

The Report of the Rural Mission Learning Review

(commissioned by the Vision and Strategy team of the Church of England)

Rev Dr Richard Tiplady, Brendan Research

Review aims

Support the development of a learning community around rural mission by providing a review of six completed evaluation reports and four ongoing projects.

Identify the key learning from these reports in the following areas:

- The strategic design of projects that focus on making disciples in rural areas
- Revitalisation or growth in rural parishes and fresh expressions of church
- Thematic areas of focus for a learning community

The six completed diocesan evaluations

- Carlisle, "God For All" Strategy Implementation 2017-2019
- Hereford, *Growing Intergenerational Mission* 2017-2022
- Salisbury, Tending The Seedlings: Rural Hope 2017-2023
- Exeter, Unearthing The Treasure: Growing the Rural Church 2016-2023
- Winchester, Going Fast or Going Far? Mission Action Programme Phase 1 2017-2023
- Bath and Wells, *Pioneer Project* 2017-2024

The four ongoing projects

- Southwell and Nottingham, The Potting Shed, 2017-2025
- St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Lightwave: Growing God in the Countryside, 2018-2026
- Hereford, Youth Hubs pilot project, 2023-2026
- Winchester, *Growing Rural Parishes Programme (2023-2028)*



- Not all the projects or reports had a uniquely rural focus
- The projects had very different foci and priorities, making direct comparison difficult. This worked against the desire for consolidated learning about strategy from across the projects.

It was difficult to identify transferable outcomes from the projects, but a lot has been learned about creating a sense of possibility and a renewal of hope, albeit one that will take time to bear fruit.

Presentation outline

- Rural Realities: What Do The Reports Tell Us About The Rural Context?
- Implications for the Six Bold Outcomes in rural areas
- Conclusions and Recommendations for the Learning Community



Issues relating to the rural context

- Context matters
- Parallels between rural ministry and urban outer estates ministry
- Resource constraint
- "Church culture and structures are robust in defending what they know"

Rural Realities

Issues relating to discipleship, mission and church

- Growth was 'subtle' or less than expected
- Contact, participation and discipleship
- Tensions between existing church members and new people



Leadership issues

- Collaborative ministry
- Lack of available lay leadership
- "Identify your stars and what's on their heart"



Project management issues

- Clear project aims and focus
- Struggling locations or those with most potential for growth?
- Don't rush your recruitment



Measurement and metrics

- Five-year project timescales are too short
- Expectations regarding growth are often unrealistic
- Different metrics for 'success'?



Key learning

- How best to manage and release change agents?
- Investment in people is a priority

One Vision

A Church for the whole nation which is Jesus Christ centred, and shaped by, the five marks of mission. A church that is simpler, humbler, bolder.

Three Priorities

- To become a church of missionary disciples where all God's people are free to live the Christian life, wherever we spend our time Sunday to Saturday.
- To be a church where mixed ecology is the norm –
 where every person in England has access to an
 enriching and compelling community of faith by
 adding new churches and new forms of Church to
 our parishes, cathedrals, schools and chaplaincies.
- To be a church that is younger and more diverse.

A church for everyone through:

- **Doubling the number of children and young active disciples** in the Church of England by 2030.
- A Church of England which fully represents the communities we serve in age and diversity.

A pathway for everyone into an accessible and contextual expression of church through:

- A parish system revitalised for mission so churches can reach and serve everyone in their community.
- Creating ten thousand new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital.

Empowered by:

- All Christians in the Church of England envisioned, resourced and released to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and world.
- All local churches, supported by their diocese, becoming communities and hubs for initial and ongoing formation.

A church for everyone through:

- Doubling the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030.
- A Church of England which fully represents the communities we serve in age and diversity.

A pathway for everyone into an accessible and contextual expression of church through:

- A parish system revitalised for mission so churches can reach and serve everyone in their community.
- Creating ten thousand new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital.

Empowered by:

- All Christians in the Church of England envisioned, resourced and released to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and world.
- All local churches, supported by their diocese, becoming communities and hubs for initial and ongoing formation.

Two Bold Outcomes

A pathway for everyone into an accessible and contextual expression of church through:

- A parish system revitalised for mission
- Creating ten thousand new Christian communities

A Mixed Ecology

Six Moderate Outcomes in rural areas?

- Report titles: Tending The Seedlings, Unearthing The Treasure, Going Fast or Going Far
- Much of the impact was small, below expectations, and very provisional
- They do speak of potential, of green shoots, of first fruits

The projects began to open people up to the possibility of something new and different. They represent the start of a journey that may well take some time to complete. Conclusions and Recommendations for the Learning Community

Think in terms of people and process, not methods and strategy

Create a sense that the rural context is still valuable. Possibility, creativity, and confidence

Leadership development: "look for people who are already doing something"

Mixed ecology of parish and pioneering

Conclusions and Recommendations for the Learning Community

Resource constraints – "What is that in your hand?" (Exodus 4:2)

"Develop and adapt as you go"

Is there space for the truly innovative?

People, not Programmes