

**Faith and the Future of the Countryside Conference.**  
**November 2010.**

**The Papers: An Appendix**

Copies of some of the papers are available in full from Robert Hill. However, revised papers will be published in book form following the conference.

**Keynote Papers.** (Notes from these papers are in the main report)

**Marks of Mission:** the spread of the gospel through the occasional offices in a small rural village.

Dr Anne Richards, National Adviser for mission theology.

**The Land and Human Well-being.**

Prof. Michael Winter, Centre for Rural Policy, Exeter University.

**Planning and Housing:** Power and Values in Rural Communities.

Prof. Mark Shucksmith, Commission for Rural Communities.

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**Seminar Papers.** (Author's précis and attendee's notes where available)

The list of papers is as follows in order below:

1. Enabling the people of God: advocating new ways of collaboration
2. The rural church and environmental crisis: incarnational response in an age of global change
3. Creating communities of mental health and well-being
4. The trees of the field shall clap their hands: the metaphor of trees, woods and forests as symbols of creation, justice and hope.
5. Ways of coping in rural ministry
6. A future in the countryside for the free churches
7. England's rural economies 20 years on from Faith in the Countryside
8. Climate, Jesus and a rural prophetic alternative
9. Food security: the approach of the Scottish Churches Rural Group
10. Older people in the country: burden or blessing?
11. Emerging from the rural church
12. How should we eat? The principles and practice of just food
13. No-one is a sustainable island: a theological perspective on the sustainability agenda in the rural context
14. The contribution of church tourism to the rural economy
15. Climate change, faith and rural communities
16. Practising episkope: priests in rural mission today
17. An ethical, economical and welfare-friendly approach to animal exotic disease prevention and management.
18. The church and mobility: dealing with exclusion of Eastern European migrants in rural Scotland
19. Spirituality and the countryside: a rural perspective on Christian formation and the big society

**1 - Enabling the people of God: advocating new ways of collaboration – Peter Ball et al**

How best are we to shape rural church relationships and activities to reflect the relational character of God's being and live in greater harmony with each other and with Creation? How does the church demonstrate the full potential of life in God through relationships built on patterns of radical equality and dynamic mutuality? In response to these questions, this paper seeks to explore the powerful theological arguments which support adopting Local Collaborative Ministry (LCM) as a radical alternative to current models of being church in rural communities. LCM is a way of empowering people to take responsibility for coordinating, developing and enabling member participation in the life and mission of the church. Disciples in their locality are supported by an 'Enabler' from the wider church whose task is not to do the work of ministry but to help the church become a ministering community and reflect on its activities.

The driving force of this approach is the liberation and empowerment of people and communities in the local context and for a healthy degree of power to be vested locally. [Authors]

*'The Cavalry won't be coming' so collaborate and grow. The vicar cannot do everything; he is not at the top of the pyramid! Jesus is the centre with everyone around Him, and the priest. Collaborate vs. individualism. Theology of inclusion not exclusion. Trinity is relational. Baptism is incorporation to Church and discipleship is what we do – We are Church.* [NS]

**2 - The rural church and environmental crisis: incarnational response in an age of global change – Adrian Hough**

The paper sets out to consider and develop a theology which underlies both the rural church and rural life more generally in the current context of increasing globalisation and environmental threat. The study begins with reflections on the place of the rural church in the wider community, followed by consideration of the challenge posed by the inter-related phenomena of international development and globalisation. In the wider context these have resulted in environmental damage, shown particularly, though not exclusively, through climate change. On the more local scale they have resulted in significant changes in the nature and life of the countryside and the context in which the rural church both exists and ministers. These parallel effects on both physical and social geography can be considered in terms of physical and moral evil.

The theological response to this situation is presented through incarnation, understood in the context of critically-real christology and incarnational patterns of human activity in the rural community. The paper seeks to explore these issues in terms of inclusion, exclusion, relationship and what it means to be other. This leads to a theology which mirrors God's self-expression in Trinity and finds an outworking through an ecclesiology of the way in which the Church relates to that which is other than itself. This has implications for the nature of both the rural church and rural life, both of which are severely impoverished without the other. The result is that the rural church at its best can be a paradigm for a response to globalisation and the wider threat of environmental changes as well as for the life of the worldwide church.

### **3 - Creating communities of mental health and well-being: the role of the rural church – Lorna Murray**

The purpose of this paper is to highlight ways in which the committed and faithful presence of the rural church can benefit the well-being of the whole community. The pastoral ministry of the church is defined as care which seeks the well-being of all. It is, therefore, both pro-active (working for social justice and challenging prejudice) and re-active (offering care and support to those who need it). This perspective challenges the understanding that mental health can be defined simply as 'freedom from illness'.

The importance of partnership is emphasised: partnership with other community agencies and also with those people who are in need of help or support.

The need for good communication between all those working to improve community well-being is stressed. A significant contribution by the rural church is offered where there is sensitive reflection on needs from the perspective of Biblical teaching and theology.

Issues specifically related to rural mental health are outlined. The paper then considers the potential benefits of believing (faith) and belonging (church attendance); potential problems associated with each are also outlined.

The paper concludes with some examples of rural initiatives within which the church has, or could have, a significant contribution to make. [Author]

*Starting with the spider's version of the legend of Robert the Bruce, Lorna noted that many issues in this area depended on your perspective. Pastoral Care needs to be both reactive and proactive, challenging stigmas that damage mental health and promoting mental health rather than focusing on mental illness. The church 'just being there' isn't enough if that means it is only open on a Sunday. Chaplaincy is an active way of engagement. Faith communities are a positive sign in the dark if we are modeling the right way.* [RH]

### **4 - The trees of the field shall clap their hands: the metaphor of trees, woods and forests as symbols of creation, justice and hope – Graham Usher**

Taking Biblical themes of encounter, enlightenment, abundant living and valuing resources as a basis, an argument is presented detailing the value of trees, woods and forests for our collective narrative, in human wellbeing, spirituality and sustainable living. This is explored through the cherishing of veteran trees and sacred groves, the part played by woodland in burials and community forests, and the role of trees in combating climate change. The image of the Tree of Life is suggested as a metaphor for our own generation with its promise of offering the 'medicine of healing' to our planet. Recommendations are made about developing the resources to celebrate trees, woods and forests in our daily living and worship, and how we can enhance the well-being of the whole of creation by planting more trees. [Author]

### **5 - Ways of coping in rural ministry – Christine Brewster**

Following the recent amalgamation of numerous rural benefices in the Church of England (C of E), which has been caused by a decline in the number of stipendiary clergy, enormous demands have been placed on many rural clergy. Potential

stressors for rural clergy who find themselves serving in multi-church benefices include 'overextension' and 'inadequate resources', which cause many rural clergy to experience poor work-related psychological health. In order to 'survive', rural clergy need to employ coping practices whereby they can 'manage' the personal and/or environmental stressors which 'tax' or 'exceed' their personal resources. The present study examines the coping strategies of a sample of 722 Church of England rural clergy who are responsible for three or more rural churches, following their completion of the 'Ways of Coping (Revised)' checklist (WOC (Revised); Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). The data produced suggest that the most frequent coping strategies used by rural clergy in multi-church benefices, are 'self-controlling', 'seeking social support', 'planful problem solving' and 'positive reappraisal'. The strategies of 'confronting coping', 'distancing' 'accepting responsibility' and 'escape-avoidance' are used less frequently. Both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies were found to be used regularly by rural clergy, and it is suggested that the provision of educational programmes focusing on 'coping strategies' by both the church and healthcare providers, might lead to the enhancement of work-related psychological health among rural clergy. [Author]

#### **6 - A future in the countryside for the free churches – Gill Crippen and Nicholas Wood**

This paper reflects on the long and important history of the Free Churches in rural Britain and considers what sort of presence might be sustainable and appropriate for the future. It draws attention to the alternative models of church community which the nonconformist tradition has offered, and takes two areas of the country as case studies, Leicestershire and Rutland, and West Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds, noting the significant presence of nonconformist denominations in market towns and elsewhere across the two regions. The paper considers the impact on the Free Churches of 'mission shaped church' and 'emerging church' thinking, and reflects on whether all models of church will need to move away from historic models, whether geographic or associational, into new more flexible patterns appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [Authors]

*'A mixed economy of Church' sustainable in rural market towns, a struggle in villages. In a 'post denominational age' 'what sort of church?'*

- a) *Parish ( e.g. geographical )*
- b) *Associational ( e.g. gathered)*
- c) *Small Group (e.g. book reading club )*
- d) *Third Place ( e.g. meets in secular setting – School, Pub )*
- e) *Magnet (e.g. people from large area – personality / gifts of leader / congregation).* [NS]

#### **7 - England's rural economies 20 years on from Faith in the Countryside – Prof Neil Ward**

This paper reflects on 20 years of rural change in England since the publication of *Faith in the Countryside* and takes as its particular focus the economic aspects of rural life and public policy measures to support rural economies. It first considers what *Faith in the Countryside* had to say about the economy of rural areas, assessing continuity and change between 1990 and 2010. It goes on to chart the four phases

in the treatment of rural economy issues since 1990. These are characterised as: Liberalisation and Integration – Coming to Terms with the New Rural Economy (1990-97); Modernisation and Institution-Building – Resourcing Rural Renewal (1997-2001); The Accident of Defra and Post-Foot and Mouth Retrenchment (2001-07); and Responsive-Mode Reviews to Tackle Rural Disadvantage (2007-10). [Author]

*In addition to his précis above, Neil noted that opportunities for decarbonisation has been given little thought so far; the geographically variable decline in rural agriculture; the net flow from cities, reshaping social and economic life; demographic aging; the rise of Service Economy (tourism and personal services); that rural incomers can be positive; and, that the loss of young people is seen as negative. [RH]*

#### **8 - Climate, Jesus and a rural prophetic alternative – Edward Echlin**

We discuss our context of climate change and what Christians can do to respond. The rural church is especially important because of our inherent responsibility for the whole created soil community. We are disciples of the prophetic alternative Jesus Christ, the Jesus movement, Jesus existing as community today, not merely an organization. The proximity principle is vitally important for our contribution. That is, we live and feed ourselves in and from as close to our home region as possible. [Author]

#### **9 - Food security: the approach of the Scottish Churches Rural Group – David Atkinson et al**

Food is one of the few real essentials for life. As a result the church has had a long history of involvement with the issues which define its production and distribution. It has often taken a different approach to secular agencies. Food and farming remain important to both the Scottish way of life and our national income and so have been prioritised by the Scottish Churches Rural Group, a body which brings together most churches in Scotland. Food has always been a heavily politicised issue and so church engagement with both Government and with secular bodies such as supermarkets has been a key element in our work. The paper describes both current initiatives of this type and the development of our thinking in key areas such as food security, universal affordability, food access in rural areas and the importance of working with others. We place major emphasis on the importance of what we term embedded values which we explore through a consideration of genetic engineering, fair trade and care farming. We also high light the importance to society of food becoming a primary and specific locus for policy making and of the churches expanding the range of bodies with whom they regularly work. [Authors]

#### **10 - Older people in the country: burden or blessing? – Albert Jewell**

We live in an ageing and an ageist society. Increased life expectancy can be viewed, both in individual and societal terms, as either a burden or a blessing. The age profile is highest in rural areas and mainstream churches are ageing at a faster rate than the wider community. This paper draws upon the 50 year pastoral experience of the writer and his recent areas of research to encourage a positive response. Basic spiritual needs do not vary throughout life: love, faith, hope, peace, worship, creativity. However, they are focussed in specific circumstantial and existential ways in older age: isolation, affirmation, celebration, confirmation, reconciliation and

integration – all of which can be met in the Christian Gospel and within church communities.

The findings are discussed of recent research amongst older people. What promotes a sense of purpose? How can they go on growing in faith? How do they cope with the challenges of later life? For many the greatest challenge is posed by dementia. However, personhood and resilience can be reinforced and communication maintained through person-centred and relationship-centred care, humour and worship. The paper ends by identifying some encouraging shafts of light and hope and making appropriate recommendations for action. [Author]

*There is no doubt that not only is this a feature of our world generally, rural UK is experiencing a huge upward shift in its age distribution. The seminar helped us to identify some needs which are common to everyone, warning us not always to treat the elderly as a special case. But we also considered some special needs of the rural elderly – e.g. lack of mobility and (in some cases) real poverty. [JM]*

### **11 - Emerging from the rural church – Stephen Skuce**

This paper challenges the idea of a distinctly rural mission as helpful to thinking. Fresh Expressions are critiqued, along with the concept of a ‘mixed economy’, as the way forward for mission in rural areas. The complexities of contemporary rural life are addressed. The weakness of much of the rural Church, especially the Free churches, is considered. Appropriate missional practices, including church planting, are pointed to as part of the future for the church in rural areas. [Author]

### **12 - How should we eat? The principles and practice of just food – Prof Elizabeth Dowler**

‘Food issues’ are rising up the political and news agenda: climate change, rising prices, farmers and small shops struggling, social unrest and concentration of power. This paper examines how we might think and respond, as citizens and as Christians. The centrality of food to social exchange, identity and wellbeing, and as marker for God’s generosity and redeeming love – in which we are invited to share – raises profound questions about how we should manage provision. Drawing on some Biblical and ethical principles I focus on inequalities and disconnections, and the potentials for change, to link our practice with the wider, international scene, and with the biological, social and political forces which enable us to eat. [Author]

*Inequality within the food industry leads to unequal food distribution. In hard times, food can be cut back on whilst the gas bill must be paid. Food industry relies upon low wages: We have to externalize the real costs. Food Justice is about Fair Share (equality of outcomes), Fair Play (open access), and Fair Say (autonomy of voice.) [RH]*

### **13 - No-one is a sustainable island: a theological perspective on the sustainability agenda in the rural context – Dagmar Winter**

The aim of this paper is to bring a theological perspective, nourished by insights of Scripture, into conversation with issues and goals for sustainable rural communities. The introductory part offers a brief overview over the origin of the term in its current use and looks at the way the discussion has structured its subject matter.

In the second part, we explore biblical material on issues such as interdependence, inclusion, participation, responsibility and servant leadership. The third part seeks to give a theological shape to the concept of sustainability. Using the framework of *creatio originalis, continua* and *nova* and the symbol of the eucharistic community, a theologically informed vision of sustainable communities is developed. It embraces the implicit worth of creation, mutual need and interdependence. A practical outlook concludes the paper. [Author]

1. *Sustainable Development: Sustain life. Which ensures needs of future generations.*
2. *Biblical Perspectives: Serve and protect the environment. Share load equally. Jubilee Year.*
3. *Theological perspective: One body many members. The Good Samaritan. Continuing creation. The Eucharistic community; thankful, remembering, peace, banquet for all, serving, death acknowledged.*
4. *Environmental: On going statistical analysis.* [NS]

#### **14 - The contribution of church tourism to the rural economy – Jeremy Martineau**

Tourism is the world's largest industry in both wealth generation and employment. It plays a significant part in the UK economy. Tourism's contribution to the rural economy is set out to provide the context for an examination of church tourism. Church tourism is a largely unmeasured and unrecognised contribution, particularly to the rural economy where it has a great potential. Church managers and clergy are encouraged to see the ministry to visitors as a valid mission activity and to begin to measure visitor numbers with a view to increasing them by activities that are proven to work in the case studies outlined. The potential to work in partnership with other tourism related local businesses and with Tourist Information Centres is important for there is recognition in those sectors of the value added that church tourism can make to the rural economy. [Author]

#### **15 - Climate change, faith and rural communities – Martin and Margot Hodson**

Climate change is a major issue for this century with significant impact on the future of the countryside. The first part of this paper considers the expected impacts of climate change on rural communities in the UK and the contribution that these communities make to climate change. Climate change is complex and interacts with many other factors. One aspect is exposed through a consideration of the impact of Peak Oil. Having presented the interaction between physical, biological and human issues, the paper has at its heart a reflection on the cosmic nature of Christ (Colossians 1.15-20). The theological reflection explores the themes of interconnectedness and eschatological hope. An ethical analysis builds on the theology to develop a Christocentric model for holistic mission. The authors propose their model as a faith-based framework for responding to climate change within a UK rural context. The final part of the paper shows how engaged faith can have a major role in helping rural communities both mitigate and adapt to climate change. Practical examples lead on to discussion of the value of a faith based approach. The authors conclude that faith in the countryside for this century needs to be sustainable in its praxis and holistic in its mission. They recommend relocalisation of

rural communities and call for the church to support community regeneration.

[Authors]

16 - **Practising episkope: priests in rural mission today – Robin Greenwood**

This paper explores how giving greater definition to the role of the presiding priest with responsibility for mission in rural parishes could promote the development of mission through collaborative forms of ministry. Although prominence is given to the creation of congregational life that is characterized as communion or community (koinonia) there is a recurring expectation that the gifts of the laity will be exercised also in working for the flourishing of the entire community and society. A key metaphor, re-developed in recent ecumenical conversations and the reflections of individual theologians, is that of episkope. The presiding role of the priest can best be given confident expression when seen in the context of the whole church's episcopal task of watching out for the trinitarian God's activity in the entire neighbourhood and among those who constitute the church itself. A framework for understanding the church's sharing in God's mission for the whole of life is offered by developing the four ecclesiological values of Richness, Range, Contact and Transformation. The suggestion is made that the future of rural mission requires priests, supported by dioceses, confidently to facilitate the growth in discipleship and ministry of many others. In selection and formation, the church needs to re-address the core competencies required in priests charged with "acting as bishop" within rural Britain. [Author]

*The conference membership included 20 Bishops but they seemed the first to want those dealing with multi-parish situations to recognise their 'episkope' (oversight) role as well.* [JM]

17 - **An ethical, economical and welfare-friendly approach to animal exotic disease prevention and management: are these realistic aims? Prof Sheila Crispin**

Recent incursions of exotic animal viral diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), avian influenza (AI) and bluetongue (BT) into the United Kingdom (UK) have brought into sharp focus the ways in which such diseases are managed and the safeguards that are in place to prevent them occurring. In addition, it is inevitable that when there are outbreaks of human exotic viral disease, such as pandemic influenza (H1N1 2009), differences of management are scrutinised. This paper explores some of the multiplicity of factors that are involved in exotic disease management and the importance of ensuring that accurate and up to date science informs, and if necessary modifies, legislation and policy decisions globally, but especially at European and United Kingdom level.

There is ample evidence that human activities and climate change influence disease patterns in both humans and animals and many of the diseases are zoonoses (they can be transmitted from animals to humans), so it is clear that the preventative aspects of exotic disease management must be based on accurate appraisal of those factors within our control as well as those over which we have less or no control. In relation to animal disease, examples of those factors under our control include border and import controls, the movement and transportation of animals and their products, the type of husbandry and the adequacy of welfare. The factors, in whole or in part, outside our control are more complex as so many of them relate to

aspects of human behaviour on a global scale, but there are also individual actions with unintended consequences and some of these are considered in this paper. The UK's experience of foot and mouth disease, avian influenza and bluetongue will be used, with particular emphasis on foot and mouth disease, to exemplify the strengths and weaknesses of current exotic disease control policies, the various ways in which the management of exotic diseases might be improved and the adverse impacts of control measures reduced. At a time of global environmental and financial crisis there is an opportunity, but little time, to learn lessons and ensure that disease control policies are efficient, economic, ethical and environmentally sound. [Author]

**18 - The church and mobility: dealing with exclusion of Eastern European migrants in rural Scotland – Sergei Shubin**

The paper explores theoretical and practical issues related to mobility and integration of Eastern European migrants in rural Scotland. Emerging mobile lifestyles create different patterns of living and working “on the move”, which challenge existing organisational structure of rural institutions, including the rural church. Regionalised structure of socio-political organisations and dominant “sedentary” thinking (Cresswell, 2001), which prioritises fixed and bounded conceptions of culture and identity, often lead to exclusion of Eastern European migrants in the British countryside. The church and other key rural institutions do not take into account complex mobility practices of migrants including affective relationships with existing immigrant communities, family support strategies, travelling behaviour and cultural links. To address this gap, the paper develops a holistic understanding of mobility and different approaches, which attend to specificity of mobile practices. First, it considers opportunities within the church to attend to affective dimension of movement and performative practices of migrants in order to facilitate their inclusion in the rural communities. Religious meetings can provide space to reconnect migrant histories (confessions, life-stories), established practices (rituals, prayers) and lead to re-affirmation of mobile identities. Second, the paper argues for development of pro-mobility thinking within the church and other rural institutions which appreciates different forms of movement and empowers marginalised itinerant groups. Physical movement of migrants is often accompanied by periods of “still” living, metaphorical movement (travel as a way to deal with psychological traumas) and “travel in mind” (anticipation of movement), which need to be appreciated as key elements in the new system of mobile living in the countryside. The paper concludes with theoretically informed observations about the new ways of conceptualising “mobility” and “integration” of Eastern European migrants in the British rural communities.

**19 - Spirituality and the countryside: a rural perspective on Christian formation and the big society – Tim Gibson**

This paper argues that the Church can nurture a distinctive rural spirituality that is grounded in its worshipping life. Studies of rural spirituality have tended to construe the term quite broadly, in ways that are interchangeable with non-Christian-specific expressions of spirituality. But the Christian narrative, embodied in the life of the Church, provides a distinctive framework in which to understand notions of

spirituality. This framework is given expression in the Church's practices, especially the Eucharist.

By framing a discussion of spirituality in this way, the paper will show how the Church can nurture a distinctively Christian spirituality, which increases the bonds between community members, contributes to the life of the wider community and fosters an appropriate attitude among community members toward the natural environment.

Such a Christian-specific construal of rural spirituality has clear common ground with elements of the Coalition Government's hopes for a 'Big Society'. My argument is that it provides a more compelling account of social and community cohesion, grounded in localism, than the political narrative. Because of this, I urge that the government recognises the distinctiveness of the Church's contribution to rural life, grounded in its worshipping and spiritual life, and finds ways of working constructively with it for the good of rural communities.

The paper will provide: (I) a survey of rural spirituality studies, (II) a critique of their broad construal of spirituality in secular terms, (III) an analysis of the distinctive character of Christian spirituality, grounded in the Church's worshipping life, (IV) practical suggestions for ways in which the Church can nurture spirituality in the countryside, and (V) advice for government on how to work constructively with churches in order to enhance community life in the countryside. [Author]

*Current idea is Big Society = community. Meet the challenge. 'Christians taking right things for granted' is 'Presence Evangelism' in our villages. Looking out for needs of others. The bustling Annual Fete, regular Quiz, eclectic Church Bazaar, Parish and District Council and thoughtful/caring words. All clearly leading to uninhibitedly inviting non church goers to ponder 'Fresh Expression' at local Primary School and 'Messy Church'. Build capacity to serve: Faithful vs. faithless/abandonment/betrayal.*

[NS]