural economy and varied attitudes to the countryside highlight the need for a national debate on the long-term future of the countryside and its people.

‘Faith in the Countryside’ – the role of the Church of England.

11. When the report *Faith in the Countryside* was published the sort of disaster that has been visited upon the countryside had not been envisaged. Despite the changed situation many of the report’s recommendations have put in place resources that although severely tested in recent months, have been found to be a real sign of hope and celebration.

12. In 1988 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York invited Lord Prior to lead an Archbishops’ Commission on Rural Areas (ACORA):

- i) to examine the effects of economic, environmental and social change on the rural community.
- ii) to describe the changing nature of the Church in the countryside.
- iii) to examine the theological factors which bear upon the mission and ministry of the Church in rural areas.
- iv) In the light of the above, to make recommendations for consideration and action.

13. A single benefactor largely funded the Commission. Its report *Faith in the Countryside* was published in late 1990. Although it did not produce the controversial response from leading politicians elicited by the *Faith in the City* report of 1985, it has played a steady and influential role in contributing to a more informed understanding within the Church and wider society of the particular character and needs of rural people and the countryside.

14. Governments have tended to follow the generally accepted myth, that all is well in the countryside. It may be true that people need to *feel* that all is well there, for so many wish they could live in their idealised rural setting as a reaction to urban living. For members of the Church of England the idealised rural parish with its vicar epitomises so much of the powerful paradigm with which we wrestle.

15. Early in 1999 the Bishop of Blackburn, as Chairman of the newly-formed Rural Bishops' Panel, invited every diocesan Bishop to answer a series of standard questions about progress in key policy areas identified in the many recommendations of *Faith in the Countryside*.¹ The following developments since 1990 have been identified as particularly significant.

16. First, the appointment of a network of rural officers and agricultural chaplains. Their presence and contribution has been vital in the crises affecting the agricultural community. They are due a debt of gratitude.

17. Second, the continuing reduction in the number of full time stipendiary clergy has brought about an increased role for lay people, not just in maintaining but also developing the ministry of local churches.

18. Third, the acceptance of a de-facto ecumenism in rural areas. Denominationalism is an unaffordable luxury. With the help of the Council for Christian Unity the policy *Declaration of Ecumenical Hospitality* has won favour but remains

¹ The responses have been collated and summarised in a short report *Celebrating the Rural Church* published by ACORA ISBN 0 9516871 8 2 (£5.00).

unknown in too many places where there is only one church.
[See Appendix A]

19. Fourth, a surge of interest in ministry to visitors. That more people might pass through the church doors as visitors than as worshippers is a challenge to the way the building is presented and furnished. The threat of damage is not enough to persuade churchwardens to lock most rural churches. The battle against locking churches is slowly being won by those who recognise the vital part church buildings can play in the spiritual journey of many who may have lost their Christian roots. The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group support this approach. The establishment of the National Churches Tourism Group, based at the Arthur Rank Centre, has contributed much to this major but quiet enterprise.

20. Fifth, the campaign to make fuller use of church buildings. It is difficult to justify the cost and effort of maintaining plant in use for only an hour or two each week or month. The “Rural Churches in Community Service” project was able to help at least one hundred churches to provide contemporary facilities and a more useable layout in keeping with the practice of the mediaeval church, for in most rural communities the church was then the main solid building, available for a wide range of uses. The lessons from that project can be learned for any PCC thinking of such adaptations in *Open All Hours*².

22. Sixth, the inconsistency and variation in provision of theological preparation to help those preparing for ministry to

² *Open All Hours* (ACORA Publishing; 2000 £6.00). Available from the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2LZ. Tel 02476 8583

appreciate the significance and special characteristics of the rural context. An Arthur Rank Centre research project, funded by the Jerusalem Trust, to learn the perceived needs of those engaged in rural ministry is nearing first stage completion. There is likely to be a role for distance learning involving a number of training partners. The contribution to such training is a major commitment of the staff of the Arthur Rank Centre.

23. Seventh, the commitment of dioceses to provide rural/agricultural chaplaincies has been assisted by the full time appointment since 1992 of a national rural officer, located at the Arthur Rank Centre (see paragraph 27). This officer, formerly an Archbishops' Rural Officer, funded by Lambeth with the support of the dioceses, became in 1992 a staff member of the Board of Mission now within the Archbishops' Council and funded by the General Synod at a cost of £50,000.

24. Eighth, within the National Synodical and Episcopal structures two groups have been formed since 1990 to oversee and raise the profile of rural concerns within the Church and more widely. The **Board of Mission formed the Rural Affairs Committee** in 1993. Chaired until his resignation in May 2001 by the Bishop of Brixworth it has brought together lay and ordained Synod members with representatives of the Church Commissioners and Synodical Boards and Councils. It has steadily increased its impact on Synod, with a fringe meeting at every Synod and the debate on the farming crisis at the end of the February 2000 sessions. The Bishop of Exeter has succeeded the Bishop of Brixworth as Chairman.

25. The **Rural Bishops' Panel** of the House of Bishops was formed in 1998 in parallel with the long established Urban Bishops Panel. Under its first chairman, the Bishop of Blackburn, himself a Board member first of the Countryside

Commission and then its successor the Countryside Agency, it has worked closely with the Board of Mission's Rural Affairs Committee to raise awareness throughout the Church and at every level of the significance for the Church of England of developing a greater understanding of the place of the church in the life of the rural community and the possible effects of the radical restructuring of the rural church's ministry.

26. The Bishop of Norwich has recently been appointed to succeed the Bishop of Blackburn as a Board member of the Government's Countryside Agency and take over the chair of the Rural Bishops Panel.

27. **The Arthur Rank Centre.** Ecumenical working at national level has grown. A unique partnership between the Churches ecumenically, the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) and the Rank Foundation has contributed creatively to rural well being over nearly 30 years. The Arthur Rank Centre, as it is known, based at the RASE showground at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire provides a unique national resource for the Churches in which by working together on one site officers of individual churches can prove to be more than the sum of their parts. The Centre's core staff includes the rural officers of the Church of England, the Methodist and United Reformed Churches and the Baptist Union.

28. Rural issues that have been addressed in the past include the need for affordable housing, injustice associated with tied housing, animal welfare, training for young people, the biodiversity hidden in churchyards and burial grounds, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, church tourism.

29. Before June's election the then Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions had made a one-year

full time secondee available to the ARC to work on developing links between urban and rural people, based on faith communities. That rural and urban and suburban people are inter-related in shared cultures, aspirations and economic activity is increasingly obvious. It is a shared vision of Government and Church that we avoid a polarisation between urban and rural populations.

30. A 'Churches Rural Group' was formed in 1993 with representatives drawn from all denominations to encourage ecumenical action. It is a forum of 'Churches Together in England' and is serviced by the staff of the Arthur Rank Centre.

Other Aspects of the Church of England's Presence in Rural Areas

31. The Rural Church through its people and buildings, churches and schools, has a perceived special significance not found in urban and suburban settings. It has a wide range of roles – spiritual, social and educational. Much of this special significance lies in the Church's central presence in rural communities over many generations; it is frequently the only remaining 'traditional' institution. It features in people's lives in many ways. In places where family roots may stretch over several generations the usual sacramental 'rites of passage' can have a special relevance. It continues to feature day-by-day in community life through church schools, youth and children's groups and choirs, through bell-ringers guilds and Friends of Churches organisations, concerts, fetes and flower festivals and in the adaptive use of the church building for community services, shops and day centres. There is frequent cross-membership of PCCs with Parish Councils (and School Governors where there is a school). There is also a widespread

sense of community ownership of the church building, illustrated recently in the number of community-led Millennium projects through which communities sought to express their sense of place.

32. **Schools.** A quarter of all primary schools in England are Church of England schools. In rural areas this proportion is often much higher. The church's involvement in rural primary schools represents a major commitment by the church to service provision in rural areas and through this to the quality of rural life. In recent years the slowing down of the closure of rural primary schools and the increasing understanding of the quality of education that the best of them provide has been important for the church and for the many local communities in which they provide a focus. The provision of safe, healthy and environmentally friendly means of getting to and from school has been a contentious issue in many areas. At secondary school level the church does not have many schools that serve rural areas, but it continues to have a care and concern for the young people.

33. **Young People.** The isolation and deprivation experienced by young people living in rural communities is often masked by perceptions of their life being "idyllic". Young people in rural communities, in particular, experience isolation from their friends at school and work once the "working day" is over, find it extremely difficult to access facilities and opportunities in their leisure time and may even have difficulty in simply travelling to and from work. In many senses they do not have access to, and are deprived of, those opportunities more readily available to their peers living in other urban or sub-urban environments.

34. Youth Work in rural communities, especially, can complement and support learning in schools and colleges, and can make a vital contribution to the overall social welfare and wellbeing of young people. The Church, having a presence in almost all rural communities, is ideally placed to support and encourage youth work and is often the initiator of projects involving young people. Initiatives taken by the church to support young people in rural communities have included mobile youth work provision (e.g. in the form of "bus projects"), Deanery youth work programmes, and mentoring schemes for young people, as well as traditional youth group provision often delivered in collaboration with other denominations or youth organisations. As well as these larger projects, it has to be remembered also that there are many small parishes where individual members of the church befriend, encourage and support young people known to them. The Arthur Rank Centre has run a small grants scheme to support churches' rural youth work.³

35. **Children.** Work with younger children in a parish context is also important and is sometimes still possible at the level of the individual church. Increasingly the provision of work for children at the level of the benefice, group or team is more likely to meet the specific needs of children being brought up in the rural church. Much has been written in recent years about the importance and value of all age worship and learning. The rural church is perhaps more likely to be working in this way than the urban church and is correspondingly benefiting from the development of new approaches in this area.

³ The report *See you down the bus-shelter* is available from the Arthur Rank Centre at £3.00

36. **The Church Commissioners.** The Church Commissioners' rural estate comprises some 350 farms with a total area of approximately 125,000 acres. It is all let on tenancy and managed by agents. Much of the land has been owned by the Church since before the last century but the estate was considerably enlarged in the 1960s and 1970s by acquisition when it reached a peak of 175,000 acres.

37. The Church Commissioners' long term objective is one of realising value from their rural assets. Rents are reviewed regularly, both up and down, and the current annual rent roll is some £9m. There has been, and remains, a policy of rent relief in appropriate circumstances. The current outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease and an extremely wet winter have both triggered relief arrangements.

38. **Church Buildings.** Over one-third of all Grade I listed buildings are churches and many of the finest stand in lightly populated rural areas. The care for church buildings is a significant element in the maintenance of England's built heritage; in its churchwardens alone the Church has a number of volunteers caring for buildings (amongst their many other responsibilities) on a similar scale to the National Trust. Our buildings make a substantial contribution to the tourism industry. According to the English Tourism Council they are overall the most visited category of buildings, bringing unique access to the spirituality and history of our communities and society.

39. The rural church faces distinctive problems such as the on-going burden of maintenance and repairs but diminishing sources of external funding, for limited national government funding has been concentrated on highly listed buildings or those in coal-mining areas, while the last budget announced

changes to the Landfill Tax – formerly a fruitful source for many rural churches. It is proving increasingly difficult to obtain funds for adaptations or community projects. It is not unusual for churches to be refused external funding for projects which are intended to benefit the whole community on the grounds that the PCC is an ‘exclusive’ body. This fails to recognise the Church’s role as the sole ‘community service’ in many rural areas.

40. Our rural areas have experienced many kinds of turbulence in the 10 years since *Faith in the Countryside* was published. The countryside continues to attract many who would like to live there and to leave the towns and cities. A series of disasters have hit agriculture - BSE, swine fever, Foot and Mouth, the adverse exchange rate caused by the weakness of the Euro, the liberalisation of world trade, the necessary reform of the Common Agriculture Policy and the flooded fields over the past year. To re-read *Faith in the Countryside* in the light of the current rural crisis is to realise how prescient was the analysis provided by the Commission and how far-seeing its recommendations.⁴

The Government and the Rural Church

41. The last Government (1997-2001) began publicly to recognise the important role of the rural church in building strong community life. In November 2000 it published a major Rural White Paper (*Our Countryside: the future. A Fair Deal for Rural England*) after much consultation and in the spirit of listening and a willingness to receive criticism. The Churches have been much involved in that process. One consequence of

⁴ The main report is now out of print but the shorter report is available at £2.50 from the Arthur Rank Centre

FMD has been a renewed willingness to ask ‘what is the countryside for?’ and ‘what kind of agriculture do we want?’. These are major questions for our urban society in a global market. If these crowded islands can resolve a right way of living with the natural world in a sustainable way, with attractive surroundings and with a healthy diet, then we shall be able to offer the world something precious. The debate has started in many quarters and Christian people must be encouraged to play a full part including a confident sharing of theological perspectives.

42. The ecumenical Churches Rural Group provided a response to the Rural White Paper to the Secretary of State for the Environment. An extract from that letter of February 19th 2001 follows:

‘Many of the financial problems experienced by producers stem from their inability to cover commodity production costs. Recognising this, the authors of the White Paper have drawn attention to the need for a ‘strong code of practice to put relations between supermarkets and their suppliers on a clearer and more certain basis’ (8.3.6). We believe that this recommendation requires urgent action. Research undertaken by the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) put the total cost of producing a litre of milk at 21.9p. On average producers at that time were receiving only 15.9p per litre from processors and retailers (RASE 2000). Such a situation is clearly not sustainable, and yet it is not confined to the dairy sector. We would argue that the difference between a commodity’s ex-farm price and the price paid at the supermarket check-out frequently mitigates against the producer and that urgent action must be taken to resolve

the current situation and to ensure that the producer is not always at the mercy of the retailer. Producers must take some responsibility for the resolving of this situation and we recognise that this requires co-operation between farmers right across the industry (8.3.2). To some degree this is already happening; ‘Concerned about the growing gap between farm level and retail prices, producers have sought opportunities, often collectively through co-operatives, to add value through processing, storage and transportation, etc.’ (Hughes, RASE 2000:53). We believe however, that the government must still play a major role in the relationship between producer and retailer. This role must include the monitoring of the recommended code of practice for supermarkets (8.3.6). We would also argue that the code must be legally enforceable if it is to have any credibility or effect.’

43. Involvement in the Government’s Rural Task Force, the Countryside Agency’s Market Towns Forum and other fora are indications of increased recognition of the Churches’ role, but the resources to respond to the opportunity are slender, there being only three executive staff at the Arthur Rank Centre. Just as the Church may be expected to make a significant contribution the Church itself must rediscover God’s great vision and resist those who would withdraw the church from public life.

44. The Government has undertaken to seek EU approval to a reduction to 5% of the rate of VAT payable on repairs to listed church buildings. In the meantime it has instituted a scheme of grants in lieu of VAT which is welcome. However, both the Government Agency which will administer the grants and the means by which they can be claimed remain unsettled.

The support to all church and charitable work by Gift Aid must be eagerly taken up. The continuation of the work of Rural Churches in Community Service (RCCS) needs support from Government if their affirmation of what has been achieved is to be matched by adequate resources and if more facilities such as those provided with the support of RCCS are to be put in place.

45. The work of Cathedrals and churches in bringing much needed tourism income needs to gain greater recognition from those who spend the nation's taxes on developing this growing industry. Perhaps as many people "go to church" as visitors as attend church as worshippers. The work of the National Churches Tourism Group is vital to help churches share the faith to this "mobile congregation", most of whom are not worshippers. Diocesan and other links with Churches in Europe hold potential for attracting other visitors.

46. It should be expected that church representatives are invited to the many consultations that are part of the shaping of policy, at national, regional and local level. The Church should find ways of appointing and supporting competent lay people as representatives, and for that to be understood by those initiating the consultation. Churches need to explore ways of appointing representatives from any denomination. Electronic systems of communication may contribute to the ease of reporting back.

47. Will Government recognise the crucial role of the local church in building strong communities and offer support to their income in the short term where these can be proved to have been reduced by FMD? How will those managing diocesan and national church budgets respond to this challenge?

48. We are grateful to The Countryside Agency for part funding the current issue of *Country Way*, so that this issue can be sent free to every rural church in England. A copy forms the supplement to this report. The main section is dedicated as a workbook for rural churches based on the document agreed at the January 2001 House of Bishops and the Churches Rural Group of CTE as the Church's response to the Government Rural White Paper.⁵ We look for further ways of working with the Agency.

Conclusion

49. The need to address rural regeneration, particularly highlighted by the Foot and Mouth epidemic remains one for the whole nation and the Churches will be expected to play an important part. Questions that need discussion will include those around the impact of market economics on every aspect of human activity; the place of local and national identity and economy in the global market; the purpose of the countryside; the length of the food chain; the place of the environment in economic equations. Ethical and spiritual values illuminate all these questions and the Church needs to play a greater part in these discussions. These issues are common to other nations in Europe and could also be addressed on a European basis, particularly through Churches related to the Church of England through the Meissen and Porvoo agreements. The Arthur Rank Centre provides an important ecumenical focus, increasingly recognised as speaking and acting on rural issues with the backing of all the Churches.⁶

⁵ *Country Way* is available to subscribers from the Arthur Rank Centre for £7.50 a year.

⁶ A fuller report on the Centre's work is available from the Arthur Rank Centre

50. The Foot and Mouth crisis has revealed the capacity of the Church to respond to its call to pastoral mission and ministry. This has raised expectations for the future. The challenge now is whether the Church can renew its commitment to a prophetic rural ministry and mission in joining with others in working for the regeneration of the countryside and its people.

On behalf of the Board of Mission

+James Liverpool

Appendix A

WHEN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IS THE ONLY CHURCH IN A VILLAGE

Suggestions and Guidelines

1. In many villages there is only one church building and worshipping community, most often Church of England. Within the village there may be Christians of different traditions, some of whom try to combine loyalty to a particular denomination with their desire to worship and witness in their local community. Sometimes a church of another denomination has been closed, sometimes people from another denomination have moved into the village, sometimes those who previously commuted to a church outside the village are prevented from doing so through infirmity or poor public transport.
2. The aim of Parochial Church Councils and Incumbents will be to make members of other denominations feel at home in their local Anglican church, and to feel that they belong to the Christian community in that place. The sense of belonging and being valued may not for everyone be the same as "being a member". This is because not all those of other denominations are able, because of their denomination's rules, to declare themselves also to be members of the Church of England (as the Church of Representation Rules permit).
3. The church making this declaration, whilst remaining subject to the jurisdiction of the Church of England and guardian of its tradition, formulates a policy towards those of other denominations which enables their insights, strengths, gifts and graces to be incorporated

into the whole life of the congregation. That life will include worship, mission and service, as well as the administrative and decision-making process.

4. There may be occasions when those of another denomination worshipping in the parish church wish to express their membership and belonging in a particular way. For example, when the tradition with which they have been familiar has a membership structure more closely defined than that of the Church of England. This could be expressed through a short welcome, prayer, and the right hand of fellowship which could take place at the Peace.
5. The congregation of the parish church will want to be especially aware of its responsibility to be broad, flexible and open, and to affirm a diversity of religious experience and expression. (This applies to the variety of emphases within a denomination, as well as between the various denominational traditions.) Breadth and openness could be affirmed through:
 - Choice of hymns, tunes, and hymn books
 - Prayers for other churches and their leaders
 - Invitations to ministers of other traditions to participate in leading worship or preaching (as allowed by Canon B43)
 - Occasional use of other denomination's liturgies (as allowed by Canon B43)
 - Occasional use of other practices of administering Holy Communion
 - Careful use of language which includes and is not specific to one denomination
 - Offering occasional (or regular) use of church buildings to other Christian traditions

- Use of non-eucharistic services to bridge divide of eucharistic hospitality between Roman Catholics and other churches
 - Consultation between those with pastoral oversight in the area about the responsibility of care, initiation, nurture etc.
6. Before a single church agrees a Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment it should seek advice from the 'Intermediate Body' or its ecumenical Officer as to which other denominations should be consulted, and at what level. The Group for Local Unity of Churches together in England suggests that – for the Methodist Church this should be the Circuit Superintendent and stewards, and for the United Reformed Church, the Church Secretary and the President of the District Council. Care needs to be taken over the real or imagined effect on the congregational strength of these churches, so that this is not seen as 'poaching.' Sensitivity is needed, to the existence of small groups of Christians, who may be meeting for worship in local houses in some situations, so that this initiative is not perceived as Anglican imperialism. A copy of the Declaration should be displayed in the church.

A DECLARATION OF ECUMENICAL WELCOME AND COMMITMENT

By a Church of England Parish

1. We, the *Vicar* and people of *St CCCs*, are aware that *St CCCs* is the only church in *Aford*, and therefore we invite all Christians in *Aford* to be as fully a part of our life and fellowship as they are able.

2. We invite those of Christian traditions other than our own
 - to share in the ministry and mission of the Church in this community
 - to worship and, if baptised and communicant members of other Churches, to receive Holy Communion at *St CCCs*¹,
 - to be part of the decision-making of the church and to contribute to a common fund for the mission and ministry of the wider church in so far as their continued giving to another church will allow.

3. We undertake
 - to give pastoral care to all those who desire it
 - to invite ministers of other churches to take part in leading worship³
 - to incorporate the riches of worship of other traditions as appropriate⁴
 - to consult with neighbouring churches concerning the mission of the church in Aford
 - to include this ecumenical declaration as an integral part of the parish profile

4. Following the decision made by Churches Together in Ashire (our 'Intermediate Body') on 1999 that such declarations may be made in the area which they serve, we have sought and followed their advice as to which churches should first be consulted, and those mentioned below have given us their blessing and encouragement.

for St CCC's Aford Vicar

Church

Wardens:

for other churches: signature:

on behalf of

¹Canon B15a (1972) enables the admission to Holy Communion of

"baptised persons who are communicant members of other Churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and who are in good standing in their own Church....."

If anyone by virtue of this provision "regularly receives the Holy Communion over a long period which appears likely to continue indefinitely, the minister shall set before him the normal requirements of the Church of England for communicant status of that Church."

²The Church Representation Rules 1995 enable a person to be enrolled if she/he is baptised, sixteen years or upwards and declares themselves – "to be a member in good standing of a Church which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and also prepared to declare himself to be a member of the Church of England having habitually attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment." Making this declaration also confers eligibility to stand for

election to the decision-making bodies of the Church of England.

³Canon B43 (1989) says

"A minister or lay person who is a member in good standing of a Church to which this Canon applies and is a baptised person may, subject to the provisions of this Canon, be invited to perform all or any of the following duties –

- a) to say or sing Morning or Evening Prayer
- b) to read the Holy Scripture at any service
- c) to preach at any service
- d) to lead the Intercessions at the Holy Communion and to lead prayers at other services
- e) to assist at Baptism or the Solemnisation of Matrimony or conduct a Funeral Service
- f) to assist in the distribution of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the people at the Holy Communion if the minister or lay person is authorised to perform a similar duty in his or her own Church."

⁴Canon B43 (1989) says

"9. The incumbent of a parish may (with specified approval) invite members of another Churchto take part in joint worship with the Church of England or to use a church in the parish for worship in accordance with the forms of service and practice of that other Church on such occasions as may be specified in the approval given by the bishop."

Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment in the Church of England
Council for Christian Unity 1997