

Enhancing the Rural Church in the Diocese of Oxford

**A Report to the Board of Mission of
the Oxford Diocesan Rural Strategy
Steering Group (RSSG)**

January 2017

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NB This report, and specifically the recommendations, needs to be read in conjunction with the document *Rural Strategy Implementation Grid*

Executive summary

There is no doubt that with falling congregations and vocations and the financial pressures of not only caring for our rich legacy of church buildings but also the increasing costs of ministry, the Church of England is facing significant challenges. These challenges are felt more particularly in the rural church, and yet, in the words of a previous report: '*at its best the village church, within the context of a well-organised benefice, is beautifully Anglican – patient, kind, spacious, quietly impressive and inclusive, steeped in prayer and history yet with a smiling face.*' - a precious asset, maintaining and sustaining our commitment to be a Christian presence in every community.

Oxford diocese is one of the largest dioceses in the country, within which 30% of parishes have populations under 500. If the Countryside Commission's definition of a rural place (populations under 3,000) is used, 50% of our parishes qualify as rural.

The diocese has a valuable history over the last 50 years of paying particular attention to rural ministry and mission. Please see Appendix A on Milestones for how this has developed. This report comes in the context of the 'Renewal and Reform' process and in the wake of the 'Released for Mission – Growing the Rural Church' report made to General Synod (Jan 2015). It recognises that under the broad umbrella of 'rural', the church comes in many shapes and sizes and no one-size-fits-all and yet the pressures within even differing ruralities are very similar.

This report, to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, presents the results of a 2-year process of consultation (begun in late 2014) with key players within the diocese and includes wide-ranging recommendations to enhance the Rural Church in the Diocese of Oxford.

The evidence for the findings of this report and subsequent recommendations builds on more wide-ranging research, including both qualitative and quantitative research, carried out by the national church and presented in the 'Released for Mission – Growing the Rural Church' report (*GS Misc 1092*), made to General Synod in early 2015. Please see Appendix L for the report's recommendations.

Consultations within the Diocese of Oxford have included a number of interviews with identified experts in their fields (listed in Appendix K), two events for lay and ordained leaders run by the Rural Strategy Steering group, including one held on 10th January, 2017, and the long-term experience in rural ministry of the nine members of the steering group.

Terminology varies across the diocese, so where the words 'Area Deans' are used, in places this also means 'Rural Deans'

We recognise that Christian formation is essential in the rural church as elsewhere that the church may be replenished for the future. We hope that by specifically

addressing vocation, leadership and relationship with schools we can not only release people to help in the making of disciples but create an environment and culture where church life may develop and flourish.

These recommendations address 9 identified areas which impinge on the life and flourishing of the rural church:

- Addressing the environment, context and well-being of those who serve in a rural context
- Raising vocations
- Ensuring the future of church buildings
- Exploring different models of governance in Multi Parish Benefices
- Strengthening finance
- Supporting rural schools
- Engaging with the changes new housing brings
- Training for people in leadership roles
- Replenishing the rural church for the future

When any complex organisation is facing complex challenges, no one strategy will suffice. In drawing up our recommendations we are not offering a 'top down' programme, rather a distributed project with a set of linked modular activities that we hope, pray and believe will lead to the enhancement of the rural church across the diocese. It is likely that targets may evolve in response to not only learning but also to the reality of specific contexts. It may be necessary to experiment. What works with one community and church may not work with another. Such experimentation should not be viewed with suspicion but as a learning process through which we gain experience and wisdom as we work together collaboratively. Several of the recommendations propose such a collaborative process.

Recommendations

A. Addressing the environment, context and well-being of those who serve in a rural context

See page 17

Strategic aim: That lay and ordained rural church leaders thrive.

We recommend that:

1. The Ministry Accompaniers' network has at least three rural specialists.
2. The Human Resources Department ensures that part of the induction into the role of Ministerial Development Reviewer includes a module on rural ministry.
3. The appointment proposals, outlined in Appendix B, are promoted by appointing bodies.
4. Each person appointed to a rural context is offered a mentor by their PDA as they begin their ministry.
5. Mentors be recruited and trained by the Mission Department using the CPAS materials, network and experience including 'Mentoring Matters'. Mentoring needs to be included in the Mission Department's annual budget.
6. The specific issues relating to the rural context be considered by those working towards a relaunch of Wellbeing at the 2018 Diocesan Conference. (A small working group of the Director of Human Resources, the Archdeacon of Berkshire, and the Parish Development Adviser for the Buckinghamshire Archdeaconry is working on this.)
7. The Rural Strategy Implementation Group (RSIG) considers any findings and recommendations of the forthcoming 'For Richer, For Poorer' report on deprivation and poverty as they relate to the rural context.

B. Raising vocations.

See page 20

Strategic aim: To increase the varieties of forms of ministry in the rural context.

In using the phrase 'expressions of ministry' we want to affirm a broad approach to vocations including not only the number of people offering for authorised ministry but also widening the opportunities and ways in which people can express their vocation.

We recommend that:

1. The question of enabling, equipping and releasing the gifts of all the people of God for mission in the rural context be considered by the Mission Department in its exploration of vocation, discipleship and leadership during 2017.
2. Any new Vocations Strategy should have explicit references to Lay Discipleship and resources for how this might be nurtured in the rural context.
3. A broader range of authorised ministries, such as lay pastoral assistants be considered by the Training and IME Team in the Mission Department and Bishop's Staff to enable the pastoral aspect of mission in rural areas to be developed.
4. The practice of having at least one training curate placed each year in a Rural Multi-Parish Benefice be continued.

C. Ensuring the future of church buildings. See page 21

Strategic aim: **That more people engage with and experience the church building in their community.**

We recommend that:

1. The role of church buildings as centres of mission is always included in the discussion and creation of Mission Action Plans, at all levels in the diocese, with an emphasis on the key role they play in community engagement and community enrichment.
2. The diocese, through the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, signs up to membership of the Association of Festival Churches, in order to benefit from the experience and expertise being gained elsewhere on Festival Churches.
3. While there should not be a diocesan/central strategy for rural church closure, the diocese should be sympathetic to local decisions to close as centres of worship and invest in resources to help people through the process.
4. As part of its mission and pastoral strategies, each deanery should discuss with its rural benefices and parishes the future of its church buildings to provide an opportunity for the sharing of support, wisdom and experience.
5. The diocese promotes the Diocese of Hereford's 'Crossing the Threshold: A Community Development Approach to the Use of Church Buildings'. In 2017, we recommend that the Archdeacons, at their Visitations and with the support of Area Deans, identify five pilot deaneries – 1 in Berkshire, 2 in Buckinghamshire and 2 in Dorchester - with the aim of 20 benefices using the material by the end of 2018.

6. An audit of church buildings usage is trialled in 3 rural deaneries and examples of creative good practice are reported in the DOOR during 2017. Deaneries to be identified by PDAs and Archdeacons at Area Deans' meetings.
7. Rural Multi-Parish Benefices consider forming benefice-wide buildings committees to share experience and expertise. This will be promoted by Lay Chairs and Area Deans at deanery synods.

D. Exploring different models of governance in Multi Parish Benefices

See page 24

Strategic aim: **That Rural Multi Parish Benefices can be enabled to consider a range of options relating to governance.**

We recommend that:

1. The diocese engages fully with the national simplification agenda through its representatives on General Synod.
2. The archdeacons explore during 2017, with the Diocesan Registry, what advice they might be able to give regarding simplification to RMPBs, and explain what the options are for simplification now and what they might be in the future.
3. Area Teams review their practice on guidance to RMPBs at times of vacancy and pastoral re-organisation by the end of 2017.
4. PDAs devise and promote material by the end of 2019 that can offer specific support to those RMPBs who want to explore greater unification of areas that could be held in common, such as finances and administration, to free up time and resources for mission.
5. Consideration be given by Benefice Councils on structures and working groups to forward mission, as outlined in Appendix G.

E. Strengthening finance.

See page 25

Strategic aim: **Increase in the financial sustainability of churches.**

We recommend that:

1. The Generous Christian Giving Adviser produce and promote material that has specific application to the rural context.
2. An increase of the number of 'Friends of ...' schemes by 15% be aimed for by the end of 2018.

3. The use of on-line Grant Finder is promoted by the Generous Christian Giving Adviser.
4. The Finance Department reviews the impact on rural benefices of the current Parish Share Scheme by the end of 2017.

F. Supporting rural schools.**See page 27**

Strategic aim: **That relationships between church and school grow and flourish.**

We recommend that:

1. The work of the Rural Education Action Group continues to be encouraged and monitored by the Boards of Education and Mission. Please see Appendix H.
2. CMD Team and Education Department continue to offer CMD days such as 'Supporting you, Serving Schools' and other events for Clergy, LLMs and head teachers.
3. Schools' Advisers continue to monitor this aim, specifically in OFSTED and SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) reports, and promote examples of good practice.
4. The Mission and Education Departments continue to explore and trial ways that churches, schools and their communities may engage further.
5. The Education and Mission Departments produce a new resource pack on 'Examples of effective and enriching partnerships between churches and schools'.
6. Schools should be involved in the appointment of new rural clergy, where appropriate.
7. Material for the specific induction of clergy with rural schools be devised by the Education and Mission Departments by the end of 2018.
8. Where appropriate, the appointment process for new head teachers should have wide representation from the church.

G. Engaging with the changes new housing brings.**See page 28**

Strategic aim: **People living in new housing experience and engage with their local church.**

We recommend that:

1. Further consideration be given by the Board of Mission into the concept of place making – please see Appendix I for more details of this - and how it may be fostered in the diocese.
2. “What are the missional opportunities and challenges for us of new housing?” is a regular topic of discussion at deanery chapters, deanery synods, benefice councils and PCCs.
3. The New Communities Group and a Rural Strategy Implementation Group, if established, meet to discuss this area further during 2017.
4. The good practice guide, *New Housing and Rural Communities*, as outlined in Appendix F, be promoted in the DOOR during 2018.
5. Rural PCCs discuss annually how people living in new housing in their parish experience and engage with their local church. Where appropriate, this might be discussed at a benefice level.

H. Training for people in leadership roles. See page 29

Strategic aim: To support and develop people as leaders.

Achieved by:

1. Those who lead in a rural context are encouraged to join the Germinate Leadership Programme. The Arthur Rank Centre describes it as follows, “**Germinate Leadership** is an exciting programme on leadership in the rural church to help lay and ordained leaders from all denominations to develop creative, entrepreneurial skills for effective rural church leadership”. The cost of the programme is £1,400 and we recommend that funding for four people to attend each year be found. Please see Appendix E for more details.
2. Archdeacons and PDAs have a rural element in Churchwardens’ Training mornings as appropriate.
3. The CMD Team explores the provision of a rural ministers’ learning community in 2017.
4. The Mission Department organises a further 24 hour consultation of rural leaders – similar to the one held in early 2016: please see Appendix D - to be held in 2017, at a cost of £3,500.
5. The Mission Department works with rural practitioners to produce resources that can be used in the local context to train, support and affirm those in positions of responsibility and leadership, including Administrators, Treasurers, PCC Secretaries, Pastoral Carers and Worship Leaders. By the end of 2018, training packages for lay leadership roles be available so that local training can be delivered by clergy and others on a Benefice wide basis.

I. Replenishing the rural church for the future. **See page 30**

Strategic aim: To enable people to grow in discipleship.

Achieved by:

1. Lay discipleship being supported by the rural team in their support for people in agriculture and through agricultural chaplaincy.
2. Engaging with the poorest communities across the diocese.
3. Promoting community engagement/enrichment as a key aspect of discipleship for individuals and churches
4. Discussions being held by benefices and PCCs on 'How might people learn about the Christian faith in our parish/benefice?'
5. Providing opportunities for people to share their faith.

Final recommendations.

1. That subject to their discussion and decisions on the contents of this report, the Board of Mission command it to the Diocesan Leadership Community Residential in May 2017 to ensure this material is engaged with in wider discussions relating to strategy.
2. That subject to recommendation (1) the Director of Mission be authorised to set up a Rural Strategy Implementation Group [RSIG], with the Diocesan Rural Officer and Dorchester PDA amongst its members, to take this work forward. The RSIG will produce a progress report to the Board twice a year.
3. That subject to recommendations (1) and (2) the RSIG make presentations on the strategy to Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committees, Area Deans meetings, and holds a series of consultations across the diocese to promote the strategy.
4. The Mission Department spends time during 2017 considering how its partnership with the rural church can be enriched and strengthened.

A report of the Rural Strategy Steering Group (RSSG)

Introduction

In the autumn of 2009 one of the diocese's rural multi-parish benefices wrote to Bishop John Pritchard to highlight some of the issues which they felt were threatening the rural church's ability to survive, let alone thrive – just one milestone among many on the journey towards a rural strategy in the diocese of Oxford (The more complete picture is outlined in Appendix A). That letter largely addressed the financial pressures that the team believed mitigated against success and pointed out that while many of our villages may appear to be affluent, the Buckinghamshire Rural Affairs Group (BRAG) had done some work around the area of rural deprivation.

They highlighted the following issues:

- *Poor access to services in many rural areas (shops, community services, GPs/dental, Broadband etc).*
- *Transportation issues including poor access to public transport, congestion, lack of community-led transport, road maintenance etc.*
- *Housing issues include a lack of affordability, provision of social housing (particularly rented), fuel poverty, accommodation for ageing populations etc.*
- *Countryside and Environment issues such as a loss of traditional land management skills, greater pressure on the countryside etc.*
- *Economy and Enterprise issues include the severity of planning constraints, closure of rural retailers, continued threat to traditional industries etc.*
- *Community Self-confidence issues such as the creation of dormitory settlements/impact of commuting, crime and anti-social behaviour, social exclusion (elderly, youth) etc.*

The benefice asked the diocese to consider whether it might be possible to bring some relief, in terms of Parish Share, to rural parishes and benefices in the same way that relief was offered in areas of urban deprivation.

Over the past seven years the needs of the rural church do appear to have become more of a priority. A Parish Share Review Group was formed and, as a result of their work, a new system for the calculation of Share was implemented which did offer a measure of support to the rural Church.

A small group was established to make recommendations to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (the group reported in May 2014). That report opened with the following words:

When it is at its best the village church, within the context of a well-organised benefice, is beautifully Anglican – patient, kind, spacious, quietly impressive and inclusive, steeped in prayer and history yet with a smiling face. What is truly impressive is that this picture is not unusual.

Both the joys of and the impediments to the work of the rural church were highlighted and the following key thoughts were offered and recommendations made:

- *This is a hugely significant piece of work which will require considerable resourcing, commitment and clarity of thought if a cogent policy is to be formulated. As a result of the work which we have begun we recommend the formation of a more formal consultation process. It should be chaired by one of the bishops with the support of at least one archdeacon. A number of experienced RMPB practitioners should be appointed to sit on that supported by the Diocesan Rural Officer. There should be an expectation that ‘experts’ in the field may be called to offer advice – for example, legal officers of the diocese and the Parish Development Advisors. The group should focus on three particular areas, namely:*
1. *Governance: how can highly complex structures be rationalised in Rural Multi-Parish Benefices (RMPBs) in order that they may function as benefices rather than parishes held in plurality? We suggest that the issues of governance in RMPBs are such an impediment to ministry that they should be addressed at national level, perhaps after preparatory work in this diocese which may lead to a pilot scheme.*
 2. *Finance: is there anything which can be done to mitigate the high costs of rural ministry, in particular on the local community, without seeking to close buildings or reduce clergy numbers?*
 3. *Training: how can appropriate training be offered both at theological colleges and for those who are actively considering applying for rural posts?*
 - *We believe that there is a need to be clear that this dialogue is not about managing decline and retreat but about building on examples of success and growth. It is important that we understand how to measure success in rural communities. It may include church growth, but we have to re-assert that ‘small’ does not necessarily equate with failure. Small rural communities are much more susceptible to change – one family moving away from a village may lead to what looks like a catastrophic fall in the number of regular attendees. Contact time, work in schools and all their associated events, engagement in community groups and pastoral work in the wider community are all marks of successful rural churches.*
 - *Not only must the area of mutual support be addressed, but also that of central support. What can the diocese do to inform itself and equip itself to better resource and rejoice in the success of these parishes? How can lines of communication be opened which feel directed at these particular contexts rather than trying to use a ‘one size fits all’ approach?*

To all intents and purposes, these recommendations brought about the formation of the Rural Strategy Steering Group which began its work in late 2014. At the heart of the group’s work was the ambition to ‘enhance the Rural Church in the Diocese of Oxford’. It very quickly became apparent that to arrive at a strategy which achieved that goal would require significant work in a number of areas. They were identified as follows:



In order to facilitate its work, the group has, where possible, met with those who we might refer to as being 'key players' in the various areas.

What follows is a report of the work which has been done to date and the conclusions that we feel we have been able to draw.

The Context

Any work attempting to deal with the life of the rural Church needs to at least attempt a definition of what is, and what is not, rural. The Government definition of rurality begins with a population size of 10,000 for a rural town (increased recently to 20,000 for a large rural town). The intention of the Rural Strategy Group has not been to focus on such large communities.

We have to recognise that population size is too blunt an instrument to define what we might consider to be rural. Within the Diocese of Oxford we have to recognise that the rurality of south Bucks is completely different from that of north Oxfordshire or even north Bucks. There is not one 'rurality' but several and so any definition we might attempt needs to come with a significant 'health warning'.

The context of this diocese is that 30% of parishes have a population of under 500 and that if we were to use a population of 3000, the Countryside Commissions definition of a rural place in the 1990s, then we would probably find more than 50% of the parishes in the diocese are rural. In other words, half of the parishes in the diocese are likely to be affected by some of the issues of living in rural communities listed in the Introduction.

It will, therefore, be helpful if we outline what the RSG considers makes the rural Church distinctive. Firstly, there is the environment of rural living. Roads are generally poorly maintained, street lights, where they exist at all, are either not working or consciously turned off. Mud is an issue for much of the year as is poor access to services as laid out in the BRAG report. Many come to the countryside near the end of their working lives seeking some sort of rural idyll which has probably never existed except on the lid of a chocolate box or in a particularly cheesy jigsaw. Local young people are priced out of the housing market and it would be fair to say that these village populations are likely to be inherently conservative – both in Church and community. There are often tensions in these communities between the 'born and bred' and those who are described as 'incomers'.

And what might be particularly distinctive about the rural church? Congregations are generally smaller than those churches in urban and sub-urban settings and we have to be careful in guarding against having too narrow a definition of what makes a church successful. In these smaller ponds people who seek influence can probably exercise more influence. That is a force for good where the people concerned are looking to work in cooperation with the clergy to move the Church forward. It becomes a problem when those who are described in *Released for Mission* as 'destructive gatekeepers' are the more vociferous.

The clergy experience rural ministry in different ways. For some it is an isolated and isolating ministry while others may value working as part of a Team Ministry in which ministers meet together regularly for prayer, planning and 'chewing the cud'. They often feel as if they are having to compete with the clergy of days gone by to achieve a perceived paradigm which, in reality, probably never existed but in which there is a living memory in the parish of the time when they had their own vicar who could devote all of their energy to a single village.

We need to recognise that Archbishop Justin Welby is absolutely right when he suggests that ministry in a rural multi-parish benefice is more complicated than other forms of ministry.

It would be quite wrong to paint a wholly or largely bleak picture of life and the Church in the countryside. In many ways we want to affirm that the rural Church may well be more visible in the community than is possible in other settings. In our smallest communities the Church may well be the only community focus and there is genuine fluidity between church and community. We also need to acknowledge that, in spite of the strains on rural parishes, there are, according to the National Rural Officer, Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson's, report, *Released for Mission*, signs that the rural church is sustaining itself and that the 'growth versus decline' figures are slightly more encouraging for the rural church rather than urban or suburban. We ought also to be aware of the work in 2013 at Cranmer Hall of David Goodhew with Ben Kautzer and Joe Moffatt on *Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church*. which was part of the Church Growth Research programme.

Those signs of growth are to be found in parishes which are prepared to challenge that which might hold them back – parochialism, unrealistic expectations, clerical dependency. Posts can be difficult to fill and power bases are easily established. That is why we believe, as we look at addressing the context and well-being of rural clergy, it is essential there is in the appointment process from start to end and on into the commencement of a new ministry, an honesty about parish profiles, parish accounts and how the place does (or, for a time, doesn't) work. We also acknowledge that particular care needs to be taken with appointments around the time of any pastoral re-organisation.

Other dioceses are also thinking creatively about the rural church. The Diocese of Exeter's strategic plan for growth includes a major new initiative, the Growing the Rural Church Project. The Project will involve creative engagement with rural churches and their communities in order to promote church growth and sustainability. The diocese believes that "This is an innovative and exciting project and the project learning will help inform other dioceses and the national church".

In the Diocese of Leicester, a rural deanery where 8 out of 12 posts were vacant has reorganised to form a collaborative response to parishes. A matrix approach is envisaged with a model which will appoint 12 clergy to locally based churches and as deanery specialists over 65 Mission Communities. The Area Dean, Peter Hooper says the plan is "to create a high degree of collaboration with a huge amount of flexibility, but based on the fact that churches in our villages are still frequently seen as being a key part of the community ¹".

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz² has defined culture as 'The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves'. As Richard Giles has observed, "Smallness is in fact one of the most significant signs of the kingdom of God ...The stories that Jesus loved to tell about the kingdom focused more often than not on something small and easily overlooked: the grain of salt, the mustard seed, the pinch of yeast, the tiny pearl, the lost coin"³. We would encourage diocesan senior staff to consider how they relate to, and relay, stories from the rural context.

¹ *The Church Times* 9th September, 2016

² C.Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (1977)

³ R.Giles *Here I Am*. (2006)

We want to emphasise the vitality of having an 'ecology' of mission which tries to see different missiological approaches working together to create effective evangelism tailored to different contexts. As Dr Anne Richards, National Adviser: mission theology, new religious movements and alternative spiritualities, Mission and Public Affairs has noted, "Rural mission and ministry is not only one part of an ecology of mission but also offers us insights into how such an ecology can be expected to work because rural churches are often the most effective at living out the holistic forms of the five marks of mission precisely because concentrating solely on proclamation will not necessarily make much impact in terms of numbers. In fact, holistic mission through the five marks has been shown to create social capital in rural communities which itself creates better conditions for faith sharing and outreach and opportunities to grow the Church.

"In many rural situations, small things may have huge evangelistic potential even if they are not reflected in immediate rise in numbers in any one particular church. For example, occasional offices and visitor ministry may have particularly rich possibilities in sharing faith with cold contacts which then leads to growth elsewhere (Richards in Smith and Hopkinson, 2012). Targeted rural ministry also has a particular potential for making 'invisible Church' (Aisthorpe 2016) not only visible, but active"⁴.

Finally, in welcoming Bishop Steven to the diocese we have to work within the framework of the priorities that he has established for the early years of his ministry:

- Engagement with children, young people and young adults
- Enabling lay discipleship in the world
- Engaging with the poorest communities across the diocese

These challenges can be related to by the rural church every bit as much as by the Church in other contexts. The particular challenge for the rural church is to look for smarter ways of working together and pooling resources to be able to be more effective when it comes to mission and outreach.

⁴ In e-mail correspondence with A. Webster and C. Chadwick.

A. Addressing the environment, context and well-being of those who serve in a rural context

As we have already said, there are a variety of rural contexts. Some serve in relatively large RMPBs, part of a team of clergy and, perhaps, others who minister who may well meet together relatively frequently. There are all sorts of complexities which will need working through to make life bearable. But being part of a team can bring huge benefits so long as those responsible for building the team realise that is what they are doing. The member of the senior staff who leads the appointment of a new member of a team, the area/rural dean and the team rector, are principally responsible for ensuring that the right appointment is made. We provide our thoughts on making rural appointments in Appendix B.

Others work in far more isolation. They may well be alone in looking after a number of parishes and feel pulled in all sorts of directions. Again, making the right appointment is vital, but equally important is what happens after the appointment and how the successful candidate may be helped to what may be a new way of ministering in an environment which may initially feel rather alien and bewildering.

If the right appointments are made, then it goes without saying the ministry stands a good chance of succeeding. Where the wrong appointment is made or where insufficient care is taken in deciding what support and training might be appropriate, then the ministry may well break down and both the member of clergy and the benefice or parish(es) are likely to end up being very unhappy. Are there developed systems through which ministerial breakdown might be identified at an early stage, before it is too advanced and protocols to ensure that all parties can be extricated from the situation without there needing to be blame attributed or there being a sense of failure? How effective are MDRs in achieving this? Of course, we acknowledge that this is not a solely rural problem.

Even those clergy who are viewed as making a decent fist of running their parishes or benefices have to acknowledge that they are operating under more and more pressure. Madeleine Davies writing in a recent copy of the Church Times (posted online on the 18th March 2016) reported on a reception hosted by St Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy.⁵ She began:

Like the coal miners of the 1920s who fought to gain paid time to wash before returning home, priests today need greater support to deal with the burdens of ministry, a reception at the House of Lords was told this week.

Jan Korris, a psychotherapist, said that clergy were now operating in a “much more demanding time”, in a “culture that seems to be both goal-orientated and results-driven”, and with “little deference to authority”. She had been “somewhat surprised” to discover that clergy did not receive the same kind of support as others working in pastoral care.

There was a clear call to look at ways in which to help clergy build resilience.

Besides providing 14 dioceses with resilience training, St Luke’s is currently helping to develop reflective-practice groups in Southwark, Rochester, and Llandaff. The groups enable priests to meet in small numbers, with a professional facilitator, with absolute confidentiality. Mrs Korris said that they were “a kindness

⁵ The article can be read at <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/18-march/news/uk/help-clergy-build-resilience-says-charity>

to your clergy and a very good economic model, because if your clergy stay healthy, your dioceses will stay healthy".

In many ways we would suggest that the larger the diocese the greater the need to be intentional in providing clear structures to support the clergy, and we welcome the proposal that a Wellbeing initiative be launched at the diocesan clergy conference in 2018. It appears simply not possible for members of the senior staff to be on top of the pastoral needs of every member of the clergy or even to be available to deal with problems as they arise. Just as the NHS might be said to be stretched, at least at times, to breaking point, the same might be said of the senior staff in this diocese. It is a large, sometimes cumbersome, organisation which seeks to support ministry in a whole variety of circumstances.

In terms of the scope of this report, we are focussing on the specific needs of rural ministers and the ways in which they might be supported. There first needs to be a belief that both the senior staff and diocesan structures recognise the varieties of rural ministries. Communication cannot be a 'one size fits all approach'. Think of the team rector in a RMPB who has been used to receiving communications from the diocese talking about her or his parish. She or he doesn't only have one parish, so what does the diocese want from him or her? The situation has improved but there is more to be done.

A particular characteristic of rural ministry is that the clergy may take three or four services on a Sunday (it sometimes simply is not possible to stick to the recommendation of no more than two⁶) with congregations that never exceed twenty. And that can be dispiriting because it can lead to feeling of failure. And it doesn't seem to help that one of those services with a congregation of sixteen, say, was on an ordinary Sunday in a small village of 85 souls. There are many times when real success can look like failure.

We worry that there appears to be a growing tendency to narrow our definitions of success. What Susan Howatch might refer to as the glittering images are the large gathered congregations worshipping in a particular style. They are seen as the growing churches, the powerhouse of the Church, which will draw in new members. We would suggest that it is not quite that straightforward for a number of reasons. Growth simply cannot be measured by new membership. If we attract fifty or a hundred new members each year but lose the same number, we are less a growing church and more a slightly transitory community. Our gathered churches do have something to offer but it comes, at times, at a price. Discipled Christian life can be taken out of the rural communities towards a gathered centre and so, we would suggest, the aim of being a Christian presence in every community could be said to be somewhat compromised.

It is easier to stand in front of two or three or four hundred people and feel successful than to stand in front of ten and feel that the work you are doing is valued. There needs to be some intentionality about recognising the particular challenges of rural clergy and ensuring that there are resources available to them from the centre so that they do not feel isolated and that their 'success' is not measured against that of an entirely different context.

How do we ensure that village congregations are aware that they are part of something larger? Might the cathedral have a role to play? Perhaps hosting a service targeted

⁶ ACORA *Faith in the Countryside* (1990) 9:24 recommendation 29

at gathering together those who would normally worship in small numbers and with few resources?

Rural ministry, while deeply rooted in small communities, often feels hidden or unseen. How often, for example, does a faithful country parson get accorded the accolade of an honorary canonry? What do we do as a diocese to ensure that those who are working faithfully in rural ministry feel that their work is as much appreciated as any other?

B. Raising Vocations

Jill Hopkinson made the following observation in a communication with David Goodhew in 2013⁷:

In rural churches vocations to ordained ministry are generally infrequent – and one benefice may only produce one candidate every 10-20 years. In my experience vocation is not talked about frequently in many rural churches, especially to ordained ministry. In small communities and congregations it may also be more difficult for individuals to talk openly about vocation and calling.

The work of the Renewal and Reform agenda has recently challenged the assumption that there is an inevitable trend of decline in clergy numbers. And it is also said that the reality described by Jill is far from being a solely rural problem. She points to dioceses like Worcester and Ely which have well developed and popular authorised lay ministry schemes with the result that a large number of people offer themselves for all sorts of ministries.

We acknowledge that considerable good work is carried out across the diocese by DDOs and Vocations Officers. We were unable to consult with the vocations team during this part of the consultation and so it is one of the least well developed parts of our work.

We have discussed ordained ministry in the rural context and recognise that further thinking needs to take place not least in terms of training, authorisation and deployment.

For us there is a question, as framed by Jill Hopkinson, that it may well be more difficult to raise vocations from small parishes. And if that is the case then is there a way of working on a broader canvass or of producing materials which might have been through a process of ‘rural-proofing’?

As part of our ongoing work we would look to hold discussions with the vocations team in the relatively near future.

We recognise that discussions are taking place facilitated by the Mission Department relating to vocations, discipleship and leadership and these will inform thinking in these key areas of faith and its manifestations.

⁷ *Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church* David Goodhew et al p. 34

C. Ensuring the future of church buildings

The most visible symbol of the Church's presence in any community, but most particularly in small communities, is the building itself. And a closed church building, converted to residential use or some other, speaks powerfully to some, at least, of the Church abandoning that community and reneging on its pledge to be a Christian presence in every community.

As much as we all know that the Church is not all about the building, they are both a significant asset and a spectacular drain on limited resources. Maintenance of a listed building, repair, insurance, heating and lighting and care of the associated churchyard all take time and money. If the payment of parish share is the largest outgoing for rural churches then the building is likely to come second.

And yet some of these buildings may actually only be used for a couple of hours a week, or a fortnight or even a month. Many of our rural churches are used for little more than conducting worship.

That being the case there may be an argument for closing many of our church buildings. However, The Church Buildings Review Group, under the chairmanship of Bishop John Inge and reporting in October 2013, made the following observation:

Moving to the New Testament, it could be argued that Jesus Christ, Lord of space and time, has eliminated attachment to particular places: Jesus is the new Temple and the Promised Land does not have the significance for Christians that it had for the people of Israel. In defining the locus of God's relations with humanity to be focussed in one particular individual, however, the incarnation asserts the importance of place in a way different from, but no less important than, the Old Testament, initiating an unprecedented celebration of materiality and therefore of place in God's relations with humanity.

When God chose to enter the world, it was not in some ethereal generic manner but in a particular family, in a particular town, in a particular country with particular socio-religious practices. Just as Christ "became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood" (John 1:14 The Message), so also the people that comprise the local church in the parish are meant to be a tangible expression of God's love in the everyday reality of life.⁸

Later they make the point that:

Though the building is not the church, it speaks of the character and reality of the church in a profound and vital way. It can help to root the community in its faith, nurture its prophetic witness, and draw it to its destination. Sacred places 'encapsulate a vision of ultimate value in human existence.' Only when it does this is a relationship between God, people and place properly maintained and will it speak as an effective sign.⁹

The report contains powerful arguments for the retention of church buildings but with that there is a recognition that there is a need for these facilities to be put to wider use. Again, they say:

⁸ Report of the Church Buildings Review Group published October 13 2015 para 64. The second paragraph P. Sparks, T. Soerens and D. Friesen, *The New Parish. How Neighbourhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (London: IVP Press, 2014), 24

⁹ Report of the Church Buildings Review Group published October 13 2015 para 107.

As the report entitled *Building Faith in our Future* put it, churches are:

*a major contributor to social capital, providing a physical base where people can meet and be supported, practically, emotionally and spiritually – expressing the church's unending concern to recognise all humanity as neighbours. Day in, day out, church buildings host groups of all types and all age ranges, from toddlers upwards, reaching many who lack confidence to find self-worth elsewhere.*¹⁰

In Appendix 2 of the report the following unattributed quote is to be found:

The building has significance to the community as a sacred space where its collective memory and spiritual heritage is expressed – but also, the community has significance for the well-being of the building.

In many ways that is the pivotal point. If a connection cannot be made between the church as building and the community it exists to serve, then the required level of commitment to the upkeep of the building is unlikely to be found. The reality is that this sort of connection is not maintained solely through worship. Neither are the locals likely to want to be associated with a building which is cold or dark or both and lacking basic facilities. Our buildings are highly significant when it comes to expressing the nature of our welcome.

In a tiny community where maybe only six or seven come to worship once a month, there may be more than the whole population of the village at a Christmas Eve Carol Service and up to sixty people at social events held in the church because it is the only covered space in the village large enough.

It is clear that there are many examples of rural churches beginning to think more creatively about the use of their buildings. Examples cited in Becky Payne's book *Churches for Communities*¹¹ give some good examples of this. We believe that there is a high level of interest in this topic as there have been representatives from c.150 benefices at a series of workshops on *The Village and Its Church* run recently by Maggie Durran and Glyn Evans in recent years.

Some are major projects, such as Stadhampton, and other examples of creative use of church buildings, are provided in Appendix C. But it is fair to say that new toilets and serveries can be, and are being, installed at more modest expense.

The Church Buildings Review Group made ten recommendations as it sent the report out to consultation. Certainly they look towards a time when red tape is reduced and Church and Government representatives explore ways in which more financial support for listed cathedrals and church buildings can be provided in the long term. They also clearly envisage greater diocesan participation in ensuring building reviews or audits are incorporated into each diocese's vision and strategy.

We believe that when discussions about the future of church buildings are underway they should include the school for two reasons: it may be that the school can use the building more and therefore any changes could take this into account and also it may be that the school itself could be used as an adjunct/additional/replacement to the church building.

We would assert that many rural communities have done remarkable work in maintaining, restoring and adapting their church buildings. For others even the

¹⁰ Report of the Church Buildings Review Group published October 13 2015 para 107. quoting Church Heritage Forum, *Building Faith in our Future* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 8

¹¹ B. Payne *Churches for Communities: Adapting Oxfordshire's Churches for Wider Use* (2014)

prospect of setting out along that sort of journey is overwhelming. We need to continue to be aware of the progress of the simplification agenda and to establish whether the diocese might review the way in which it promulgates and enables the sharing of good practices and plays its part in creating new networks and partnerships for the sharing of those practices. And there needs to be a willingness in rural communities to think creatively about what the building can be used for. These might include:

- The provision of children's services
- As a remote doctor's surgery
- Space for a village store
- A pop-up pub
- The possibilities could be endless

The final question is to ask how we go about trialling some of these and other ideas to see what the benefits and pitfalls might be.

D. Exploring different models of governance in Multi Parish Benefices (MPBs)

Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church further encouraged multi-church groups to improve their own systems for managing administration, which might include administrative posts shared across a number of benefices or a deanery, and addressing financial management, accounting, building and churchyard management issues. This could provide another potential prototype for managing buildings more economically and effectively.¹²

There can be little doubt that running a MPB is complicated and expensive, in terms of both finances and people. A single church parish with a population of, for example, around 7500 will need to find two churchwardens, one lay chair, one secretary and one treasurer – a total of five PCC officers. They may choose to appoint other officers (Chairs of Building Committees, or Finance Committees and the like) but they only have to find five. Add to that maybe another couple as deanery synod reps and ten as PCC members and the total number of people required for the governance of the parish is a little under twenty.

A similar sized rural population may well encompass nine parishes arranged in a MPB or a group but rarely, currently, as a single parish. And so there is a need to find eighteen churchwardens, nine lay chairs, nine secretaries and nine treasurers. Add to that somewhere between nine and eighteen deanery synod reps and probably between sixty and seventy PCC members. The governance of a MPB with a similar sized population to that of the single church parish is likely to involve over one hundred people.

Because, as we have already said, rural populations are inherently conservative and because, if we are to be entirely honest, they can be considerably parochial, there is a marked reluctance to look at ways in which structures could be changed to ease the burden of governance. They have a fear, which is to a degree understandable, that yet more ‘power’ (or perhaps more accurately the ability to make decisions which affect their future) will be taken out of their hands. They have a memory, perhaps, of simply losing their much loved vicar and being told that he wouldn’t be replaced and that they were going to join up with such and such a parish. Whole teams and groups of parishes have been formed in that way – a parish added here, a parish added there, without there being any apparent strategic thinking.

So, as the need for possible pastoral reorganisations remains, and because it is likely to impact on some rural areas, we feel strongly that a good deal of thought needs to be given to the way in which MPBs are formed and reformed and to their ongoing care and maturing, taking regard to the healing of relationships. A member of the RSSG is currently preparing a paper on that aspect.

We would also ask whether the archdeacons would be willing to explore, in the light of the simplification agenda, what advice they might be able to give, particularly in the context of Rural MPBs, to explain what the options are for simplification now and what they might be in the future.

¹² Report of the Church Buildings Review Group published October 13 2015 para 143.

E. Strengthening Finance

Pressures on finance in RMPBs are considerable and it is entirely fair and demonstrable to suggest that the running costs of the rural church in RMPBs are significantly higher (by proportion) than those of single church parishes in other contexts.

Let's return to the comparison between two populations of around 7500, one with one church building and one with, say, eleven because three of the team's parishes function as a single parish with three buildings. If we assume an average of around £3,000 for insurance – that's £3,000 for the single church and £33,000 for the RMPB. Clergy expenses of, say, £4,000 in the single church, but the RMPB has two stipendiary and two house for duty clergy and regularly sees combined expenses in excess of £12,000. The RMPB may well face a Benefice Share in the order of £95,000, the single church parish around, say £50-£60,000. Heating and lighting will not multiply by a factor of eleven because the buildings are likely to be used less but this is all before consideration is given to general maintenance, restorations and any improvements that the church might like to make in order that it be better equipped for mission in the twenty-first century. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the costs in these two contexts is likely to differ by considerably more than £100,000 per year.

As with any budget, there are a number of ways of achieving a balance. The church can look to reduce costs but it is hard to see in many rural churches where those savings could be made. They aren't running administrators or parish offices although there are strong arguments that they should. Generally speaking, they are not employing children's workers or youth workers – they are faithfully trying to keep their church going with limited resources. The second way is to increase giving. We were not able to consult with the diocesan Generous Christian Giving Adviser because the post has been vacant for some time but we would hope that, once the appointment has been made, the new adviser, having been given time to settle into the role, might work with the RSSG to see whether materials might be tailored to rural situations when it comes to increasing income. The third way, though a temporary way, to balance the budget is to dip into reserves. However, for the great majority of parishes in rural contexts, reserves are a thing of the past.

We are aware of the on-line Grant Finder and would hope that part of the task of the new Generous Christian Giving Adviser would be to promote it in those parishes and benefices seeking to carry out major works.

We believe that the work of the Parish Share Review group was fundamentally important in acknowledging, for the first time, that there was a need to mitigate the impact of parish share on rural parishes and rural deaneries. The final scheme is undeniably complicated in spite of the Review Group's initial desire for simplicity and clarity. We would hope either that the work of the Parish Share Review Group might be on-going or that a piece of work may be done in the Finance Department showing whether the mitigation offered is effective and sufficient.

If we wish to accept the first recommendation from *Released for Mission* that we include, as part of Church life, an intentional focus on mission and evangelism, then there needs to be a focus (and for us it is a focus in the rural church) on what are the impediments to mission and how they might be alleviated.

F. Supporting Rural Schools

Church schools are a jewel in the crown of most dioceses and offer significant opportunities to interact with young people and the wider community. Relations between parishes and church schools are likely to be easier but we should never assume that secular schools will resist our approaches.

We do, however, need in the rural context, to look at what may be possible and what may not. We deal again with expectations – of memories of the time when the vicar chaired the governing body of the local school and was seen at least once a week taking an assembly. But what if you have four church schools in your benefice? You may be an ex officio member of a governing body simply because of your appointment.

The nature of the governing role has also changed. Thirty years ago being a member of a governing body meant little more than turning up three times a year to endorse the decisions which had been made by the head teacher and the chair of the governing body. It was actually quite tedious. And being chair meant meeting with the head from time to time just to check that everything was OK. Move on thirty years and contrast that with the expectations of today. Governors should have a working knowledge of all school policies, they should be prepared to report regularly on particular subject areas and to sit on at least one of a raft of sub-committees. No longer a cup of coffee and an occasional nod or desultory raising of the hand. Being a governor today involves significant commitment and significant work-load. And as for being a chair of governors... there are times when that could become almost a full-time job.

Given the value of the work that our schools carry out and the ministry that is possible in schools we may need to look at how clergy and others from the parish who may offer school work can be of best service to the school. Is it as a governor or is it as somebody who regularly conducts collective worship? Perhaps it might be better simply to offer an afternoon a week to be a friend to the school – pupils and staff alike.

While relationships with rural schools are key to maintaining connection with young people, in some contexts this might be more realistically done on a deanery basis or across a group of MPBs. Robin Sharples has suggested that each deanery might identify lay people within a deanery who are willing and able to act as school governors especially where small rural communities cannot find them. We support this suggestion.

Having met with Fiona Craig, Deputy Director of Education (School Effectiveness), we became clear that there were further discussions to take place with the suggestion that a discrete group deals with those opportunities before feeding back into the thinking of the RSSG. To take this further forward a Rural Education Action Group has been established. Please see Appendix H for details of the remit for this group.

G. Engaging with the changes new housing brings

The reality is that a large number of new houses need to be built and new areas of land need to be identified for their development. We see within the diocese significant expansion in, for example, Aylesbury and Bicester. Thousands of new homes are being built on previously unoccupied land to cope with the stated need. We acknowledge that the New Communities Group has been working on this area and would seek opportunities to work with them further on this.

Clearly, rural communities, particularly the smaller rural communities, do not have to deal with development on this scale. But many communities are feeling under threat from developers. Pockets of land in villages are being identified by developers for house building and applications are being made even where the land has been identified by the local authority as not suitable for development.

For example, let us think of a village with a population of around eight hundred which is subject to an application to build eighty houses in a field on the edge of the village. The area has been specifically mentioned as unsuitable and yet is the subject of multiple applications and appeals from the developer. The desire to oppose remains strong for now but there is a sense that the builders will win in the end, that they will grind the community down. The school is already oversubscribed – but that is not a planning issue but rather is the responsibility of those who make educational provision. It is almost impossible to get an appointment at the GP surgery – but that is not a planning issue, it is a matter for the local healthcare trust. Traffic during the morning and evening rush hours is already quite heavy with a road which is particularly narrow in places already being used as a rat run but because the bus service is so poor pretty nearly every household where there are two people working will need two cars. The population of the village will increase by between twenty-five and thirty percent over a relatively short period of time.

There is considerable resentment and the action group is really very active! The rural church needs to consider what is an appropriate reaction to what many villagers see as a predatory application.

The scenario described is current in parts of the diocese. Such applications do appear reasonable to oppose for a whole host of reasons. But what to do if the houses are built? Perhaps the rural church can be an important facilitator of community development both at parish/benefice and deanery level.

At the Place Making conference held in autumn 2016 – see Appendix I, which was supported by the diocese, it was concluded that the church has a role in helping not just building churches but also in building community and taking part in community development processes. It is hoped to find some exemplar projects in new housing areas which include rural developments where this can be piloted.

H. Training for People in Leadership Roles

In recent decades there has been an increased awareness of the importance of providing appropriate training and support to enable people to develop their gifts and skills in ministry. A good example of this is the Arthur Rank Centre's Germinate Leadership course.

"The Germinate course has taught me more about the gifts, challenges and opportunity for rural churches and Ministry.

It has enabled me to listen and gain a much greater understanding and awareness of the work undertaken by rural ministers and the needs of their communities.

It is equipping me with and strengthening my Leadership skills. This continues to develop an increasing confidence in my willingness and ability to generate new initiatives as well as more professionally undertake those of which I am currently involved.

The space that Germinate has provided has helped me to stand back and place the Ridgeway Benefice that I represent within the context of the bigger picture of rural ministry ecumenically.

I am hoping that it will enhance my Benefice by enabling and supporting me in identifying along with my Minister, Leonora Hill, gaps in the ministry of our community that I can research and resource and support.

An example of this is that much of Leonora's time is taken up with administration. The assistance of an Administrator would free up more time for much needed ministry, hence I am currently researching how this works in other benefices prior to drawing up a suggested plan of action for the implementation of an administrator's role for the Ridgeway Benefice."

Debbie Leek

We are aware that there are organisations which focus on the distinctive nature of rural ministry and which offer training. The Germinate course has been found useful by those who have attended it as attested to by Debbie Leek, from the Wantage Deanery, above. We would also recommend that the diocese liaise with the Arthur Rank Centre to see whether they might be able to offer training and support to rural clergy in the diocese.

We piloted a Leaders' Consultation in early 2016 with the incumbent and two lay leaders from six RMPBs which was well received and details of this can be found in Appendix D.

The Director of Mission, with colleagues, has begun a series of consultations which consider the question, "What does leadership look like that enables discipleship?"

I. Replenishing for the future.

Throughout Christian history God has refreshed and renewed his church as people come to faith, deepen their commitment to Christ, and the Church contributes to the common good, often on a local basis.

We believe that the other focal areas in this strategy have the potential to produce a culture in which mission and evangelism can grow. We also note that insights are emerging from conversations on discipleship being held by the Department of Mission.

The report on the commission on religion and belief in British Public Life *Living with Difference* states that, “Many Christian denominations have been living with numerical decline for some decades. Nevertheless, their physical and social infrastructure continues to play an important role in the provision of social welfare and the promotion of social justice. Many rural churches are now considering the role their buildings can play as a community hub; both rural and urban churches are now exploring partnerships with housing associations so land can be harnessed for affordable housing while also sustaining Christian congregations.¹³

In the Theos report *Doing Good: A future for Christianity in the 21st century*¹⁴, which received considerable publicity at the end of 2016, the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster wrote, “The Church continues today to demonstrate the unquenchable love of God on an enormous scale... The report’s idea of ‘Christian social liturgy’ expresses how Christians can combine their fidelity to the two greatest commandments – loving God and loving their neighbour – in a way that is simultaneously distinctive and inclusive”.

We believe that much social capital has been, and is being, created by rural churches, as Appendix C shows. We hope that Archdeacons and Area Deans can encourage the development of this.

The rural team and agricultural chaplaincy supports people in their work in the countryside and we believe this work needs to be promoted further that people’s discipleship may be developed.

Rather than a directive on the lines of “Every benefice must have an explorers/inquirers’ course every year” we consider that there is merit in this question being discussed on a regular basis by benefices councils and PCCs, “How might people learn about the Christian faith in our parish/benefice?”

The Mission Department’s conversations on discipleship, vocation and leadership provide occasions for further discussions on both resources and opportunities for people to share their faith.

¹³ *Living with Difference*, p.62

¹⁴ As reported in the *Church Times* of 23/30 December 2016

The Appendices

Appendix A: Milestones on a journey to the Rural Strategy 2016

The Rural Strategy 2016 is part of a long line of attention to rural mission and ministry over 50 years in the diocese. Here are some key milestones:

Mid 70s	Oxford Diocese appoints first Rural and Agricultural Chaplain
1980	“The rural Face of the Oxford Diocese” report for Diocesan Synod
1989	Dorchester Area appoints Parish Development Adviser and Rural Chaplain as part of the build up to the ACORA report
1990	Publication of Faith in the Countryside (ACORA)
Early 1990s	Appointment of Rural chaplains/officers in Bucks, Reading and Dorchester Archdeaconries
January 1993	Rethinking Pastoral Strategy “Windsor Conference
July 1993	“The Future of our Past” report published
1990s	Series of conferences, training events and working groups for clergy and laity around changing needs of rural; parishes and communities. Conferences and study guides developed to help PCCs address issue of the future of church buildings. Representatives from diocese collaborate with Arthur Rank centre to produce a series of training books on rural ministry include <i>Turning the Sod. A handbook on multi parish ministry</i> .
2005	Regional officer appointed for 5 year post with remit to develop rural regional issues including in job description.
2004	Building Faith in our Future report on future of church buildings. National launch held in the diocese and south east region.
2005	Diocesan rural team of deanery representatives established
2008 “	Rural Ministry Consultation
2009	Rural Parish Share Group work
2011	Rural Forum on Mission and Evangelism
2012	Deanery MAPs identifies concerns about changing rural patterns of ministry
May 2013	Mission and Pastoral Committee recommends that ‘The diocese should continue to develop a vision for ministry in rural areas to encourage creativity and mutual support.’ Working party to produce initial support established by Director of Mission chaired by Diocesan rural officer.
October 2014	National Germinate conference attended by a selection of lay and clergy reps of the Mission Department to feed into and inform Director of Mission.
November 2014	A vision for rural ministry report recommends the formation of “a more formal consultation process.... conversation which needs to focus on organisation, structure, governance and finance – on appointments and management of ministry (how do we ensure that clergy – and laity – are adequately skilled, resourced and nurtured?) as well as on what we believe the nature of Christian community will look like in our villages in, say, the next fifteen or twenty years.” Rural Strategy Steering Group convened
Sept 2015	Buckinghamshire Archdeaconry appoints Area Dean for Rural Mission and development for three and a half rural deaneries

"Key findings in the 2008 consultation"

- There should be a regular multi parish benefice forum attended by representatives of the Senior Staff Team.
- More attention should be given to relieving the Administrative burden on multi-parish benefices.
- There is a need to strengthen appropriate training for clergy, and lay people in multi-parish benefices
- There is a need to review the role of the deanery in taking rural issues and concerns forward
- Collaborative ministry is essential for the future development of rural multi-parish benefices.
- A key policy area which should be addressed is that of Rural Proofing. Rural proofing developed as a Countryside Agency initiative (now Commission for Rural Communities) to encourage the public sector to assess the impact of policy maker on rural communities. All Government departments are required to rural proof.
- Many churches have already made good progress in developing their churches to be fit for purpose in the 21st century as both a place of worship and as a community facility.
- It was recognized that in rural areas the occasional offices of funerals, baptisms, weddings are essential as part of mission.
- The effect of new housing areas on existing rural parishes and benefices is exercising those affected

The Rural Strategy Steering Group has borne in mind the following:

Working Together: The Future of Rural Church of England Schools published by the National Society October 2014

GS Misc 1092	Released for Mission (January 2015)
GS Paper 1985	Mission and Growth in Rural Multi-Parish Benefice (February 2015)
GS Misc 1124	In Each Generation: A programme for the renewal and reform of the Church of England (October 2015)

Appendix B: Making Rural Appointments

The aim of the diocese, and of the parishes/benefices involved, is to make the right appointment to the right post.

With that in mind there are various things that need to be considered.

- Advertising the post
- The parish/benefice profile.
- The interview process
- Support
- Practicalities of moving to the country
- Pastoral care of parishioners who find that their parish is going to become part of a large group or United Benefice.

1. Advertising the post

Almost every advert in the church Times seeks a “gifted preacher, an inspirational leader, someone good with children.....”etc.

Somehow we need to express succinctly and much more clearly the complexity of rural situations. People might be wanting to “Escape to the country” and need to understand better that whilst there are few rural idylls as found on jigsaw boxes and postcards, there are real benefits in living in the country, as well as downsides too.

There may well be a better life-style, lower crime rate, good schools, clean air, dark skies and a lovely environment, but there are also noises and smells, lots of mud, greater distances to the shop or the theatre, the doctor or the library, the hospital or the local garage, and poor public transport.

So the priestly qualities we are looking for may well be the same as for someone working in an urban, suburban or deprived setting, but other qualities sought might include

- *Flexibility in churchmanship*
- *A willingness to work with rural communities rather than impose ideas upon them*
- *The desire to enable lay people to exercise their many and varied ministries*
- *An eagerness to play one's part in community life*

And every job advert stresses that “We offer a fully supportive PCC.....”etc. It might be more helpful to state clearly and simply exactly what sort of assistance and help there currently is, as well as saying things like “St Mildred’s wishes to remain a BCP church....”

Some places have used video as an advert – showing real places and people and skilfully done this could be imaginative and helpful.

2. The Parish/ Benefice Profile

When PDAs, Archdeacons, Area Deans and others work with parishes to write the Profile there needs to be an understanding that

- *The previous profile written seven years ago cannot simply be re-hashed*
- *Parishes are expected to have looked critically at, thought about, and prayed about their current situation, and to have some vision for the future, couched in real terms rather than “We want to create a vibrant worshipping community”.*
- *The profile needs to be much more than a photograph album of “significant” parish events, loosely stitched together with some woolly paragraphs.*
- *It is good to have something written by the local schools, and consideration be given to other ways that schools can be involved in the appointment process, where appropriate.*
- *A current worship rota would be helpful – showing exactly what the new incumbent will be doing on a Sunday and how many miles they will be driving.*
- *A clear amalgamated set of accounts would be useful – or individual parish accounts expressed in identical formats.*

So there could well be a generic formula for a part of the profile, which all recruiting benefices will copy, followed by a chance for the individual statements, hopes and desires which add the richness and “filling” to the document.

3. The Interview Process

There are several elements to this process:

- *Showing candidates the whole of the Benefice, perhaps offering them the opportunity to come and spend time in the benefice to gain a wider appreciation of its physical reach, culture, ministry and mission*
- *Looking at the house*
- *Meeting the Wardens*
- *Visiting a school and being grilled by the children*
- *Meeting some parishioners*
- *Spending time with prospective colleagues in multi-parish benefices*
- *Being formally interviewed*

There is a wide variety in style and content of interview process at the moment; this needs to be standardised to some extent. Interviewers need some degree of nous, or maybe some simple skills, to elicit information about the candidate, and to discover whether someone who looks good on paper is the right person after all.

Are there skilled people from throughout the diocese who might assist the interview panel in this way?

With RMPBs there is a danger that too many people will be involved in an interview panel; the Benefice needs to elect representatives who interview alongside the Senior Staff member and who are trusted by the several parishes to make the right decisions.

The Area Dean should also have time with the candidate; they know well the dynamic of the Deanery, and the needs of the parishes/benefice, and can also explain any problems on the ground, which must be flagged up, whilst not queering pitches or betraying confidences, and also remind candidates of the need for a more measured pace of change in conservative rural areas.

4. Support

Who cares for the rural incumbent?

What check list of things/people/groups/lists/things to do has been created for day 1 in the new job?

Who will work with, alongside the new incumbent? Identifying areas of training needed?

Who will observe critically and thoughtfully and be able to say after 6 months or a year “This is, or is not, working”? And if it is not working what sort of interventions will make a difference?

How do we enable someone who is unhappy to leave post without them either feeling or being labelled as a “failure”?

These are all questions which need to be addressed if adequate support is to be provided. Someone, or a small group, could be appointed to ask

- *Are you getting your days off?*
- *Are your expenses being paid?*
- *Do you know how best to use your time locally?*
- *What more support do you need from the benefice, or the diocese?*

And if, as we are told, wrong appointments are made, then we need some process so that the person realises

- *They can receive further support and training*
- *There are experienced people who understand the rural context who will help them work through difficult issues*
- *There are ways of leaving and moving on without feelings of failure*
- *There will be good support in such a move.*

5. Practicalities of moving to the country

A huge variety of things to consider, and situations which may arise;

- *Oil central heating; the tank should be full – and left full upon leaving post*
- *The house should be in reasonable condition and decoration so that the entire resettlement grant is not spent on new carpets*
- *Account must be taken of the size of the garden, the time required to tend it, and the sorts of machinery need to do this efficiently – employing a*

gardener, using a ride on mower, or a petrol hedge cutter; all must be considered.

- *Parish documents and phone numbers and email addresses need to be made available – even if there is no parish office someone can hold these vital things until the new incumbent arrives.*
- *Church friend, or neighbour could show people where the supermarket is, the doctor's surgery, the school bus, the dog walk, and so on; the family need to live happily.*
- *Expenses of office need to be agreed and, in our opinion, should cover the cost of attending parish functions such as harvest suppers. And if there is any sort of expectation that the incumbent's family should attend then the cost of their tickets ought to be covered.*
- **Single people may** need even greater support and care.

6. The formation of a Multi Parish Benefice

Expectations on the part of the Diocese, the Deanery, the individual parishes, and the incumbent need to be known, explained and managed.

Sixth day ministries rarely sit easily or well with rural ministers.

When pastoral reorganisation is planned it is important that at a very early stage discussion is held with PCCs and parishioners. This will undoubtedly involve someone being in too many village halls in evening meetings answering the same question over and over again, but each community and church fellowship deserves that degree of interest and input.

There needs to be honesty about the reasons for amalgamation. For whose benefit? What will be the new opportunities such amalgamation will offer? What will be the flip side?

There needs to be honesty about the Parish Share – and how the new Benefice will be run. Serious consideration and support should be given to the provision of a benefice office and administrator.

There needs to be realism – again the need for honesty – as parishes strive to keep “their vicar” doing things as they have always been done.

There needs to be honesty and willingness about how structures and church governance could be reformed and streamlined – everyone needs to be involved in thinking about the best use of priestly time and energy – which might not include chairing 12 PCCs.

7. Induction into the role

Below you will find a list of questions to enable you, the wardens and parish to think what level of introduction to the benefice / parish your new minister would benefit from, whatever their age or experience.

People

Who are the key people the Minister needs to meet early on?

- Can you provide a Who's Who of key people in the life of the church, with their telephone numbers, and the responsibilities they have?
- Is there a resident organist and/or who is responsible for the music in worship?
- Who orders candles, wafers etc. and prepares the church for a communion (if there isn't a sacristan)
- Who is it that knows the story of the church well – its history, key people and events?
- Who are the people (or organisations), both in the church and in the wider community, who exercise "power" or influence and the minister needs to meet sooner rather than later?
- Who has responsibilities in the parish for child protection and where are the files kept?
- Who are the local undertakers – names, addresses and contact details and where are is/are the crematoria / churchyard (if the church graveyard is closed)

Practicalities

- Have you arranged to meet with the new minister to go through the Terrier, Log Book, Inventory and Churchyard plan? (Note: Minister and churchwardens should also sign the Inventory).
- Have you arranged to hand over keys? (Note: your new Minister should sign a record of which keys are in his/her possession.)
- What financial information would it be helpful for your new minister to know early on? eg, Do they need to meet with the Treasurer(s) about the financial affairs of the parish, and to let him/her know about any local Trusts, Discretionary and Charitable funds.
- How much administrative support is currently being offered and when will this be reviewed?
- Do you have a list of helpful / important telephone numbers for the minister, eg doctors, local schools, police, plumbers, electricians etc
- Could you provide a local map with some of the key facilities marked, eg residential / care homes, schools, supermarkets, petrol stations, pubs, restaurants or takeaways
- Could you provide the minister with a copy of the electoral roll(s), a list of wider church community contacts, last year's annual report(s) and key orders of service/service booklets
- From the registers could you compile details and contact information for recent and forthcoming baptisms, funerals or weddings?
- Does your new minister have access to the latest Diocesan Yearbook and is aware of the latest, rules and regulations on churchyard memorials and other important policies and guidelines?

- Have you discussed the issue of Data Protection? (Most clergy will need to register with the Data Protection Commissioner as ‘data controllers’ in their own right. Information concerning baptismal/confirmation records constitutes ‘sensitive personal information’ within the meaning of the Act.)

Getting into the Role

What does the minister need to know about the churches?

- Are there any outstanding faculties or churchyard issues (either applications or work to be done)?
- What are the current pastoral concerns that need to be shared?
- What are the “traditions” which are particularly important to your church?
- Are there any unresolved conflicts or other human relationship dynamics that should be shared? (including any “skeletons in the closet”)
- What is the biggest mistake the new minister could make in the first 3 months!?

Appendix C: Illustrations of some of the additional and alternative uses to which rural churches are being put.

In the Dorchester Archdeaconry the Stadhampton village hall is within the parish church. In two summer months this year it has hosted: Pilates- A Lunch Club – River Thames Conservation Trust Training Course – Parents and Toddlers – WI – Film – Ramblers - Book club and the Parish Council.

Kirtlington has a similar story to Stadhampton with the church creating more space for community activities when the village hall needed more space for village activities.

Deddington has the Farmers Market once a month.

Culham is discussing the building being used as a possible extension of the school.

Fernham was the first church in the country to be leased to the community.

In the Berkshire Archdeaconry Beech Hill has an excellent shop and café in the north aisle/transept.

In the Buckingham Archdeaconry Hillesden has just had a new kitchen and toilet installed and is now consulting further on community use of the building.

Cuddington has moveable chairs, a front small staging for concerts, a kitchen and disabled toilet and it is used extensively for local events in addition to the memorial hall which stands on the opposite side of the church and it is also used by the school.

Appendix D Rural Leaders' Gathering/Consultation

Aims of a rural leadership event for ordained and lay leaders:

- To provide a space for sharing and reflection on rural ministry with fellow-practitioners in a similar context.
- To review how ministry is being exercised that mission may be better enabled.
- To consider how leadership and responsibility might be shared and developed.
- To share issues and ideas that can enhance the understanding and appreciation of mission in a rural context drawing on questions such as, what is giving life and vitality to those ministering here? What impediments can be identified to developing mission and ministry in this benefice? What are the challenges to living and working here and how might they be handled?
- To provide an opportunity for people to review their calling and how it is being expressed in their own context.

The consultation will offer an opportunity for:

- Drawing on experience and expertise of those attending.
- Modelling confident, collaborative ministry.
- Sharing of issues and concerns brought by the participants.
- Theological reflection.
- Sharing examples of leadership.

Format

- 24 hours from Friday lunch time concluding with lunch together on the Saturday.
- Leaders – one ordained and two lay - from six benefices.
- Two facilitators and two other members of the RSSG.

Appendix E Germinate Leadership

The Arthur Rank centre writes that “Germinate Leadership is an exciting programme on leadership in the rural church to help lay and ordained leaders from all denominations to develop creative, entrepreneurial skills for effective rural church leadership.

Germinate Leadership is a subsidised 18 month programme which includes 360 degree appraisal, a residential event, input and peer days, mentoring and work shadowing. A blend of learning styles is used, incorporating wisdom and experience from both secular and church leadership spheres. As a result, it is practical, relevant, and tailored to the person and context. The programme builds on the findings of *The Effective Christian Presence and Enterprise Project* (Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire & the Humber, Faithworks, 2008). This project conducted two years of research with 19 innovative Christian groups in the Yorkshire and Humber region. It aimed to identify; learn from; encourage; and sustain enterprising forms of Christian presence.

One of the project’s recommendations was that lay and ordained church leaders should be trained to develop the ‘entrepreneurial leadership style’, including project development and management skills. They should be supported and encouraged to start new community initiatives and social enterprise projects, and in helping Christian presences to be more effective in engaging with their communities. In response, the CRCYH and the ARC collaborated to produce a pilot leadership development programme specifically aimed at lay and ordained leaders in the rural church. This was successfully completed in Yorkshire during Spring 2013. A national programme commenced in October 2013 and was fully subscribed and enthusiastically received”.

A participant commented:

The programme has been inspirational. The combination of theology, leadership training, peer and mentor consultancy, spiritual development, stories from rural experience, in theory and practice, has given me renewed enthusiasm and confidence in my ministry. It has been a vital part of my continuing formation and learning.

And the Bishop of Knaresborough, the Right Revd James Bell observed:

Promoting creative leadership in the rural church isn't about making up for a lack of clergy; it is about recognising and receiving the gifts given by the Spirit for the good of all. It has been a privilege to share in this imaginative and intelligent process and ... I believe that the work and witness of the rural church will be enriched by this contribution to leadership development.

Appendix F:**New housing and rural communities**

Churches are in a unique place to identify and articulate the effect of new housing on not only the nature of rural communities but also how new housing may alter relationships within them.

New housing presents an opportunity to forward the mission of the church, to work with other local agencies, to welcome new folk to the community, to help them feel at home, to help people make friends, and to demonstrate and share the Christian faith.

While each context is unique, good practice often includes:

- Regular public and private prayer for those new to a parish/benefice.
- A personal call to new homes.
- A well-produced leaflet with local knowledge and details of local provision of services.
- Asking people what their needs are.
- Offering community wide events.
- Appointing a Champion or responsible person who is on the PCC/Benefice Council who focuses on this.
- Being aware of the local Neighbourhood Plan, and contributing to it where possible.
- Working with the Parish Council and other local agencies.

While it is important to have a positive attitude towards new housing developments, they can produce a wide range of emotions amongst local people and the church may find itself having an important role to play at the interface between old and new, not least in providing ways and means to help people articulate their concerns, and to heal any perceived and actual divisions.

Deaneries may want to consider establishing local forums to share information, good practice and experiences.

Appendix G: RMPBs missional structures: A paper to generate ideas and discussion

To forward mission and ministry across a multi-parish benefice, each PCC agrees to the establishing of some benefice wide working groups. The rationale here is of "Working together to be stronger in and for Christ".

The aims of working more closely together are to:

- Share strengths.
- Combine resources.
- Share expertise.
- Getting to know one another.
- Form a critical mass of people.
- Encourage mission across parish boundaries.
- Provide learning resources.
- Obtain benefits of scale.

The working groups could include:

- Pastoral Care. *This could include maintaining contact with those who experience the church through the occasional offices, visiting the housebound, taking Holy Communion to those who cannot attend church.*
- Developing in the faith. *This could include confirmation groups, questioners and explorers' groups, Bible study and home groups, prayer groups.*
- Children and young people. *This group could be responsible for developing relationships with schools and those who provide for the very young. It might seek to promote and deliver activities such as, 'Open the Book', 'Godly Play', 'Messy Church'.*
- Engaging with the world together. *This group could consider ways and means for the church to connect with the wider world. It might promote links with mission agencies such as Christian Aid. It would review means of communication such as web sites, noticeboards, Facebook pages, magazines, etc.*

The incumbent can be a member of each group but her or his role is probably better expressed by spending time with the group leaders and helping them to develop both themselves and their group.

Each group would have a leader, appointed jointly by the incumbent and PCC, who would provide a report to the PCCs across the year.

It is recommended that there be no more than four groups.

Other possible groups could be:

- Buildings.
- Worship.
- Responding to God with our time, talents and money

Appendix H: Towards an education strategy for rural schools

Background/Rationale

In March 2015 a discussion of '*Working Together – the Future of Rural Church of England Schools*' October 2014 report was held by members of the Rural Strategy Steering Group with Fiona Craig as part of the group's engagement with its objective of "Supporting rural schools". Subsequently, Fiona Craig's paper "*Report and proposal for discussion on the challenges facing our Small and Rural schools*" was discussed and agreed by the ODBE at its meeting in July 2015. The paper noted that the pace and nature of changes in the provision of education in this country may have a major impact on the large number of small rural schools and their communities in this diocese. It is proposed to establish a discrete multi-disciplinary group to evaluate and assess how the situation may be responded to in terms of education, mission and pastoral support of parishes and schools.

Purpose of the Group

The overarching purpose of the Rural Schools Strategy Group is to begin to formulate and collate diocesan thinking and strategy relating to rural schools and to make a series of reports and recommendations to the Bishop's Staff, Bishop's Council, ODBE, Board of Mission on a regular basis. This will enable the diocese to engage creatively and constructively with a significant change to the provision of education, nationally.

Without this collation of information and joint thinking we may risk finding ourselves driven by events.

Outline Terms of Reference:

- To review the communication of the context, culture and content of changes in education, currently being undertaken on a deanery basis by the Department of Mission and ODBE team, working collaboratively.
- To promote good practice of governing bodies and PCCs in working together to review their own context by means of dissemination of information and sharing examples of effective collaboration.
- To encourage the adoption of a creative range of options for joint working between schools.
- To develop experts and expertise in this field, with particular reference to the handling of change.
- To be aware of the reputational impact to parishes, deaneries and diocese of changes in provision of local education.
- To provide appropriate resources and support relating to change, loss and endings for churches, community/ies and individuals. To investigate

opportunities for rebuilding trust and mitigating threats to the mission of the church when changes affect relationships between, church/es, community/ies and individuals. To devise appropriate resources and support relating to change, loss and endings.

- To develop and deliver clergy training to include reference to the above points.

Membership

- Deputy Director of Education (School Effectiveness) - Fiona Craig
- Rural Head teacher – Andy Browne, Challow
- Rural Clergyperson – Dorchester Archdeaconry – Richard Hancock
- Rural Head teacher – Carol Philips, Bampton
- Rural Clergyperson – Bucks Archdeaconry – Patricia Slusar
- Schools Adviser –Robin Sharples
- Glyn Evans – Rural Adviser
- Charles Chadwick – PDA Dorchester Archdeaconry & Chair of Rural Strategy Steering Group.

Other people with specific skills will be invited to contribute to the group's work as appropriate.

Accountability.

This group is accountable to the ODBE and the Board of Mission. The budget will be shared between the two departments. The membership of the RSSG will be reviewed as necessary. These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by members of the Group, or as requested by the Directors of Mission and Education.

Appendix I: What is Place-Making?

Author: Project for Public Spaces

As both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighbourhood, city, or region, **Place-making** inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, Place-making refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, Place-making facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.

With community-based participation at its centre, an effective Place-making process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.

The PPS Place-making approach can be a springboard for community revitalization. Emerging from forty years of practice, 11 Principles of Place-making offer guidelines to help communities (1) integrate diverse opinions into a cohesive vision, (2) translate that vision into a plan and program of uses, and (3) ensure the sustainable implementation of the plan. Turning a shared vision into a reality—into a truly great place—means finding the patience to take small steps, to truly listen, and to see what works best in a particular context.

A day on Place-making is being held in Abingdon on 8th November 2016 to which one of the key contributors is Archdeacon Martin Gorick. Creating thriving, socially active, successful communities where people have a positive sense of belonging

In partnership with the Diocese of Oxford, Community First Oxfordshire are bringing together communities, Local Authorities, Developers and Voluntary Community Sector groups to discuss how to create thriving new communities alongside existing ones.

We acknowledge that further thought needs to be given to the suitability of place-making in some rural contexts where places may have no physical centre at all and hope that as this process is engaged in this diocese that the particular issues of rurality be considered.

Appendix J: Membership of the Rural Strategy Steering Group.

Andrew Anderson-Gear, as PDA for the Buckingham Archdeaconry.

Denise Brown, Associate Priest in the East Downland Benefice in the Newbury Deanery.

Charles Chadwick, PDA for the Dorchester Archdeaconry Parish Development Adviser for the Dorchester Archdeaconry and Convener/Chair of the Rural Strategy Steering Group.

Glyn Evans, Rural Officer in the Diocesan Mission in the World Team.

Beren Hartless, Director of Initial Ministerial Training for Curates.

Ronald Hawkes, Rector of the Wykeham Benefice in the Deddington Deanery.

David Meakin, Team Rector in the Schorne Benefice and Area Dean of the Claydon Deanery.

Val Plumb, Area Dean for Rural Mission and Development serving the deaneries of Buckingham, Claydon, Mursley, and rural Aylesbury.

Kate Stacey, Vicar of the Wychwood Benefice in the Chipping Norton Deanery.

Appendix K: Rural Strategy Steering Group Consultees

Sir Tony Baldry, Chairman of the Church Buildings Council.

Fiona Craig, Deputy Director of Education (School Effectiveness).

Jo Duckles, Editor of the DOOR.

Christine Fenn, Historic Churches Support Officer.

Alison Jestico, Director of Finance.

Natalie Merry, Senior Church Buildings Officer.

The Archdeacons of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Dorchester.

Appendix L:**Recommendations from Released for Mission
Growing the Rural Church (GS Misc 1092)****Recommendation 1**

This research shows that meaningful mission and growth are possible in rural multi-church groups, where time and space is created for it to take place and where the ministry of lay people is enabled and equipped. Strategies for mission and ministry in rural multi-church groups, devised locally, or by deaneries or dioceses should therefore:

- include an intentional focus on mission and evangelism
- free up the time and energy of lay people and clergy to focus on mission and ministry
- envision, nurture and equip the ministry of lay people.

Recommendation 2

High quality, specific and locally accessible training and development should be provided through dioceses for clergy and lay people in multi-church groups to support discipleship, mission, the ministry of lay people, work with schools, children and young people, worship and leadership.

Recommendation 3

It is important to build a culture of discipleship within rural congregations. Relevant resources and distinctive models to encourage discipleship need to be collated and promoted to assist in building the foundations for mission in rural communities.

Recommendation 4

The burden of administration, financial management and legal requirements is generally too heavy for clergy and lay people alike, taking up a considerable amount of time and energy.

A thorough review of legal governance structures and the requirement for many officeholders within a multi-church group needs to be overseen by the Archbishops' Council and carried out urgently. This should aim to simplify structures and processes, make recommendations on efficient governance mechanisms and reduce the number of officeholders and formal meetings required.

Recommendation 5

Multi-church groups should be encouraged to improve systems for managing administration to reduce the burden placed on both clergy and lay people. The provision of this resource could be approached in a number of ways such as: a part time post, an appointment shared across a number of benefices, a full time post for one or more deaneries. The resource could address administration, financial accounting, building and churchyard management. This should be seen as an enabling resource which releases time and energy amongst clergy and lay people and should therefore be a legitimate call on mission funding.

Recommendation 6

Addressing isolation and promoting collegiality is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of mission and ministry in rural multi-church groups. During formation, clergy should be supported to develop the habits and values of collegiality.

Additionally, within IME Phases 1 and 2 and as part of CMD, clergy should receive specific training to work in rural multi-church groups, to develop an enabling and equipping style of leadership that seeks to grow and facilitate the ministry of lay people.

Recommendation 7

Multi-church groups should be supported by dioceses to develop cooperative working between the different churches, with other multi-church groups and ecumenically, where possible. Many rural multi-church groups would also benefit from a process to find a collective identity, operate collegially, share resources and expertise, improve communications and develop intentional mission and evangelism.

Recommendation 8

Church buildings can be both a blessing and a burden, which falls primarily on the congregation and clergy. Urgent attention needs to be given to a strategy for their future management, as well as continuing the work to sustain buildings through extended community use.

Recommendation 9

Further qualitative research is needed to assess the most effective methods of enabling mission in rural communities within multi-church groups, including fresh expressions and work with schools

Appendix M: Cost Summary

1 Rural Leaders' consultation in 2017	£3,500
4 Attendees at Germinate Leadership course at £1,400/person	£5,600 *
Resources for Lay office holders development	£ 500
12 people trained as mentors at £28/person	£ 336
Total	£9,936

* We hope this will be an ongoing piece of developmental work and would request it be funded for the next three years.

As can be seen from the Implementation Grid it is anticipated that much of the work will require time of the PDA for the Dorchester Archdeaconry, the Rural Officer, and the Social Responsibility Adviser, and other members of the Mission Department. We hope that Archdeacons, Area Deans and Lay Chairs will also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the promotion and implementation of the report.