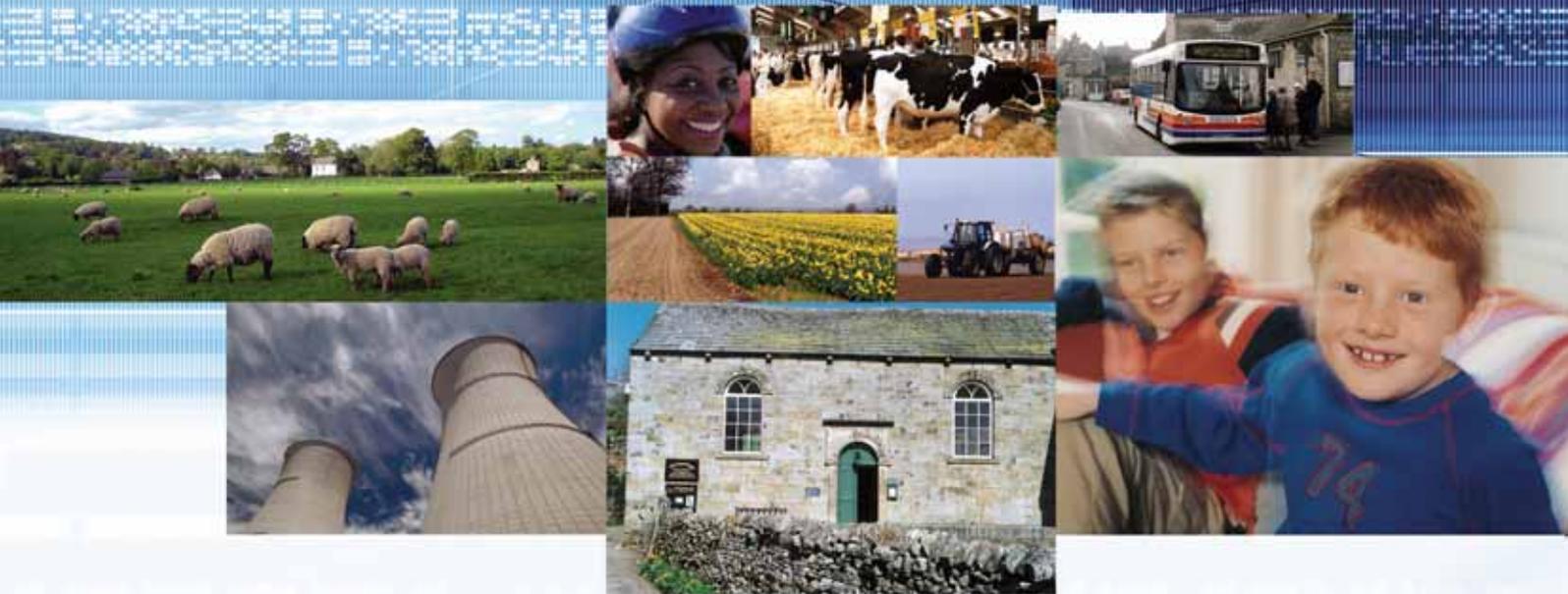


Presence



**A workbook to help promote and sustain
an effective Christian presence in villages**



PRESENCE

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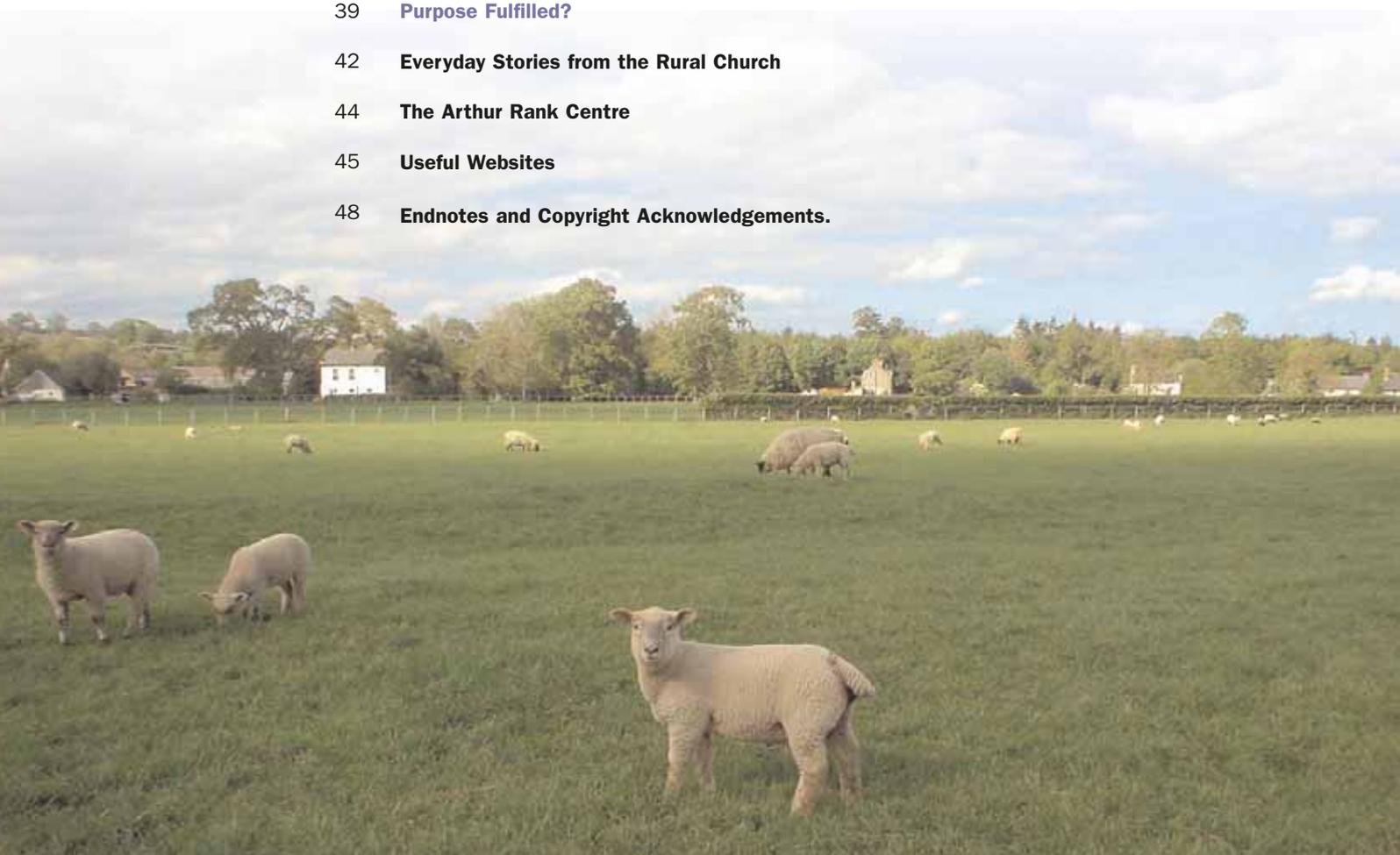


The task of promoting an effective Christian presence in the communities of Britain is now beyond any one of the Christian denominations and therefore an effective Christian presence will always be ecumenical. (Presence p 14)

While this is a document prepared for Methodists and therefore uses Methodist language, we offer it to all Christian communities, both rural and urban, for adaptation and use.

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FOREWORD

Presence seems an appropriate title for a publication to encourage rural churches and rural Christians. It affirms that being is as important as doing. The low-key faithfulness of many rural people is worthy of celebration and should not be discounted in the face of more up-front Christian witness, with larger numbers and grander venues.

We speak of God as being 'omnipresent'. His people, too, are called to live and love in every kind of community – not least the rural areas of Britain. His presence, often mediated through human agency, working, praying, supporting, encouraging, teaching, challenging, is vital to the well-being of our increasingly fragmented communities and our threatened countryside. The Church is called to live out Christ's reconciling mission in standing up for justice and creating social cohesion.

At the Methodist Conference in Ipswich in 2001, there was a strong emphasis on rural issues and the rural church. Two key resolutions were passed:

"The Conference expresses its solemn commitment to rural communities, directing the Connexional Team and strongly encouraging districts and circuits to promote an effective Christian presence in villages, examining the balance of resource allocation to achieve this." and "The Conference challenges Methodists to share their riches and insights and to explore with other Christians the most effective means of being the Church in rural communities".

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Presence has been written to follow up these resolutions. Its aim is to help local churches, circuits and districts to explore different ways of being church in a rural setting and to dare to experiment in order to reach out to a wider constituency than current regular chapel-goers. It is not only about 'being there' but about being there in creative ways, living out *Our Calling*. Many of the examples quoted are from the English context, where the authors currently serve, but we believe that the principles spelt out are widely applicable.

The Chairs whose districts are predominantly rural in character have worked with me as URC/Methodist Rural Officer-Consultant and first David Deeks, Co-ordinating Secretary for Church and Society then Anthea Cox, Co-ordinating Secretary for Public Life and Social Justice, on the preparation of this publication. David Emison, Chair of the Cumbria District, has done the lion's share of the writing and editing. His paper *What is an effective Christian presence?* is at its heart. The sections *Rural Britain* and *The Rural Church* draw, with permission, from *Sowing the Seed*, the publication of the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber¹. We commend this as further reading and thank Graham Brownlee and Howard Petch for allowing us to use it so extensively.

Jenny Carpenter

(URC/Methodist Rural Officer – Consultant)

COMMENDATIONS

"At the start of the twenty-first century rural communities in Britain are faced with an increasing range of changes and challenges that demand our serious attention if we are to discover real opportunities therein.

Presence states: 'The presence of God is to be realised where we are; in the struggles and joys of our everyday lives. The presence of God and the reality of God's love are to be seen and borne witness to in the ordinary everyday stories and experiences of our lives as they are lived out amongst our neighbours.' Thus it is that an effective Christian presence 'is needed in the many and varied communities that human beings inhabit.'

It is my hope that this publication will play an important part in enabling us to discover effective patterns of Christian presence. I warmly commend it for study in the hope it will stimulate action that will be blessed of God."

The Revd Will Morrey

President of the Methodist Conference 2004/05

"I commend the Methodist Church on publishing *Presence*. As well as promoting the message of the Gospel, the Church continues to play a major role in binding rural communities together, helping them to remain sustainable and developing solutions to their problems. From my own community work experience I know how important this is and in many small villages the church or chapel is the only remaining public building or community facility. The Church also has a key role in helping people faced with poverty and social exclusion: a special problem in scattered communities which are generally well-off but where those without transport – especially the young and the old – can be particularly isolated. As this booklet recognises, the churches also need to work with other public service providers, local authorities and parish councils, to develop an integrated approach to meeting the changing needs of rural people and communities."

The Rt Hon Alun Michael, MP

Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality

"Some of the problems of rural communities today stem from a lack of understanding by the non-rural part of society about countryside issues; and from a failure to appreciate the delicate interrelationship between farming and rural businesses and interests in general. Often when communities work together they have found that the differences that they had expected to dominate tend to disappear; the problems that seemed insuperable become bearable and even soluble; and critically hope is restored and spirits rise. This workbook seeks to encourage Christians to recognise and play their part in enabling this to happen."

Ben Gill

ex President, National Farmers' Union

"The challenges facing the rural church are many and varied. So are the opportunities. The Christian presence as it lives out its calling to be priestly, prophetic and evangelising, can energise and transform its local community. This series of group studies, well illustrated with stories, ideas and photographs, challenges rural Christians to deepened engagement in prayer, thought and action. I commend this publication for use by rural churches locally and at wider levels where policy and financial decisions affecting our rural communities are taken".

The Rt Revd Michael Langrish

Bishop of Exeter

Chairman of the Rural Affairs Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England

• RURAL BRITAIN •



WHAT IS RURAL?

Britain has an extraordinarily diverse countryside. No fewer than 159 distinct broad areas of landscape character have been identified in England alone. Over the centuries coastal areas have been eroded and villages have been wiped out by the Black Death or by landlords developing arcadian landscapes. The countryside we see today is the result of thousands of years of work by farmers and landowners. Draining marshes, cutting down woodland, and clearing fields was part of a continual process of change and development as the population gradually grew and agricultural production increased. Revolutionary changes in agricultural techniques and the enclosure movement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries altered and regulated the landscape still further. As industry grew, former villages mushroomed into industrial towns and new, expanding towns absorbed earlier village communities. The Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions coincided with the growth and spread of Methodism with which they were closely related. In the countryside the village chapel became the place of worship for the farm labourers, quarrymen, miners, fishermen and their families, while the parish church was identified more closely with the landowning class.

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Until about 1850, more people lived in rural communities than in towns. These rural communities were rooted in farming, self-reliance and often the fierce independence of their members. It has been suggested that this historic link with the countryside is the basis of a deep-seated urge in people to return to their roots. How far this is the case and how far the search for a rural idyll is the result of more recent romantic poetry, literature and television programmes is debatable.

Across the British Isles the countryside continues to change. For example, in England the latest Countryside Agency vision acknowledges the traditional view of the countryside whilst pointing to dramatic changes yet to come:

"Farmed countryside is people's traditional picture of rural England – a landscape of fields and farm buildings dotted with villages, hamlets, woodlands and open space. Over the next 20 years farming will remain the spine of much of the countryside, but not farming as we have known it. There will be two big stories: new economic opportunities for farming and the diversification of land management...

*A twin-track pattern of agriculture will, therefore emerge; on the one hand, highly capitalised, highly mechanised, highly specialised, large scale, often oriented to world markets; on the other hand, smaller-scale, high value-added, and focussed on local and niche markets."*²

Similar visionary statements are coming from the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

In a strange way, commonly held images of rural life overlook the realities – both past and present. For the greater part of history and for most people, the realities of rural life were hard work, cold, hunger, dampness, discomfort and uncertainty! Sweeping changes and innovations in farming continually affected the landscape. This was especially true of the rapid change post 1945 when, in the wake of the deprivations of the Second World War, the Government's emphasis was on the need for expanded food production at lower cost. It is against this background of continuous change that the present situation needs to be understood.

WHO IS RURAL?

There is no nationally accepted definition of what constitutes rural though there is general agreement that the term describes an area with settlements of less than 10,000 inhabitants. Increasingly the term is being refined so that DEFRA now distinguishes between remote rural and accessible rural communities. The Countryside Agency distinguishes between commuter countryside, country towns, farmed countryside and ex-industrial areas.³ Clearly market towns, as centres of rural life, may have populations in excess of 10,000 yet cannot be separated from their rural hinterland. The Methodist circuit pattern which, except in major conurbations, normally centres on one or more significant market towns, acknowledges this reality.

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Rural areas are shaped by those who sustain and manage the countryside; landowners, farmers and foresters. 75% of the countryside in the UK is presently held under agricultural usage yet, in 2000, only 1.9% of the UK population was employed in agriculture, forestry or fishing.⁴

Patterns of farming and agricultural employment differ throughout the United Kingdom. In the north and west of England and in Wales farms are more heavily dependent on family labour. The larger arable farms in the south and east tend to be more flexible in their use of hired labour. In the 18 years up to 2002, the number of full-time farmers nationally decreased by 20% and the number of part time farmers more than doubled.⁵ Even between 1999 and 2000, the number of full-time farmers went down from 177,000 to 164,000 and the number of part-time farmers increased from 179,000 to 193,000.⁶ This reflects a trend towards more part-time farming, hobby farming and farmers working by themselves to maintain the farm business.



• RURAL BRITAIN •

Over a quarter of farms no longer pass on to sons or daughters when the present farmer retires. Fewer young people are prepared to enter the profession. The majority of farmers are in the 45–54 age bracket.⁷

In some areas of rural Britain tourism is a major factor in the local economy. Tourism supports an increasing number of businesses and jobs in rural areas. The low wage economy traditionally associated with the tourism industry together with the lack of affordable housing in rural areas often leads to staff and skills shortages. Many farming families are supplementing their income, often in very creative ways, by diversifying into tourism.



A growing number of people are moving into the countryside from urban areas. Some of these still commute to work in urban areas whilst others have retired. This is in contrast to the indigenous rural community who either work in the countryside or may have to commute to urban areas. 'Counter urbanisation', whereby urban commuters and retirees replace those who can no longer afford to live or find work in rural areas, has shifted the social balance. Anyone who has worked in rural communities will recognise the basic difference between 'locals' and 'incomers'. Typically, 'locals' belong to and identify with the community but may feel no strong need to get involved actively in community affairs. 'Incomers' often seek acceptance by the community through active participation and getting things done. The growth in the number of 'incomers' is a major factor in the changed identity of many rural villages. Rural communities are ageing as the young move out, unable to afford homes or find work. Francis and Henderson⁸ lists the characteristics of rural communities, citing conservatism, self-sufficiency and self-help. Incomers may be part of the problem of community development and cohesion but they can also be part of the solution.

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Rural communities have long memories and it may take generations to heal rifts and divisions caused by seemingly slight disagreements or *'faux pas'*. At the same time, recent research on social capital and the voluntary sector in rural Britain⁹ emphasises the safety net that rural communities depend on to manage risks. Family links are still important and friends rally round. Rural residents are more likely to give time and effort to voluntary organisations than those living in urban areas but there are fewer links to institutions. There are also lower levels of partnership development in rural areas. There is less diversity among rural groups and sometimes a reluctance to recognise, face and deal with the difficult issues – racism, poverty, domestic violence, drugs or social exclusion.

Town dwellers often see the fact that animals are raised for slaughter as a paradox and are therefore unable to recognise the farmer's deep commitment to the welfare of animals. The majority of farmers have that commitment and it is reinforced both by Government policy and European legislation. Farmers and other country dwellers often feel that government policy-making is too heavily influenced by the urban agenda and by people who have little understanding of, or sympathy for, those who live in the countryside.

Rural areas are not simply the concern of those who live in them. The interdependence of urban and rural areas was dramatically illustrated during the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease [FMD] in 2001. There remains a need to acknowledge the importance of rural areas for everyone, and of our shared responsibilities as stewards and custodians of the countryside. We need to attach more value to the archaeological and architectural heritage held in our landscape's rich natural and built environment. The traditional activities and celebrations of rural church and community life are important threads in the rich cultural tapestry of life in Britain. All these are being threatened by current social and economic changes. Positive action is needed to ensure their continuation while, at the same time, we discover new ways of forming and sustaining community.

THE RURAL CHURCH

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Christian churches still constitute the principal representation of faith communities in the countryside. They are a distinctive part of the physical landscape and a feature of rural life. In many villages, along with the Anglican parish church there is also a chapel, most frequently Methodist. More modest in scale, it is still a significant and valued part of the scene. Often located at the heart of communities and engaging directly with them, the ongoing action of the churches to champion the poor, supply the needy, educate, and inform, is the outworking of their mission.

The parish has been the centre of self-sufficient, self-contained governance in rural areas for centuries. The pattern of parish churches was well established by medieval times. Not only were the churches often the largest and most splendid buildings in settlements, they were also the centre of communal life. In Scotland, following the Reformation, the parish church continued to exercise a comprehensive rural ministry. Early Scottish Methodism tended to be revivalist in nature and its later development has been confined to urban areas. In England and Wales religious expression became more diverse in the seventeenth century with the growth and development of the nonconformist denominations and other groups such as the Quakers. Churches and Chapels of all denominations and religious sects were added to the landscape especially in the nineteenth century. Christian concern for the disadvantaged was often expressed in the building of schools, hospitals and almshouses, many of which are still to be seen today. Primitive Methodism and, in the South West of England the Bible Christians, were particularly significant in areas where mining and quarrying were creating new employment opportunities. In rural Wales the Calvinistic Methodist revival focussed on Howell Harris and the

community at Trefeca similarly had widespread influence. The second half of the twentieth century saw the closure of many rural places of worship, and a marked decline in Church membership both in the countryside and in the town. This has not necessarily diminished the strong sense of ownership of church and chapel by people who are part of the community but who rarely attend worship.

This Christian inheritance of history and architecture provides many cultural attractions and has the potential to contribute further to the rural tourism economy. It also offers the churches scope to share their faith in imaginative ways, especially with visitors.

The way in which the churches sought to engage with rural issues in the late twentieth century is particularly interesting. The two consultations carried out in the Diocese of Hereford in 1976 and 1986 are impressive examples of the Church seeking to engage with rural problems.¹⁰ These reports gave detailed evidence of the parish perspective and preceded the decision to set up the Archbishop's Commission on Rural Areas (ACORA). The resulting ACORA report *Faith in the Countryside* published in 1990 was part of the gradually growing awareness of the particular problems facing rural areas. It recognised that the identity of rural communities was changing, and that the churches had a role in building and sustaining community:

“A community is one whose people draw together to express their relatedness by focussing on things that they have in common. Traditionally, this used to be centred around the land, and around farming as an activity, a work pattern and a way of life. Yet any group which shares concerns, norms, patterns of mutual support, is a community. So it is possible to build communities which look very different from those of the past and yet which give people space to grow and be enriched.”¹¹

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The report recognised that the church can be a catalyst to bring indigenous rural dweller and ‘incomer’ together, in what are now very different kinds of communities, for instance commuter villages and retirement communities. Government is increasingly recognising that faith communities have a role in creating ‘cohesive communities’ in which no one is excluded and everyone has equal opportunities.¹²

Faith in the Countryside stressed that a primary Christian principle is respect for the whole created order and a concern for our fellow human beings throughout the world. Creation is given to us on trust. As trustees or custodians, we are all responsible for its stewardship. Farming parables and metaphors recur throughout Christian teachings, but what do we feel about farming? Most people are now separated by four or five generations from actually living in the countryside and, for many, the perception of a link between the countryside and their food has been lost. However, farming remains vital for everyone and there is increasing awareness throughout society of the issues associated with GM food, organic food, animal welfare, and sustainable farming.

Recent events in the countryside have raised the profile of rural issues, not least following the 2001 Foot and Mouth epidemic. The rural church was particularly active at this time, providing effective pastoral and practical support in many different parts of the country. So while many rural congregations are declining in numbers, many are also deeply involved in local communities. There are still many opportunities for churches to serve their communities and witness to their faith. Christian people need to refocus the Church's mission to serve the needs of rural communities at this time of uncertainty. We need to turn the threat of uncertainty into an opportunity for outreach and support.

The countryside is changing rapidly. In the midst of all this stands the church – present, active, struggling. The church buildings are often among the oldest in the community. Their story is woven into the fabric of the settlement and they remain central to its life. The congregations are made up of local people and sometimes recent incomers who see and experience the impact of change on their own lives and on the lives of their neighbours. How can the church discover new ways to support those experiencing fundamental change? How can the rural church, whilst facing enormous challenges itself, continue to serve the whole community including the disadvantaged and the excluded?

The churches have a mission to worship God and to serve their neighbour. Part of this role is to help people to make sense of the issues facing them, by hearing, listening, understanding and responding. In partnership with other agencies, churches are becoming increasingly important links in the delivery of some services traditionally provided by local and central government. In many areas involvement in community development is using a more significant part of the Church's time and resources. In ways that are locally appropriate, our rural churches are working to assist local people to achieve their full potential. Sometimes called 'capacity building', this means helping people to develop skills, confidence and knowledge. Churches can also enable the voice of rural communities to be heard by speaking out on policies and economic decisions which affect the countryside. One way in which they can do this is by becoming active members of Rural Strategic Partnerships to work with local authorities and the voluntary sector in rural community development.



SUSTAINING THE RURAL CHURCH



Between 1995 and 2001, some 650 – 700 Methodist church buildings were closed, many of them in rural areas.¹³ The rapid decline in church attendance and membership that lies behind these statistics is not restricted to the Methodist Church but is reflected in all the major denominations in Britain.

In the Methodist Church our mission policy is often limited to short term assessments of what is possible and to the maintenance of what is there already rather than to the development of mission and outreach. What if we look 25 years ahead? What kind of Christian presence do we believe will be appropriate for villages and what shape of presence do we want to see? If we could agree on a vision for the long-term future then all the decisions we take now about finance, buildings, personnel and patterns of congregational life would be determined by that vision.

For some, the future lies in maintaining strong centres of Christian worship and witness in the towns and larger villages. Those who hold this vision argue that we should close small village chapels and churches and concentrate all our energies and resources in larger centres of population. If this is our vision then we need to move speedily, realise our remaining assets in the villages, concentrate our ministry, and build these strong centres. Many who hold this view would go further and insist that such centres should be ecumenical rather than denominational.

The vision behind this publication is very different. In its debate on rural issues the Methodist Conference of 2001 passed the following resolution: *"The Methodist Church expresses its solemn commitment to rural communities, directing the Connexional Team and strongly encouraging districts and circuits to promote an effective Christian presence in villages, examining the balance of resource allocation to do this."*¹⁴ The resolution springs from a deep conviction that every community, if it is to be whole, balanced and healthy, needs at its heart a committed group of Christians. An effective Christian presence will be one in which a priestly, prophetic and evangelising ministry is exercised.

In 25 years time, if we have been able to realise the vision, in some village communities we shall have retained our church building(s) but not in all. In some communities there will be a complementary Christian presence, i.e. a number of churches complementing each other's ministry, but in others there will be a single ecumenical presence. In some the local church will gather together for worship on Sundays but in others it will meet for mid-week worship and prayer.

• SUSTAINING THE RURAL CHURCH •

The churches will be local and led by lay people but enabled by ordained ministers who will be itinerant rather than parish-based. The ministers will move between the congregations enabling, training and constantly reminding each congregation who and whose they are and helping the church to grow spiritually, theologically and practically. These churches will be the keepers and sharers of the story of God's grace in Christ and a sign in their community of the kind of people God calls all of us to be. They will celebrate their place in the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church on earth and in heaven. They will enjoy the rich heritage of the story of the people of God and they will affirm that they belong to the exciting, growing and dynamic community of the World Church.

The use of the word 'church' is important when we think about alternative patterns of presence. A church is more than a fellowship group. People belong to fellowship groups for prayer, mutual encouragement, learning and support whereas "the Church exists to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission"¹⁵. Of course we all need mutual encouragement, we all need to learn more about our faith and we all need support in living out our discipleship – but the primary calling of the church is to be there for others and to build community.

There is no more powerful argument for promoting "an effective Christian presence in villages" than the life and ministry of Jesus as described in the gospels. When God chose to reveal himself to his world he did so in Jesus of Nazareth. St John tells us that "he made his home among us and we saw his glory"¹⁶ The presence of God is to be realised where we are; in the struggles and joys of our everyday lives. The presence of God and the reality of God's love is to be seen and borne witness to in the ordinary everyday stories and experiences of our lives as they are lived out among our neighbours.

12

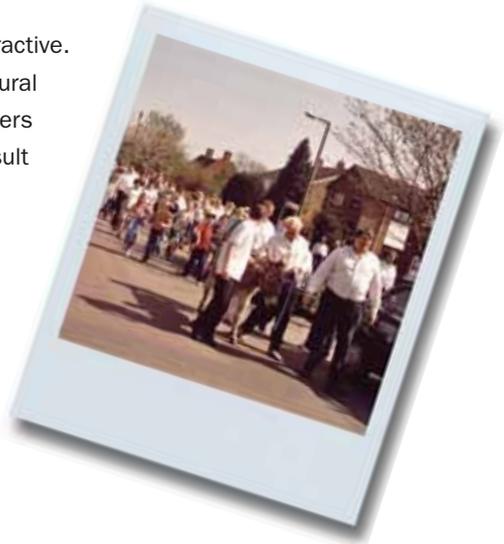


• SUSTAINING THE RURAL CHURCH •

Until recently there has been no stated connexional policy on the ministry of the Methodist Church in rural areas. As a result, decisions have been made that have led to the neglect and inevitable closure of many village churches. Often these decisions have been dictated by the larger and financially stronger churches in town and suburb.

Many presbyters and deacons perceive rural ministry as unattractive. As a consequence of this it is difficult to station ministers in rural appointments. Without appropriate training and support ministers can find rural appointments demanding yet unfulfilling. The result of this experience is often stress, frustration and disappointment. Members of rural churches frequently feel misunderstood, undervalued and under-resourced.

The overwhelming expectation of many within our churches is that the primary purpose of worship and fellowship is to bring a sense of personal fulfilment, support and well-being to the individual. In many Methodist churches there is little understanding of the importance of '*presence*'.



- The belief that worship, prayer and the celebration of the sacraments offered faithfully and lovingly in the heart of a community enriches everyone is under-developed and as a consequence under-valued
- The importance of 'the sacred space' is neglected and yet many people crave silence and stillness in the midst of the frenetic demands of their daily lives
- The growing demand for simple rituals to express the sorrows and joys of human experience such as: the lighting of candles, the writing of prayer requests, and the laying of flowers, goes unrecognised and yet it is an authentic expression of popular spirituality
- The confidence that our faith story has an authenticity and power to communicate in every culture and every new generation is weak and therefore we do not face the challenge of finding new and imaginative ways of telling it and celebrating it
- We know and affirm that Christian discipleship lived out in the routines and seasons of everyday life is the most powerful and effective means of witness and yet we often deny ourselves effective opportunities for mutual support

An effective Christian presence is needed in the many and varied communities that human beings inhabit. These include not only urban, suburban and rural neighbourhood communities but also, for example, the communities of the workplace, leisure centre and mutual interest. Each of the following group study sessions explores different aspects of what it means to promote an effective Christian presence in the communities of rural Britain but the principles behind the whole document could be applied equally to every human community.

GROUP STUDY 1



14

WHAT IS AN EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN PRESENCE?

In its debate on rural issues the Methodist Conference of 2001 passed the following resolution: "The Methodist Church expresses its solemn commitment to rural communities, directing the connexional team and strongly encouraging districts and circuits to promote an effective Christian presence in villages, examining the balance of resource allocation to do this."¹⁷ The resolution springs from a deep conviction that every community, if it is to be whole, balanced and healthy, needs at its heart a committed group of Christians.

The task of promoting an effective Christian presence in the communities of Britain is now beyond any one of the Christian denominations and therefore an effective Christian presence will always be ecumenical. In some communities this will be a complementary presence but in others a denominational presence that is open, welcoming and affirming of all. In some communities it will be a united presence bringing together the energies, insights and resources of its various traditions into one church.

An effective Christian presence may or may not be building centred and may or may not be a Sunday presence.

An effective Christian presence will be one in which a priestly, prophetic and evangelising ministry is exercised.



PRIESTLY

- offering to God: adoration, praise, gratitude, penitence and intercession on behalf of and for the whole community
- celebrating the story of God's self-giving and redeeming love in word and sacrament
- making known through its presence and its life the creating, redeeming and sustaining God revealed in Jesus Christ and known through the Holy Spirit
- demonstrating the reality of God's purpose to reconcile all things to himself in relationships of acceptance and forgiveness
- reaching out to the community in acts of grace, love and kindness

PROPHETIC

- accepting and challenging others to obey the call to Christ-like living
- setting before the church and the world the values of the Kingdom of God
- interpreting those values into the every day life of the local community
- recognising and challenging injustice
- standing alongside, empowering and enabling the oppressed and vulnerable
- challenging people to recognise their responsibility to the world community



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EVANGELISING

- interpreting the story of God's love for every community and every generation
- witnessing to what God can do in the life of individuals and communities
- setting the claims of Jesus before people and challenging them to a response
- enabling a gracious encounter with the God whose redeeming love is for everyone
- creating and maintaining welcoming communities where people can be nurtured in discipleship



Bible Study

Luke 4:14 – 30

The greater part of Jesus' life was spent in the small towns and villages around Galilee. Many knew him as the carpenter's son; they knew his mother and his brothers and sisters. It was here that Jesus began his ministry and it was in these communities that he told his stories. Jesus often illustrated his teaching and found inspiration for his parables from his experience of village life.

It would have been much easier for Jesus to begin his ministry where he wasn't known but he chose Galilee where he had been brought up and where nothing about his life could be hidden.

It is much easier to be anonymous Christians, getting into our cars on Sunday mornings and worshipping in the town church ten miles away. It is much more difficult being identified as gospel people in our own village. If we are to follow the pattern of Jesus we must live out our discipleship where we are known and where we can be held accountable to each other and our neighbours for our discipleship.

Grange Farm
Heathlands

Dear George,

We are looking forward to your visit to Heathlands next Sunday when you will be leading our morning worship.

There will only be a few of us – probably about eight. There may be three children aged between nine and fourteen. Jane will be playing the piano (we've no organist now) and so if you could let her have your hymns she'd be grateful.

Thank you for travelling so far, there are so few of us we sometimes wonder if it's worth continuing. When you last came we had a Sunday School but it closed at Easter. It wasn't that the children wouldn't come – it was just that most of us are getting on and don't feel we can cope. Jane and Judith ran it for a while but they are both teachers and feel that after a week's teaching they just can't cope with children on a Sunday morning! I wish some of the new folk in the village would show some interest but they all seem to be so busy.

You ought to know that Dorothy's husband (James) is very ill. Dorothy will probably be there on Sunday – if she can leave him. Perhaps you could mention James in your prayers.

Ben and I are keeping well although with farming as it is we've both had a lot of anxiety. You will have heard that Philip was married just before Christmas. He and Alison wanted to buy a house in Heathlands but the houses here are too expensive for them. Dorothy's daughter had the same problem. It's a pity!

I look forward to seeing you on Sunday. We'll both be there if Ben gets the milking done in time.

Yours sincerely,
Betty



"Truly the Lord is in this place,
and I did not know it.....How
awesome is this place! This is
none other than the house of
God; it is the gateway to heaven."

Genesis 28:16-17¹⁹

Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.¹⁸

F Pratt Green
Hymns & Psalms 804

Quotations from the Heathlands letter – for discussion

"...we sometimes wonder if it is worth continuing"

Is this how you feel?

How far does your church understand itself as a priestly, prophetic and evangelising community?

Would this understanding help the people of Heathlands?

Does it help you?

"You ought to know that Dorothy's husband's very ill"

"We've both had a lot of anxiety"

In what ways can a small village church respond to the pastoral needs of its community?

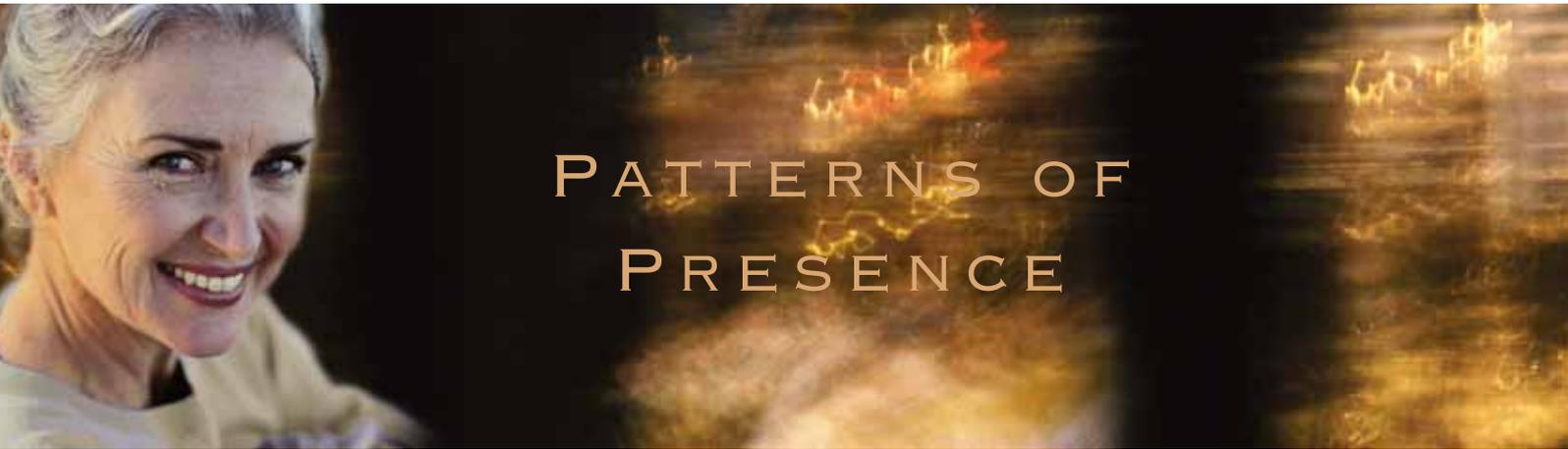
He and Alison wanted to buy a house in Heathlands but the houses here are too expensive for them. Dorothy's daughter had the same problem. It's a pity!

How should a small rural congregation exercise its prophetic ministry? What are the main issues in your community?

"We had a Sunday School, but it closed at Easter...."

In many villages the Sunday School provided a way of "telling the story". In what new and imaginative ways can we tell the story today? How can we invite others to join us on the journey of Christian discipleship? In what ways can we engage with young families?

GROUP STUDY 2



PATTERNS OF PRESENCE

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AN UNSUSTAINABLE PRESENCE?

The rate of decline in rural church life is accelerating and within a relatively short period of time, unless things change, there are going to be huge areas of rural Britain without any effective Christian presence. Christians in rural areas have to face the uncomfortable truth that the ways of being Church that they have either drifted into or have inherited from the past are, in many places, unsustainable. We have to discover new, effective and sustainable patterns of presence that take the best of the tradition and move it into the twenty first century.

"A population of only 200 and three churches...its just doesn't make sense!" Elizabeth and Jim have just moved into the village and simply can't understand why there is this unnecessary duplication and waste. The Baptist building is the oldest of the three and was built in the early 18th century. It is a listed building. Both the Anglican and Methodist buildings date from the middle of the 19th century and are of little architectural merit. All three buildings are in a sad state of repair. The three congregations are dwindling and making little visible impact on the village. The members of the three churches all know each other and in some instances are related to each other – they work happily together in the WI and in supporting village functions but cannot or will not consider becoming one church. The Baptists have no minister at the moment and rely on visiting preachers to lead worship. The Methodists are served by a minister who lives ten miles away in the market town and has four other churches to look after. Worship in the Methodist Church has always depended upon local preachers but many of these are now elderly and find the travelling difficult. Until recently the Anglicans had a resident vicar who also looked after the neighbouring parish. Now the vicar cares for five parishes and no longer lives in the village. There is only fortnightly worship in the parish church. Elizabeth and Jim have 'tried' all three churches but have decided to travel into the market town on Sundays – and they are not the only ones!

AN UNSUSTAINABLE MINISTRY?

Bill was glad to see the Minister. New to the Circuit, Beverley was still on probation. When she heard that she was to be stationed in a rural circuit and have pastoral care of six churches she was shocked and disappointed. It was not at all what she had expected. Beverley was brought up in a town and had never even thought of serving in a rural appointment. "How are you settling in?" asked Bill. "Well I've found everybody very friendly" said Beverley, "and I couldn't have hoped for a warmer welcome." "Yes, we're friendly folk round here though you'll find it takes a while to get to know us properly. How are you enjoying country life?" "Oh, I love the countryside but I'm finding rural ministry tough. I don't know where to begin to make sense of it all – there are eight Sunday services in my section and then, of course, I'm expected to take services in the other churches of the circuit as well. I just can't get round. Six villages to look after, lots of visiting to do, I never thought it would be like this! Last week I had my first funeral – there was a service in the chapel and then a committal at the crematorium. It took me almost the whole of the day and it's the same when I visit people in hospital – it's a sixty mile round trip to the General. How did ministers manage in the past?" "Well," replied Bill, "you must remember there were almost twice as many chapels sixty years ago and we've only dropped one minister in all that time, but life was more settled then. The congregations weren't all that much bigger than they are now – except for specials – but somehow or other people had more time and probably more commitment. We only ever saw the minister twice a quarter on Sundays but he, and it was always 'he' in those days, would usually visit in the village one afternoon a week. He would then have his tea in one of our homes and stay on for the mid-week fellowship in the evening. That's where we got to know him. We always thought of the minister as a friend and we always knew he was there if we needed him but we used to do much more for ourselves." "So why is it so different now?" asked Beverley, genuinely puzzled. "Oh, I don't know, everything seems different." Ministers expect to do too much themselves; it's probably because they have cars and can chase about all over the place. When ministers relied on buses or bicycles they couldn't be expected to be everywhere! But then we've changed too; we expect more of our ministers than ever we used to and we seem to rely on them more instead of getting on and doing things ourselves."

QUESTIONS

What should be done in Elizabeth's and Jim's village?

Are Elizabeth and Jim right to go to the town church on Sundays?

How can the village church offer effective ministry to children?

Is it true that Ministers expect to do too much themselves and rural congregations expect more of their ministers than they used to?

What can be done to redress the balance ?



REMEMBERING OUR STORY

Bible Study

Hebrews 11 – 12:2

Here we meet God's people; a pilgrim people who are always on the move. 'Change' and not 'the status quo' is the norm but through all this change runs the faith which is described in Hebrews 11:1. From the very beginning of the human story and despite their own disobedience, fear and uncertainty, God's people have trusted him. In their faith they have found an irrepressible and at times inexplicable hope that has enabled them to discover new ways and patterns of faithfulness and obedience. All this comes to a climax in Jesus. Jesus is the pioneer of a faith and the ground of a hope that leads through death to resurrection, from dying to new life.

What does this mean for us today? The people of the Bible knew times of tiredness, frustration and disappointment but in such times there was always someone to remind them of their story. When their forebears were slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses, set them free, and led them through the wilderness to a new land (eg Deuteronomy 6:4-12). When they forgot what it was to be a covenant people God sent the prophets to challenge them and lead them back to him (eg Hosea 6:1-6). When they were carried into exile and grieved deeply for all that they had lost they found him in the strange land; calling them by name, holding them in the hollow of his hand and leading them into a radical and new understanding of his nature and purpose (eg Isaiah 42:1-13). When the disciples of Jesus found themselves battling against a head wind and a rough sea, Jesus came to them in the midst of the storm and when they cried out to him he helped them (Mark 6:45-52). When all their hopes were shattered at Calvary they found him walking by their side and recognised him at the breaking of bread (Luke 24:13-32).

Times of change are also times for remembering the great stories of faith and discovering new ways of being his people.

*Then give us courage, Father God,
To choose again the pilgrim way,
And help us to accept with joy
The challenge of tomorrow's day.*

Fred Kaan, *Hymns & Psalms* 619





Sing a new song....

The Methodist chapel closed. The only church building in the village, it had gradually become more and more of a burden to the elderly Christians who cared for it. These faithful people had never stopped hoping and praying that others would join them but in their hearts they knew that the way in which they ordered their church life and worship just wasn't attractive to others although it still spoke to them.

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Faced with the closure of the chapel their minister encouraged them to ask some important questions such as: *"If we close the chapel: who is going to pray for this community and, if we are not here, who is going to offer thanks to God for all the ways in which he blesses our village?"* They began to see that God still had work for them to do.

There were at least four other people in the village who worshipped in the nearby town. Rather reluctantly three of the four agreed to meet with the Methodists. They expected that they would be asked to help save the chapel, but nothing of the sort! This handful of elderly people had found a new vision. They only mentioned the old building in passing. They had already shed their tears and had decided to leave the chapel behind. Now they were excited about being church in a new and different way.

The three couldn't help but be impressed by what they saw and heard. They each wanted to retain their Sunday links with their own denominations but agreed to try the new way. The new 'church' began to meet in one of the members' homes on Tuesday evenings. On arrival the members greeted each other warmly. They set up a table in the centre of the room and stood a candle and an open Bible on it. Each meeting began with a time of worship but then everyone shared information about the village; issues raised at the last meeting of the Parish Council, news of one or two people who were sick, concerns about the threatened closure of the village post office. After reading one of the lectionary Bible passages they shared their understanding and insights with each other. When they came to say their prayers they tried to link the village

news with what they had read from the Bible. They imagined their prayers as a circle of love thrown around the village. Before their meeting came to an end they always discussed what they could do – often in simple ways – to care for the village and its people. The whole meeting was usually over within the hour. People began to notice this Tuesday evening congregation and from time to time would ask if they could be remembered in prayer. One neighbour began attending the weekly worship and became a member of the little church.

Because this new congregation had its roots in the Methodist Church it came under the care of a Methodist minister and was part of the local circuit. The minister visited on a monthly basis and always celebrated Holy Communion. From time to time the local vicar and a United Reformed Church Minister from the nearby town also shared in the Tuesday evening worship.

A complementary presence

To concentrate only on those places where our work is difficult would be unfair to those many villages where the Church is alive, vital, and still at the heart of community life. In many village communities there is more than one centre of Christian worship and this does not always mean unnecessary duplication. We need to be able to discern and celebrate where there is a complementary presence. Here the Christian presence is richer and more effective because there are two or more expressions of Christian spirituality or there are complementary mission strategies. Where this is the case, other people need to see just how much these Christians love them, love their village and love one another!

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Creating a welcoming presence when the Methodist Church is the only church in a village

Here are some guidelines written by the Methodist Church in 1998. They describe a "Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome".

1. In many villages there is only one church building and worshipping community. In some villages this will be a Methodist Church. Within the village there may be Christians of different traditions, some of whom try to combine loyalty to a particular denomination with their desire to worship and witness in their local community. Sometimes a church of another denomination has been closed, sometimes people from another denomination have moved into the village, sometimes those who previously commuted to a church outside the village are prevented from doing so through infirmity or poor public transport.
2. While the local church will belong within a Circuit and be part of the wider Methodist connexion, it is able in a variety of ways to make members of other churches feel that they belong to the Christian community in that village. This sense of belonging may not be the same as becoming a member of that local church. Some churches do not permit their members to become members of another church and some individuals may feel that their sense of denominational identity is such that they are unable or unwilling to become members of the Methodist Church. They may, however, be willing to be on the community roll of the church and take as full a part as possible in its worship and life.

3. The local church will want to welcome all who wish to be part of its fellowship and enable their insights, strengths, gifts and graces to be incorporated into the whole life of the congregation. That life will include worship, mission and service, as well as the administrative and decision-making process.

4. The minister and congregation of the Methodist Church will want to be especially aware of their responsibility to be broad, flexible and open, and to affirm a diversity of religious experience and expression.

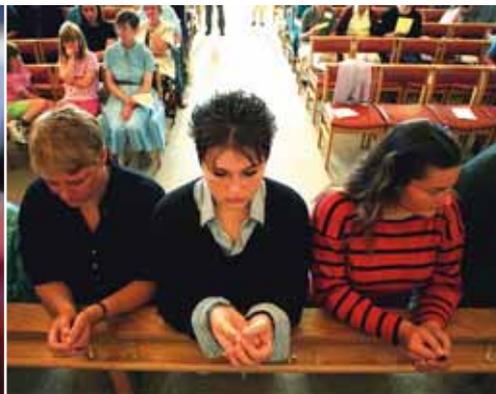
Breadth and openness could be affirmed through:

- choice of hymns, tunes and hymn books
- prayers for other churches and their leaders
- invitations to ministers/preachers/readers of other traditions to lead worship
- occasional use of other denomination's liturgies and ways of administering Holy Communion
- careful use of language which includes and is not specific to one denomination
- offering use of church buildings to other Christian traditions
- consultation between those with pastoral oversight in the area about matters of mutual concern and responsibility
- involvement in the life of the wider church through Churches Together groupings

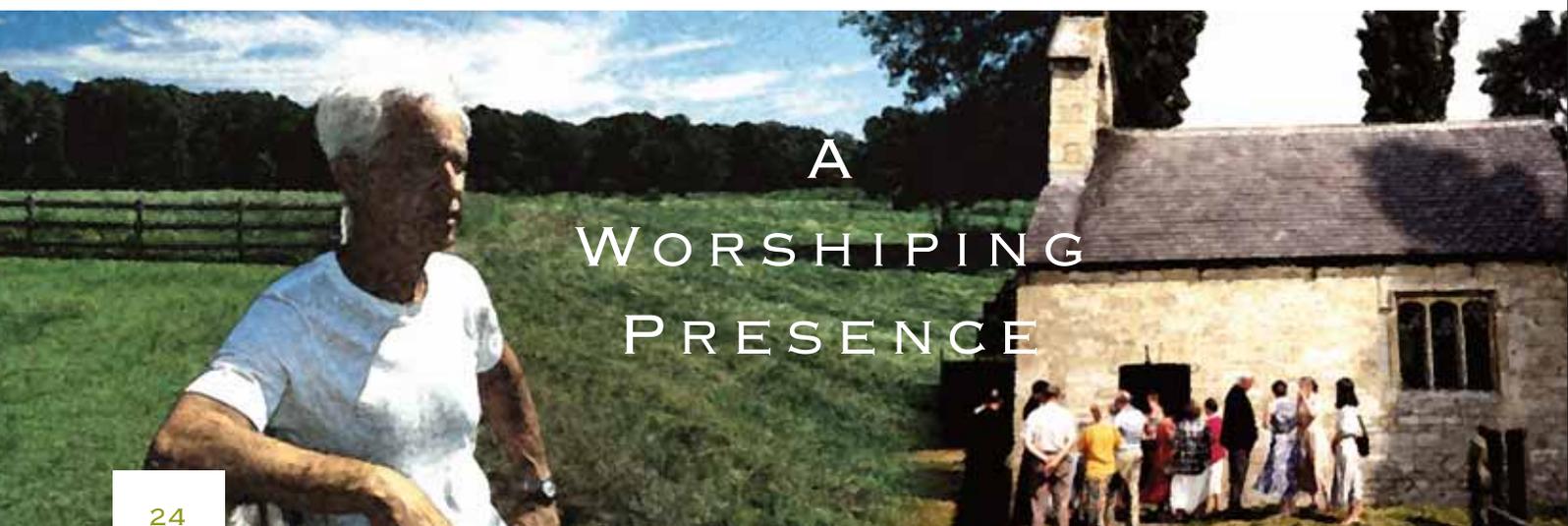
5. The local church may wish to formalise and ensure the continuity of this ecumenically enriched life by agreeing a 'Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome'. Before doing so it should seek advice from the Intermediate Body or the District Ecumenical Officer as to which other denominations should be consulted, and at what level. The Declaration must be endorsed by the neighbouring churches and care needs to be taken over the real or imagined effect on the congregational strength of these churches so that this is not seen as 'poaching'. A copy of the Declaration should be displayed in the church.

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For similar statements by other denominations go to: www.churches-together.org.uk



GROUP STUDY 3



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Worship is a vital part of the life of any Christian community. We are all challenged to ensure that our worship is relevant, authentic and worthy of the God who creates, redeems and sustains.

- Each congregation is called to exercise in its worship a **priestly** ministry; recalling the great themes of the gospel and praying for the community in which it is set.
- Each congregation is called to exercise in its worship a **prophetic** ministry; including in worship awareness of local and global issues of justice.
- Each congregation is called to exercise in its worship an **evangelising** ministry; inviting others to be part of the shared journey of discipleship.

In each of the above, the aim is to ensure that in every rural community all are prayed for, all are challenged and all are invited to be followers of Jesus.

There is a real temptation for us all when we are discussing worship to focus on practical issues. We talk about the difficulty of finding competent musicians, about which hymn book we prefer or about our responses to different preachers. And yet all of these questions are secondary ones. The primary question is in the first paragraph above – how can we offer worship that is relevant, authentic and worthy?

Bible Study

Acts 2:43–47

Here, in a summary paragraph, is a glimpse of the early Christian Church.

There was a sense of awe among these early believers. Authentic worship lifts us out of the ordinary and familiar into an awareness of the mystery of God; of his awesome being and of his presence and grace both in the world and in human experience. In this awareness we offer ourselves to him in humility, reverence and gratitude.

These New Testament Christians lived lives of integrity. Life choices were determined by their faith and, in these early days, by the belief that the return of the Lord was imminent.

Worship was public and private, corporate and individual. It was offered both in the temple and in the home with 'unaffected joy'. Such worship, and its accompanying life style, was seen by and proved attractive to family, neighbours and friends.

QUESTIONS

What do you value about worship?

In what sense do you experience a sense of awe and reverence in your weekly worship?

How far does your building or place of worship speak of "humility, reverence and gratitude"?

Could you invite a neighbour to your church in the confidence that they would experience worship that was "relevant, authentic and worthy"? If not, why not?

What can make it difficult for a new person to join a church?

What are the special challenges and opportunities for a rural church in developing its worship?



*Here the servants of the Servant
Seek in worship to explore
What it means in daily living
To believe and to adore*

F Pratt Green
Hymns & Psalms 653

A CASE STUDY

Jean and Ann had attended the Methodist Chapel in their village all of their lives. It was a place of many happy memories. Recently, however, Sunday numbers had declined and it was hard to find someone to play the organ. As they sat drinking coffee in Jean's kitchen on Wednesday morning they talked about the fact that although the preacher last Sunday was well intentioned, he didn't seem to understand village life

"I'd invited Sue, my new next door neighbour", said Jean, "She said she would be interested to come sometime – but I have to say that during the service I found myself thinking that I was pleased she wasn't there! But what can we do?" "Perhaps", said Ann, "We could invite her to coffee next Wednesday. I've got some good Bible notes which we could use for a discussion. Ask Sue if she'd be interested".

Two years later, Jean and Ann are still having coffee together each Wednesday morning, but now Sue is there most weeks, together with three ladies from the Parish Church and two of Sue's friends – neither of whom had ever been to church in their lives. Each week they read the Bible and discuss the questions that arise. They have lots of different viewpoints but they all enjoy the friendly debate. Last week they talked about the way that some people were feeling more isolated now that the number of buses through their village had been cut. They discussed ways in which they could use their cars to help some of those who would now find it even more difficult to get to the shops. They chatted about the programme on the television the previous night about trade justice and Sue said she would write to their MP about it. At the end of the morning Ann said a prayer which brought all these concerns together.

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QUESTIONS

Is what is happening in Jean's kitchen on a Wednesday morning worship that is relevant, authentic and worthy?

If you were Sue and her friends, what would you most value about the Wednesday group?

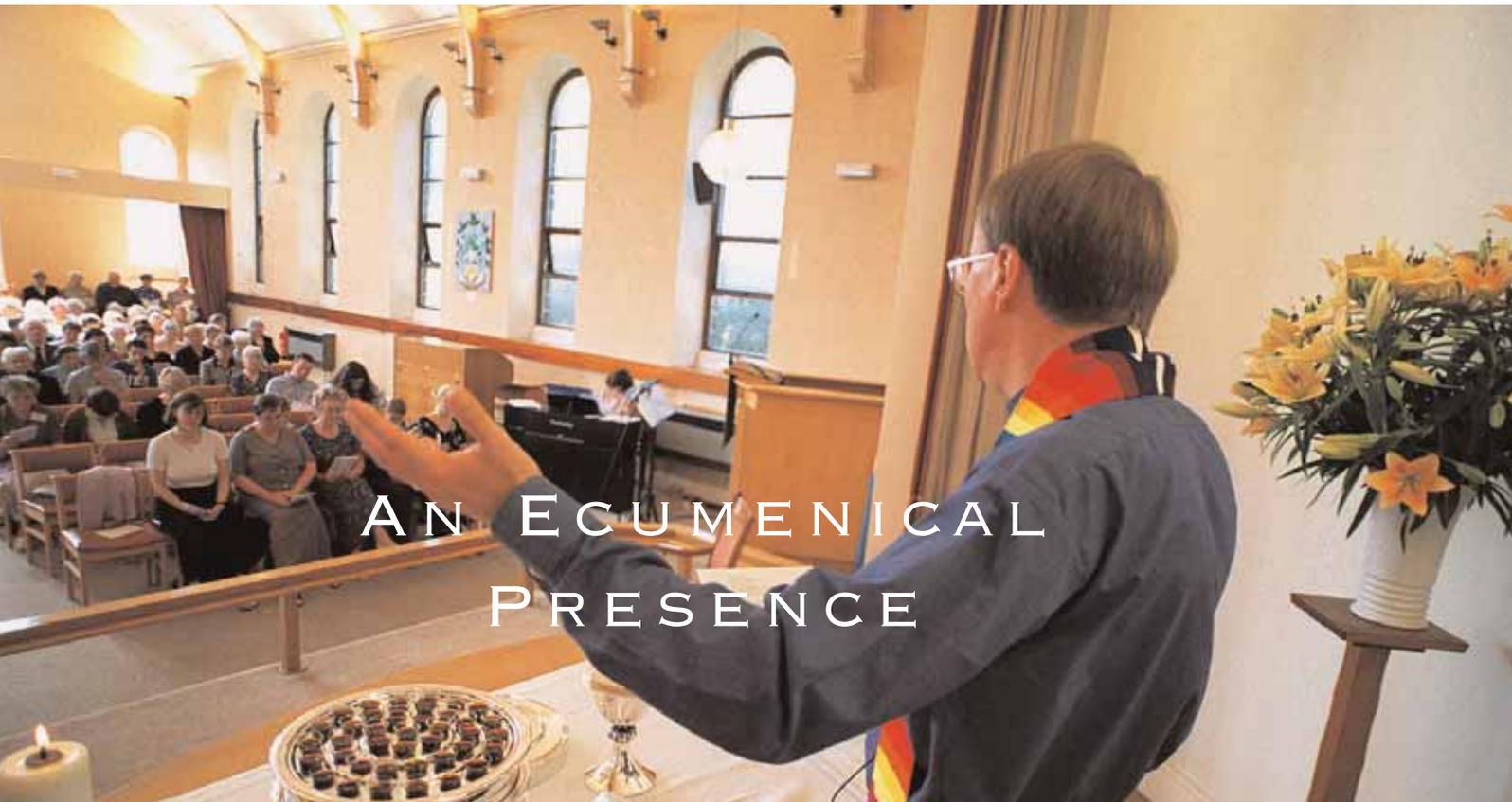
In what ways could you be adventurous in developing new worship opportunities?



The church exists to: Increase awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love.

The Methodist Church "Our Calling"

GROUP STUDY 4



AN ECUMENICAL PRESENCE

The Church of England National Rural Officer, Dr Jill Hopkinson, says "In the light of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant it is vital that the Methodist Church and the Church of England consider the future together." The Rural Affairs Committee of the Church of England is having similar discussions and preparing a paper under the current working title "Strengthening the Rural Church". Liaison continues, notably through the Churches' Rural Group, which has seen draft material from both churches and encouraged the production of the two parallel but mutually informing publications. Other ecumenical partners are thus involved, and must never be excluded, but all recognise that the Anglican-Methodist Covenant provides a new and exciting context for our work in rural areas. The covenant can be a catalyst for wider ecumenism. An effective Christian presence in villages will always be an ecumenical presence.

A STORY

A group of Methodists, Anglicans and Roman Catholics were brought together for a day by the staff of a small retreat centre. St Aelred House, having received a modest legacy, was now in the fortunate position of being able to fund a project to support local Christians in their ministry. The staff decided that the best way of doing this was to convene an ecumenical meeting. In the event the seven representatives who gathered at St Aelred's had not met as a group before. Their traditions and ways of being church were distinctively different, yet when they were asked to talk about their own priorities and challenges a surprising pattern emerged. In conversation they discovered a wealth of common ground. The group began to feel a real sense of solidarity and recognised that they had much to learn from and offer to one another. Strangely enough by the end of the day the legacy seemed unimportant, the real gift had been time spent together and a fresh commitment to working through the challenges of mission and ministry ecumenically. Above all this small group of Christians recognised that they needed to recover confidence in God. And strange as it may seem, by the time they left St Aelred's, they had.

If we are to meet the challenges and opportunities of being an effective Christian presence then in rural areas especially we shall increasingly be looking to the sorts of conversation that happened at St Aelred's. It is at times such as these that the Holy Spirit fires our imaginations, rekindles our enthusiasm and enables us to be courageous.

QUESTIONS

As local Christians what priorities do you share with Christians of other denominations? If you don't know how are you going to find out?

How might your chapel join in partnership with other groups in the community to make a real difference where you live?

What are the common opportunities for mission in your village or town?

How might your circuit best engage with your local Anglican Deanery?

Bring your traditions' richest store,
Your hymns and rites and cherished creeds;
Explore our visions, pray for more,
Since God delights to meet fresh needs.

*Richard G Jones
Hymns & Psalms 765*



AN EXAMPLE

A mission partnership was entered into by an Anglican Deanery and two Methodist circuits. Covenanting together to find common solutions to the familiar problems of mission and ministry, these Christians are engaging realistically and locally with the commitments of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, given below.

COMMITMENTS

1

We commit ourselves, as a priority, to work to overcome the remaining obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches, on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church. In particular, we look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry.

2

We commit ourselves to realise more deeply our common life and mission and to share the distinctive contributions of our traditions, taking steps to bring about closer collaboration in all areas of witness and service in our needy world.

3

We commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptised members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches.

4

We commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.

5

We commit ourselves to listen to each other and to take account of each other's concerns, especially in areas that affect our relationship as churches.

6

We commit ourselves to continue to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight.

In fact the Methodist circuits decided to merge so that they would be better able to work alongside their Anglican counterparts. Ways are being explored under Standing Order 733 and Canon B43 of enabling a more effective interchange of ministry. From now on Readers and Local Preachers will be allowed to take services other than Holy Communion in churches of the other denomination and it is hoped that soon Presbyters will be allowed to preside at services of Holy Communion in the other denomination subject to meeting certain criteria. *And all this because the initiative came from the grassroots and was supported by the church leaders.*

The Circuit and Deanery have started joint training sessions for lay people on such important topics as pastoral care. In a small market town the Anglican, Baptist and Methodist congregations have covenanted together and plan to share one building, worship together regularly and do their mission activity jointly. In all these instances it is early days and no one pretends that this is an easy journey. It is most certainly not pain-free. But it is hopeful. And it is possible. And it is necessary if we are to be an effective Christian presence.



"We have all, in the intervening years, discovered things about Christ and his kingdom that we are now eager to share with each other, as brothers and sisters working to overcome the distant legacy of arrogance and resentment."

Most Revd and Rt Hon Dr Rowan Williams²⁴
Archbishop of Canterbury

"The Covenant is fundamentally a call to go forward together in faith, hope and love. May it be a catalyst for the renewal of our common life and mission. And may its benefits be felt beyond our churches."

Revd Dr Neil Richardson
President of the Methodist Conference 2003/04²⁵

"Christian obedience demands that the church continues to strive for that unity of the followers of Christ for which he prayed so earnestly on the day before he was crucified. The urgent missionary situation in which the churches find themselves today also calls for a united witness."

Conversations on the Way to unity²⁶

GROUP STUDY 5

A COMMUNITY PRESENCE



“Community is a place of generous attentiveness to individuals, a place where power is never exercised to diminish or humiliate, where humility is respected, yet where people are helped to grow by being challenged and having demands made on them, and where they are taken seriously enough to be argued with – where we both stand up for and stand up to each other.”

Quote from a Roman Catholic priest

Bible Passages to read:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Nehemiah 2:17-18 | - a story about leadership and capacity building |
| Luke 9:46-49 | - valuing children and recognising partners as such. |
| 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | - one body, many members |

RESOURCES TO OFFER....

The churches have paid ministry, local leadership, people committed to loving and serving their neighbours. There is usually a history of involvement of these Christians in the life of the community in a multiplicity of ways. A recent survey showed that over half of those serving on the Parochial Church Council or Church Council were also engaged in some piece of regular service in their community, with young, elderly or disadvantaged.

PARTNERSHIPS TO SHARE....

Methodists are fond of the word 'fellowship' – literally a collective word for those who pay a 'fee', so indicating a degree of commitment to a common cause. Government agencies use the language of 'stakeholders' for those who have an interest in a particular issue and who ought to be consulted about it and involved in finding and delivering an appropriate solution. Can 'stakeholders' experience 'fellowship'?

The Church talks about salvation : government talks about well-being.

Charles Wesley's hymns emphasise that salvation is offered to all : 'social inclusion' is a key aim of the Government agenda.

It is to be expected that a group of people who share in Holy Communion will see the building of human community as a key task – the Rural White Paper calls for "thriving rural communities" and "a vibrant countryside that can shape its own future".

Churches have a key role to play in affirming individuals and showing them their potential, secure in God's love for them. In a congregation, disparate individuals can work together, mutually valuing each other. The body imagery of the epistles is powerful. Does it apply to rural communities too?

The distinction between 'the community' and 'the church or the chapel' should not be too obvious in a rural setting. Christians are challenged to live out their understanding of God's commitment in Jesus Christ to humankind by themselves identifying with and being at the service of the local (and where possible the wider) community.

In other words, to use a popular cliché, much of the time 'we are singing from the same hymn sheet'.

IDEAS TO TRY

Eco-congregation is a programme that may help to bond church and community – as you involve others with environmental concern in ‘going green’ – particularly the school or Young Farmers Club members.

British Food Fortnight promotes locally produced food. Why not arrange a community supper and demonstrate how using local food can reduce food miles, boost the rural economy and improve our diet? Volunteers can go into the local school and using local foods teach cooking skills to children.

Earlier this year the Countryside Agency announced it was closing down its ‘**Vital Villages**’ programme. The programme encouraged local people to take more responsibility for the well being of their communities. Within the programme there was funding to enable villages to undertake an audit of their existing services, local resources and unmet needs. Whilst funding is no longer available this remains important work that the local church could facilitate. The church could work in partnership with the Parish Council, the District Council, the Rural Community Council, Village Hall Committee etc. in undertaking a village audit and identifying opportunities to create a more sustainable community.

Fairtrade issues and local farming Why not challenge the Young Farmers Club to explore fair trade issues as they relate to farmers in developing countries and farmers in Britain? You could suggest sources of information, resources, audio visuals etc.

There is also a requirement that Clerks and Parish Councilors undertake training so that they are equipped to fulfil their roles well. School governors now undergo training too. Volunteers are all very well, but most of us need training and to be kept up to the mark. Historically, Methodism has been known as a Church that empowers its lay people. Are we only doing this to help people fulfil churchy roles? The community calls.

*Brother, sister, let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.*

Richard Gillard



A GOOD NEWS STORY

In West Bradford in the Clitheroe Circuit, the village post office closed. The Methodist Church offered to make available the vestry (with a reinforced door) to be used instead, so that this facility was not lost. It is indicative of the same mindset that this church is also home to a Roman Catholic congregation each Saturday evening and increasingly there is a sense on the part of the whole village that 'this is our place'.

"The Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and challenge injustice"

The Methodist Church *Our Calling*

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QUESTIONS

What is our attitude to gypsies and travellers, for example?

How does a desire to maintain the value of our own property equate with encouraging so-called affordable housing?

Are we prepared to stick our head above the parapet by standing for the Parish Council?

Who will put themselves and their car at the disposal of neighbours who have to rely on infrequent public transport?

Do we care that other people's children are not interacting enough with adults within their own community? What can we do?

What sense is there of a corporate life either in your rural congregation or in your village?

Does anyone think that you can initiate change locally?

If the Church Council only meets twice a year, are there other informal ways in which the "mind of the church" can be discovered and the community be influenced for good?

GROUP STUDY 6

EFFECTIVE RURAL MINISTRY

The calling of the Methodist Church is “to respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.”²⁹ Whilst in many places there is a vision for this calling and a longing to fulfil it more effectively there is also a dearth of resources. In some churches the vision has been lost in an overwhelming sense of tiredness and defeat. Partly as a result of a lack of understanding, training and support, many of our presbyters and deacons feel ill equipped for rural ministry and feel that their ministry is restricted to supporting the faithful and managing decline. There is an acute shortage of presbyters. We need new initiatives to fire our imagination, channel our commitment and release new energy. We need to re-discover what the ‘ministry of the whole people of God’ means and how it can be worked out in rural communities. We need to equip our presbyters and deacons more effectively for rural ministry both in initial formation and in their continuing development.

PATTERNS OF MINISTRY

The Methodist Conference statement on the Church Called to Love and Praise³⁰ reminds us that our starting point for understanding the Church is the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Called into being by God, the Church is to reflect that loving communion of three co-equal ‘persons’ and “to participate in God’s mission and proclaim God’s reign as Jesus had done”.³¹ All this is only possible in the gift of the Holy Spirit; “But the presence of the Holy Spirit alone makes possible the credibility of the Church as a witness and sign in the world of the new life in Christ”.³²

*“...to speak of God as a loving communion of three co-equal “persons” suggests that the Church should be a community of mutual support and love in which there is no superiority or inferiority”.*³³

*“...the Church’s vocation is to testify to God’s reign and to share in his mission in our damaged, hurtful and often despairing society”.*³⁴

*“In conclusion, God’s reign and mission, focussed and expressed supremely in the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are the foundation of any authentically Christian understanding of the Church and of the church’s participation in God’s purpose for the world. In this task the Church is not an ideal community somehow separate from every local assembly of Christians. It was no accident that New Testament writers used the same word “ekklesia” both of the whole church, and more often, of the local church. So each local church is, or may be, fully the Church”.*³⁵

There are many patterns of ministry in the New Testament. Diversity, development and new responses to changing situations and a variety of contexts are the norm but running through them all is the insistence that ministry belongs to the whole people of God. Each individual brings God-given gifts to be used collaboratively for the benefit of all and in ministry to the world (eg Romans 12:3–5, Ephesians 4:7, 1 Peter 4:10). Whilst the church needs leadership it is to be exercised collaboratively so that the whole body is enabled. (eg 1 Peter 5:1–2).

These principles are fundamental to Methodists **but how are they to be reflected in rural communities? How can we develop new patterns of ministry that are effective and sustainable?**

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REMEMBER

The challenge is to encourage lay and ordained to work together in developing appropriate and sustainable patterns of rural ministry. Ministry is for everyone, not just the clergy. We need to empower our local congregations to show the love of Christ in and for their local community. Here are some suggestions for you to discuss:

What about Local Ministry Enabling Teams?

Robin Greenwood has developed this concept. Writing as Ministry Development Officer in the Anglican diocese of Chelmsford he reminds us that: *“Ministry is for everyone, not just the clergy. The leadership of every church, parish and congregation in the land is the responsibility of the whole of that community. Churches need leadership, but that leadership will empower the whole congregation, fusing them into a dynamic, outward looking community, bearing witness to the powerful message of the Gospel”.*³⁶

A Local Ministry Enabling Team is composed of a small group of people nominated by Church Council and appointed by the circuit meeting. The team always includes the ordained minister who has pastoral responsibility for the church and maybe a locally commissioned ‘pastor’.

In small rural churches the whole membership might be 'the team'! A regular mid-week meeting (fortnightly or monthly) is the focus of devotion, study, sharing and planning. The team works at fulfilling the four areas of *Our Calling* in the context of its village community and in the setting of fellowship, prayer and bible study. Formal church council meetings will only be necessary where matters of trusteeship are to be decided.

Working within local ministry enabling teams will be a new concept for many presbyters. For some it will mean learning new skills and adopting new ways of working but this approach has the potential to bring a new dynamic and offer new opportunities for creative ministry. This will be particularly true where the Presbyter has pastoral responsibility for several churches. For these patterns to emerge the whole church needs to take this process seriously and local churches need to know that they are supported by the circuit, district and Connexion.³⁷

Could Cell Church be an answer?

Where the traditional patterns of Church life become hard to sustain, Cell Church, or some similar weeknight structure has much to offer. Where buildings become too difficult to maintain and numbers are small, a positive way forward can be to meet in local homes on weeknights or Sunday evenings as a cell of a larger church. Cell church is often a model adopted very effectively by large urban or suburban churches. In rural areas the cell church principle could be adapted so that a number of small dispersed cells work together as part of a greater whole.

The values of Cell Church are:

- Jesus is at the centre,
- every member is contributing and growing,
- witness and evangelism can be through social events,
- cells are part of a larger whole: the building blocks of community.

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Cells can have tasks such as study or care as their priorities; they are about personal growth and multiplication. All of this could prove to be a catalyst to get our smaller rural churches back into a growth mode rather than a maintenance mode, with a shift in culture that will need to be carefully nurtured.

Is it difficult to provide the desired number of communion services?

Have you explored the possibilities of 'Extended Communion'³⁸ or explored whether additional authorisations to celebrate Holy Communion would be appropriate?³⁹ Although the 'Agape Meal' or "Love Feast" are not celebrations of Holy Communion would they enrich your worship and serve to deepen your fellowship?

Could we achieve a 'Pastor in every Church'?⁴⁰

If so, should the pastor be a lay person, someone who is able to be the primary contact for the church in a particular place, someone who is able to take the lead in caring for others in the church community and the community beyond?

Should a 'Pastor in every Church' be somebody ordained, a kind of 'worker priest' who is LOCAL and equipped to celebrate the sacraments and conduct rites of passage? In the Orthodox Church a respected member of the village community is often chosen as its priest. This priest receives regular in-service training but continues to support himself financially as a shepherd or in some other form of rural occupation – is there here a model for us to adopt?

QUESTIONS

What support from the Connexion would help your church's rural ministry and mission to become more effective?

Could your Circuit provide an effective rural placement for a presbyter or deacon in initial formation?⁴¹

An effective placement will be in a circuit where:

- there is an effective leadership team
 - there are churches already exploring, or ready to explore new ways of working
 - there is an awareness of and commitment to connexional policy for rural ministry
 - there is an ordained presbyter or deacon who is a reflective practitioner
- 38 understands the nature of rural communities and the challenge of rural ministry
- is actively encouraging new patterns of working in the rural context
 - there is a willingness to learn from the student

Such an experience should help the student

- have a deeper understanding of what it means to live in and minister to rural communities
- experience through the church and wider community an insight into rural culture and the particular challenges of rural life
- gain an appreciation of the opportunities for mission and ministry in rural areas and recognition of the need for appropriate patterns of ministry
- experience sharing in and leading worship appropriate to the smaller congregation
- experience and test out strategies to cope with the demands of encouraging and enabling processes of change and opportunities for new ways of working
- gain an ability to reflect theologically in a rural context
- to consider a vocation in rural ministry



• P U R P O S E F U L F I L L E D ? •



The traditional term used in the Methodist Church to justify the closure of buildings is ‘failure of cause’. This is too negative an interpretation of what is happening in our rural communities and rather suggests that there is no alternative way forward. How can circuits and churches respond positively to those situations where our traditional building-centred presence is no longer sustainable?

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CONSULTATION

In some rural circuits further closure of Methodist buildings will be necessary but only in the most exceptional circumstances will the decision to close a chapel need to be taken urgently. If we are to be faithful to the Methodist policy of "promoting an effective Christian presence in villages" then it is important that time is given to asking important questions and exploring alternative patterns.

- **What consultations within the Methodist circuit and district need to take place?**

When there is the possibility of a chapel closure the Circuit and District should be a part of the review process from the earliest stage. A variety of alternative possibilities should be explored. The District Policy Committee should always deal sympathetically and supportively with circuits where such an exploration is being taken seriously. Congregations exploring the possibility of the closure of a building must be encouraged not to feel a sense of failure or guilt.

- **Which ecumenical partners need to be consulted?**

Every denomination is struggling to maintain a witness in rural areas. We need to work in close co-operation to make sure that we are not wasting our resources. We need to develop and maintain a common approach towards the realisation of ‘an effective Christian presence in villages’ There should be effective consultation with all the Christian traditions represented in the area.

• PURPOSE FULFILLED? •

- **How are we to consult with the local community?**

How will others perceive the closure of the Methodist chapel? How are we going to explain the reasons behind it? Are there Christians within the community who have not felt able to share in the life of the existing church but who might welcome the opportunity of a new beginning?

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- **How is the local authority development plan going to affect the village?**

Is there going to be a development of new housing? Are there any plans for the development of 'one stop centres' for the delivery of local services – if so, does our building offer an ideal centre? A village audit would reveal needs and services that the building might be able to accommodate eg shop, meeting rooms, clinic, post office, cyber café. In such circumstances, could the building also continue to be the base for a worshipping congregation?

- **What future is there for other centres of Christian presence in the village?**

Can Christian witness and presence be left in the care of another denomination or is that denomination equally vulnerable? What conversations have taken place?

- **Is there a possibility that a building will be needed in the future?**

Selling the building or putting it to an alternative use is not the only option. Sometimes it may be appropriate to "mothball" the building or to demolish the building and retain ownership of the site. It is difficult to re-enter a village once we have lost the building and/or site.



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SELLING THE BUILDING

Sometimes the best way forward will be to sell the building. If we are to act in the best interests both of Christian mission and our responsibility as trustees, then there are still further decisions to be made.

- **Is this the best time to sell?**

If there is to be housing development then property values might be set to rise. An examination of the local development plan may reveal changes that will affect property values eg the building of a by-pass. Where a community is growing there may be a need for a church building in the future.

- **Is the building best sold with or without planning permission for change of use, development etc.?**

The Connexional Property Committee can help and advise. Please consult before coming to a decision. Planning permission for change of use is likely to enhance sale value.

- **How can the proceeds of sale best be used to promote an effective Christian presence in villages?**

• PURPOSE FULFILLED? •

MAINTAINING A CHRISTIAN PRESENCE

- **Who will offer Christian worship, mission and service within the community following the closure of the Methodist building?**

The Church is called to be a priestly, prophetic and evangelising presence. Human communities need such a presence at their heart if they are to be healthy and whole. If we withdraw,

- who is going to pray for this community?
- Who is going to offer worship on behalf of all its people?
- Who is going to demonstrate the power of the gospel to reconcile and heal?
- Who will tell the story to future generations?

- **Is this an opportunity to explore a new pattern of Christian presence in the community?**

For some who are seeking to explore Christian spirituality our traditional buildings and a way of discipleship that is pre-occupied with the maintenance of buildings is an obstacle. Too often our vision is limited to a building centred presence. Many of our faithful congregations have been oppressed by the burden of keeping a building open or by the weight of duty and loyalty to the past. Maybe the closure of the building is an opportunity for the group to be set free.

The closure of a traditional building can be the opportunity to develop new patterns of presence. A presence focussed on the village hall, school, in homes or in the buildings of other denominations are all possibilities that need to be explored. There may already be an alternative pattern of Christian presence eg a Christian house group. Could this group now accept the privilege and responsibility of being the priestly, prophetic and evangelising presence? Can we offer them the recognition, fellowship, oversight and discipline of the wider church? Maintaining a presence without a building is not without its difficulties, particularly in a rural commuter village with a high turnover of population. What resources, help and support can the wider church give?

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- **What arrangements for on-going pastoral care of the community need to be made?**

If withdrawal is the only possibility, what arrangements will be made not only for the elderly, vulnerable and sick of the existing Christian community but for the wider community and for future generations? How will we help those people in the community who have supported the chapel 'from a distance' but for whom it has been a 'sacred space' to come to terms with its closure?

MARKING AND CELEBRATING THE PAST SO THAT WE CAN EMBRACE THE FUTURE

Where a building is closed, a church 'ceases to worship', or a new pattern of Christian presence is adopted there should be a worthy celebration of all that is past.

There are legacies of personal, family and community history that must not be overlooked. Where a cause is closing because of frailty and illness, thanksgiving for faithfulness over the years should be publicly offered. Where a new form of Christian presence is being developed, the debt to past Christian witness should still be marked and celebrated. As in any experience of loss there needs to be an appropriate rite of passage. Only when we have properly grieved our loss can we be free to embrace the future. Rather than marking the 'failure of the cause' we need to celebrate 'a cause whose purpose has been fulfilled'.

EVERYDAY STORIES...

FISKERTON – NEWARK & SOUTHWELL CIRCUIT, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

The members at Fiskerton contend that their church is the oldest purpose-built Methodist church still in regular use in Nottinghamshire! They may be right; but the future of the Methodist cause in Fiskerton has been uncertain for many years. Fiskerton is a small but growing village on the banks of the River Trent close to the minster town of Southwell. Although there is no parish church in the village, two nonconformist churches were once in evidence.



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The decline of first the Seaman's Mission (closed some time after the Second World War) and then the Methodist church has been inversely proportional to the growth of the village! When the current members were finding it impossible to maintain the premises, they were fearful that the one remaining place of Christian worship in the village would be lost. In order to maintain the witness, they approached an evangelical group who made use of their premises inviting them to consider purchasing the property. This is what eventually happened. It has meant that the Methodist society has been able to meet for a few years longer and that Christian witness in Fiskerton continues.

EDEN – WEEK ST MARY CIRCUIT, CORNWALL

"I call it the 'Eden Project' without the car park ... though we are praying for one!" When the local society at Eden officially 'ceased to meet', the Circuit took up the vision for a multi-purpose worship centre. After some renovation with the removal of pews, floor levelling, carpeting, heating and painting inside and out, we now have the making of a Circuit Mission and Outreach Centre to a very rural North Cornwall community of 180 square miles. A weekly Shell Club for those in primary education with lots of craft work. Activities in the centre include: a fortnightly Teen Club with volleyball, badminton, table tennis and loads of music for those in secondary education; a monthly Friends & Family games and fellowship evening with Christian video/films being shown; a quarterly skittles evening, (last time out we had ten teams competing); a monthly healing service and a celebration service, with the makings of a youth band, also once a month. The young people have just begun outreach with 'Puppet Praisers' using a family of six puppets. The flexible worship area has been used for funerals and we have had a 'multi-visual' Taizé service led by the Bude Taizé Music Group. The second phase is to create a kitchen and coffee bar; upgrade the toilets and a shower unit for possible future youth camps, since we are only a few miles from the great North Cornwall coast.



...FROM THE RURAL CHURCH

KIRKBY LONSDALE – KENDAL CIRCUIT, CUMBRIA

Ten years ago, the Church was struggling to survive. A hard core of church members had kept worshipping in faith. Then families with young children, drawn by the welcome of the congregation, started arriving: and so the growth started.



If we try and analyse how and why the church has grown, we believe it is down to many different factors:

- *The positive willingness of 'old'*

members to welcome new people and encourage them to be part of the fellowship and decision making processes but not necessarily to take on all the traditional church jobs

- *A recognition that the positive encouragement of work with young people is vital to the future of the Church*
- *A willingness to compromise on sometimes deeply held feelings and convictions*
- *A wonderful mixture of skills and talents in the congregation which have been richly used*
- *The power of prayer*

Ten years ago, we could never even have dreamt of building an extension. When we launched our appeal for funds in January 2002, we did not have a penny in the bank. Eighteen months later, thanks to the generosity and commitment of very many people, we had raised £250,000 and built a wonderful building which is appreciated, used and enjoyed by many, not just in our fellowship but in the community. Not only that, but numbers have grown, and continue to grow. The church membership has grown from 24 to 63 and average attendance (all ages) has increased from 33 to 80. Looking back, we wonder how we managed it and yet it 'just happened'. God has truly been at work in this place.

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BEADLAM/NAWTON, RYEDALE CIRCUIT, NORTH YORKSHIRE

This small village is situated in beautiful countryside on the main A170 Helmsley to Kirkbymoorside road. The Methodist Church was sold and converted into a house. The Parish Church is a listed building and had no facilities, particularly toilets, kitchen and church hall. Monies from the sale of the Methodist Church were put into the Parish Church and all the required facilities have now been provided in a well-constructed scheme. The foundation stone and stained glass windows from the Methodist Church were put into the inside wall of the Parish Church. The Church is now an LEP and a fine example of a creative scheme for effective Christian presence for the future.



THE ARTHUR RANK CENTRE (ARC)

Since 1972 the Arthur Rank Centre has been a presence within the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. Still true to its original conception as a partnership between the RASE, the Rank Foundation and the Churches, it has developed from a chaplaincy to RASE and the site of the Church Pavilion during the Royal Show into the hub of church thinking and good practice in relation to rural church and community. Many of its projects have become self-standing – eg Rural Housing Trust, Arthur Rank Training, ARC-Addington Fund, Farm Crisis Network.

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ARC is the base for the Church of England's National Rural Officer, the United Reformed/ Methodist Church Rural Officer–Consultant and the Baptist Union's Rural Consultant. The Director, Revd Dr Gordon Gatward, a Methodist minister, has a farming background and has a PhD in Livestock Ethics.

Queries about rural church concerns, appropriate worship resources, agricultural policies and rural trends should be addressed to ARC. If they don't know the answer – they can probably put you in touch with someone who does. Current projects include Hidden Britain Centres (a low key community based tourism initiative), Rural Computer Project, identification and networking of Social Farming projects, Landfill Tax Grant advice for rural churches. Eco-congregation, which several rural and urban congregations have embraced, is now also under the aegis of ARC in respect of England and Wales. The Churches' Rural Group, under the umbrella of Churches Together in England meets at ARC, with the URC/Methodist Rural Officer as its Secretary. ARC publishes a magazine *Country Way – Life and Faith in Rural Britain* three times a year, for a modest annual subscription. This deserves a wider readership.



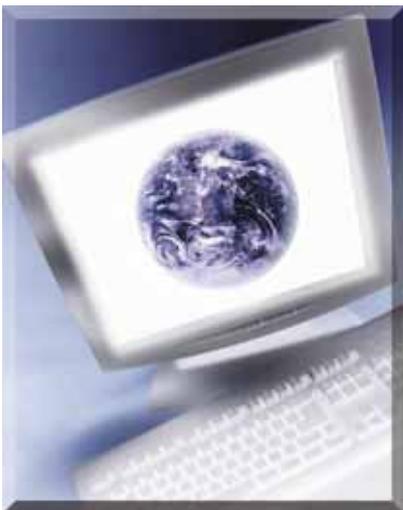
USEFUL WEBSITES



Name of organisation dealing with rural issues	Web address
ACRE (Action for Communities in Rural England) - umbrella body for Rural Community Councils	www.acre.org.uk
Action for Market Towns	www.towns.org.uk
Age Concern England	www.ageconcern.org.uk
Agricultural Chaplains' Association	www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
Agricultural Christian Fellowship	www.uccf.org.uk/acf
Arthur Rank Centre (ARC)	www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)	www.btcv.org.uk
Christian Rural Concern	www.cruc.org.uk
Churches' Rural Group (CRG)	www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
Council for National Parks	www.cnp.org.uk
Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE)	www.cpre.org.uk
Country Land & Business Association (CLA)	www.cla.org.uk
Countryside Agency	www.countryside.gov.uk
Farm Crisis Network (FCN)	www.farmcrisisnetwork.org.uk
Farming Information for Rural Ministry (FIRM)	www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
Help the Aged	www.helptheaged.org.uk
Hidden Britain Centres	www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
Kids' Clubs Network	www.kidsclubs.com
Local Government Association	www.lga.gov.uk
MIND (including Ruralminds)	www.mind.org.uk
National Association Of Councils for Voluntary Service	www.nacvs.org.uk
National Association of Local Councils	www.nalc.org.uk
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	www.nacab.org.uk
National Centre for Volunteering	www.volunteering.org.uk
National Farmers' Union	www.nfu.org.uk

• P R E S E N C E •

National Federation of Women's Institutes	www.womens-institute.co.uk
National Rural Enterprise Centre	www.nrec.org.uk
National Trust	www.nationaltrust.org.uk
National Council of Voluntary Child Care Orgs	www.ncvcco.org
NCVO	www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	www.nfyfc.org.uk
Royal Agricultural Society of England	www.rase.org.uk
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	www.rspb.org.uk
Rural Agricultural and Allied Workers (TGWU)	www.tgwu.org.uk
Rural Evangelism Network (REN)	www.ruralmissions.org.uk
Rural Health Forum/Institute of Rural Health	www.rural-health.ac.uk
Rural Media Company	www.ruralmedia.co.uk
Rural Stress Information Network	www.rsin.org.uk
Ruralnet	www.ruralnet.org.uk
Rural Theology Association (RTA)	www.rural-theology.org.uk
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations	www.scvo.org.uk
Village Retail Services Association (VIRSA)	www.virsa.org
Wales Council for Voluntary Action	www.wcva.org.uk
Woodland Trust	www.woodland-trust.org.uk
Women's Food and Farming Union	www.wfu.org.uk



ENDNOTES AND COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ¹ 'Sowing the Seed', Church and Rural Renaissance in Yorkshire and the Humber, The Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, 2003
- ² The State of the Countryside 2020', pp 18-19. The Welsh Assembly published its strategy for the future of agriculture in November 2001. 'Farming for the Future' can be found at the Assembly's website at www.wales.gov.uk
- ³ *ibid*
- ⁴ DEFRA, 'Agriculture in the UK 2002 (2003)' table 2.4 summary measures by region in 2000.
- ⁵ Alan Spedding, 'Farming Information for Rural Ministry', Briefing 39, 27th May 2003
- ⁶ DEFRA, 'Agriculture in the UK', table 3.5 Labour force in agriculture
- ⁷ Alan Spedding, Briefing 18, 21 May 2003, taken from the NFU website. www.nfu.org.uk
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- ¹⁰ 'The People, the Land and the Church', R Lewis and A Talbot Ponsonby, Hereford Board of Finance 1987 and 'The Country Parish', A J Russell, SPCK 1986
- ¹¹ 'Faith in the Countryside', Copyright by The Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas, 1990 (ACORA) p23
- ¹² 'Sowing the Seed', pp 14 & 31
- ¹³ Methodist Property Office Statistics
- ¹⁴ The Methodist Conference Agenda 2001
- ¹⁵ The Methodist Church 'Our Calling'
- ¹⁶ John 1:14 'Revised English Bible', © Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press 1989
- ¹⁷ The Methodist Conference Agenda 2001
- ¹⁸ F Pratt Green 'Hymns & Psalms', 804, Reproduced by permission of Stainer and Bell Ltd.
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- ²³ Richard G Jones, 'Hymns & Psalms', 765, no copyright
- ²⁴ Rowan Williams – address in Westminster Central Hall on the signing of the Anglican – Methodist Covenant 1 November 2003. "in the intervening years" refers to the years of separation between the two churches
- ²⁵ Neil Richardson – address in Westminster Abbey on the signing of the Anglican – Methodist Covenant 1 November 2003
- ²⁶ Conversations on the Way to Unity; Informal Conversations between the United Reformed Church, Church of England and the Methodist Church 2001'
- ²⁷ Richard Gillard, © 1977 'Scripture in Song' a division of Integrity Music, administered by Kingsway's Thankyou Music. PO Box 75, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NW.
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³¹ ibid paragraph 2.1.7

³² ibid paragraph 2.1.7

³³ ibid paragraph 2.1.9

³⁴ ibid paragraph 2.1.10

³⁵ ibid paragraph 2.1.12

³⁶ Robin Greenwood. 'Ministry Teams Handbook', SPCK 2000

³⁷ A paper on 'Local Ministry Enabling Teams in the Methodist Church', is available from the Cumbria District

³⁸ 'Methodist Worship Book', page 229

³⁹ see 'The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church' Volume 2 Standing Order 011

⁴⁰ 'A pastor in every church' was a concept promoted by the Revd Nigel Collinson during his year as President of the Methodist Conference

⁴¹ Offers of rural placements for presbyters and deacons should be made in the first instance to the Formation in Ministry Office.

THE MEMBERS OF THE RURAL CHAIRS' GROUP ARE:

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John Carne	Plymouth and Exeter	
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Jenny Carpenter	United Reformed/Methodist Church Rural Officer – Consultant	
David Deeks	In his role as Co-ordinating Secretary for Church and Society until September 2003	
Anthea Cox	Co-ordinating Secretary for Public Life & Social Justice from September 2003	

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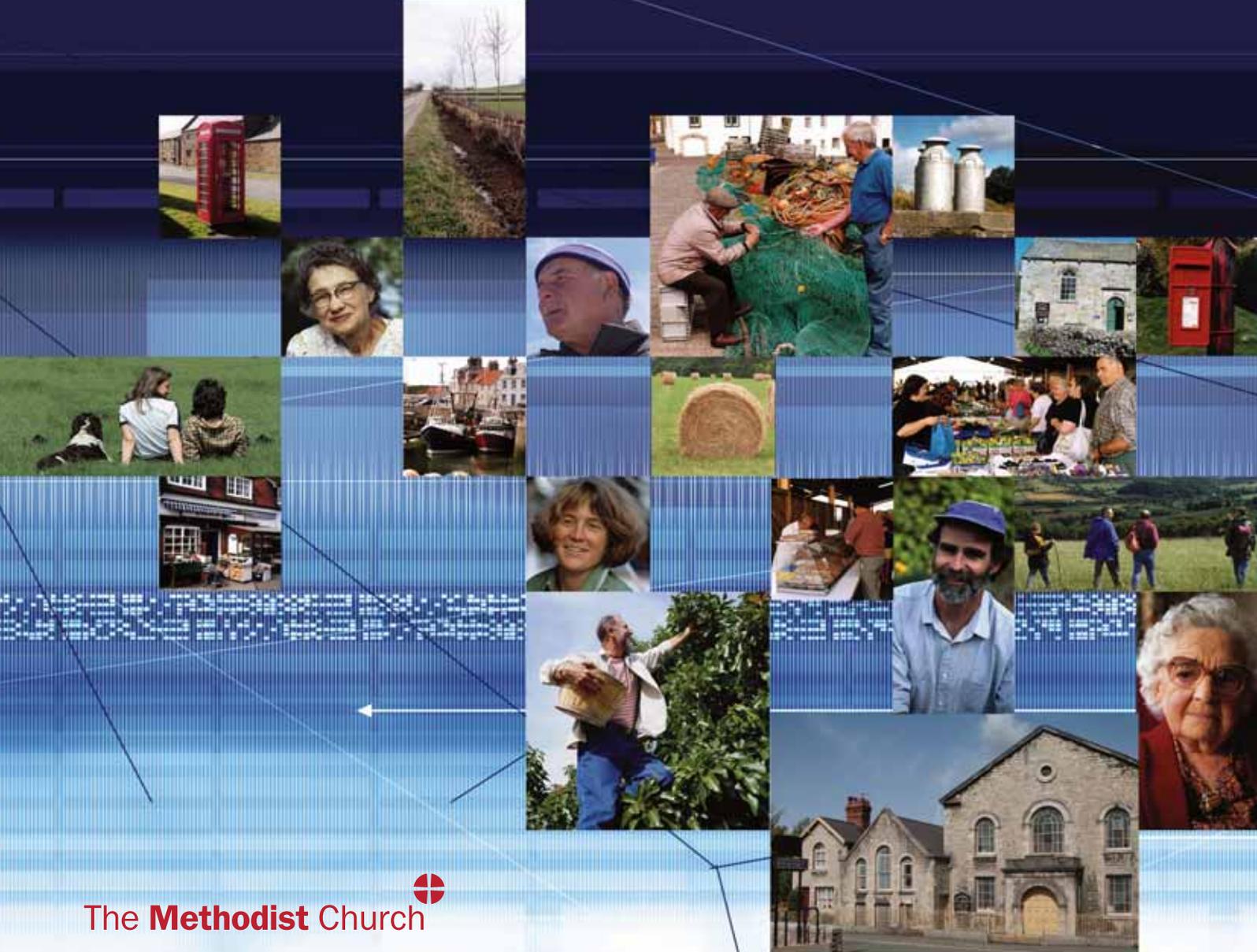
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