

GENERAL SYNOD HUSTINGS FOR LAITY QUESTION 4

A majority of the parishes in our Diocese are in rural and semi-rural areas. What is your understanding of the challenges of Rural Ministry and how would you seek to address them?

<p>BARRON, Mr Alastair</p>	<p>There are many but I'd suggest that the key challenges are the resource available at parish level, ordained and lay; finance and also some of the processes around parish administration.</p> <p>Multi parish benefices seem to be the norm and incumbents are increasingly stretched. The lay community is playing its part in our mission and ministry but it needs to be trained and led as they work with their ordained colleagues. There is much that can be done through, for instance, schools, events for older villagers, pooling resources with other parishes, special services in church but these initiatives need energy and commitment.</p> <p>Finance is always a difficult issue. Churches are expensive and congregations are becoming smaller and revenues more difficult to generate. Imaginative fund raising events, the involvement of the broader village, even those who do not regularly attend church, through for instance a 'Friends of ...' can be successful and regular updates of tax efficient giving are also beneficial.</p> <p>The responsibilities of parish officers, with interaction with church recruitment processes and faculties as examples, can all be daunting – all these things can be barriers to the laity taking leadership roles. Much would be gained by simplifying processes and legal structures.</p>
<p>CLIFT, Dr Simon</p>	<p>The demands on the ordained clergy in rural areas are considerable with a number of different parishes to serve. There is therefore an urgent need for the Church to consider new patterns of leadership and governance structures within such settings. Perhaps we can learn lessons from the African Church where each ordained minister has oversight of a large number of parishes devolving responsibility at the parish level to catechists and evangelists with only a small amount of formal training.</p> <p>Our church buildings, while a testimony to the witness of the Church over the centuries, are expensive to maintain, impossible to heat and a challenge to make compliant with current legislation. Therefore rural parishes require the assistance of the Diocese in navigating the new 2015 Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 so that existing buildings are more in line with our mission.</p> <p>Many rural parishes are within the commuter belt where significant numbers of extremely able parishioners have little time or emotional energy to invest in the Church in their evenings or at weekends. Creative approaches are needed for resourcing such individuals, investing in materials accessible on mobile phones during daily commutes and harnessing the social media to create virtual church communities.</p>

<p>COULTER, Mrs Alison</p>	<p>I see the key challenges facing Rural Ministry as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreasing numbers of stipendiary ministers: rural Priests often spend Sundays driving between services, which is exhausting • The need for more lay leaders • Historic buildings, expensive to maintain and heat • Often (but not always) declining numbers and ageing congregations <p>The Parish Church has a unique opportunity in a village, as it is often central to community life. I think it is vital that we support lay leadership in rural Churches, so they remain alive and welcoming. We need to support and grow patterns of effective rural ministry: lay lead family services and children’s holiday clubs, mid-week discussion evenings with supper in a village hall are just some examples already happening. Other Churches have reordered their interiors, so the building can be used during the week, for example for lunch clubs or other community gatherings.</p> <p>We need to grow the rural Church, supporting Christians to be a blessing in these communities.</p>
<p>DAVIES, Mr John</p>	<p>As churchwarden in a multi-parish benefice, I see the challenges to a rural congregation as making disciples and Christian witness (Matt 28.19).</p> <p>Difficulties in meeting the challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing affluent incomers together with original village families. Often the incomers take over the church! • Keeping viable. Weekly worship, a full complement of parish officers, financial solvency • Fewer clergy • Little money to spend locally on mission after the share • Lovely listed churches! Totally impractical for anything apart from formal services and expensive to run. <p>Addressing the difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray. Don’t just work for enough attendance to survive. Do something the Holy Spirit will get involved in. • Run social events to break down barriers • Raise money, not just for the share but for village causes • Through Neighbourhood Plans influence a community hall project into becoming a church-run community centre? • Get where Christ wants to put us, as the leadership and force for good in our communities. The traditional role of church..... • Lay service leadership encouraged, accepted and the norm. <p>As clergy allocations reduce, survival of the rural church is going to entirely depend on lay leadership. General Synod needs to empower this, removing barriers, allowing us to flourish locally!</p> <p>It’s more than Communion by Extension.....!</p>

<p>FRY, Mrs Christine</p>	<p>I grew up attending a small rural church in the Midlands and benefited from the strong all age bonds of church family. As a small rural church we had several periods without a minister- one lasting 8 years! The gap was filled by lay ministry, with the lay readers and church wardens leading the church.</p> <p>There is a wealth of experience and developing new patterns of rural ministry as described in the recent General Synod report: Released for mission: growing the rural church (GS Misc 1092). These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • envisioning, enabling and equipping the ministry of lay people, • effective training and resourcing for clergy and lay people in rural and multi - benefice parishes, • the simplification of governance and legal structures within the wider church of England • building creative ecumenical partnerships - aimed at mission and growth, • investing in training young ordinands as the next generation of ministers <p>Rural ministry combined with falling clergy numbers of the next decade remains a key issue for church of England in the next five years.</p>
<p>GREENE, Ms Jay</p>	<p>I am a churchwarden and lay worship leader in a rural, multi-parish benefice so I know these challenges at first hand! We have wonderful and terrible old buildings which are a treasure and a burden absorbing much time, energy and money in maintenance. Congregations are smaller, reflecting the smaller populations of the villages, so more work falls on fewer people who are all volunteers. We cannot afford more clergy so empowering and equipping the laity to lead is a valued way to have both regular Sunday services and pastoral visiting in dispersed multi-parish benefices. This has worked for more than 10 years in our area.</p> <p>On the positive side, it does seem easier to build community in villages and to bring people together around projects. The challenge is to retain them when the fundraising or holiday club is over. Parishes need to be encouraged to look to organisations like The Arthur Rank Centre who offer support and new ideas, like their Germinate programme, which will help rural ministry to flourish.</p>
<p>HUNT, Mr Alan</p>	<p>I have no direct experience of rural ministry, so I would defer to those who have better understandings in this area. But I'm aware that the complexity of ministry in multiple parishes greatly stretches church leaders, sometimes to the limit, not least because this can be a very lonely task. So I believe we must look to develop teams in which clergy (stipendiary and self-supporting) and lay leaders work interdependently. I heard recently of some very encouraging and fruitful work of this kind in villages where lay leaders have been serving faithfully and effectively for some years. We also need to keep looking at the management and use of rural church buildings, so that we make the best use of these resources, even if this means making some hard choices in the future.</p>

<p>KIDD, Mr Christopher</p>	<p>Based in a church on the edge of the New Forest, and playing a role in the Lyndhurst Deanery I see these challenges regularly. Economic factors are placing great strain on farmers and rural trades whilst the aging population, price of housing, and changing uses of the countryside all contribute to social stresses. Fewer Clergy having oversight for more and more parishes leads to expectations of them which inevitably set them up for failure.</p> <p>The concept of Festival Churches as suggested by Revd Anna Norman-Walker (until recently Diocesan Missioner for the Diocese of Exeter) has some merit in how we maintain local churches where the regular Sunday worship is deemed no longer viable.</p> <p>A Festival church would provide occasional offices, a public act of worship for the major festivals, and have the ability for the building to be open for private prayer. A village could apply to the Diocese, who would provide them with all of the above at a locally determined cost, based on occasional office provision, cost of basic building maintenance and insurance.</p> <p>There are no easy answers but there are different avenues to be explored as we look to deal with the challenges facing these parishes.</p>
<p>LALLY, Mr Daniel</p>	<p>Unfortunately I have lived in an urban Parish all my life but I seek to learn and trust from the guidance of my fellow Brothers and Sisters who may know more about the challenges on this particular issue.</p>
<p>MAIN, Mr Paul</p>	<p>There is a two-fold challenge concerning management of resources – human and property. The parish system, in the way it covers the whole country, is a major plus for our Church. We joyfully accept the obligation to provide a Christian presence throughout the land, but this puts strain on our people, the clergy in particular but also the laity.</p> <p>We need to pursue the development of every-member-ministry, with the clergy acting as enablers rather than the traditional solitary parson.</p> <p>Our church buildings can be great assets if we can find uses for them in their communities, rather than the liabilities that they become if used only for occasional services – but all this applies in urban areas too!</p>
<p>MOORE, Mrs Lucy</p>	<p>From working with many mission-minded rural churches across the UK, giving seminars at the Rural Ministries Conference and conversations with the Arthur Rank Centre, I see the challenges are around limited transport; small numbers which makes ‘critical mass’ difficult; a sense of village ownership of the church building that has no corresponding sense of responsibility; in some cases there is a strong sense of wanting to do things as they have always been done with little thought for their suitability for today’s culture, which can steep a church in the past, especially perhaps when it comes to a love of pews; ageing village populations that make forming a team difficult; limited facilities (kitchens! <i>toilets!</i>); and deciding how a multiparish benefice works most effectively, strategically and fairly.</p> <p>However! Rural churches often have the joys of a wonderful sense of place; a fabulous grapevine for sharing news; freedom for lay people to minister; and from a Messy Church point of view we are green with envy at your ready supply of sheep, chicks, manure, hay and other biblical rural messy stuff. We can learn from the many flourishing examples of imaginative, creative rural ministry and mission and share their good practice.</p>

<p>NASH, Mrs Abigail</p>	<p>Often rural parishes are part of a multi-parish benefice. For clergy this means they can be physically tiring to minister to as they cover a large geographical area.</p> <p>The opportunities for sharing the gospel are still there. There is a strong parish identity not found so often in towns. At significant times of the year – Christmas, Easter, Harvest – the opportunities of reaching out, as the parish church, are available because of the strong parish identity.</p> <p>Linked to this strong parish identity are opportunities afforded in pastoral situations – visiting the sick, funerals, baptisms and weddings. It means very few local families will have had no contact with their local church in some way.</p> <p>There are often great opportunities within local schools, especially in primary schools to help with assemblies, seasonal and end of term services.</p> <p>Help in training people to run assemblies, with understanding about how it fits into the curriculum, along with resources for making the most of pastoral visiting would equip the local parish to be effective in these areas.</p> <p>Combining some PCC responsibilities in a Benefice, such as administration or building maintenance may utilise people’s skills, time and talents wisely.</p>
<p>WILSON, Mrs Cynthia</p>	<p>The spiritual condition in rural parishes may sometimes be better than in urban areas solely because of the faithfulness of older people! However, clergy aren’t made of elastic and the hours spent travelling etc is a major problem. Greater encouragement of house-churches and laity-led groups; sound video teaching and missions from other-church’s by led by local congregations.</p>