The Reader aims to assist the ten thousand Readers in the British Isles and Europe in the exercise of their ministry by stimulating them theologically and encouraging them to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ effectively in their dioceses. The Reader reflects the work of the Central Readers’ Council and the Church of England generally, while being aware of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The Central Readers’ Council of the Church of England
Chair: The Bishop of Sodor and Man, the Rt Revd Robert Paterson
Vice-chair: Mrs Chrysogon Bamber
Secretary: Dr Alan Wakely
Associate Secretary: Mrs Jenny Macpherson

The Reader production team
Editor: Heather Fenton
Reviews Editor: Mark Hurley
Advertising Manager: Anna Leyden
Designer: Wild Associates Ltd
Editorial Committee Chair: Marion Gray

The Reader is available from the Central Readers’ Council, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ

General enquiries: crcsec@hallarn.com
Tel: 01353 775132

Circulation enquiries: mo.cheesman@churchofengland.org
Tel: 020 7898 1401 or 020 7898 1417

Editor: readereditor@btconnect.com
Please send information for Gazette and In Memoriam to the General Enquiries address.

The Reader is available in the UK for £6.00 for four issues a year.
Cheques should be made payable to The Central Readers’ Council.
ISSN 0300-3469
Charity commission number 271916

© Copyright of The Reader is held by the Central Readers’ Council. Material is accepted for publication on the basis that it may need to be edited or shortened. The views of contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those held by the Central Readers’ Council. The acceptance of advertisements does not imply endorsement. Permission to reproduce material that appears in The Reader must be sought in writing.
Choosing a picture for the front cover of The Reader can be fun. Mostly I use pictures I have taken myself and this one is no exception. However when I came to look for something I realised how what I think of as a familiar country scene would be very different elsewhere and towards the end of this issue I have written a short article focusing on this.

Aside from ideas about different sorts of countryside, there is plenty of variety in the contents of this issue. David Sprigg reflects on his understanding of rural whilst confessing that these days he is a town dweller. The Rural Theology Association appears in several places: Stephen Cope, their chair, writes about their work which is both nationwide but has area groups which meet regularly. Leslie Francis tells us about their journal and in another article he tells about the psychological profiling of cathedral visitors, which could also be of interest to those who live in cathedral cities!

Country Way, the Christian magazine for rural dwellers, has some space under our new R4R logo. I helped start this magazine over 20 years ago and so I have a particular interest in telling you about it. Martin and John from CRuC tell us about the resources they have available.

Oxford Diocese is doing some interesting work, and there are two articles about their Cotswold Tourism Project. Jeremy Martineau, Andrew Duff and John Brown all bring insights into promoting our churches as venues for tourism as well as outreach and Barry Osbourne shares possibilities for ‘tailor-made evangelism’ in rural areas.

Multi parish benefices are a regular feature of rural areas and an article by Martin Coppen looks at this, whilst Sue Price helps us to think about children’s work in this context. Matt Page, our films reviewer, came up with a subtle twist; he reviews the film The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, the ultimate in tourism travel maybe?! Kay Vernon has definitely travelled outside the UK all the way to the little town of Bethlehem, where she makes some important discoveries and reports on what she finds there.

Future issues of the Reader will include an issue about various forms of Christian Community, something to help us think about the Olympic theme, and, yes, for those of you frustrated by too much rurality, an issue about things urban. So if you have any ideas about the possible contents of these please do drop me a line. Not that I am making any promises, you understand.

Meanwhile ‘Read, mark, learn’– oops that is the title for the autumn edition. See you again then!

Heather Fenton
Editor

www.readers.cofe.anglican.org
What do you do if you have a couple of families attending your Sunday services? How do you provide for a handful of children that may range from babies to young teens? Can you really help them all grow spiritually? And what about your volunteer leaders, how do you resource them and keep them motivated?

At the last Hand-in-Hand children’s and family ministries conference I heard Sandra Millar, Children's Officer for the Diocese of Gloucester, talking about children’s work in rural areas. She said, ‘Be glad for the children you have, not sad for the ones that you don’t.’ How easy it is to bemoan the fact that we don’t have sufficient children on a Sunday morning to break them into several groups and teach them using published materials that are age-relevant and follow a structured programme. But much of the recent thinking on child spirituality and faith formation suggests that models based on the educational system of age related, Bible story based, lessons are not as effective as we may have believed.

‘Learning information and being able to turn ideas round is often well served by this developmentally sensitive approach. But it is not inevitable that spirituality is subject to the same restrictions. There’s a real danger here of making the error of over-identifying spirituality and intellectual ability. We need to take seriously the alternative – that spirituality might have less to do with age, intellect and mental life, and much more to do with being and feeling.’ Children’s Spirituality, Rebecca Nye (CHP)

Instead of looking enviously at our town-based brothers and sisters who have enough children to be sure that a reasonable number will be present each week in every age band to engage in activities that require group participation, it may be that those of us in rural churches, driven by the need to provide for small numbers of children, are at the vanguard of developing new models that will be more effective in developing children spiritually, encouraging faith to grow but still giving children knowledge of the Bible – both individual stories and how they fit into the Big God Story: the arc from creation and the fall through to salvation and eternity.

Until recently in my church we had two families, one with a baby and a preschooler who attended fairly regularly and one with a preschooler and two school age children who came more erratically. We provided a crèche and a structured session was prepared for the older children, but often not required. The act of preparing material that isn’t used can become quite demoralising for the adult leaders and, although you can hold it over to another time, it isn’t easy to find published resources that don’t presume you are going to use them in sequence and, if you have a rota of leaders, that may not be the case in situations similar to this example. We thought it would be easier for planning and preparing if we had a few more children and prayed about it. The family with the older children drifted away! Well, we rationalised, the leaders could spend more Sundays in church and we do have a monthly Sunday 4pm service aimed at families that is attracting up to 50 from the parish and beyond which has been established for almost two years now. But in the last couple of months two new families (friends) have joined the church bringing six more children from 2 – 12. It seems as if the problem may have shifted from erratic attendance to a very wide age range. ‘Help!’ cry the leaders, ‘Where are the resources we can use?’

I have to admit there aren’t any off-the-peg resources for this situation, although I do think that is about to change. I know Sandra Millar is trialling some materials...
in and around Gloucester at the moment and I’m working on some resources with a friend of mine who, in addition to church experience, has her own ‘small group’ of grandchildren.

One big advantage that you have if you only have a few families and children in your church is that you can get to know them really well and can tailor your sessions to their interests, concerns and faith journey.

Ivy Beckwith says, ‘I began to think that one of the ways, if not the way, children develop faith and are spiritually formed is through having their imagination captured for the kingdom of God…’

‘…the New Testament is full of stories of people literally dropping everything to follow Jesus. And the history of the church is full of the same kind of stories of people being compelled to give up wealth, careers, and life in order to work in and for the kingdom of God. So what must it take to capture our children’s imaginations, and then souls, through the hope and magnificent love of God’s kingdom? It takes people… It takes being intentional with story, ritual, and relationship… and it takes understanding the power of these elements to inspire and form children into adults who not only desire to live in the way of Jesus but who daily make choices to live that way.’ Formational Children’s Ministry, Ivy Beckwith (Baker Books)

The use of story and the establishment of ritual can work across ages. As I write this article there is a series on TV called My Life in Books with celebrities discussing their favourite books. Most talk about a favourite childhood book not just with fond memories, but as something they still enjoy reading as an adult. The Bible is packed full of exciting stories to tell. Find a children’s Bible story book that you feel comfortable reading out loud and use that as the basis of a session. The youngest children may not fully understand the detail of the story but you can use the technique of ‘wondering’ to get children of all ages to respond to the story at their level of intellectual and spiritual development.

If you are familiar with the concept of Godly Play you will have come across the idea of ‘wondering’.

It uses open-ended questions and statements and gives space and time for children to respond.

Beyond telling and wondering about a Bible story you can use your knowledge of, and relationship with, the children in your group to add ways for them to explore the story and shape their response. Some activities like drama or cooking work well across ages and if you have several children from the same family they may already be used to co-operating on these kinds of projects. Other options can be available for children to explore on their own and so will work however many or few children are present. For instance, you may tell the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert (Luke 4:1-12) and wonder how Jesus felt and what we discover about Jesus in the story and then you could make rock cakes together; but then you may have construction bricks available for younger children to play with and possibly use to retell the story; craft materials for all ages to find, copy and illustrate favourite Bible verses; and web access or books for older children to move from hearing how Jesus was true to God’s Word to discover the stories of people like Tyndale and Cameron Townsend who faithfully translated God’s Word into many languages (the Wycliffe Bible Translators website also has children’s materials you can download). While all these activities are ongoing you can have conversations with one or more children, sharing your experiences and thoughts and helping them think through their own understanding and response to the story, possibly including ideas they can take back into their families. None of these activities require a huge amount of preparation, other than gathering together the cake ingredients, and so leaders can be encouraged to spend more time reading and wondering for themselves about the passage. Even if no children turn up they can feel it was a valuable exercise for their own spiritual growth.

Erratic attendance is a problem in most groups. The concept of traditional, sequential materials was created in a time when most children attended Sunday school on a regular basis. Now broken families and alternative activities mean that children are rarely in church every week. This is not a particular problem in rural areas but it is highlighted if there are only a few children in the first place. A leader in a large, city church that has 30 children in their age group won’t have to modify their session if half the group is absent. It will have a much bigger impact if half your group is missing when you only have two on the register.

You can overcome the problem by telling Bible stories that are complete by themselves. But buy or make a Bible Timeline or use a Bible contents page or make a scrapbook of stories that you tell to put them into order and context and then periodically you can have a session where you review how recent stories fit into the larger picture. There are several books that now tell the whole arc of the Bible in an appropriate way including The Big God Story. Michelle Anthony (David C Cook).

If all this still seems too daunting or unmanageable in your circumstances, or you want a change for a few weeks, look out for the new DVD series from Phil Vischer who created VeggieTales. What’s in the Bible? will eventually be a series of 26 half-hour episodes on 13 DVDs which will engage children from preschool to preteen. It tells Bible stories, explores the bigger God Story, explains how the Bible was put together and is fun. All you need is a DVD player although teaching resources are being released to go alongside the DVDs.

Sue has been involved in the children’s work in her own, village parish church in the Diocese of Chichester for over 25 years. She is currently co-writing with Ruth Alliston a book titled Few Children, Great Opportunities to be published by Barnabas in the autumn which will give practical ideas and session outlines for churches that have small numbers of children, possibly with a wide age spread and who may be erratic attendees. Sue also works for Kingsway Trust as the director of the annual Hand-in-Hand children’s and family ministries conference in Eastbourne. This is a weekend of seminars, workshops, Bible study and worship for anyone engaged in any aspect of children’s or family ministry, whether paid or voluntary. Many of the organisations and agencies that support churches in these areas of ministry participate in the event, providing speakers and showcasing resources. For more details of the 2012 conference, to be held 3rd – 5th February, visit the website www.familyministry.co.uk.
A few years back, a young curate who had served his title in outer Coventry, or thereabouts, was suddenly thrust into the public glare, as television cameras followed him round his new group of rural parishes. I will confess I didn’t watch a single episode, but it came as no surprise to find that he was unable to fit into his new surroundings, and I believe he withdrew from public ministry for (at least) a few years as a result. About the same time, I witnessed a colleague in a benefice a few doors down from mine have a nervous breakdown. He had come from a lifetime of urban/suburban ministry, and took what he thought would be his last set of parishes before retirement. They were indeed, but retirement came sooner than he expected. He too found his new context alien. Not that many years before they were still effectively putting clergy out to grass as they grew older, a handful of villages to wind down in after a working life in suburbia or ‘urbia’. It was a disastrous policy.

The problem was, and probably still is, that most candidates for ordination come from suburban backgrounds, and have no first-hand knowledge of the ways of the rural church, and they arrive, astounded to discover that working together across parishes is not at the top of the agenda, and perplexed to discover that there is no worship committee drawn from their congregation of ten. Similar, I suppose, to someone I trained with who was absolutely dumbfounded to learn that not every church in the Church of England used the Angelus after Mass…

The RTA exists to help people understand the rural context, and the many and varied layers it has. Obviously upland Dartmoor parishes will be different to green-and-pleasant Home Counties villages. Obviously the people drawn to live in the picture-book Cotswolds will be different to those left behind in the erstwhile County Durham mining villages. Where I live, there is no dairy industry; where you live might not grow wheat. Yet while there are great differences between individual contexts, there is still the fundamental notion of living in a village which is closer to living in true community than most suburbs will ever manage – together also with the problems of an idealistic view of that village life which just might not be there in reality. When services close, when

It is a curious fact that a greater percentage of people go to worship when there is only one place of worship in a village than go where there is a choice.

In a previous edition of Rural Theology, the RTAs (now) six-monthly journal, I put forward a caricature of the theological difference between suburban and rural, which ran something like this: ‘Suburban Christians will be familiar with their Saviour and what he has done for them, and the praises of Jesus will ever be on their lips. They will strive to walk closer with him, and to understand more of his will and his words, and will meet Christians worship God, while suburban Christians believe in Jesus.’

The RTA exists to help people understand the rural context, and the many and varied layers it has. Obviously upland Dartmoor parishes will be different to green-and-pleasant Home Counties villages. Obviously the people drawn to live in the picture-book Cotswolds will be different to those left behind in the erstwhile County Durham mining villages. Where I live, there is no dairy industry; where you live might not grow wheat. Yet while there are great differences between individual contexts, there is still the fundamental notion of living in a village which is closer to living in true community than most suburbs will ever manage – together also with the problems of an idealistic view of that village life which just might not be there in reality. When services close, when

The Rural Theology Association has been in existence since 1981 in an attempt to encourage people to engage in contextual thinking. As parish was added to parish in rural areas, so it became clear to many that not only was the method of working in rural areas different, but also the underlying theology was also radically different. Compare, if you will, the percentage of the population which attends church in a rural setting as opposed to an urban setting. Yes, the absolute numbers are small, but the percentages are much higher. Why should this be?

In a previous edition of Rural Theology, the RTA’s (now) six-monthly journal, I put forward a caricature of the theological difference between suburban and rural, which ran something like this: ‘Suburban Christians will be familiar with their Saviour and what he has done for them, and the praises of Jesus will ever be on their lips. They will strive to walk closer with him, and to understand more of his will and his words, and will meet Christians worship God, while suburban Christians believe in Jesus.’

The problem was, and probably still is, that most candidates for ordination come from suburban backgrounds, and have no first-hand knowledge of the ways of the rural church, and they arrive, astounded to discover that working together across parishes is not at the top of the agenda, and perplexed to discover that there is no worship committee drawn from their congregation of ten. Similar, I suppose, to someone I trained with who was absolutely dumbfounded to learn that not every church in the Church of England used the Angelus after Mass…

The RTA exists to help people understand the rural context, and the many and varied layers it has. Obviously upland Dartmoor parishes will be different to green-and-pleasant Home Counties villages. Obviously the people drawn to live in the picture-book Cotswolds will be different to those left behind in the erstwhile County Durham mining villages. Where I live, there is no dairy industry; where you live might not grow wheat. Yet while there are great differences between individual contexts, there is still the fundamental notion of living in a village which is closer to living in true community than most suburbs will ever manage – together also with the problems of an idealistic view of that village life which just might not be there in reality. When services close, when

It is a curious fact that a greater percentage of people go to worship when there is only one place of worship in a village than go where there is a choice.
facilities shrink, when people age, when schools amalgamate, then the rural idyll might be threatened. And the rural poor are just as poor as the urban poor – except they are that little bit further from the service providers who might help them. Or perhaps there are those who move into the countryside who think that the smells and sounds of the farmyard are intrusive to their chocolate-box imaginings, and sue the farmyard cockerel for his early-morning noise. Yes, it has happened.

And then there is the ecumenical context. In towns and cities, Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics etc. can all usually go to their own denominational churches and worship. In villages, more often than not there is only one place of worship, which tends to be Church of England but needn't be, where folk of all shades of opinion worship together with greater or lesser success. Do I care that we have an unrepentant Methodist on our PCC? Do I care that one of my churchwardens mutters about wanting to have incense while another says ‘over my dead body’? It is a curious fact that a greater percentage of people go to worship when there is only one place of worship in a village than go where there is a choice. Why is this? The RTA is ecumenical (our ten-person Executive has members of five different denominations!), and supports no church party over any other.

To help understand and work through all issues relating to the rural church on a theological level, the RTA works on four distinct levels.

1. The most local is that of the local groups; where folk gather on what these days might be called a sub-regional level to discuss matters of concern to them. These groups are autonomous, and depend very much on committed leadership which, as in many cases, comes and goes. Thus the once-thriving East Anglian group is no more; but the Welsh Marches group goes from strength to strength. There have also historically been groups organised under a different umbrella which have been affiliated to the RTA; currently, only the North Yorkshire group (Rural Churches Support Network) falls into this category. A list of our groups and affiliates can be found by following the relevant links on the RTA website www.rural-theology.org.uk. Most groups meet somewhere between two and four times a year, and a number of them submit reports which are published on the website.

2. The second thrust of our work is in our publications. What were once Occasional Papers evolved into A Better Country (cf. Hebrews 11:16 AV), produced three times a year, which in turn morphed into the more-academic Rural Theology, produced bi-annually, which Leslie Francis talks about elsewhere in this publication. And as the journal went up-market, so to speak, so the resulting mid-range gap was filled by our Newsletter, also published twice a year but in a more chatty vein, with a ‘chairpiece’, the infamous Cope’s Comment, details of future events and occasional group reports and articles of a more personal and speculative nature. Recent highlights include a piece by Eric Kyte, which formed the basis for discussion at a session in one of our recent conferences. Those who have permitted their details to be shared are also collated annually into a public membership list, so that those who might wish to consult like-minded near-neighbours can do so. By this means local groups have started in the past.

3. The third element of our offering is our conferences. These have changed in style and ethos substantially over the years, from the ground-breaking ‘Towards 2000’ conference at Scargill House in 1987, which confirmed my own interest in rural ministry and was influential in the production of the Archbishops’ Commission on Rural Areas report (and perhaps even the setting-up of the Commission itself), via large-scale biennial conferences at Swanwick, a format now passed over to the Churches Rural Group (a national ecumenical body in association with Churches Together in England, of which RTA is a member), to its current format of an annual twenty-four hour smaller gathering (15-50), and our policy is that this should rotate around the country. Over the years, we have been everywhere from Devon to North Yorkshire, from the Lake District to Surrey, from Hawarden to Ely; this year we will be visiting Worcestershire, to be precise Holland House, on November 25/26. We endeavour to be topical as well as theological, and this year’s speakers will be Dr Jill Hopkinson, National Rural Officer for the Church of England, and her predecessor the Revd Canon Jeremy Martineau, who will be speaking to the title ‘The Rural Church and the Big Society’. More details as they emerge, on the website.

4. Which brings me to our fourth product, namely the website. While being (as webmaster) only too conscious of the site’s failings, we do endeavour to pull everything together here. Details of the groups, news from other rural-church organisations and links to their websites, and details of the conferences are all there, or should be. More of a work in progress is the provision of reports from previous conferences, and a fully downloadable database of all past issues of the journal in all its manifestations, together with an authors’ index and an index of books reviewed (but not, sadly, a subject index). We welcome any suggestions as to how this could be improved within the constraints of a busy life – and of course, the RTA has no paid staff.

To go back to where I came in: I believe there is no excuse for starting work in a rural area without at least attempting to discover some of what makes ‘rural’ different to ‘urban’ or ‘suburban’. There are plenty of resources at the Arthur Rank Centre to help with this, not least their rural induction course, which comes very highly recommended (well, it would, as I sometimes help with it!). My hope is that the RTA can provide some of these resources as well, offering fellowship as well as scholarship, debates and discussions as well as facts and statistics, an opening into some of the more arcane areas of study such as ‘implicit religion’ as well as an analysis of visitors to cathedrals and the goings-on in Pennine Methodist Sunday Schools. Of course everyone claims to be different – but ‘rural’ certainly is!

Revd Canon Stephen Cope is RTA Secretary and Rector of 5, soon to be 7, churches in East Yorkshire.
Church Buildings – Asset or Liability?

John Brown
from the Churches Tourism Association

When the item on the agenda of your Parochial Church Council meeting is ‘Church Fabric’ do you groan inwardly? ‘Oh, no!’ and wait for the desperate news about the leaking roof, the crumbling walls, the death-watch beetle, or the smashed section of stained glass window? You know it will mean more fundraising for totally uninspiring objectives! ‘Will it never end?’ In your heart of hearts you know it won’t! Then there’s the failing heating system, the need to do something about Mrs. Green’s totally legitimate and very regular complaint about her inability to hear ‘the dulcet tones’ of that otherwise lovely Reader lady, the urgent need to consider where to locate the much needed toilet with all that that means to do with Archdeacon, architect, Diocesan Advisory Committee, Faculty and English Heritage; the inadequacy of the entrance for disabled access, and the longing of some to get rid of the pews to free the building up for flexible and multi-purpose use. ‘Wouldn’t it be easier to pull the whole lot down and start again,’ you think to yourself, ‘especially if the location of the church building is not that appropriate for the post-war housing developments or the rest of the village now distant from it following the destruction at the time of the Black Death of the dwellings then nestling around it?’

But you know you can’t and won’t pull it down! You’re stuck with it, as previous generations have been. So what do you do?

That’s part of the solution – to realise that, as for previous generations, so now for yours, the building has been there, is there, and will be there for generations to come, whether you do anything to it or not. Ancient buildings perish very slowly. They were built to last. History indicates that successive would-be conquerors have not been that successful at it. So maybe you should consider channelling your energies into making the most of it – the church building I mean, rather than wasting time in complaining!

The church building is the Church’s greatest asset for mission. It took me a long time to realise this. I was certainly not taught it in theological college, in Post Ordination Training, nor in Continuing Ministerial Education. But just reckon with the following: 99 times out of 100 your church building has been there for many generations, and is likely to be so for many generations to come! Generally it is a large enough building for everyone to see, both those familiar with it and those who see it only once. It is on show 24 hours per day, 365 days of the year, come rain or shine. It never has a day off. It constantly proclaims a message to all be they religious or non-religious: God is in your midst.

That’s what the building is there for, to be an open building where people can come and be welcome. Church buildings have so much to teach us about living and about dying and death, about God and his Christ – not only occasionally, but constantly. But who are the us? If your church building is open for the faithful to enter, once or perhaps twice on a Sunday, once or perhaps twice during the week, does it not fall within the category of ‘restricted practice’? Who is your church building there for? Just the faithful, even just those living within your community? The Church buildings have so much to teach us about living and about dying and death, about God and his Christ – not only occasionally, but constantly. But who are the us? If your church building is open for the faithful to enter, once or perhaps twice on a Sunday, once or perhaps twice during the week, does it not fall within the category of ‘restricted practice’? Who is your church building there for? Just the faithful, even just those living within your community? The Church building has to proclaim.

It constantly proclaims a message to all be they religious or non-religious: God is in your midst.

Church buildings are not just ‘the religious’ who wish to enter, ‘OPEN’. There is increasing evidence that it is not just ‘the religious’ who wish to enter church buildings, but those of faiths other than Christian, and those of no overt faith allegiance at all. Sometimes the desire is to admire the building, its architectural heritage as well as its symbolism; sometimes the desire is to engage with the ‘GOD in the MIDST’ which is the building’s supreme raison d’être; sometimes the reason for entering is elusive to words, there is a seeking, a searching, a longing, often which life’s particular circumstances have thrown up for the individual or couple or family. The church building is the place where people seek answers to questions they often find it impossible to construct. So when the church building is locked, and there is no indication when it will be open, or where a key holder can be located, those who come seeking answers go away thinking that either there are no answers or that any answers there are, are too precious to be made openly available. I recently visited a church on a weekday afternoon and found to my astonishment just inside the door a tea-tray laid with plastic mugs, tea bags, dried milk and sugar, and a packet of biscuits. Not far away stood a bottle of orange squash and a kettle with a flagon of fresh water. ‘Help yourself’ read the invitation ‘and may you know that wherever you go, God goes with you’. What a welcome to a building devoid of human contact, yet proclaiming so much about Christian hospitality as well as the more profound messages the Church has to proclaim.
The Churches Tourism Association is always inviting individuals and churches – and dioceses – to become members. But even if this is not achieved, then CTA is constantly in the business of locating church buildings at the forefront of the Church’s mission. People come and go, they are born and they die, and this is the way it will always be until the Kingdom comes! Most church buildings precede generations of people currently alive, and most church buildings will succeed these generations. The invitation is that the Church should capitalise on this asset, and every time it is considered to be a liability the question asked and answered: ’Who is the church building for?’

Canon John D. Brown is Chair of the Churches Tourism Association to promote the openness of church buildings to whoever wishes to enter at times of their choosing. It is run by a board of trustees all of whom give their time voluntarily. Its financial support comes from membership subscriptions, and donations. It has a website – www.churchestourismassociation.org – and it sends out a newsletter approximately bi-monthly. A number of Anglican dioceses, but not all, are members, as are other equivalent ecumenical bodies. CTA does not of itself offer training in welcoming and the promotion of church buildings, but through its website it signposts organisations which do. In July 2008 the

Over the years however CTA has learned that the more a church building is open for the use of the community and others, whether for special services, or activities ranging from farmers markets to festival suppers to locations for musical events and exhibitions, particularly of local skills, the greater the involvement of the whole community with the church building. Their support of it financially as well as in person, and their questioning of, even if not actually seeking, what it is primarily there to promote will only serve for its purpose to be enhanced. In other words, if the Church invites people from the locality or beyond to enter its doors for a variety of reasons and events, such openness encourages entry when no-one is present but the building continues to convey this message about ‘GOD in the MIDST’. If part of the package of a church building being open is the provision of small pieces of paper (and pencils) on which the visitor or tourist can write a very brief note, and a receptacle

General Synod of the Church of England unanimously agreed to the appointment of either a Diocesan Tourism Officer or a Diocesan Tourism Group or both, in every one of the 43 dioceses of the Church of England. This has not yet been implemented by every diocese, and CTA continues to lobby for it to be effected. A Convention is held bi-annually and a Symposium in the intervening years. Small group support and seminars are planned in various parts of the country particularly is provided in which these can be placed, clergy, Readers, churchwardens, and PCCs will be made aware of the benefits of the openness of their church building. There may be requests for prayer, there may be expressions of appreciation of the building itself, there may be indications that despite the absence of a human person, the visitor or tourist has been able to engage with ‘GOD’, or to have been assisted with a further step in their pilgrimage.

The Churches Tourism Association is always inviting individuals and churches – and dioceses – to become members. But even if this is not achieved, then CTA is constantly in the business of locating church buildings at the forefront of the Church’s mission. People come and go, they are born and they die, and this is the way it will always be until the Kingdom comes! Most church buildings precede generations of people currently alive, and most church buildings will succeed these generations. The invitation is that the Church should capitalise on this asset, and every time it is considered to be a liability the question asked and answered: ’Who is the church building for?’

Canon John D. Brown is Chair of the Churches Tourism Association

Over the years however CTA has learned that the more a church building is open for the use of the community and others, [...] the greater the involvement of the whole community with the church building.
‘Well vicar, I don’t know what we’re going to do next week with only you to entertain us!’ This casual remark (not meant unkindly – but in fun), made towards the end of a special outreach mission in a rural Cumbrian benefice was to stimulate a paradigm shift in the approach to rural mission. At the time of this particular outreach I was responsible for planning and sharing in leading approximately ten such outreaches to rural churches each year across the denominations and throughout Britain. This event had been carefully planned with a variety of activities over ten days all crafted to fit with the local village culture. The success of the enterprise was evident from the large number of local people of all ages who attended. But it was its very success that precipitated a major re-think of mission strategy.

It was not so much the word ‘entertain’ that was the problem but rather the phrase ‘only you’. I had taken a team of four or five very talented people. All knew themselves to be called of God to evangelism and were experienced. Between us we were able to communicate the gospel through preaching, solos, story-telling, children’s and youth activities, conjuring tricks, and large-scale artwork (Rolf Harris style). The burning question was, how much of what we had achieved was sustainable?

During the period of theological reflection that followed that important comment I also undertook what was to become an MBA degree course run by the Open University. This fed into the theological reflection with fresh understanding of the role of the local church in God’s mission. Sadly, the paradigm shift it suggested was a move too far for the founder/director of the mission agency. But a few years later I was free to develop the concepts and found churches willing to embrace them.

At this time the concept of mission enablement, now so common, was generally unheard of. The small team with which I now worked developed this vision into a process designed for rural churches. To this was later added the concept of enabling churches to design and develop bespoke strategies. Most active Christians accept the fact that each of us is uniquely prepared and enabled for the part we have to play in his mission. Passages of scripture in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 bear witness to this. It then follows that each local church – as a gathering of uniquely enabled individuals – also has a unique purpose within the missio Dei.

But for most rural churches, and those called by God to minister and lead them, there are significant constraints. Often we find ourselves encumbered by ancient buildings, inherited (and sometimes strongly defended) patterns of services, unrealistic expectations, too few (and at times inappropriate) resources. The very idea of adding mission to the agenda is enough to make many clergy look for the nearest hole into which to crawl!

‘Brother, don’t you think that God has already given you all you need in order to do what he is asking you to do right now?’

It was not so much the word ‘entertain’ that was the problem but rather the phrase ‘only you’. I had taken a team of four or five very talented people. All knew themselves to be called of God to evangelism and were experienced. Between us we were able to communicate the gospel through preaching, solos, story-telling, children’s and youth activities, conjuring tricks, and large-scale artwork (Rolf Harris style). The
This profound question is well worth pondering. Dare we imagine that a sovereign God who knows our limitations yet calls us to share in his mission has actually provided all we need in order to do what he wants us to do right now? In St John’s account of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6) Jesus asked, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’ With a few words he revealed his desire to meet the needs of the multitude, yet at the same time his expectation that his disciples would play their part in the process. I am sure this was a shock. We read of the reaction of two of his disciples. For Philip the issue was the enormity of the task: ‘It would take eight months’ wages just to give each a bite!’ For Andrew it was the meagre resources: ‘What are these [few loaves and fishes] among so many?’

John, ever careful to present to us the enigma that is Jesus of Nazareth, tells us that the original question was a test, because Jesus already knew what he was going to do. And that is what he did, and how the needs of all were met, with twelve baskets of scraps left over. We are not told of the impact this had on the disciples, though we might guess. We are told of the impact on the crowd who now saw Jesus in a new light and saw other possibilities. Why is it that we, who already believe who he is, find it hard to believe that he can take the little we have to offer and somehow bless and use it beyond our imagining? Did he not use a stammering shepherd, who had already failed in his intentions, to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and on to the Promised Land? Is not this the God who reduced the ranks of Gideon’s army and still put the enemy to flight? What of David and Goliath, and so many other examples?

The trouble is that most of us are where Philip and Andrew were, overwhelmed by the needs to be met and the limitation of resources. Many years ago, when on mission in Devon, I stopped while driving down a country lane and asked a local man the way to a particular village. He helpfully suggested that I should not go from where I was as that would be difficult. It would be better if I made my way a mile further down the road and then took a different road from there. Perhaps getting to where we might want to be in the life of our church and its mission will not be easy from here. But here is where we are and here is where we make our start, using who we are and what we have, listening to God and putting what we have into his hands. Over the following months and years after that mission in Cumbria I was not only able to reflect theologically on the fact that God can take the very ordinariness of rural congregations with their limitations and transform them into an effective instrument for mission and evangelism, I was also able to put it into practice. I was first able to help a rural parish church in Norfolk develop an outreach strategy that depended almost entirely on their own resources. We finished a nine day outreach with a family service and with the parish church unusually full. During the preceding days the congregation had run daily home meetings, a senior citizens event, a men’s meeting, a gospel concert, and a family fun day with a gospel dimension. That Sunday over half the congregation shook my hand during the final hymn as a sign that during a mission designed and executed by the village church, they had responded to God’s loving call to put their trust in him as Saviour and Lord.

The following year a call to a new pastorate (I am a Congregational Minister who works ecumenically) took me to a moribund village church with a congregation in single figures in an area of rural deprivation. We started from the same premise that where we were and who we were was God’s starting point for a better future. All I asked was that they would remain willing to change whenever we felt God’s call to change. We resisted the temptation to draw a congregation from beyond our immediate location. Yet we grew in numbers and in other ways. We took over a closed shop and ran a community facility for the benefit of the whole village. This venture led to the village obtaining a prize. We started a monthly fresh expression before we had ever heard of fresh expressions: a kind of café church but with a chat show format. In addition to the consistent witness of Christians who were fully engaged with the wider village life we had the privilege of seeing three of our younger adults go into overseas mission work. We saw a youth congregation come into being, and at one time around 100 different people attended one or more church based activities each month. But all we ever did was look at who we were, what we had, and the needs of the community in which God had placed us, then work as we felt him leading us, leaving the rest to him. If the loaves and fishes had remained with Andrew or the lad the needs would never have been met.

Today, these two early experiments have led to the process of tailoring mission for churches with the aim of developing mission strategies that are right for the church and right for the community in which it is situated. As with bespoke tailoring, careful preparation and planning are important. There may also be a need for some adjustments to be made along the way. But the object is to end up with something that fits the local church and a strategy in which the congregation will be comfortable not embarrassed.

I believe that the God of community longs that his mission, including the sharing of the good news, should also be done through community. Each local church should be both sign and servant of the kingdom. In a rural setting the churches are highly visible and subject to critical examination. The foundation for our mission must be our shared life of mutual love and respect that also lacks integrity, for this is the task to which all Christians are called.

Sometimes people go to a different part of their home, but then forget why they went there. Rather than retracing their steps in the hope of remembering why they went there, many find something alternative and useful to do while they are there. I wonder whether many are doing good and useful things but have forgotten the real purpose for the journey.

Barry Osborne is a rural mission consultant who works ecumenically and also serves the national Rural Evangelism Network. He has written two books The Key to Effective Rural Evangelism and Rural Evangelism in the 21st Century.
Saint David’s Cathedral in West Wales traces its origins to the very life and work of St David himself, the patron saint of Wales. St David’s, the most western city and cathedral in Wales, continues to attract visitors, pilgrims and tourists from across the world.

As part of the cathedral’s long-standing commitment to welcoming visitors and tourists, the current Bishop of St Davids, the Right Revd Wyn Evans, collaborated with me to establish a serious study to listen to those who came to the cathedral. We wanted to discover who they were, why they came, and what they made of their experience. When we set up the project we suspected that we might be able to learn from the interest of the tourism and leisure industry in psychological profiling. So we included in our survey the Francis Psychological Type Scales that draws on theory originally proposed by Carl Jung.

During the months of July, August and September 2007, our colleague the Revd Dr Jennie Annis talked with those who came into the cathedral and invited them to complete our questionnaire: 2,697 questionnaires were returned. This is what we discovered.

WHO CAME TO THE CATHEDRAL?

Of the participants, 43% were men and 57% women; 16% were under the age of twenty, 9% in their twenties, 11% in their thirties, 21% in their forties, 22% in their fifties, 15% in their sixties, and 5% aged seventy or over. The majority of the visitors had travelled over 20 miles to visit St David’s Cathedral (94%), although comparatively few of these had travelled from overseas (8%).

In terms of religious practice, St David’s Cathedral attracted almost equal proportions of weekly churchgoers (23%) and of people who never attended church (24%), with 9% attending at least monthly, 10% at least six times a year, 34% attending less than six times a year, and 1% declining to answer the question.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES

Information provided by so many visitors enabled us to explore the patterns in their responses, a technique often used in the tourism industry.

First, we looked at the differences in responses between regular churchgoers (whom we called pilgrims) and those who never attend church (whom we called secular tourists).

Secondly, we looked at the differences in responses between different psychological type profiles. In particular we distinguished between the two perceiving functions (sensing types and intuitive types), and between the two judging functions (feeling types and thinking types).

Finally, we looked at how typical cathedral visitors were of the population as a whole in terms of introversion/extraversion and judging/perceiving.

PILGRIMS

These are the visitors who have been shaped and formed by the Christian tradition, who feel at home not only in their own parish churches but in the great cathedrals as well. The majority of these pilgrims walked away satisfied and refreshed by their visit, having found the cathedral inviting (97%) and uplifting (95%). The majority of these pilgrims responded to the cathedral as a source of spiritual sustenance, having found in the places a sense of peace (88%), an awe-inspiring experience (87%), and a sense of God’s presence (77%). It is among these pilgrims that the cathedral shop did its business, with nearly three-quarters visiting the shop (73%), and appreciating the range of products. Overall, the cathedral seems to have positioned itself well for a valued ministry among today’s generation of pilgrims.

SECULAR TOURISTS

These are visitors who currently stand outside the Christian tradition, who may not feel at home in their parish church and who also seem not to feel fully at home in the cathedral. In many senses, these are the visitors who are now replacing the pilgrims of an earlier age as more secular tourists; and it is to these visitors that the cathedral speaks with less clarity and certainty. However, the cathedral is far from silent in its call to these secular tourists. Although only 18% of the secular tourists felt a sense of God’s presence from their visit, 35% found the cathedral to be spiritually alive, 50% felt a sense of peace from their visit, and 68% found the cathedral awe-inspiring. Over three-quarters of the secular tourists found the cathedral uplifting (77%) and inviting (88%). The majority of the secular tourists felt an appreciation of history from their visit (87%) and felt an appreciation of the architecture (96%). Thus, many aspects of the visit were able to stir the soul.

It may well be the case in today’s secular society that cathedrals possess a unique opportunity to draw back the veil between the secular worldview and the worldview of transcendence, and to build bridges between contemporary spiritualities, implicit religious quests, and explicit religious traditions. If this is the case, then the present data suggest that future research needs to listen much more carefully to views of the secular tourists visiting cathedrals in order to be better informed regarding ways in which cathedrals may respond more effectively to the challenge to extend their ministry among this key constituency.

PERCEIVING FUNCTIONS

The two opposing functions of the perceiving process are known as sensing and as intuition. On the one hand, sensing types focus on the realities of a situation as perceived by the senses. They tend to focus on specific details, rather than on the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real, and the practical; they tend to be down...
to earth and matter of fact. On the other hand, intuitive types focus on the possibilities of a situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They may feel that perception by the senses is not as valuable as information gained from the unconscious mind as indirect associations and concepts impact on their perception. They focus on the overall picture, rather than on specific facts and data.

We predicted that sensing types and intuitive types would experience their visit to the cathedral differently, and we tested that prediction with an eight-item instrument concerned with facts and information. Those who scored high on this instrument agreed that they had found the information leaflets informative, and had accessed the cathedral website. Sensing types recorded significantly higher scores than thinking types on this instrument.

Clearly some psychological types are more interested than others in factual information about the cathedral that they are visiting. In order to enhance the experience of sensing types, cathedrals need to provide clear and accessible facts about the history, about the architecture, and about the people associated with the place. On the other hand, in order to enhance the experience of intuitive types, cathedrals need to develop a different genre of material designed to spark the imagination.

**INTROVERTS AND EXTRAVERTS**

Introversion and extraversion are concerned with the source and focus of psychological energy. On the one hand, extraverts are orientated toward the outer world; they are energised by the events and people around them. They enjoy communicating and thrive in stimulating and exciting environments. They are usually open people, easy to get to know, and enjoy having many friends. Introverts, on the other hand, are orientated toward their inner world; they are energised by their inner ideas and concepts. They enjoy solitude, silence. They may prefer to have a small circle of intimate friends rather than many acquaintances.

Extraverts are under-represented among visitors to the cathedral (19%) compared with their representation in society (42%). Cathedrals may wish to explore ways of engaging more proactively with perceivers who will approach the cathedral with somewhat different expectations from those carried by judgers. Perceivers may welcome less formal ways through which to engage with the cathedral, perhaps through displays and activities in the cathedral grounds, through attractive and stimulating ideas and possibilities about the cathedral displayed in the shopping precinct, and through opportunities to converse and to socialise. Cathedrals possess facilities ideally suited to such activities. Extraverts may welcome engaging stewards, chaplains, and other visitors in conversation, made possible by appropriately designed coffee shops. Extraverts may welcome engaging with interactive presentations and with experience-based ways of communication.

**PERCEIVING TYPES AND JUDGING TYPES**

Perceiving and judging are concerned with ways in which people respond to the external world. On the one hand, judging types seek to order, rationalise, and structure their outer world. They enjoy routine and established patterns. They make use of lists, timetables, or diaries. They tend to be punctual, organised, and tidy. They prefer to make decisions quickly and to stick to their conclusions once made. On the other hand, perceiving types do not seek to impose order on the outer world, but are more reflective, perceptive, and open. They have a flexible, open-ended approach to life. They enjoy change and spontaneity. They prefer to leave projects open in order to adapt and improve them. Their behaviour may often seem impulsive and unplanned.

Perceivers are underrepresented among visitors to the cathedral (19%) compared with their representation in society (42%). Cathedrals may wish to explore ways of engaging more proactively with perceivers who will approach the cathedral with somewhat different expectations from those carried by judgers. Perceivers may welcome less formal ways through which to engage with the cathedral, perhaps through displays and activities in the cathedral grounds, through attractive and stimulating ideas and possibilities about the cathedral displayed in the shopping precinct, and through opportunities to drop into and out of the cathedral.

**CONCLUSION**

As a consequence of this serious study, St David’s Cathedral now knows a great deal more about its visitors. The findings are likely to be relevant to other cathedrals and greater churches as well. However, the scientific approach would want to replicate this study in other places.

Reverend Canon Professor Leslie J Francis is Professor of Religions and Education, University of Warwick and Canon Theologian, Bangor Cathedral.
Developing our response to Tourism in the Oxford Diocese

Back in July 2008 the General Synod passed a motion encouraging every diocese to look at its response to tourism – and to improve on it.

Here in the Oxford Diocese – with Oxford itself, Blenheim Palace, Windsor Castle, the Cotswolds, the Chilterns and many other much-visited towns and villages – tourism had always been on our ‘to do’ list but, despite a number of small-scale initiatives by our Rural Officer, nothing had ever really taken off.

Faced by the request from General Synod I was asked to see if there was a way in which we could do it better than we had done in the past. From the start I felt that, whilst volunteers would be crucial for any large-scale developments, what we needed was to have someone who woke up each morning knowing that this was a primary responsibility in their life.

With some ‘Mission’ money from the Church Commissioners potentially available, one obvious way forward would have been to appoint a tourism officer on a time-limited contract. The advantage of this would have been to give tourism a well-embedded and high profile presence in the Diocesan structures. The major disadvantage was that it was highly unlikely that such a contract would be renewed after an initial period of three or four years. Another thing that struck me was that a tourism initiative, rightly handled, had the potential to make money and so to become self-sustaining financially after the initial start-up period.

I therefore proposed to Bishop’s Council that we should set aside up to £40k p.a. for three years to develop a partnership with someone who knew about the tourism industry and who shared our goals both spiritually and financially in terms of creating a project that would support the work of the Diocese and which would become self-sustaining.

By a happy series of ‘coincidences’ we discovered in David Gambier someone who was both a Churchwarden and an experienced tour operator with decades of experience in the travel industry. What we have therefore done is to ask him to take on this project on our behalf and to see if he can grow events and tourism opportunities that will benefit all concerned and be financially self-sustaining in the longer term.

The jury is still out on whether we are going to succeed in this. Our first major event is the Cotswold Churches Festival this May (www.cotswoldchurchesfestival.org) which we hope will become an annual event. Groups from overseas like to visit this part of the world and we are looking to develop links there for Parish Visits and the like. A Faith Literary Festival is being mooted and the Olympics are coming. I am in no doubt at all that this can succeed as a venture and we now need to ensure that it has a spiritual edge to it.

Already with the Festival we are seeing many churches thinking how they can become even more welcoming to visitors. A pilgrimage map is being produced by our Communications Department. There is plenty of evidence that people like to use our churches as places to be still and to pray. Again there is an ‘art’ to marketing all these opportunities and to offer people the chance to encounter the Living Christ. A tourism project without that as a central tenet would soon become pretty lifeless – but with it it becomes very exciting indeed.

Colin Fletcher is Bishop of Dorchester in the Diocese of Oxford. He has been working closely with David Gambier whose article appears opposite.
‘Festival Puts Churches at Centre of Local Life!’

Guess the venue of a musical version of *Mamma Mia*, a cinema night, or a local quiz night? No it’s not the local pub or the village hall, it’s the local church and it’s all part of a creative new festival taking place throughout the Cotswold AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) during 2011.

The Cotswolds AONB is known across the world for its delightful scenery and numerous picturesque villages and historic towns straddling a vast area of outstanding natural beauty. At the heart of these villages and towns are their churches. They come in all shapes, sizes, ages, denominations and for centuries the churches have been at the centre of community life. Far from being stuck in their history, however, they remain to this day vibrant centres of worship and activities serving the needs both of their regular congregations and of their wider communities – to say nothing of the many thousands of visitors who come to The Cotswolds throughout the year.

This is the view of the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher, the Bishop of Dorchester, and forms the inspiration behind the Cotswold-wide Churches Festival – to be staged between 14th and 22nd May this year 2011. The purpose of the festival is simple – to give churches throughout the region an opportunity to open their doors and provide a warm welcome to visitors, whether they are coming from the immediate area or further afield.

The Festival is being organised and coordinated by ‘Inspirng Experience Travel’, a specialist division of the Witney-based company, ‘Great Experience Travel Group’. In addition to their regular business as highly-respected independent travel agent and tour operator, especially as Oxford Airport’s official travel partner, ‘Great Experience’ also provides a range of tourism-focused consultancy services. For the last eighteen months, they have been engaged by the Diocese of Oxford to develop a wide-ranging programme of activities aimed at showing off the visitor potential of the beautiful churches across the Diocese.

And the thinking behind the Festival fits in well with Bishop Colin’s key roles of developing relations with neighbouring dioceses, denominations and secular bodies across the county.

‘We want to make this a completely ecumenical and inclusive event’, said Bishop Colin. ‘The Festival will provide these beautiful churches with a platform to stage events and activities – whether providing tea and cakes, offering tours around their church, hosting a flower festival, an evening of poetry reading or any other ideas that they may have’.

‘Although the initiative for the Festival comes from the Diocese of Oxford, churches from neighbouring dioceses across the Cotswold AONB and other denominations are most welcome to take part and are certainly showing a great interest in doing so.’

And ideas are coming in aplenty! A dedicated website has been created for the event, www.cotswoldchurchesfestival.org. The site is designed not only to give churches an opportunity to register what they are doing during the Festival period, but will also be used by visitors to the Cotswolds along with local residents who would like to build in a visit to one or more of the area’s beautiful churches into their plans.

Amongst the events which are scheduled to be taking place include choral concerts, art displays, mystery plays, demonstrations of brass-rubbing, tours around the churches along with a range of historical and heritage events – all designed to link the churches strongly to their local communities.

As a Churchwarden at St James the Great in the lovely village of Stonesfield, where our church dates back to the 12th Century, I know all too well that people pigeon-hole churches as somewhere that they only think of on a Sunday or during a birth, marriage or funeral. And this even though the village church is probably the community’s most recognised landmark.

The Cotswold Churches Festival will give the churches throughout the region the opportunity to show themselves off in a variety of new and exciting ways. It’s only since Victorian times that churches have had the reputation for being quiet, sedate places where visitors only feel comfortable speaking in hushed tones. Prior to this, the church would fulfil a myriad of roles central to village life – the pub, the school, the shop as well as being a centre for worship. We want to bring a bit of this pre-Victorian era back to the region’s churches.

A key barometer of the success of the Festival will be to see just how many churches are embracing new ideas for putting themselves back at the centre of village life, especially in those locations where there may not be a Village Hall or local pub that can be used for a range of distinctly non-churchy events.

We know of churches throughout the Cotswolds who are now being used for atmospheric candle-lit dinners for groups and as a venue for barn dances and quiz nights. One church even became a cinema for the night and was packed out for a singalong version of *Mamma Mia!* Churches are also linking themselves to the ever-growing farmers’ market movement and are staging lively monthly markets supported by a host of local suppliers.

If you are a member of the clergy or belong to a congregation of a church within The Cotswolds, and you would like to become involved in the Festival, visit www.cotswoldchurchesfestival.org and register your church for more information, or if you are visiting the area, click on the website to find out what’s on, because the churches of the Cotswold look forward to welcoming visitors and making many new friends.

David Gambier is a Tourism professional in the Diocese of Oxford.

David Gambier
Managing Director of the ‘Great Experience Travel Group’, and principle coordinator of the Cotswold Churches Festival 2011 project.

David Gambier
is a Tourism professional in the Diocese of Oxford.
Dr Jill Hopkinson is the National Rural Officer for the Church of England

‘Country Way’

Country Way is a publication which brings people, the countryside and the rural church together, in a unique and inspiring way. For nearly 20 years now, Country Way magazine has been focusing on the church and the countryside – and the people who belong to both. So if you live and worship in the countryside, or if your heart is in the countryside, then this magazine is for you. Jill Hopkinson, the current editor, explains.

Country Way – life and faith in rural Britain, provides ideas, information and inspiration for rural churches and their communities. It is packed full of encouraging stories and creative new approaches to events and activities, and the challenges for the rural church.

Published by the Arthur Rank Centre, the churches rural resources centre, Country Way aims to share good practice for rural churches of all denominations. It is put together by a lively ecumenical team, who between them have years of experience of working in rural churches and rural communities. Each issue focuses on a special theme and explores it in detail. Recently we have covered rural spirituality, food and faith, faith in public life and hope for the future of the rural church.

One of Country Way’s strengths is the variety of articles that it carries regularly. Features have addressed new ventures with buildings – including how to make the best of them, with and without expensive alteration and adaption. Country Way regularly covers ideas and liturgies for worship, links to resources and new books, and publications and training courses. By telling practical stories of what rural churches are actually doing, ideas for mission and ministry are shared, and new projects can flourish elsewhere. There is something for everyone in the pages, no matter how small the congregation or how remote the church building is.

Many articles from Country Way are re-used in parish magazines. This is a good idea, but do please acknowledge the source (www.countryway.org.uk will do just fine).

There are some good examples of rural churches and benefices trying something because they had read about it in Country Way. A benefice of six relatively small churches started a monthly activity for children on a Saturday afternoon, having read about a similar activity in the magazine. Their venture started with only a few children. Now there are more than 20 who come each month, with a time for worship with parents at the end of the afternoon. One rural vicar described how the liturgies suggested for Rogation Sunday, with further resources on www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk, meant she had the resources to have a special service for Rogation for the first time.

So if you do not already subscribe, a modest £9 will get you three issues each year, and lots of fresh ideas for rural churches. If you work in a multi-church situation we offer special deals on multiple copies sent to the same address and other multi-buy deals.

We welcome offers of articles on the experience of small rural churches, to share good ideas and give inspiration to other churches. After all there is nothing better than hearing: ‘we did this because we read about it in Country Way’.

024 7685 3060 or admin@arthurrankcentre.org.uk or www.countryway.org.uk.

Editor’s note: Country Way represented my first venture into magazine publications as I was part of the group which brought it into being 20 years ago! Although I have no formal connection now, I still enjoy reading it!
Getting your church thinking about Tourism

Jeremy Martineau
lives in a tourist area in West Wales

The rural economy is heavily dependent on tourism. In most regions the income from visitors is significantly higher than that from farming. Each industry needs the other as farmers can earn as much from their diversified tourism activities as from farming, but visitors appreciate the landscape that is shaped by good farming practice.

Churches too are in the tourism business if they did but realise it. Those who worship regularly are so used to their building that they forget it is of interest to visitors who will contribute to its upkeep by donations and sales. St Pancras at Widecombe in the Moor, Devon is a prime example with thousands of visitors bringing £17 000 a year! Most churches will not be so well rewarded, but it is likely that an open church will be visited by more people in a week than sit in the pews on Sundays. The opportunity for revenue earning is significant. ‘But we are not a business’ you may say! No, but we are in the business of offering hospitality, a place to be quiet, for prayer and meeting the mystery of God. A closed church denies the potential of incarnation, and suggests that God has gone away. As most visitors, to churches are not regular worshippers the interface with them needs to recognise that the opportunity for mission and sharing the faith is right in our faces.

It is helpful to start by approaching your church as if you were a visitor and unfamiliar with everything about the Christian faith. The book Rural Visitors (published by ACORA) gives you many helpful ideas based on wide experience and comments from over 12,000 visitors to many rural churches. A way forward is for two of three lay people in each church to make links with tourism related businesses in the area, whether they be stately home, hotel, taxi firms, garages or shops. Visitors frequently arrive in the countryside with little idea of where they are going or what there is to do; they are impulse visitors. Working in partnership offers the chance to give visitors a more coherent experience of your bit of rural Britain. The church often contains the history of the community which will have special historical events and interesting characters which need to be shared. This is a challenging task which may need expert help and advice, which may be available from a local authority or college. Church people are so used to solving their own problems they may be blind to the support that is available, for instance from a Tourist Information Centre, whose staff are hungry to know details about what special features are in your church and when it is open. A recent survey of Tourist Information Centres showed their enthusiasm for churches to play a fuller part. One important step is to get an estimate of visitor numbers by counting the entries in the visitors’ book and multiplying by eight.

Local tourism related businesses such as restaurants, guest houses, hotels and bed and breakfast homes may be very willing to advertise your church and its open hours if they are provided with good quality free literature.

Good and simple signage should include a ‘church open’ and welcome sign. One church found that increased visitor numbers tenfold, another that donations increased to £100 a month. Get the local school to design and write a simple one page leaflet describing the church and its story. If your church has so much of interest you may need a second more expensive product alongside the free leaflet.

You may be surprised that visitors want to know what’s happening in the area and in the church too. Make sure your displays are kept fresh and up to date. Many visitors want to pray or spend time in quiet. Provide the space for that with aids such as a prayer board, suggestions for prayer and cards for them to buy.

The recent surge of interest in the Church of England originates with a Synod motion which recognises the importance of this ministry. Every diocese has been asked to give new impetus to this way of sharing the faith with the millions of people who want to discover a spiritual focus on their own terms by visiting a church.

While acknowledging the excellent projects based on grants from elsewhere that are proving their worth in some dioceses, this article focuses on what can be done in any parish without much input from outside.

The diocesan tourism group or officer may be able to give advice having visited your church, but there is much you can do without spending much money, to improve the way your church can speak to the visitor in the absence of any guide or ‘welcomer’.

The pages of Rural Visitors show what visitors want and expect and give advice on how to provide simply for their needs. Information relating to worship can be shared with visitors by leaving the hymn numbers up and a hymn book out for reference. Leave the lectern Bible open with the chosen text highlighted or even printed off for visitors to take away with them.

The more a church gives the impression of being in use, the less likely will unwelcome visitors feel inclined to misbehave. Remember that the main church insurers, the Ecclesiastical Insurance Company, strongly recommend that churches are unlocked in daytime, while urging that precious items are securely locked away.

Canon Jeremy Martineau OBE is Chair of the St David’s Diocesan Tourism Group. He can be contacted on jeremy.m@talktalk.net
The young couple with the noisy baby are here again at our small village church. New in your Readership you actually found the crying distracted you from the fine sermon you know you could have preached given less competition. However, at the door as they are leaving, they say rather awkwardly, 'We want you, please, to christen our baby. What do we have to do to arrange it?' There's a smooth but off-putting answer which involves telling the story of licensed ministry in the Church of England, or the short off-putting one, 'I'm afraid you'll have to ask the vicar, she's the one who sorts out baptisms here.' 'But we want you ...'

Readers and a wide variety of ordained clergy – stipendiary, self-supporting, parish and assistant priests – together sustain the licensed ministry of the Church of England in its rural aspect. So how are we doing with our rainbow of different ministerial colours?

And he [Christ] gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastoral teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, for the building of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unifying faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ ... [Ephesians 4:11-13]

The gift of the exalted Christ to the church consists, according to Ephesians, of persons who fulfil their service by speaking: they are 'Ministers of the Word'. Christ has given us 'talking people' to further his aims for the church (three cheers for talking ministers!). It is we who have institutionalised them. We ministers are the institutional dressing up of theological truths about ministry. Second, the ministry which exists for the building of Christ’s church looks beyond itself to its mission to the world, the work of service – centred for rural dwellers upon the parish. Talk about ministry might be the church’s fascination with itself. But we should remember that getting the ministry of the church ‘right’ is actually for the benefit of the world and furthering God’s purposes within it – the work of service.

Now I guess that congregations, should they think about the matter at all, regard the episcopal and national authorising of ministry as generally a Good Thing. If they have had the privilege of supporting and sponsoring a candidate through selection, training, ordination or licensing into ministry among them they will have a proper pride that their minister is recognised by the Bishop too. Such ministry requires common, agreed standards of selection, training and performance. In a diocese all licensed ministry has its authority from one source alone – the Bishop. Yet there is sustained pressure, especially strong in the modern age in which authority is by definition suspect, to break out of defined boundaries into a more liquid organisation. The scattered rural church is less under the eye of the Bishop than places closer to him. Rural people can be independent-minded. So services might be led by churchwardens, lay worship leaders or a family service planning group, accepted locally but with negligible training. A mixed economy of ministry – promoted as every member ministry – could be very creative and the way forward given the declining numbers of stipendiary incumbents. The people themselves must learn to do more, not expect to be done to. The Church of England doesn’t do the right thing until it is forced to do so, allegedly. But ministry is a greedy concept which is capable of gobbling everything in its reach. By suggesting everyone is a minister, the licensed ministry is undermined. If you can lead a service after four training sessions, what is the point of three years’ rigorous theological education, demanding essays and probing seminars?

The passage in Ephesians speaks about ministry in an unusual way. It is not about people with gifts, but people themselves who are the gifts of God for the equipping of others. 'He's a brilliant actor, but have you read what the tabloids are saying about his private life?; we say, as though you can separate out the talent from the person who has it. Ephesians challenges that easy distinction: the whole person is the gift. In this sense the minister is also a sacramental sign of the grace of God. The spiritual formation of ministers is less easy to define and measure even than whether a sermon is 'successful'; but each of us needs to be the gift of God to our people.

In 2008, the Diocese of Winchester had a total of 583 licensed ministers, of whom 275 were Readers. The number of Readers was thus not far short of that of the ordained (218 stipendiary and 82 self-supporting). Given such numerical strength there is a real dependence in the Diocese upon Reader ministry. The total of licensed ministers is considerably more than the number of churches (406) and over double the number of parishes (259). But of course they are not necessarily spread evenly: there is one (not rural) church in this diocese with ten Readers! Almost two thirds of the Readers in this Diocese are serving in rural benefices (country towns and villages) and 56.3% of assistant clergy are rural. These figures confirm the comparatively recent blossoming of licensed support, lay and
ordained, to the decreasing number of rural stipendiary incumbents.

Once upon a time, there were only parochial clergy, the vicar, rector and curate: ‘The priest picks his way / Through the parish. Eyes watch him...’ 1 The incumbent of a single parish is a stock character on the rural stage, partner with the landowners for the common good, or enjoying the rich life of a gentleman while the poor curate did the work. They found time to be poets, pioneering botanists, bee-keepers as well as priests and pastors.

So when the first deaconesses and lay-readers were appointed in the 1860s through the visionary initiative of a few Bishops they were clearly defined as not being clergy. Deaconess and lay-reader were self-contained, life-long vocations of value and an end in themselves. Lay-readers also were distinctive in another way, following lay vocations of their place, nourished out of a community into which they would likely offer ministry after training. The clergy on the other hand were by policy, called in one parish, theologically educated and trained in monastic settings, serving curacies in two others before being instituted as vicar or rector in yet another parish – the ministry of the displaced. The roots of some of the difficulties of working together may lie in the different attitudes and assumptions between those who, as Readers or self-supporting clergy, live where they have been ‘ordinary’ lay people of the place – and the displaced incumbents. Rural areas, villages, country towns are places with a story, where a sense of place is still an important value and a matter of pride.

In 1969 the first women Readers were licensed, and then in the 1990s women priests were ordained. The seeds were sown for growth in the number of self-supporting ministers, female and male. For a few, Readership has given the structured experience in which a further call towards ordination has been discerned.

All these developments happened despite something of a loss of nerve about the role of ordained ministry in modern England and a considerable decline in congregational numbers. Their effects have been felt proportionally more in rural areas, which are popularly supposed to be the more conservative and traditional end of the Church of England. In fact that characterisation is not completely accurate. Because new ministers were already known and respected in their small communities, they have been welcomed as Readers and self-supporting clergy, even by those who thought beforehand that they could not accept women ministers for theological or personal reasons.

So, Readers might perceive themselves as ‘under pressure’ from at least three directions: their original strong definition of not being stipendiary clergy has weakened with the declining numbers of the latter. But the main pressure points come from their distinction from the new group of assistant clergy, which Readers are most ‘like’ as seen by the untrained eye. And the existence of unlicensed but locally authorised lay leaders of worship presses upon the Reader from his or other congregations, or from the incomer with experience of an urban church.

It is not about people with gifts, but people themselves who are the gifts of God for the equipping of others.

A new factor is the growth of mega-parish benefices, a comparatively recent development in Winchester Diocese. One 12 parish north Hampshire rural benefice has a staff of Rector, Associate Rector, three assistant clergy and four Readers. The need in such an arrangement is for ‘team-players’ rather than ‘prima-donnas’; with the consequent taming (or expulsion) of the eccentric and refocusing of the licensed ministry from a parochial to a benefice view. Some would regard the ministry team as important progress, but it runs counter to centuries of rural ministerial tradition.

We tend to regard our ministerial challenges in benefice and diocese as managerial or functional problems, to be solved by better training or ministerial agreements or such like. In fact, what we desperately need is opportunities for shared theological exploration in smaller, cross-benefice groups and between readers and clergy. We need to tease out how New Testament theological essentials such as koinonia (a concept which is rather bigger than our usual translation of ‘fellowship’) and sunergia (working together in ministry) might help us understand our modern challenges. What about studying agape specifically amongst benefice teams, or the synod? Licensed clergy will all have spent a lot of time trying to master elements of theology in their training – a great strength though not so many feel confident in doing it. Personal theological development is so easily stunted by the pressures of balancing lay and ministerial life. This can be more acute in rural areas because of the need to nourish personal relationships and pastoral care around the parish and serve the demands of scattered worshipping communities, rather than reflect on pastoral theology. But there is great help and encouragement out there in the shape of the Rural Theology Association4 and The Arthur Rank Centre5 in particular to keep our rural contextual theology in view. They have made a real difference here by their encouragement to establish the Hampshire Rural Group6, just one of the regional support groups for rural ministers and lay people.

1 Marcus Barth, The Anchor Bible – Ephesians 4-6 (New York, 1974), p436
2 for sustained thinking about liquidity in the modern world, see, for instance, the writings of Zygmunt Baumann. His 44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World (Cambridge, 2010) is particularly accessible.
4 Government definition of the rural: settlements of less than 10,000 population. The percentage of Readers based in rural areas of Winchester Diocese is 64.6%.
5 R S Thomas, The Priest
6 www.rural-theology.org.uk
7 www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/7
8 www.hantsrural.org.uk

Martin Coppen is from the Diocese of Winchester and involved with the Hampshire Rural Group. They meet three times a year to explore issues relating to rural church life. It is open to anyone interested, lay or clergy. See www.hantsrural.org.uk
I was born in the country – very rural Leicestershire. In fact there were only three railway houses and a farm across the road. Half a mile away was a small agricultural college. So for the first nine years of my life (I suppose once I reached three!) I was free to roam. I wandered through the spinney which fed my imagination with dreams of Robin Hood and Red Indians. Sometimes I would sit on the bank of the small river – although it seemed large to me – sitting with a garden cane and a bent pin; the fish were perfectly safe from me but not from the anglers. I would watch enviously as they lifted their fish from the shimmering water. When it was time to start school just before I was five, the great treat was that sometimes I could hitch a lift in an old man’s pony and trap. It doesn’t get much more like rural life than this.

Yet even this experience would not be available in the countryside now. However, even my childhood memories remind me that it was no idyllic paradise – the outside toilet in the winter and the hand pump that ran dry in the summer are just two powerful memories to dissolve that! Yet these are precious years, freedom, friendly trustworthy people, the generosity and kindness of the people at the little Methodist chapel where I first learnt the stories of Jesus, the safe gnarled work-hardened hands of older men who took my tiny one in theirs. So you will understand that I care deeply about rural life and am passionate that it should be sustained, even as I recognise that it will inevitably change. There are deep realities and profound values that are most easily kept and experienced among people who are committed to and sustained by the land through generations.

For the last thirty years I’ve lived in Coventry with my wife and children. So, we are now often in the role of tourists – people who look, linger maybe, and then disappear again. We frequently enjoy walking in the Warwickshire tree-studded countryside and often take short breaks in other parts of rural Britain. What a wonderful world Britain’s countryside is.

Whenever we go away we see rural life through other eyes. How convenient is the B&B for a pub for evening meals? Where are the National Trust properties? What is the car parking like at the start of the way-marked walk? How far away and how interesting are the nearest towns and cities in case it rains? We visit, we breathe deeply, we replenish our memories and return to the city. Being a tourist is very different from belonging to the country! But whenever we are there, we seek to respect the land and the people as an insider, not simply as a tourist or even ‘incomer’. No doubt I fail, but my heart is essentially and forever a rural one.

I hope that all who live and work in the countryside will realise the divine ministry you have in welcoming visitors.

Another way we city dwellers experience (?) or at least benefit from rural life is through our food. I put a ‘?’ because so many people, apparently forget or have no connexion
with the context from which their food comes. Normally, however, we buy our fruit and veg from the local greengrocers. But, recently, I bought some potatoes from our supermarket. Unlike the greengrocer’s potatoes, which still have the soil clinging to them, connecting us to childhood memories of potato picking all day in cold wet fields, these were scrubbed clean and safely packaged in a clear plastic bag – of course! Yet they had their attraction – these potatoes had a lovely red skin and were two bags for £2! Closer examination told me they came from a farm in Essex – that raised my interest enough to read on. I discovered they came from a farm where I had often been entertained while preaching at a church in Ipswich. Now these ‘anonymous’ potatoes sprang to life. I had walked through the fields on a sunny afternoon with the dogs and their owners where these very potatoes had grown. I knew a little of their struggles – the need to irrigate from the large pond, the fierce fire that had destroyed hundreds of metres of hedgerows and had started to burn down their woodland, the frequent challenges of disease and the financial struggles they have co-operating with a supermarket chain. Now, I valued these potatoes in a deeper way than convenient food for the table. My life was linked into the life of the families who produced them; I had shared their life.

Living in the countryside is very different from seeing it as a tourist or using it as a consumer. Having lived there in the past, when I am in the rural context as a visitor I am aware of the rural perspective too, from seeing it as a tourist or using it as a consumer. Having lived there in the past, when I am in the rural context as a visitor I am aware of the rural perspective too, because the countryside still feels like my real home.

John’s Gospel tells us

The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognise him. He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him.

The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s only Son. (John 1:10,11,14)

In Jesus, God shared our human life. He sees it – all of it – now not from the perspective of a casual visitor, nor a consumer or absent landowner, but as ‘one of us’. The incarnation means that God is eternally committed to understanding life from the inside, our side. He belongs to our country and sees the world from our perspective – as well as God’s! Although it might appear he was only a visitor to our world, he actually knows it better than any of us, because it was through Him the world was made.

But there is another side to all of this. John tells us that when Jesus came he received a rough welcome. His own people did not receive him, they did not make him welcome, they did not recognise and treat him as fully ‘one of us’. Living in the countryside, with all its problems - remoteness from a coffee shop, or even a post office, the need to protect our school, or even the one three villages away because ours closed ten years ago, the ever rising price of houses forcing our children to move away, the inconvenience of visitors clogging up our streets with their cars, the lack of a policeman, not to mention doctors, dentists, libraries and vicars when you need one, the higher prices for everything etc etc – living in the country is still an amazing privilege. But always in the Bible, as here, privileges bring responsibilities. As Amos put it,

Of all the nations on earth, you are the only one I have known and cared for. That is what makes your sin so terrible, and that is why I must punish you for them. (Amos 3:2)

There is, of course a difference between being antagonistic and not providing a fulsome welcome. There are only a few people in the Gospel stories who are clearly antagonistic, the people of Nazareth when Jesus’ message of God’s love for the Gentiles had provoked their nationalistic reaction, the pig farmers whose herds had been destroyed (Luke 4:16 – 30; 8:26–39), the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem whose position and security he threatened. In spite of the accounts of the crowds following him, there will have been many who were too busy buying animals or ploughing fields (Luke 14:15–24) or even disinterested or dismissive to bother with him. Biblically the call to be hospitable is a strong one, even a sacred one and being hospitable is far more than tolerating or allowing. Being hospitable is about truly welcoming, even when there are inconveniences caused by this. Being hospitable means opening up our hearts, sometimes even our homes, to the stranger. Hospitality requires sensitivity to the other and a commitment to serve people. It means not only making the church building available if we possibly can, but also showing that the stranger is welcome to explore, to pray or simply to be there ‘as an honoured guest’, rather than an inconvenience.

Now, please don’t read my words as a criticism of rural people, past or present. Nearly always we have experienced genuine friendship and a rich welcome when we take our trips into the countryside. Normally we sense a ready acceptance. When we stand in the queue in the village shop, we are not cold-shouldered. So please read my words as an encouragement to continue the good work that goes on!

But I intend more than this. I hope that all who live and work in the countryside will realise the divine ministry you have in welcoming visitors. By your welcome you can actually help to restore the humanity of us city dwellers. So much of our lives we are pressurised. We don’t have time to hear the birds and there is too much light to see the stars and without them we can cease to wonder (Psalm 8). We are overwhelmed by the machine gun bombardment of media messages and our freedom to roam is restricted by the ever present threat of traffic, which pollutes our lungs and generates aggression. We hardly dare look in the eyes of those who walk towards us, let alone say ‘Good morning’! To do so is to risk embarrassment. So in the city everyone must remain a stranger to us. By your open-heartedness you can help us keep in touch with who we truly are, people made in God’s image and so help us live a little more the Christ-like life, to share a little more of his grace and truth. So together we can welcome him into our world, whether countryside or cityscape.

David Spriggs works for Bible Society as Bible and Church Consultant. He is a member of the Editorial Board for The Bible in Transmission. This is Bible Society’s journal for Church Leaders and preachers as well as all those who are interested in relating the Bible to our society and culture. It is available free of charge on request. Please ring Bible Society’s contact centre 01793 418222 or email contactus@biblesociety.org.uk to request your free copies (3 times per year).
In the early 1980s a group of Anglican priests became strongly aware that rural communities were undergoing fundamental changes because of economic pressures, the effects of global marketing and the disintegration of the traditional communal bonds. This came just at the time when effective clergy provision in the countryside was contracting. Rev Tony Hodgson, while working at a Youth Centre in the Staffordshire Peak District, drew together a group of fellow enthusiasts to set up a Christian Rural Centre in the small settlement of Calton, the first Christian Rural Concern (CRuC).

This venture acquired a more structured basis when CRuC formed a partnership with the Continuing and Professional Education Department at Keele University. The study course then, as now, is open to all and has become a two year part-time Certificate validated by the university, set at first year undergraduate level. CRuC and its courses have attracted a wide spectrum of lay people and clergy; its membership has included Methodists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army officers, and Church of England Readers!

While supporting rural studies has been central to CRuC, it has always maintained a wider focus. There are ‘Field Days’ which are spread around the country, the journal *Countrywide Care* is produced, and local initiatives like the Companions group in North Staffs/ South Cheshire began. Its immersion in rural experience means that it can provide material for course modules. The aims of this article will be first to briefly consider the latest CRuC research project, and secondly to outline our current distance learning courses.

**CHRISTIAN RURAL CONCERN’S PRESENT RESEARCH PROJECT**

One of the original challenges which inspired CRuC has become more serious: the decreasing number of clergy in rural communities. While pastoral oversight has inevitably diminished, increasing fabric, financial and practical burdens having to be shouldered by local church officers has meant retrenchment and decline. A trio of CRuC clergy have undertaken a project in conjunction with a team based at Ripon College Cuddesdon to investigate not only the practical realities on the ground, but also the necessary re-modelling of an inclusive ministry which must follow. This has critical implications if governing concepts of ministry are no longer adequate to the present situation. As nowadays the primary contacts, what is lay leaders’ understanding of their role? The response of *The Reader* would be enormously valuable! Please contact Rev John Whitehead at: jbwhitehead@onetel.com

**PARTNERS: THE JOHN RAY INITIATIVE AND CRES (CHRISTIAN RURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES)**

In the early 2000s CRuC were joined by the John Ray Initiative (JRI) in a new partnership which totally revamped the CRuC course. JRI is an educational charity bringing together scientific and Christian understanding of the environment. Formed in 1997, JRI was established to respond to the environmental crisis and challenges of sustainable development and environmental stewardship. As a result of this collaboration Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES) was born. In the mid 2000s CRES moved from its old home at Keele University to Ripon College Cuddesdon (RCC), an Anglican training college near Oxford. RCC now provides quality control for the course and facilities for many of the associated CRES meetings. The CRES courses are now independently managed by a Steering Group with representatives from CRuC and JRI. One of CRuC’s pioneers, John Neal, a farmer near Banbury, chairs the Group, and the courses are led by the Principal Tutor, Dr Martin Hodson, who is also the Operations Manager of JRI.

The CRES Certificate is a distance learning course helping people put interests in rural issues and the environment together with their Christian faith. There are no entry qualifications. A key feature is local study and investigation, supported by a qualified local tutor. Under the guidance of local tutors, participants on the Certificate are led through six modules out of ten from: The Living World; Rural and Environmental Theology, Farming and Food; Christians as Salt and Light; Globalisation and Faith; The Physical Environment; The Biological Environment; Rural Communities; The Church in the Countryside; and Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide Stabilization, Energy and Climate. Students write study papers and a work diary, one for each module. In the final year of the course, students work on a project, the topic being chosen in consultation with the tutors. Throughout the year, CRES runs a variety of events for students and tutors. One day events are held at RCC, as are residential two day gatherings, where students and tutors can meet each other and discuss the ongoing work. CRES organises at least one visiting speaker, with talks across the range of rural and environmental issues and theology. For some years now CRES has run summer field trips around England. These visits vary from farms to woodlands, from urban to very rural, with different content each year. At the residential meeting final year students present their projects, with topics ranging from climate change to the role of the rural church in working with the elderly.

Once completed, the CRES Certificate can be followed by a two year Diploma, also undertaken on a part time basis. This is an in depth study of a topic that is decided in consultation with tutors, and involves the production of a larger piece of work.

For further information about the CRES courses please contact: Mrs Lynda McKeown, The John Ray Initiative, QW212, Francis Close campus, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 4AZ. Tel: 012 4271 4842. Email: admin@jri.org.uk Also visit www.cres.org.uk

Rev John Whitehead is a retired Anglican priest from Cheshire and is Chair of Christian Rural Concern.

Dr Martin Hodson is an environmental biologist, Principal Tutor of Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES), and Operations Manager for the John Ray Initiative.
Made with a significantly lower budget than either of its predecessors, the most recent instalment in the Chronicles of Narnia series may quite easily have sailed by without you noticing. So if you didn’t manage to catch it in the cinema, the recently released DVD may be something worth catching.

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader follows the adventures of the younger two Pevensie children, Lucy and Edmund, and their brattish cousin Eustace, as they arrive back in Narnia. There they rejoin King Caspian and the valiant talking mouse Reepicheep who are on a quest to find seven lost Narnian Lords.

C.S. Lewis’ novel is fairly episodic and is content to rely on this one storyline line to hold everything together, but the filmmakers (rightly in my opinion) obviously considered this to be an insufficient basis to drive the plot. As a result they have borrowed a couple of elements from the next book (The Silver Chair) and blended them into a new sub-plot which gives the movie a bit more forward momentum.

This isn’t the only change from Lewis’s work; indeed this is a far looser adaptation than either of the previous two films. Most of the changes, though, are fairly easy to justify. Some elements have been chopped, severely shortened or combined with others in order to squeeze the material into a couple of hours. Others either improve the film’s pacing, or they give it a bit more drive. One of the movie’s key innovations does feel a little too much like it has been stolen from *Lord of the Rings*, but overall these alterations work fairly well.

Another significant change is the relationship between Eustace (Will Poulter) and Reepicheep (now voiced by Simon Pegg). Poulter is outstanding as Eustace, irritatingly sulky at the start, but still human enough to make his change of heart thoroughly believable. Much of the transformation happens through his interactions with Reepicheep, which are all the more impressive because Poulter will have had to do them without the CGI mouse that we see.

Reepicheep is a more compassionate character in this film, managing to both chastise Eustace, but also coax him into becoming a better person. Of course the mouse is only really laying the groundwork here. Eustace’s conversion mainly happens when he meets Aslan. Aslan has a much smaller role here than he did in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He mainly makes fleeting appearances during the main body of the film in order to help the shipmates resist temptation, but he does appear in the film’s epilogue and it’s here that he underlines the link between him and Jesus. “In your world I have another name. You must learn to know me by it. That was the very reason that you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here a little, you may know me better there”.

There’s plenty of other interest in this film too. Lucy is growing up and starting to wish she were someone more beautiful (such as her sister). Edmund is getting fed up of always playing second fiddle, and Caspian, who has thankfully dropped the appalling accent he had in Prince Caspian, plays the role of noble hero. Together the Dawn Treader’s crew rout a bunch of slave traders, make some one-footed dwarves un-invisible, discover new lands and inevitably save the day.

Whilst *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* looked good on the big screen, the 3D was entirely inconsequential, and so it should translate fairly well to DVD. Whilst the allegory at the heart of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* will always be one Christians hold dear, from a quality point of view, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* may be the best entry in the Chronicles of Narnia series so far.
Shaping rural ministry: becoming reflective practitioners

Leslie J Francis is editor of the magazine *Rural Theology*

Those of us who still use the readings proposed by the *Book of Common Prayer* are familiar with the Gospel for Sexagesima Sunday. In that Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus invites his followers to listen to an everyday story of country folk and to observe the sower about his work. The invitation is to become reflective practitioners, to read the evidence and to draw the conclusions.

In the tradition of the Parable of the Sower, one of the aims of the journal of the Rural Theology Association is to encourage those of us who minister in rural churches today to be reflective practitioners, to observe with care the evidence, to reflect on our experience, to evaluate our practice, and to develop and re-shape our ministry. Over the past three years over thirty studies have been published in *Rural Theology* to aid this process. Here is a summary of some of the issues discussed.

**LAY LEADERSHIP**

Lay leadership is becoming increasingly important to churches across the denominations and across the world. Few churches have taken the trouble, however, to undertake serious research on the effectiveness of lay leadership. In a study on ‘Lay leadership in sparsely populated rural Australia’ Philip Hughes researched the effectiveness of lay leadership within the Uniting Churches in South Australia.

Surveys and case studies showed that the vitality of lay-led churches was no different from churches led by ordained ministers. In many lay-led churches there was a strong sense of ownership by the lay people, and those involved in leadership often reported that they had grown in faith through their responsibilities. The preferred pattern of leadership in rural churches adopted by the Synod of the Uniting Church in South Australia is that of local lay leadership. ‘Resourcing ministers’ are being appointed to mentor and resource the lay leaders of clusters of between six and twelve congregations.

This article demonstrates the value of investing serious research into evaluating the contribution of lay leadership.

**PRESSURES OF RURAL MINISTRY**

Several articles have illuminated the pressures experienced by clergy working in rural ministry. In one of these articles, entitled ‘Living the pressures of rural ministry’, Paul Rolph, Jenny Rolph and John Cole report two in-depth case studies of stipendiary clergy working in rural England, one an Anglican priest and the other a Methodist minister. The aim of each interview was to listen carefully to their experiences of rural ministry and to identify the key recurrent pressures.

These two clergymen from different denominations described highly similar experiences that the authors categorised under five themes: the distinctive demands of ministry in a rural setting, the strain of travelling between churches and communities, managing multiple church buildings, finding the human and financial resources to sustain ministry across a number of communities, and developing resilience to cope with stress.

This article highlights the support that clergy may need to maintain effective ministry and healthy lives.

**HARVEST FESTIVALS**

In many country parishes the Harvest Festival seems to stretch out to welcome a broad range of people beyond those who come to the regular Sunday services. In an article entitled ‘The social significance of Harvest Festivals in the countryside’ Bishop David Walker set out to discover just how broad the appeal of these services really can be.

Walker collected information from 1,454 people who filled in a questionnaire at the Harvest Festival services conducted within twenty-seven rural churches in the Diocese of Worcester. The data suggested that, although demographically Harvest Festival and normal Sunday congregations are similar (in terms of sex and age), Harvest services reach out into the varied categories of rural inhabitants and attract significant numbers of non-residents, occasional churchgoers, and those who feel that they really belong to the local church without having to be there every week.

This article demonstrates the importance of listening to occasional churchgoers and taking seriously the ways in which they express their understanding of belonging to the rural church.
PRAYER REQUESTS
There has been a growing awareness in recent years of ways in which rural churches can respond to and nurture the spiritual growth of the many visitors and tourists who are passing by and open the door to come in. Prayer boards, prayer cards and prayer trees provide one means through which these visitors can express their heartfelt longings.

In an article entitled ‘Prayers on a prayer tree: ordinary theology from a tourist village’, Lewis Burton undertook a careful analysis of the content of 1,262 prayer cards left in one rural church during a 12-month period. For some people, these prayers revealed true faith in a God whose power was such to answer these prayers. For other people, these prayers revealed a last attempt to resolve serious concerns.

This article reminds us of the important contribution of the prayer tree or prayer board to our churches’ ministry to visitors.

MISSION TODAY
In an article entitled ‘A missionary paradigm for the rural church in the light of 1 Peter’, Bishop John Went challenges the assumption that mission in a rural context cannot present stark challenges, but that the church simply needs to be there for people because boundaries between church and community are porous. Went challenges the view that it can be counter-productive to emphasise the church as a distinctive community set over against the wider community.

According to Went, the first letter of Peter addressed to rural communities in first century Asia Minor offers a model for exploring a more challenging and distinctive approach to mission in our contemporary rural context. The first letter of Peter offers a model for exploring a more challenging and distinctive approach to mission in our contemporary rural context. The first letter of Peter addresses the need for taking country life seriously, for looking at the evidence, and for developing the skills of the reflective practitioner. Today the invitation is for men and women involved in Reader ministry to follow in that tradition. The journal Rural Theology is there to help the process.

This article focuses on the need to face controversy and debate about how the church today draws on scriptural models to shape ministry and mission within specific contexts.

USING THE BIBLE
In a couple of articles Dick France draws on his experience of being both a serious scholar of the Bible and a country parson to reflect on how these two areas can illuminate each other. In the first article, entitled ‘Sheep and goats: pastoral imagery in the Bible and today’, Dick France argues that ‘we country folk have an advantage’. Living among the hills of Meirionnydd, one member of the adult education group that France facilitates is a shepherd’s wife and others keep a few sheep. A former member of the group is now priest-in-charge of the same parish where he was until recently a full-time shepherd. Such rural links, France argues ‘give added depth to the pastoral imagery’.

Drawing on this rural background, France examines the frequent use of the imagery of sheep and shepherds in the Bible, both to illustrate God’s care for the people of God, and also in relation to human leaders of the nation (in the Old Testament) and the Church (in the New Testament). This article then suggests ways in which an informed awareness of the reality of a shepherd’s life may enrich our understanding of such imagery. It also draws attention to some limitations of the metaphor and warns against sentimental misconceptions of the ‘pastoral’ role.

The second article entitled, ‘A tale of two mountains: mountains in biblical spirituality’, Dick France once again draws on his experiences of life in mountainous rural Wales to celebrate the symbolic importance of mountains. France considers the place of mountains in biblical thinking, as a pointer to the power and reliability of the God who made them. He focuses especially on the two mountains, Sinai and Zion, and discusses the contrasting ideologies associated with them in the Old Testament, and the distinctive ways in which the New Testament exploits this construct to symbolise the nature of Christian salvation. These insights suggest how the symbolic importance of mountains may inform modern spirituality, especially in a rural context.

These articles help us to appreciate the importance of rural experience for the interpretation of scripture.

FROM THE RURAL PULPIT
In a new series of articles Jeff Astley draws on the distinction between three modes of doing theology: sitting where the theologians are at their desks, reading, thinking and writing; kneeling where theologians are proclaiming, communicating and celebrating the Word of God among the People of God. In the first article, entitled ‘Service of Thanksgiving and Eucharist for Joan Francis’, Astley comments theologically on the themes of remembering, sacrament and thanksgiving as reflected both in one human life and in church tradition.

In the second article, entitled ‘St Valentine’s Day’, Astley draws on St Paul’s great hymn of praise to true love in 1 Corinthians 13, expressed as agape in the English of the seventeenth century, and as charity in Paul’s original Greek.

These articles help us to appreciate the importance of theological study being brought to the pulpit.

CONCLUSION
The Parable of the Sower set a tradition for taking country life seriously, for looking at the evidence, and for developing the skills of the reflective practitioner. Today the invitation is for men and women involved in Reader ministry to follow in that tradition. The journal Rural Theology is there to help the process.

NOTE:
Further information about the Rural Theology Association can be found at www.rural-theology.org.uk

Reverend Canon Professor Leslie J Francis is Professor of Religions and Education, University of Warwick and Canon Theologian, Bangor Cathedral. He serves as President of the Rural Theology Association.
Promoting your Church to Tourists

Andrew Duff
is a tourism and heritage consultant

‘Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’
Hebrews 13:2 (AV)

In his introduction to England’s Thousand Best Churches, Simon Jenkins said: ‘To make the acquaintance of an English church is to witness the breeze of history make its imprint on stone, brick, wood and plaster. No church is identical with any other. Nowhere else in the world are places of worship so idiosyncratic as in England. Each arose from its particular landscape and culture, reflecting local materials, patronage and politics, even the liturgical views of the vicar. The humblest church is a casket of varieties.’

Our church buildings are, of course, first and foremost places of worship. However, the process of communities building, adapting and renewing their sacred spaces over the years has endowed these buildings with more than a patina of age: they are tangible expressions of the evolution of our culture, local heritage, family history and tales of human events and achievements – all wonderfully embellished with architecture, art and craftsmanship.

I’d go so far as to suggest that our churches are the ‘hidden giant’ of our national heritage, and cultural assets distinctive to every locality. The parish church is often the oldest surviving building in the locality, and in rural areas often the only local heritage site accessible to visitors (a point often overlooked by tourism organisations).

Thankfully there is increasing awareness of the potential for visits to churches, and lots of good practice in welcoming visitors and helping churches to tell their local stories. I offer a few insights and examples in this article, and some practical pointers for those wishing to enhance the visitor welcome at their own local church.

WHY DO PEOPLE VISIT CHURCHES ANYWAY?

It is interesting to note that whilst fewer people today wish to attend formal church services, more than ever are choosing to visit churches as part of a day out or holiday visit – including people who would say they have no religious faith as well as those who do.

According to VisitBritain, visits to cathedrals and churches are at least as popular as visits to castles or historic houses, as the graph below indicates. Another study shows that more than half of all day trips include at least one visit to a cathedral or church – about double the proportion of people who attend at least one church service in a year (Churchgoing in the UK, Tearfund, 2007).

People visit churches for many different reasons of course. Some do so as part of a family history quest – having done their research online, many wish to see where their forebears came from. Some come for historical or architectural interest, guide book in hand. Others may be walkers or cyclists, for whom country churches are points of interest en route.

Then there are those attending baptisms, weddings and funerals and other family events. A visitor-friendly church may be a small but helpful part of their own spiritual journey.

But it seems that most visits to churches are ‘un-premeditated’: not coming intentionally to visit the church, but as a spur-of-the-moment decision when they happen to be in the vicinity or passing by (according to trends reported via www.churchestourismassociation.info).

However, most people have come to expect church doors to be firmly locked, so will not attempt to visit unless there is an obvious sign of life and interest. It is not surprising, then, that the number of visitors generally increases significantly when there is a welcoming ‘church open’ sign outside!

**WELCOMING VISITORS**

The important thing is to decide if you wish your church to welcome visitors, whatever their particular interest. Don’t be put off from developing a visitor hospitality initiative just because your church is not on some list of ‘must-see’ national heritage, or your community feels lacking in the resources to lay out a welcome for visitors.

Historic or architecturally notable churches may have obvious potential for visitors, but even the simplest village church may have potential to welcome visitors in new and creative ways, especially if it is close to other amenities, shops or where visitors are likely to park or take a walk. These could include simple local history displays, or an introduction to the local environment, a local art exhibition, or a small tourist information display.

Take a look at what your church has to offer visitors – the key features, stories and the way it feels to pay a visit to your place of worship. Analyse your existing visitors – who are they, where do they come from, and what do they most appreciate when they visit?

There are a number of ways in which a church can make visitors feel welcome – these need not cost a lot of money, but do need an effort of imagination and commitment. You may find it useful to set up a small tourism project group to take this forward.

The most important point is that the church is seen to be expecting visitors, and has put some thought into making them feel wanted and welcome.

**HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR CHURCH TO VISITORS**

The following actions are not exhaustive, but are a good starting point, and draw upon my recent experience:

First, and most basic: have the church unlocked and open – preferably daily, but at least at regular, advertised times, and place a sign (eg, neatly printed A-board) outside declaring ‘Church Open – Visitors Welcome’.

Produce a simple leaflet for local distribution – a full colour ‘DL’ leaflet can be produced for around £100 or less. Use a good photo, bold heading and just a few words on what is special about the church. Use the reverse for a location map and service times. Don’t forget your website address if you have one! We produced a leaflet like this in Alnwick and it was well received via the local tourist information centre, hotels and guest houses.

Most homes in Britain now have broadband, so getting your information online is important. A very simple website with service times, location map and a bit of local history is better than nothing. Use a couple of nice photos, some welcoming words in a clear font on a light background. Our church has a simple one-page website, www.alnwickanglican.com. This includes a short slideshow which was uploaded via YouTube, free of charge, then shared via the website.

You don’t need to provide lots of literature, but many visitors are interested in finding out about the church and its environs, and most people enjoy a good story. Most would prefer a short illustrated leaflet or booklet to a detailed history. Start with a simple free leaflet to welcome visitors to the church, summarising key points of interest and emphasising that this is a living Christian community. In Alnwick we have a free ‘Exploring St Michael’s Church’ leaflet – a dozen features briefly described, with line drawings, and easily reproduced from computer to printer (it should not be photocopied!). This has been well received by visitors, and led to increased donations!

Larger churches may have a guidebook for sale, featuring the history of the church and the stories associated with it. Try to avoid this being too detailed or academic – make it well presented and interesting to the uninitiated. With modern computers there are good creative desk-top publishing tools available – but not everyone feels confident about using these capabilities. You may need to ask around to see if someone is shyly harbouring such skills!

Some churches have volunteer stewards to welcome visitors and chat to them about points of interest and stories about the church and local area. They don’t need to be experts, but a friendly welcome and a little local knowledge can make a real difference to the visitor experience.

Offer something to take away, such as a bookmark or prayer card to reflect on (inviting donations at this point would be acceptable, as visitors will feel they have received something in return). Many churches provide a bookstall with local interest as well as Christian literature, including postcards, craft items and souvenirs for sale.

For some churches in a busy and visitor-frequented location, the combination of tearoom, bookstall and visitor information can be quite a draw!

**BE CREATIVE!**

Many churches offer events such as flower festivals, music events or art exhibitions, and this year many are having events to mark the 400th anniversary of the Authorised Bible.

Last year in Alnwick we put on a special summer church series, after we noticed that our website encouraged some holidaymakers to turn up at Sunday services. We linked Bible stories with themes of retreat, escape, rest, renewal, etc, to places of interest in our area. We even managed to work in a story around Hadrian’s Wall (fascinating evidence of the
early church, in case you are wondering!). Visitors and usual congregation seemed to enjoy this, so we plan to do something similar this year.

More substantial interpretative displays may be appropriate if your church or local area has interesting stories to tell. St Cuthbert’s Church in Norham, near Berwick, has well designed illuminated displays on the history of this borderland area.

HELPING VISITORS TO APPRECIATE THE SPIRITUAL PURPOSE OF YOUR CHURCH

Many visitors, especially those attending weddings and baptism services, may rarely attend church services and may have meagre or distorted ideas about the Christian faith. How might we hope to communicate something of the faith that is the reason we have our lovely church buildings?

Having a quiet chapel or area with icons, candles or carvings as a focus is of course helpful, as is having prayer cards or leaflets, Bibles and meditation materials available. Votive candles are popular, whilst some churches are creative with pebble pools, labyrinths, prayer trees, or a leaflet describing a reflective prayer walk round the church.

At St Michael’s in Alnwick we recently introduced full colour ‘pull-up’ banner stands to explain in a few jargon-free words (a challenging task!) the spiritual purpose of parts of the church, such as the font, together with pictures of activities including services, youth events and a wedding. These were designed on a home PC with Adobe Photoshop (some skill required!) and produced via a UK online supplier for about £50 each. (See illustrations.) This type of display can be rolled up out of the way when not needed.

For more guidance and ideas regarding all of the above, visit the Churches Tourism Association website www.churchestourismassociation.info. The Association exists to promote sharing of ideas and good practice in visitor welcome and promotion, so if you have an interesting project, please let us know about it, and please consider joining in!

Andrew Duff is a tourism and heritage consultant with a special interest in churches, heritage and the visitor experience. He is currently working for the Diocese of Newcastle on the Inspired North East project, is a Trustee of the Churches Tourism Association and a member of St Michael’s Church in Alnwick.

Illuminated story-boards recently installed in St Cuthbert’s Church, Norham (near Berwick upon Tweed)

New pull-up display banners, beside the Millennium font at St Michael’s, Alnwick
We currently hire around 80 full-time staff, so I’d estimate we are directly helping around 200 orphans, but often our staff have to hire others to tend their land for them whilst they’re at work, so indirectly we’re helping even more.

Cards from Africa ticks all the ethical boxes. It’s a fair trade company, their products are made from recycled office waste, and they even provide families who have suffered trauma with counselling. The cards themselves, each one taking on average over 30 minutes to make, are beautiful in quality, and stunningly rustic and creative in both design and texture.

But when Chris is asked what motivated him to start Cards from Africa and stay involved he replies it’s because God has a heart for the poor and marginalised in society and that faith requires action and then quotes from James suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:15-17)

Cards from Africa have recently launched two direct selling opportunities for people who want to join with them in making a difference, one for individuals who want to earn money for themselves, and the other for schools, churches and charities who want to raise money for their own good cause. Of course, the best bit is that for every 13 cards sold, 1 day of dignifying work is created in Rwanda.

When the card makers are asked why they enjoy coming to work – and from their dancing each day they clearly do! – ‘hope’ is a common reply; ‘hope that life is worth living’.

To find out more about Cards from Africa, and for any other media enquiries, please contact: info@cardsfromafrica.co.uk or visit their website www.cardsfromafrica.co.uk.
Summer is just around the corner! But as I write this the Christmas decorations have barely been put away, and the strains of well-loved carols still echo in my mind: ‘O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.’ Suddenly I am transported back to Bethlehem in April 2010, part of a group on a ten-day Holy Land Study Tour organised by the Church Mission Society (CMS) and the Holy Land Trust. (www.holylandtrust.org)

I had always wanted to visit the land of the Bible, but this was a holiday with a difference. All the usual places on a Holy Land itinerary were included: Jerusalem, Jericho, the River Jordan, the Dead Sea, Capernaum, Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee – up to then merely names in my Bible. But as well as visiting the sites of faith and history we were also experiencing the land of today: living among Palestinian Arab Christians; meeting those engaged in organisations working for peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians; witnessing something of the difficult and complex political situation that exists.

Bethlehem and its people in particular have left an indelible mark. We ‘did’ the tourist sites of Bethlehem: the Church of the Nativity, the Shepherd’s Fields, but the greatest joy was walking up Star Street from out hotel through the bustling Arab shops, and relaxing in Manger Square with a coffee, people watching. There were more people watching than we’d bargained for as the Icelandic volcanic ash unexpectedly restricted their ability to travel freely within the West Bank and to access work in Israel.

One day we sat transfixed as a small group of local boys played football in the square, two trees opposite the Peace Centre doubling as goal posts, surrounded by adults sitting under the trees and chatting. Their ball skills needed some working on but they deserved top marks for enthusiasm and perseverance. Talk to any children in Bethlehem and they may not know about London, but they have all heard of Manchester and Rooney: “We hope to visit Manchester one day,” they said.

On Friday, Star Street was eerily quiet. The shops were shut. Arriving in Manger Square we realised why. It was Friday and the square had been transformed into a giant car park. Men were standing in rows with their backs to the Peace Centre clutching their prayer mats, waiting for the call to prayer. All at once the heads disappeared as the men knelt with their faces to the ground. And then it was over, the people dispersed and soon the cars were gone.

And no two days were the same in Manger Square! We watched lines of tourists of various nationalities making their way up the steep hill from their tour buses, ducking low as they entered through the small door to the Church of the Nativity, then re-emerging, making a quick visit to the gift shop, and then back down the hill and on the bus again (don’t stop too long – Bethlehem is in the West Bank!) No-one stopped to read the well-presented information outside the Peace Centre building outlining the history of the land of Palestine and its people from the time of the British Mandate to the present day.

...to Palestinians it is a ‘separation’ wall which severely restricts their ability to travel freely within the West Bank and to access work in Israel.

One day we sat transfixed as a small group of local boys played football in the square, two trees opposite the Peace Centre doubling as goal posts, surrounded by adults sitting under the trees and chatting. Their ball skills needed some working on but they deserved top marks for enthusiasm and perseverance. Talk to any children in Bethlehem and they may not know about London, but they have all heard of Manchester and Rooney: “We hope to visit Manchester one day,” they said.

On Friday, Star Street was eerily quiet. The shops were shut. Arriving in Manger Square we realised why. It was Friday and the square had been transformed into a giant car park. Men were standing in rows with their backs to the Peace Centre clutching their prayer mats, waiting for the call to prayer. All at once the heads disappeared as the men knelt with their faces to the ground. And then it was over, the people dispersed and soon the cars were gone.

But not all our days were spent in blissful relaxation watching the changing scenes of everyday life. There was a busy schedule of visits to places not normally on a tourist itinerary, among them Bethlehem Bible College, Musalaha, and Aida refugee camp.

Bethlehem Bible College is providing a powerful and much needed Christian witness in the community, and provides training for young native Arab Palestinians to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ to their own people. Founded in 1979 by local Arabs, the college enrols over 100 students who are interested in Christian service in the Middle East. The CMS link mission partner whom our church supports worked at the college for many years, but was recently redeployed when she was unable to renew her visa.

In 2007 an expansion programme began and we visited the beautiful new Student Centre. Now with more facilities and greater opportunities for academic development, with additional classroom space and dormitories, the Bible College has been able to increase its enrolment and expand the ministry to which God has called them. In this land where hope and despair are sisters, Bethlehem Bible College is training Palestinian Christians to lead the Church and be the light of Christ to their Muslim neighbours. (www.bethbc.com)

It was with great interest that we visited the offices of Musalaha (which means reconciliation in Arabic). It was established nineteen years ago by Salim J Munayer, PhD when he acted upon his vision to see true peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The organisation seeks to promote reconciliation as demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus. We were treated to a very scholarly presentation of the theology of the land from a Christian biblical perspective by Dr Munayer.
Encounter Trips are one of the organisation’s many activities to foster reconciliation. Small groups of Palestinian and Israeli young people travel into the desert together where barriers begin to crumble, and hostility and suspicion of the other are replaced with trust and understanding as they learn about each other and work together. (www.musalahah.org)

And there is certainly much work to do! As the writer of Ecclesiastes says: There is nothing new under the sun. I remember well the jubilant scenes as the hated Berlin wall finally came down. Has humanity not learned the lessons of the past? The Israeli wall, started in July 2003, and still under construction, was never far away with its watch towers and checkpoints. In fact it now almost completely encircles Bethlehem. The indomitable spirit of the people is evident through the humorous graffiti which has turned the ugly concrete into colourful canvasses, and quotes from Mahatma Ghandi, the epitome of peaceful protest, abound.

Israel’s call it a ‘security’ wall, but to Palestinians it is a ‘separation’ wall which severely restricts their ability to travel freely within the West Bank and to access work in Israel. It has been built within the West Bank thereby encroaching onto Palestinian land and separating homes from farmland and olive groves.

The wall dominated the landscape when we visited Aida refugee camp, one of several camps which began as tents to house Palestinians forced from their homes in the late 1940s. Aida camp now comprises brick buildings erected by the United Nations. We visited the Lajee Centre which works with children and young people aged 4-20 years old.

The Lajee Centre was established in 2001 by a group of volunteers who wanted to ensure that future generations had greater opportunities and facilities open to them than they themselves had whilst growing up in Aida. The Centre runs projects and courses including art, photography, music, dance, English language, and Palestinian culture and history.

We were treated to a performance of Dabka, traditional Palestinian folk dance, by a group of children aged 10-15 years old, which they were rehearsing for their tour to England later in the year. We were fortunate enough to see them performing when they came to London, and they were spectacular! (www.lajee.org)

Travelling in the West Bank I was surprised how many Israeli settlements there were and how large: they were like small towns with their own exclusive infrastructure, creating island pockets dotted throughout the area. There was also evidence of other settlements in their embryonic stages of construction. The growth of these settlements is quite alarming, and how the problem will be resolved I do not know.

All Palestinian Arabs seem to be tarred with the same brush and unfairly labelled as terrorists by the media in the West. I was amazed at their resilience, stoicism, patience and hope in spite of the enormous frustrations they face.

I was amazed at their resilience, stoicism, patience and hope in spite of the enormous frustrations they face.

The Palestinian tour guide who came from England to lead the Study Tour was unable to make the journey from Bethlehem (West Bank) to Nazareth (Israel) with us because he was not granted permission by the Israeli authorities to travel. Another officially recognised Palestinian guide was found who had the necessary documentation to travel with us. However, at each checkpoint he was made to get off the coach and pass through an area designated for Palestinians while Israeli guards boarded our coach. Despite the humiliation he always remained calm, patient and good natured.

All the Arab people we met were friendly, hospitable and long-suffering. We spent one incredibly joyful evening eating and drinking, and dancing to music from some remarkably accomplished musicians.

I have many memories of my time in the Holy Land but two stand out in stark contrast. I remember standing on the roof of a building in Hebron looking out over the town. Below was an Israeli army camp and in the distance I could see dotted on roof tops lone Israeli soldiers, young conscripts in their late teens or early twenties, holding their guns as they too looked out over the town. There was great sorrow in my heart, and at that moment I heard the words of Jesus: Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.

The other memory is also of standing high up and looking out, but in a quite different place. I was at the Church of the Beatitudes looking out over the Sea of Galilee, a peaceful, tranquil setting. The church is surrounded by beautiful gardens, each bearing one of the Beatitudes. It was here that the Beatitudes came to life for me: Blessed are the peacemakers… Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness… Later that evening in our guest house in Nazareth our group met together and we used the Beatitudes as we prayed for Palestine-Israel and its people.

When we left we asked our guide what we could do when we returned home to England. He said in his inimitable way: I will tell you. Three things: first – pray for us; second – tell people how it really is; third – come back again and tell others to come.

The first I do continually; the second I hope I have done in this article; the third is up to me and you.

Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2:14)
Reviews for THE READER

ST

Alive in Christ
Charles W. Price
Kregel
£6.99 pbk
9780825435515

This book is basically about how to allow Christ’s power to work in us. The author uses as a starting point the Ark of the Covenant and the journey of the Israelites from the exodus to reaching the Promised Land, and parallels the customs associated with the Ark with the fulfilment of the coming of God’s glory in the person of Jesus. There is no doubt that the author knows his Old Testament and tells his story well though some may find his strictly literal interpretations of these events off-putting. I would imagine that this book would appeal to some more than others and have to admit that the rather American style (although it seems that the author is English) and the beliefs expressed did not appeal to me. However, on the whole the book is well written and some of the later chapters do seem a little more down-to-earth and rooted in everyday experience.

MARIE PATerson

W

Applying the Sermon
Daniel Overdorf
Kregel
£10.99 pbk
9780825434471

Subtitled ‘How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance’. Application, application, application sums this book up. At its heart, the author explores mostly other people’s ideas on sermon application. He comes from, and mostly talks to people in, the heartland of traditional protestant American preaching. By ‘application’ he means hitting home the message of the text to individuals, challenging them to take the word of the Lord and apply it to themselves, expecting the text and its exposition to cause life change. But to do this he generates check-lists, supposed to help you be sure you are not blocking out the text, while making it relevant to those listening. This is, of course, pastoral preaching, but his sample sermon is based on special occasion preaching visits. The two most helpful quotes for me, both from other people are: ‘Each sermon should answer the questions ‘So what?’ and ‘Now what?’’ and: ‘We have communion once or twice a month, I find I’m freer to preach stronger, more prophetic sermons when I can say ‘Just receive the body and blood.’ This book won’t be helpful to all: try a copy from your library first.

IAN WELLS

T

Baptism in the Holy Spirit
James D G Dunn
SCM
£25 pbk
9780334043881

This is the second edition of James Dunn’s classic exploration of the phrase ‘baptised in the Holy Spirit’ as used in the Gospels, Acts and Paul. Most of the book is a reprint of the entire contents of the first edition, published in 1970. The author claims that the gift of the Spirit is an experience linked to conversion, not an experience which is distinct and subsequent to it. He also argues that the gift of the Spirit is a felt experience, central to conversion-initiation. The new aspect of this edition is the lengthy and stimulating preface, completed in 2010. Here, the author defends himself against important Pentecostal criticisms and explores the implications of his thinking for traditional doctrine and the practice of baptism. For any Reader who wants to understand the role of the Spirit in becoming a Christian, this is an essential and exciting read.

ROBIN DIXON

W

Bless this House
John Leach & Liz Simpson
Grove
£3.95 pbk
9781851747672

Having led a service to bless a friend’s home a few years ago, I know this Grove booklet meets a need. It outlines the situations when the church might be approached for a service of blessing in a home and then gives solid biblical reasons why it is appropriate. Full details of a service are provided, with scripture readings, prayers and blessings, and a sheet can be printed from the Grove website to give to those present. The service details are simple and user-friendly, and are appropriate for children too. Importantly for Readers, all the material can be used by anyone, rather than having to be pronounced by an ordained minister. The aim is a service with a light tone, which I feel has been achieved. If more specific material is required, for example where there has been a disturbance in a house, references are made to other resources. The material provided is comprehensive, covering the land outside and all nature of rooms, and can be tailored to individual use.

SUE SIMPSON

H

Early Christian Thinkers
Dr. Paul Foster, Ed.
SPCK
£14.99 pbk
9780281060986

This is an interesting book comprising twelve essays originally published in Expository Times about the lives and legacies of key figures of the formative period of the church; that is, the 2nd and 3rd centuries. It was good to be reminded of the problems of heresy in the early church and how this ‘motley crew’, as Dr. Foster describes them, among others, faced the problem and developed a coherent basic Christian theology. My concerns are that as we know so little about them, and with so very little of their works existing we have to rely primarily on the works of later theologians and their views and quotations. The references to modern theologians’ arguments and discussion were, I felt, not necessarily helpful. The great 14th century theologian William of Ockham said, ‘The least assumptions make the best arguments.’ For me the essays rely on too many, ‘ifs, maybes, and possibly’s, as well as too many assumptions and presumptions about too few facts. I also found it off-putting that there were references to ‘many different Christianities’ and Christian
The adjective ‘traditional’ when applied to worship is more often than not intended to conjure up worship both in content and style emanating from the last few hundred years. Paul Bradshaw looks back to traditions much older than that: those emerging in the first four centuries. It is interesting to observe how many of the newer liturgies that we use today have their roots in soil substantially older than the so-called traditional that some fear has been swept aside. The book examines the evidence, biblical and other ancient sources, for what the early Christians did and why they did it. Baptism and other ancient sources, for instance, are substantially older than the so-called ‘traditional’ that some fear have their roots in soil older than that: those emerging in the first few hundred years. Paul Bradshaw

Growing up in the 50s and 60s could have been far more exciting than I ever realised possible at the time... Nigel Yates shows that the ‘swinging sixties’ was not a decade that appeared from nowhere, but was the child of the 1950s and had its roots way before that. He demonstrates that the post war changes ‘were driven by the upper and middle classes, through their respective younger generations’.

He shows how the churches changed between 1951 and 1969, how foreign influences broadened British culture, how male fantasies were met in the rise of strip clubs, girlie magazines, nudity onstage, and eye-watering films. Women’s Liberation, prosperity and contraception all played their part and Christians either protested against it like Mary Whitehouse or found ways of absorbing it like John Robinson. Television of course brought it all into everybody’s home. This can only be well researched background material for Readers’ preaching and teaching. A great nostalgia trip for some!

CHRISTINE MCMULLEN

The title puzzled a former mission partner until I recalled the old CMS promise to ‘endeavour by what I do, say and am, to commend the gospel of Christ’; then a recent sermon on 1 Peter 1:5 exhorted us all to live out the gospel in every circumstance. The historical, political and cultural background in which the early church grew is described here to give an overwhelming sense of a continuing yet victorious struggle. The good news was spread despite setbacks and the machinations of powerful leaders. Elsewhere there are reminders that mission is the responsibility of every member within a supportive network of the whole church. Based on lectures originally given in Lent 2010 to celebrate 250 years of Methodist mission in London, the final chapter contains valuable reflections for today’s church. The authors advocate ways to meet the challenge of mission in our post Christian ‘Big Society’. Teaching and equipping young and old with the fundamentals of faith and an understanding of the Christian gospel are emphasised. It is observed that modern worship songs often lack the theological content of older hymns. Whilst renewal courses are valuable, the need for sound biblical exposition remains. As lay theologians, Readers will be encouraged by this book, and, impelled by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to preach Christ cruised and continue to live out our faith wherever God sends us.

CYNTHIA WHITTLE

This book usesfully brings together some of the more recent advances in cosmology, evolutionary biology and physics and compares various scientific paradigms with the claims of religion. There is nothing new about this as such, but
Michael Meacher’s aim is firstly to indicate that neither science nor religious claims are as fixed and objective as many would think, and that as the aims of religion and science are different it doesn’t follow that the inconclusiveness of one is a signal for the other to fill the gaps. As he says in the final chapters, ‘what is needed for both quests is to shift their orthodoxies; science needs to allow that the universe is more teleological than post Darwinian thinking has permitted and a religious/theological mindset has to accept that religions and religious truths change.’

My problem with the book was that I was unsure who the readership is supposed to be. The publishers market it as ‘philosophy’, yet the first half of the book is taken up almost entirely with a survey of the origins of the universe, the birth of planet earth and the emergence of life and finally consciousness. Besides his favourite use of ‘postulate’, there wasn’t much philosophy here and a glance in the glossary indicates that the only ideas worth an entry are entirely scientific. The reader needs to have more than a basic philosophical knowledge. The second half of the book is more theological but here again there is an assumption that the reader will already know about liberal protestant developments since the late 18th century and accept them as being more rationally acceptable than their conservative alternatives. Besides the limitation of the glossary there is no index and the publishers have omitted of the glossary there is no index and the publishers have omitted...
who is willing to spend some effort on looking deeper into what they are doing Sunday by Sunday, and perhaps help their congregations understand it too, there is plenty of scope.

LIZ PACEY

Gospel in Life
Timothy Keller
Zondervan
£6.99 DVD
9780310328919

This excellent teaching DVD is subtitled ‘Grace Changes Everything,’ which sums up the focus of the sessions on this disc. Timothy Keller brings his evangelical roots to the subject of how we as Christians can live out the gospel. Each session is a ten minute monologue by the author with his key points helpfully displayed on screen. He looks at a variety of issues including how we relate to the cities in which we live; how we interact with the world of work and a superb look at how easy idolatry is in our society. The sessions do stand alone and would be useful for personal use but there is an accompanying study guide which was not supplied, but which I feel would be useful for small groups to make full use of this very good resource.

JANET BEER

Naked Surrender
Andrew Comiskey
IVP
£8.99 pbk
9781844744923

The ‘surrender’ of the title is in the first place surrender to God, then to the community of the Church, and finally to one's partner in the commitment of marriage. The subtitle ‘Coming Home to Our True Sexuality’ and the photo on the cover, show that this is a book about sex. Andrew Comiskey gives us a mix of theological reflection and narrative, illustrating his teaching from his own sexual journey, from promiscuous homosexuality to an enduring marriage and the journeys of six other people. There was much that I enjoyed. The author insists that God cares about the body, its passions and what we do with them. He places sex firmly in the context of a loving, committed relationship, condemning the abuse of power in its many forms. His use of quotations is ecumenical, including Pope John Paul II, Bonhoeffer and Henri Nouwen. It might be useful to a Reader in their personal life, but no genuinely homosexual person would want to read it. Its view of men and women is too stereotyped for my comfort, and I missed any awareness of the broad spectrum of human sexual orientation.

MARGARET BAXTER

The Bible in Politics
Richard Bauckham
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281061150

This handbook and casebook on how to read the Bible politically is very timely given the current political unrest in several countries. Richard Bauckham argues that this kind of reading is an art and not an exact science. To him it consists of two stages: the first is to enter into the time and world of the selected passages and then to bear in mind what God was teaching his people but to be very careful about its relevance and application, if any, to today’s very different world.

Back up his introduction are nine case studies which provide fascinating and skilful Bible study; his insights superbly phrased, his ideas persuasive and uplifting. I especially enjoyed his depiction of Rome as the fallen city Babylon in Revelation 18.

This is a book to treasure, which, once engaged with, will repay returning to and yield many valuable insights for preaching and pastoral awareness.

JEREMY HARVEY

The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians
Thomas O'Loughlan
SPCK
£14.99 pbk
9780281059539

This tiny document discovered in the late 19th century is the key to interpreting the Gospels and the Letters without accurately contextualising them and so we lose so much of what they mean.

This tiny document discovered in the late 19th century is the key to interpreting the Gospels and the Letters without accurately contextualising them and so we lose so much of what they mean.

APRIL McINTYRE

The Faith Once Entrusted to the Saints?
Geoffrey W. Grogan
IVP
£16.99 pbk
9781844744787

This is a conservative evangelical response to current areas of controversy. The writer examines five key areas, the nature of God, the cross ‘the challenge to penal substitution’, justification by faith, the Bible ‘the nature of its authority’ and biblical interpretation. It is an academic text, invigorating to read because the conventional positions and the critiques of more recent theories are set out with such clarity, and because of the scale of learning displayed. The writer affirms that we can never assume we have learned all the truth the Bible contains and that it is our responsibility to weigh new

the most authentic account of the Christian community of the first century.

O’Loughlan opens this document to the modern mind and helps us to see how it is linked to the Gospels and the NT letters. He gently suggests that the Gospels may echo the concerns and practice of the early community and by complementing this manual they define the source of the faith that the community is experiencing and promulgating through this practical text. I recommend this book to all who teach and preach in the church. It will give us the tools to further open the scriptures to all. I am ashamed to say that I was unfamiliar with the possible context of the Didache before reading this book but in further reading I find that the scholarly theological community have been using it for over a century to enlighten their understanding of the scriptures. If this book does nothing but open a door for the modern teachers of the church and they find and pass on the riches of the context of the New Testament then O’Loughlan will have fulfilled his purpose and done a great service to the church in our time.

DAVID NEILSON

The Bible in
Politics
Richard Bauckham
SPCK
£12.99 pbk
9780281061150

This handbook and casebook on how to read the Bible politically is very timely given the current political unrest in several countries. Richard Bauckham argues that this kind of reading is an art and not an exact science. To him it consists of two stages: the first is to enter into the time and world of the selected passages and then to bear in mind what God was teaching his people but to be very careful about its relevance and application, if any, to today’s very different world.

Back up his introduction are nine case studies which provide fascinating and skilful Bible study; his insights superbly phrased, his ideas persuasive and uplifting. I especially enjoyed his depiction of Rome as the fallen city Babylon in Revelation 18.

This is a book to treasure, which, once engaged with, will repay returning to and yield many valuable insights for preaching and pastoral awareness.

JEREMY HARVEY

The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians
Thomas O'Loughlan
SPCK
£14.99 pbk
9780281059539

This tiny document discovered in the late 19th century is the key to interpreting the Gospels and the Letters without accurately contextualising them and so we lose so much of what they mean.

This tiny document discovered in the late 19th century is the key to interpreting the Gospels and the Letters without accurately contextualising them and so we lose so much of what they mean.

APRIL McINTYRE

The Faith Once Entrusted to the Saints?
Geoffrey W. Grogan
IVP
£16.99 pbk
9781844744787

This is a conservative evangelical response to current areas of controversy. The writer examines five key areas, the nature of God, the cross ‘the challenge to penal substitution’, justification by faith, the Bible ‘the nature of its authority’ and biblical interpretation. It is an academic text, invigorating to read because the conventional positions and the critiques of more recent theories are set out with such clarity, and because of the scale of learning displayed. The writer affirms that we can never assume we have learned all the truth the Bible contains and that it is our responsibility to weigh new
insights. Having weighed them, his investigation does serve to confirm the conservative position. The implications for preaching are considered at the end of the chapters. This book will update, challenge and illuminate the Reader’s grasp of such central mysteries of the faith.

ERIC LEESE

The Reason for God
Timothy Keller
Hodder & Stoughton
DVD format
9780310330462

This DVD is based upon the New York Times bestseller of the same title and consists of six discussion sessions, chaired by the author, with a group of people who raise their doubts and objections to Christianity. Using literature, philosophy, real life experiences and the Bible, the group explores the truth of Christianity over the six sessions which last in total for two hours. Familiar questions are raised and addressed in each session, ‘Why does God allow suffering?’ and ‘What about other religions?’ for example. For Readers leading a house group or working with older secondary students this DVD could be useful even if only on a selective basis. The discussions are ably chaired and the content is wide ranging and well balanced with each session lasting about twenty minutes.

ROBERT BEVAN

And Finally
I am grateful for all those who take time out to read and review the books and DVDs, many providing us with a rich resource for our ministries. If you would you like to be part of the team reviewing books on a frequency to suit please do contact me on mrw.hurley@gmail.com. Two further Grove Booklets that arrived just before going to press are Christianity and Prostitution by Richard Clark and Supporting Young People Through Parental Break Up by Helen Tomblin and Pete English both retailing at £3.95.

In Memoriam

The deaths of the following Readers have been notified to us.

Bath & Wells
Nick Gulliford

Birmingham
Mr A T Crowther
Cyril Faulks
Susan Robin

Bristol
Patrick de Salis

Canterbury
Geoffrey Jameson
Carole Jenkins

Carlisle
Christopher Bennett
John Taylor
Ian Thompson

Chelmsford
Alan Peacock

Chester
Brian Maydew

Chichester
Bryan Nicholls

Ely
Gill Avern
R E Huband
John S Hullock
Felicity Littledyke

Gloucester
Brig. John Cooper

Guilford
Julian Inglis-Jones
Dr Bryan Wheeler
Michael Waide

Hereford
Albert Artwood

Lichfield
W B Ebdon

Norwich
John Wills

Portsmouth
Malcolm Lowe

Rochester
Ellis Lees

Southwark
Michael Witcomb

Truro
William Sommerville

Wakefield
Mr L Driver
Mrs R Jones
Marie Lewis
Shelley Wild
Gordon Geddes

a regular contributor to our Book Reviews section.

www.sarum.ac.uk • 01722 424827

May they rest in peace.

Liturgical Studies in Salisbury’s Cathedral Close

MA in Christian Liturgy
A study of pastoral, historical and theological approaches to Christian worship, directed by Dr Juliette Day.

Lecturers: Professor Paul Bradshaw, Dr Bridget Nichols, Professor Thomas O’Loughlin, Dr Alistair Stewart-Sykes, Professor Martin Stringer, Dr Phillip Tovey, Dr Thomas Whelan

Class- and home-based study.

“The MA in Christian Liturgy has really enriched my ministry by giving me a much deeper understanding of the services I lead as a Reader.”

FW, Diocese of London

www.sarum.ac.uk  •  01722 424827
So what exactly is rural?  

As someone who lives and works in a very rural area, I am very familiar with the joys and sorrows of rural life and ministry. Although it can be very tough at times, I certainly would not be anywhere else!

When I speak of rural I am of course thinking of the countryside as an ‘Escape to the Country’ dream place! So we all have different ideas about what ‘rural’ means.

I am fascinated by the BBC’s “Countryfile” which is a real hotch-potch of things. One minute we are watching modern recreational uses of ‘the great outdoors’ hang gliding, fell walking, etc and the next we are hearing about traditional historic breeds, hedge laying, foot trimming. We see new attractions for tourists, then the work of community groups or serious questions about things like transport or school provision. So ‘rural’ is many things and here are some rural facts and figures. They have been used with permission and can be found at [http://www.ruralmissions.org.uk/Groups/87917/Rural_Missions/Rural_Sunrise/Rural_Facts_and/Rural_Facts_and.aspx](http://www.ruralmissions.org.uk/Groups/87917/Rural_Missions/Rural_Sunrise/Rural_Facts_and/Rural_Facts_and.aspx)

So personally when I hear that term ‘rural’ I am not thinking of a youngster or the vast expanses in rural Kent I knew when I was thinking of the type of countryside as an ‘Escape to the Country’ dream place! So we all have different ideas about what ‘rural’ means.

As as editor I am in fairly regular contact with Betty Turner, our furthest flung Reader reader! She lives with her husband Howard in the Falkland Islands. In their newsletter earlier this year they write to bring us up to date about their lives there.

Betty and Howard are happy to hear from Readers who might like to learn more about their part of the world so they are happy for me to publish their email address. It is hbtturner@cwimail.fk

Betty and Howard Turner live on the Falkland Islands

As editor I am the only Reader at the cathedral and gives time to leading and helping with services; preaching and organising events.

They also remind us that oil and gas has been found in the waters around the islands and this will have political implications. Betty and Howard are still very happy to be there and feel very at home and their desire is to walk with Christ as he directs.

As editor it seems good to me that we should continue to pray for Betty and Howard as they work in such an isolated place. In particular they ask their friends to pray:

- Giving thanks for the continued work of the Seamen’s Mission and the churches in the islands; and for their good health.
- For a deepened commitment to God by Christians living in the islands, to each other and to see church growth there.
- Pray for their political situation.
- Pray for the safety of all who work at sea in their fishing, tourist and oil industries.

Betty and Howard are happy to hear from Readers who might like to learn more about their part of the world so they are happy for me to publish their email address. It is hbtturner@cwimail.fk
READING LIST AND OTHER RESOURCES

Rural Mission and Ministry: A recommended reading and resource list prepared by the Arthur Rank Centre is available in three parts: Core Published Resources; Supplementary Published Resources and Key Online Resources. This and plenty of other material can be found, together with information about the Arthur Rank Centre itself, can be found at www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

RURAL THEOLOGY ASSOCIATION

READING LISTS

and information about other resources, meetings and courses which are also available from the Rural Theology Association on their website at www.rural-theology.org.uk

The RTA also has regional groups some of which have websites. An excellent example of these can be found at www.hantsrural.org.uk

ACTION FOR COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ENGLAND

www.acre.org.uk

ACRE’s vision is that rural communities will increasingly take a leading role in ensuring the social, environmental and economic well-being of all their residents. They will do this in a way that provides for the present generation and also plans for future needs and future challenges. RCAN members are there to stimulate thinking, support local work and help turn aspirations into reality.

PARISH NURSING MINISTRIES UK

Parish Nursing Ministries UK (PNMUK) is a not-for-profit Christian organisation whose purpose is to maximise the well-being of society in community through three specific means. These are application of professional nursing skills to healthy living and coping with illness; response to people’s inner (spiritual) needs and mobilisation of ordinary members of church communities and beyond.

Parish Nurses are registered nurses with some community experience and work from local churches to develop a whole-person health ministry in the community. PNMUK provides and continues to develop training for registered nurses to become accredited Parish Nurses. They are engaged in development of the theology of health and well-being in articulating the spiritual component and value; and in identifying good practice working collaboratively with complementary organisations. PNMUK is multi-denominational and non-sectarian. Further information at www.parishnursing.org.uk/

RURAL MINISTRY TRAINING COURSES

www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/training/rural_ministry_training_courses

The Arthur Rank Centre (see left column) has been organising Rural Ministry Training Courses for over years and these continue to be popular and well-received. They cover a wide range of issues regarding life in the countryside and the role and mission of the church within the rural community. These include: Today’s rural context; How context shapes ministry; Rural mission; Worship in context.

The three day residential programme, organised in April/May and November, employs a variety of approaches which include talks, practical sessions, group work and a choice of workshops covering specific areas of relevance. It is designed for lay and ordained ministers across the denominations who may be entering a rural appointment for the first time, or who may already be in rural ministry but feel the need for a ‘refresher’. It attracts those who are keen to examine the challenges and opportunities that this ministry environment offers. Early booking is advised because of heavy demand. The next Rural Ministry Course dates are 1-3 November 2011.

THINK FOOD AND FARMING

www.thinkfoodandfarming.org.uk

Think Food and Farming is the exciting legacy project building on the successes of the Year of Food and Farming. It promotes healthy living by offering children and young people direct experience of the countryside, farming and food through growing and cooking activities, and visits to farms.

CHURCHES TOURISM ASSOCIATION

www.churchestourismassociation.info/sacred-routes/routes-and-trails

Amongst other things this website gives routes, trails and journeys, and has a number of articles about pilgrimage routes or sacred theme trails, including long-distance walking routes, cycleways, car trails and area- or thematically based church trails. There are also articles about churches, heritage and tourism, including recent research and strategic initiatives to develop the relationship between churches and visitors, enrich the visitor experience, and contribute to Britain’s visitor economy.

PILGRIMAGE INFORMATION

www.pilgrim.peterrobins.co.uk/wales/
www.pilgrimsprogress.org.uk/uk&ireland.htm
www.churchinwales.org.uk/llandaff/ministry/tourism/index.htm

CHURCHES TOURISM NETWORK WALES

www.ctnw.co.uk

HEREFORD CHURCHES

an example of an area tourism initiative

www.visitherefordshirechurches.co.uk/
Gazette of newly admitted and licensed Readers

LONDON
Admitted and Licensed 05 December 2010
Enid Barron .................................................. Ealing, St Stephen
Deborah Currens ........................................ North Wembley, St Cuthbert
Alison Wood .................................................. East Acton

SHEFFIELD
25 September 2010
Licensed to serve as Warden of Readers
Revd R B Parker

Admitted to the Office of Reader with Licensing to follow in Parishes
Norah Brook .................................................. Wales, St John the Baptist
Nicholas Edmondson .................................... Pitsmoor, Christ Church
June Fox ........................................................ Hackenthalorpe, Christ Church
Paul Mellars ................................................... Tankersley
Mark Osborne ................................................ Crookes, St Timothy
Judith Roberts ............................................. Psalter Lane, Sheffield, St Andrew
Peter Smithers ............................................ Greystones, St Gabriel
Mary Tones ................................................... Greasbrough, St Mary

Gleanings

Two Readers have contacted me to respond to Gleanings in the Spring 2011 issue. A Reader from a northern diocese wrote to me to say that he had read the review of Living with Jesus and noticed that the reviewer commented ‘one of the joys of being a Reader is the opportunities we have of moving across parish and deanery boundaries to serve.’... He says he has never met a Reader who ‘has had this happy experience’. Another person, from a diocese further south, tells me that she has had opportunity to experience different aspects of Anglican spirituality by a number of long interregna in her deanery and she has enjoyed and learnt from the opportunities this has presented. She now has dual Anglican and Methodist membership, the latter giving her further preaching opportunities. So my thanks to these two for contacting me; I enjoy discovering what you think.

Meanwhile I have also heard from two people about the rather controversial article submitted by the UK Border Agency about preventing sham marriages. I am sure that this is a very complicated issue which obviously touches part of the ministry in areas of high immigration and maybe we will hear more about this in the future?

I have recently seen the annual statistical returns of Reader ministry that are presented to our AGM, and subsequently published in the Church of England Year Book.

Statistics, so we are told, can be used to prove almost anything – but some interesting figures stood out. For example, the ratio between men and women Readers is now almost exactly 50/50. This bears out the impression I had already. However, among Readers-in-training, women outnumber men substantially, which again does not surprise me.

But the really disturbing figure (which I have to say does not really surprise me either) is that the number of Readers under the age of 40 is just 1% of the total. The number under 30 is best described as infinitesimal. Why? We have a Gospel to proclaim, don’t we?

I hesitate to offer reasons. They can hardly avoid being critical of the Reader movement as it now stands. The church has changed a lot since we who are over 60 – and frankly, that means nearly all of us – first joined it. I wonder, slightly despairingly, if we have moved enough with the times. In some places this is a criticism of the church as a whole, not just the Readers. The average ages of congregations and clergy are rising too, which may mean that the people of Christ as a whole may be failing to proclaim the Good News as well as they might, or in a way which may appeal to younger generations are motivated to respond. But the age profile of Readers is actually worse still, and we are supposed to have a particular role in proclaiming this news.

However, it isn’t all gloom. The Spirit may be pointing a way forward through the changes that have led to two very different areas of growth in our Church – the rise in charismatic worship and the increase in attendances at our cathedrals. Neither of these are ‘Reader areas’ as we have understood them from a perspective that may have been a little too conservative, I dare to suggest. But if we are trying to expand and co-ordinate all forms of licensed lay ministry, we may involve en route those who are not now licensed but perhaps should be, even if in a slightly different area of ministry.

I don’t offer a solution, but commend the situation to your prayers.

Alan Wakely
Secretary,
Central Readers’ Council
Free online, multimedia resource
An essential resource for Reader ministry

- Covers twelve topics called ‘rooms’ ideal for a through-the-year preaching series
- Material for each topic is available for three levels of learning from basic to advanced
- Can be used in various ways to resource small groups for discipleship
- Useful for new Christians and Confirmation preparation
- Includes a library of additional resources

More than 3,500 pages
More than 6.5 hours of original video
More than 7,500 weblinks

Foundations21 is now the best free resource for people who want to think about and grow in faith, as individuals or in groups. Its variety, flexibility and multimedia approach make it an amazing tool for today’s church.

The Revd Dr Keith Beech-Gruneberg, Director of Studies, Oxford Diocese

Join now for free at www.foundations21.org.uk