The Church of Scotland

God's Own Country

A Practical Resource for Rural Churches

Rural Theologies

RURAL THEOLOGIES

Foreword

Over the three years of the Working Party's deliberations and enquiries, it has become clear that there is and can be no single 'rural theology'. Theologians and lay thinkers have a variety of approaches and language to describe their reflections on the relationships between the Creator, the creation and the creatures. In addition, many of the views of 'a rural theology' have been expressed by city-dwellers who base their thoughts on perceptions rather than experience, creating a kind of theoretical debate which is not based in the realities of country or coastal living. The Working Party has decided to seek the considered response of a variety of individuals whose lives and work are involved with rural living and who know its challenges and rewards, its burdens and freedoms. We offer two articles as a starting point for your reflections – you may find them helpful; you may disagree radically – either way, they are there to encourage you to strive for an understanding of your relationship with God, the land and sea, produce and harvest and the visitors and locals in your community.

It is intended that this enquiry should continue, and the Rural Strategy Team will commission further theological reflection. If you register on the Rural Church Database you will receive information about future articles and can request copies or access them on the rural web-pages at www.resourcingchurches.org.uk

A Theology of Creation

Rev Colin Williamson

Any review of the purpose of the rural church will of course be mainly a discussion of worship, mission and service as appropriate to today's congregations set in country parishes. It will, however, serve to moderate pragmatic considerations of numbers, buildings and purpose if at an early stage some thought is given to the sanctification of space.

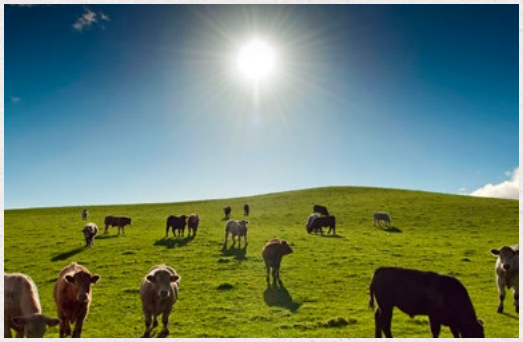
An Eloquent Witness

In Scotland at the beginning of the twenty-first century the national church has lost many of its tokens of influence and place. There is no longer an assumption that any religious body is due special place in a secular society. It may be suggested that this generation has seen the final death of Christendom in Western Europe, which begs the question as to whether the concept of Christendom ever sat well with the Gospel in the first place. However, the kirk building in its village or set among its fields was never a triumphalist symbol of establishment. It was the touch of benediction upon the land, an eloquent witness to the Christ who is Lord of space and not just of the minds and souls of men and women. Just as Sunday, the Day of Resurrection, sanctifies the week, claiming time for Christ until every day is the Day of the Lord, the country kirk, perhaps the second or third on the site in a millennium, is a prayer for the land and the beasts as well as for the folk around. In the Orthodox sense, not always understood in the West, it 'deifies' space.

Redeemed humanity is not to be snatched away from the rest of creation, for creation is to be saved and glorified along with the children of God.

"The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God ... (for) the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:19-21)

"Christ took flesh and so has made possible the redemption and metamorphosis of all creation. So the rural church stands as an ensign of hope for the land for here is the Redeemer really present in the midst of his people in Word and Sacrament so that the place becomes none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven". (Genesis 28:17)



A Priesthood Towards Creation

So it is that at harvest thanksgiving, whilst today's congregation will wish to support the sharing ministry of the Church around the world and offer prayer for responsible stewardship of the earth, it is important that the first fruits of local produce continue to find a place in the sanctuary. We are not merely giving thanks for these things as benefits to us; we are allowing them to come home in the presence of their Creator.

Being in Christ implies participation in his priesthood towards creation. Thus the use of material things becomes for the Christian a matter of Gospel witness. In former times the glebe of a rural parish was more than part of the maintenance of its ministry. "God's acre" which, in many parishes, was the only land not owned by the estate, was a significant statement that the church was not a spiritualised sect. It had a stake in the land. In a similar way the field which Jeremiah bought at Anathoth was to remain an earnest (a part payment given in advance to confirm a contract) of ultimate redemption for land and people.

There is ample record of how many parish clergy in Scotland and England during the nineteenth century were leaders and innovators in livestock breed improvement, land drainage and crop rotation. The Reverend Henry Duncan (1774-1846) of Ruthwell *"…. felt it a duty to show an example here, and with this in view had brought into operation the various improvements in the science of agriculture as they were successively published. His little territory, in short, had come to be the model farm of the district. Many were the experiments in draining, ploughing, in reaping etc. which from time to time were made under his inspection; and so well had he succeeded in fertilising his fields, that among his less active neighbours, whose farms gave token of their indifference, it was sometimes remarked that 'surely the special blessing of God rested on the glebe.'"*
Memoir of the Rev. Henry Duncan DD 1848

Use of glebes in recent times has not in every case been such a witness to Gospel values. Would it be fanciful to hope that today's Christian community, at a time of crisis for agriculture in Britain and of threat to the earth itself, might consider it a Christian duty to take thought as to its relationship with creation and begin to show this with respect to its own land?

The attitude of St Francis to creation may have been simple but it was far from naïve. In a profoundly theological sense Francis understood that created things, animate and inanimate, have a right and a longing (cf St Paul) to know their maker. By the touch of humans, God will be known to our fellow creatures as either capricious and selfish or as faithful and loving. Creation shares with us a common origin in the loving purpose of God. Creation shares with us the effect of the Fall. Creation shares with us the hope of redemption in Christ. We are priests of this.

This priestly relationship should be found in the Church's understanding of creation and in the way the Church contributes to the ecological debate. The Church's concern is not merely that the earth and its resources be preserved for succeeding human generations; rather, it will be an advocacy on behalf of creation itself for which the Christian is in loco Christi. The priestly relationship should be found also in an informed interest in the ethics of land management, animal welfare and scientific advance generally. The theological starting point of common origin and shared hope of redemption in God removes many of the anomalies which confuse discussion of creation over against humanity.

In terms of the parish, the priestly relationship might in former times have been evident in the use of the glebe as noted above. It may be hoped that space be given in the life and worship of a rural congregation to the relationship of the community and its members to creation. It is not for the Church, for example, to prescribe how farmers shall work the land and husband their stock, but the Church would be remiss if the Christian farmer, with all the pressures upon him, were left unaware of the sacred dimension to his touch. There are some practical opportunities: The local body responsible for the church's fabric and property should become accustomed to praying for it, not as a possession, but as representing the material world in which the Saviour was incarnate and which is drawn into the praise of the Creator.

A rural parish might adopt an annual form for the blessing of the land within its bounds. Since the fifth century some traditions have observed Rogation (the three days before Ascension) as a time for processions and special litanies. It would be a good exercise for a congregation to devise its own form for an annual spiritual 'beating of the bounds' when at various points of the parish, prayers of thanksgiving and intercession would be offered and a blessing given.

There are occasions which very clearly call for ministry for which the land cries out and which its owner should welcome. One example may serve. In the 2002 Foot & Mouth crisis there were echoes from the Old Testament. *"How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away."* (Jeremiah 12:4) When Joel addressed himself to a famine which had brought suffering to people, animals, and to the very land itself, he promised God's restoration, *"Fear not, O Land ... Fear not, you beasts of the field ... Be glad, O sons of Zion." (Joel: 2:21-25)* Again we see the relationship which Paul takes up in Romans in the light of Christ, that created things look to us for the touch of blessing which prefigures the ultimate redemption of all things. As the Church will bless a house for the sake of those who live in it, the Church should be prepared also to respond to any invitation to pray for the healing of the land and to bless it from God. To be prepared to stand in the fields alongside a farmer whose animals have been afflicted, his land darkened by tragedy, and to voice God's redemptive blessing over it all, is required of the Church.

Listening for the Heartbeat of God

Rev Dr J. Philip Newell

One of the favourite images in the Celtic tradition is that of John the Beloved leaning against Jesus at the last supper (John 13:23). It was said of him that he thus heard the heart-beat of God. He became an image of listening within life for the beat of God's presence. The emphasis is on listening within every moment and listening within ourselves and within all things for the beat without which there would be no life. The practice is of an inner attentiveness that can lead also to greater outer awareness and to a passionate commitment to care for one another and for the life of creation.

Origins

What exactly do we mean by Celtic tradition? What are its major features and what is its history? The name 'Celtic spirituality' is a modern term. We use it to describe an ancient phenomenon. It refers to a stream of Christian spirituality that was born in the 4th-century world of Ireland and Britain. It is distinct from what, on the other hand, can be called the 'Mediterranean' tradition, which developed its distinguishing characteristics in the world of Constantine's Roman Empire. Just as we use the term 'Scottish history' to include references to the development of a people who only later called themselves Scottish, so we use the term 'Celtic spirituality' to identify features of a spirituality that formed in that part of the world which only later became known as the Celtic world of Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Made in the Image of God

There are two main characteristics that distinguish the 'Celtic' tradition from the 'Mediterranean'. The first is the Celtic belief that what is deepest in us is the image of God. Genesis 1, with its description of humanity made in the image and likeness of God, is a foundational text. Everything else that is said about us needs to be said in the context of this foundational truth, that what is deepest in us is the sacredness of God's image. The Mediterranean tradition on the other hand has wanted to say that what is deepest in us at birth is our sinfulness. This has had the effect of seeing grace as essentially opposed to what is at the heart of human nature.

A 19th-century teacher in the Celtic tradition used the analogy of royal garments. In the 19th century royal garments were still woven through with a costly thread, a thread of gold. If somehow the golden thread were removed from the garment, the entire garment would unravel. So it is, he said, with the image of God woven into the fabric of our being. If somehow it were taken out of us, we would unravel; we would cease to be. The image of God is not simply a characteristic of who we are, which may or may not be there depending on whether or not we have received the grace of baptism. The image of God is the essence of our being, and sin has not had the power to undo what God has woven into the fabric of our being.

The belief that what is deepest in us is the image of God has a number of radically important implications for our spirituality. It is to say that the wisdom of God is deeper in our souls than the ignorance of what we have become. It is to say that the beauty of God is truer to our depths than the ugliness of what we have done. Similarly it is to say that the creativity of God and the passion of God for what is just and right is deeper than any barrenness or apathy in our lives. And above all else it is to say that love, the desire to love and the desire to be loved, is at the very centre of the mystery of our being, deeper than any fear or hatred that may hold us hostage.

This is not to be naive about the power of sin and the perversion of what has gone wrong in our souls and relationships. It is simply to say that what God has planted at the core of our beings has not been undone by sin. The 9th-century Irish teacher, John Scotus Eriugena, said that we suffer from an infection of soul, or what he calls a 'leprosy' of soul. Just as the physical disease of leprosy has the power to distort the human face, making it appear ugly and grotesque, so sin has the power to infect the countenance of the soul, making it appear unnatural and even monstrous - so much so that we come to believe that that is the true face of the soul. In the Gospel story of Jesus healing the lepers, when he offers them the grace of healing he does not give them new faces. Rather he restores them to their true faces.

One of the favourite figures in early Celtic legend is the 3rd-century Christian contemplative, Antony of the Desert. He even appears etched into the designs of high-standing Celtic crosses. Antony was remembered as saying to those who came out to see him in his desert hermitage, 'When you die and go to your place of judgement, you will not be asked whether you have become another Antony, or another St Paul or St Mary. You will be asked whether you have become truly yourself.' In the Celtic tradition there is a passionate and rigorous emphasis on repentance. Repentance, however, which simply means turning around, is a turning around not to become someone other than ourselves. It is a turning around in order to be truly ourselves. It is a turning away from the falseness of what we have become to re-turn to the true depths of our nature.

Grace and Nature

Grace and nature are both gifts of God. They are not opposed to one another. As Eriugena says, 'Nature is the gift of being and grace is the gift of well-being.' Nature is a sacred gift. At the heart of the gift of our human nature is the image of God, knitted together in our mother's womb. Yes, it has been infected by sin. Yes, it has been covered over by the falseness and inhumanity of what we have done to ourselves and to one another. And yes, it needs what Eriugena calls 'the medicine of grace' if it is to be healed. But grace is given not that we might become other than natural or somehow more than natural. It is given that we might be truly natural. It is given to free us from the unnaturalness of what we have become. The Celtic tradition in fact refers to Christ as 'the truly natural One', not as the supernatural one. He shows us the true face of our soul, made as we are in the image of God.

The second main characteristic that distinguishes the Celtic tradition from the Mediterranean tradition is the belief that creation is essentially good. Again Genesis 1 is like a foundational text. At the end of each day in the creation story is the phrase, 'And God saw that it was good'. Then at the end of the sixth day are the words, 'And God saw all that had been made, and behold it was very good'. In the Celtic tradition, creation is viewed not merely as something that occurred at one point in the past. Creation is forever being born. It is forever coming forth from the womb of God, from the realm of the invisible into the realm of the visible. And God forever sees what is created as essentially good.

Not only is creation viewed as a blessing, it is regarded in essence as an expression of God. In his commentary on the prologue to St John's Gospel, and in particular the words, 'In the beginning was the Word ... and all things have come into being through the Word', John Scotus Eriugena says that all things have been uttered into being by God. If God were to stop speaking, he says, creation would cease to exist. Creation is a theophany, i.e., a showing or revealing of God. At the heart of the Christian mystery is the belief that God is love, that God is self-giving. All that God does, therefore, is a giving of Self. Creation, the great work of God, is essentially an offering of God's Self. It is a Self-disclosure to us of the mystery of God.

In relation to the question, 'Where do we look for God?', the answer is not, 'Away from creation', but rather 'Deep within all that has been created'. Within ourselves, within our children, within all that has been spoken into being we can listen for the expression of God. Eriugena says that God is speaking to us through two books. One is the 'little book', he says, the Book of Scripture. The other is the 'big book', the Book of Creation. This is not to be naive about what has gone wrong in creation. It is not to pretend that creation, like the human soul, has not been infected by sin. It is to affirm, however, that creation is like a sacred text that we can learn to read in our journey of knowing God. It is also to say that what we do to matter is a spiritual issue, whether that be the matter of our human bodies, the matter of the body of creation, or the matter of the body politic and how we handle the resources of the earth. All these matters are central to spirituality in the Celtic tradition. In the Mediterranean tradition, on the other hand, there has tended to be a separation of spirit and matter. The mystery of God has been distanced from the matter of creation. What we do to creation, therefore, too often has been regarded as not an essential part of our spirituality.

A Re-discovered Understanding

The Celtic tradition was formally rejected by the Synod of Whitby in the year 664. Part of the debate at Whitby reflected the Celtic mission's conviction that it was continuing the way of the beloved disciple who had leaned against Jesus at the last supper. The Synod's rejection of the Celtic tradition was a tragedy for Western Christianity. The reality, of course, is that it has lived on in the Celtic fringes of Britain over the centuries. And today it is being recovered. Scottish spirituality has been heavily influenced by many aspects of the Mediterranean tradition; another part of our Scottish inheritance, however, is the Celtic stream. The reclaiming of it can be an important resource for spirituality in the 21st century. It can help us listen again for the beat of God's presence in this moment and in every moment, in our own lives and in the life of all that has being.

All-age Outreach Through Environmental Action

Mrs Eleanor Todd

An Ecology of Grace

The challenges of the human-induced environmental crisis are huge: climate change, resource depletion, pollution, food production. It would be easy to despair. 'Eco-Congregation' allows churches to meet the challenge not with despair but with grace, beginning with small changes by a few people in one place, and becoming a movement reaching tens of thousands of people (inside and outside the Church). In doing this, we are witnessing to our faith that God has not abandoned his creation. Like Moses on the threshold of the Promised L, we are 'choosing life' and following God's way, so that we and our children may live long in our land.

Eco-Congregation embodies the philosophy of Church without Walls in a very down-to-earth and practical way. Eco-Congregation churches find themselves being shaped by a new understanding of the Gospel, of the Creator who became part of his creation and who forms the kingdom from the dust of the earth. They are shaped by the locality - not only the people, but the soil, the rocks, the water and wind: the bio-diversity. They are shaped by new friendships, finding previously closed doors of communication opening into the community and across the Church. They are also shaped by unexpected gifts, as members with environmental skills or knowledge or connections - sometimes people who have previously been on the fringes of church life - take on key roles.

What is the Eco-Congregation Programme?

Since 2001 churches have been engaging with environmental issues with the help of the Eco-Congregation Programme. They have also found themselves engaging with local schools and organisations, with young people, with new forms of worship, with other denominations, and with people on the fringes of the faith community. These churches are urban and rural, large and small, affluent and deprived. Some already had considerable knowledge of environmental issues, others were starting from scratch. Of the 150 churches involved in Eco-Congregation, I have yet to hear of one which has not found it useful: over 50 churches have gained the Eco-Congregation award in recognition of their work.

A Flexible Programme

The programme is adaptable to all kinds of church context. All churches are asked to take action in three areas, summed up as spiritual, practical and community. Spiritual is about making the link between environmental issues and the Christian faith. Practical is about reducing the environmental impact of church life. Community is about taking the environmental message out beyond the church walls. A church which demonstrates to independent assessors that it has taken action in each of these three areas - to an extent within the capacity of that church - can receive an Eco-Congregation award.

As well as providing the framework of the award scheme, Eco-Congregation provides a wide range of resources to help churches to become more environmentally friendly. Firstly, there are twelve written modules, covering all areas of church life - worship, theology, children, young people, bible study, buildings, gardens and graveyards, finance and purchasing, lifestyles, community work and global issues - which provide a comprehensive toolkit of ideas and information. Secondly, there are local networks of Eco-Congregation churches who through meetings and e-mail contact exchange ideas and experiences, support each other, and make contact with local organisations. Thirdly, there are newsletters and a website providing the latest news and information.

A Wealth of Responses – Local Church Examples

You could almost count the congregation of Carlops Church in West Linton on your fingers, but it is exceptional amongst Eco-Congregations in that the entire congregation is a member of the Green Team, and almost everyone in the parish has got involved in the Church's environmental activities. Through the Edinburgh network they are also building relationships with city-centre and suburban churches which although very different are – with an approach which is right for them – involved in the same programme.

Many of the congregation at Dunscore were involved as parents, pupils or teachers in the local school, so as an Eco-Congregation and an Eco School it made sense to work together. Initiatives like litter-picks, second-hand book fairs and an environmental newsletter delivered to the whole community were the result of collaboration between the two organisations, deepening friendships and increasing understanding through shared practical action.

St Saviour's in Bridge of Allan took their Sunday School out of doors when the weather was fine. Torphichen church in West Lothian also saw the potential for Christian teaching in the beautiful countryside on their doorstep. They enlisted the help of the local Wildlife Trust to run evening bat watch walks. The neighbouring church of Pardovan, Kingscavil and Winchburgh brought nature into the church by producing banners depicting the story of the Creation in a celebration of biodiversity. Then they took the Church out of doors by creating a garden of plants mentioned in the Bible, as an educational tool. They linked Biblical and environmental themes in worship too, using Noah's ark as the basis for a service about climate change, led by young people.

St Andrew's Episcopal Church in Brechin was able to provide a comprehensive recycling service to the people of Brechin through their shop in the village centre. Sellable second-hand items raised money for the church, while all kinds of other homes were found for every unwanted item, from blankets for the dolphin sanctuary to rags for the steam railway. St Andrew's environmental work also took account of the fact that their parish incorporates some of Scotland's most beautiful scenery, in Glen Esk. There, they refurbished their retreat centre to high environmental standards and built a sensory garden to help all kinds of guests - from Dundee youth groups to disabled visitors - to appreciate the beauty of the natural world both in the landscape and close at hand.

Dalbeattie church in Dumfries and Galloway teamed up with a local environmental organisation to hold worship in the local forest.

Several rural churches of different denominations around Inverness, including Elgin, Invergordon, Aviemore and Dingwall, started out on the programme at about the same time. People from each church met in the middle, in Inverness Episcopal Cathedral, to share ideas, plans and experiences so far. They discovered common themes. For example, most were considering building-refurbishments so useful information and contact details were quickly exchanged.

Building work provides an excellent opportunity for churches to get involved in environmental thinking. Kilmore and Oban filled the ceiling of their new church centre with skylights, to maximise natural light. Westray church in Orkney saw that the rural setting itself could provide their church with power, and thanks to a grant from the Scottish Community & Householder Renewables Initiative made their church fully self-sufficient in energy. They installed a wind turbine, a ground-source heat pump, and for backup a generator which runs on bio-diesel - but is rarely needed.

Cupar Old Church in Fife made a contribution to energy saving which was just as important, although perhaps less glamorous and certainly less expensive. Members of the congregation bought lots of loft insulation, climbed up into their church roof, and put down a double layer of it, ensuring their energy bills would go down and their church stay cosy.

The small church of Bowden in the Scottish Borders, instead of embarking on one special project, integrated a range of good environmental practices into church life, including recycling, ethical investment and a range of simple energy saving measures. Having received their award they plan to get the larger, linked congregation of Melrose involved in Eco-Congregation, which would offer scope for more ambitious shared action.

Rural churches with links to the land are well placed to consider the pressing environmental issue of global food production. Fairlie in Ayrshire is not only a fair trade congregation, but led Fairlie to become Scotland's first Fair Trade village as a major part of its Eco-Congregation award work.

With so many pressures on church funds, a church green team is very lucky to be given a budget of its own. This did not prevent the "Earth Keepers" group at Dyce church in Aberdeenshire from making ambitious plans to invite speakers and take environmental action. They ran a sale to raise funds which gave them the freedom to be creative

The Kilmore and Oban Green Team also showed an enterprising streak, producing fairly-traded organic cotton shopping bags with the Eco-Congregation logo, available to churches around the country.

Iona Abbey is an unusual kind of rural congregation with many visitors from all over the world, but the kinds of activities which gained them an Eco-Congregation award are ones which many rural churches could copy. Their island pilgrimage demonstrates to the many visitors to the island how 'thin' the dividing line between the natural world and the divine world is.

St Machar's Cathedral in Aberdeen is a city congregation but was bequeathed a piece of countryside on the fringes of the city, a site important both for bio-diversity and recreation. Instead of selling it to developers, a team of volunteers from the church maintained it as a nature reserve with the help of the local Ranger.

Failing to protect nature separates us from God because we so often turn to nature to find God. Through Eco-Congregations people can learn more and as a group find ways to care for God's creation. The framework of spiritual, practical and community ensures that churches integrate environmental thinking into all aspects of church life and consider it from several perspectives. The resources and networks provide ideas and support.

Through Eco-Congregation your church is linked to a wider community of Christians concerned about the same issues, from the local green team to Regional Networks to our sister programmes across the UK and strong links with similar work across Europe and Australia. Finally, the award scheme recognises churches' achievements, encouraging their own congregation who often feel inspired to live up to their award; encouraging churches throughout Scotland to see environmental awareness as a growing Christian movement. It's also important to demonstrate to the local community that people of faith are not only taking environmental concerns seriously, they are taking action.

To find out more about Eco-Congregation and get involved go to www.ecocongregationscotland.org

or contact
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Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN.
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The Church of Scotland

God's Own Country

A Practical Resource for Rural Churches

Sacred Space

SACRED SPACE

I was glad when they said to me, Let us go up to the house of the Lord!
Psalm 122:1

The Church Building in a Rural Community

Prof John R Hume

The term 'Sacred Space' runs the risk of being a catch-all, a wrapping-up of a very disparate set of ideas and feelings – just like 'church', in fact. I prefer to think of sacred places, rather than spaces, for places have a specific location tied in with the particularities of geography, history, and past and present cultural assumptions. Spaces, on the other hand, may be completely separated from the setting in which they are placed, as witness many modern house interiors. A church in the remote Highlands, such as Strathnaver in Sutherland, may have an interior comparable with one in, say Dumfries and Galloway, like Dalswinton, but the sense of sacredness which the place has is markedly different.

In writing about the 'sacred', one is trying to capture something which is on the edge of consciousness. One in a sense knows when something is 'sacred', but it is much harder to define what makes it so. At the end of the day, it may be that the notion of sacredness is so personal that it is really impossible to communicate it. In what follows I will retreat from definition, and attempt to write about both the generality and specificity of what seem to me to be sacred places in rural Scotland.

If I look, in my mind's eye, at the many places in Scotland that I have visited over the years, I would say that what the most sacred have in common is a sense of being inhabited by unseen presences, by a 'cloud of witnesses'. Further, these presences are benign. They speak of generations of love and care, of enduring belief that these are places that matter, that counterbalance the sadnesses and tragedies of life. The places they inhabit are in, a sense, crystallised goodness; they have in a curious way a redemptive quality. By being hallowed, being associated with generations of belonging, they have the ability to communicate the thoughtful affection they have inspired to those who visit them. I do not see this property of 'sacredness' as confined purely to places created with a definite intention of being focal points for worship. In the Orkney farm museum at Kirbuster there is a central hearth, where the fire for cooking and heating is set against a wall. When the fire is burning it evokes a sense of family affection, of shared love over generations. The same atmosphere, in a different way, is communicated by the little 'black mills' of the North and Western Isles, now for the most part ruined. These were built by individual families or small groups of families to grind grain for their own use. I suppose they have about them the feeling of sharing, and of sheltering. They have too, the notion of being an integral part of all of life, and of fundamental elements of it – the shared meal – the warmth, both physical and emotional, of life shared with family and friends. They are also completely devoid of grandiosity, with no intention of impressing.

Other places with some of the same sense of being hallowed are those associated with the sea, and especially with fishing. It has seemed to me for many years that Christ's choice of fishermen as disciples, and his use of boats in his ministry, has a particular meaning, hallowing places associated with boats and boatmen. For that reason I see such places as some of the east coast harbours as having a degree of sacredness.

Inimical to sacredness is any sense of greed, humans exploiting each other for unreasonable profit or individual aggrandisement, or putting the accumulation and display of wealth before mutual obligation and respect. This does not mean that large and ornate churches need lack sacredness, if the prime motive for their construction was the worship of God, and not the demonstration of the wealth and power of a particular congregation or benefactor. Also hostile to my perception of sacredness is evidence of neglect, or of disregard of the qualities of a place. Further, I have to say that the appropriation of what was built as a place for public worship to private use can seriously erode, if not extinguish, the sacredness of a place. Curiously, I find that a public reuse of a church is less damaging to its sense of holiness than conversion to domestic use.

The sacredness of a place can be in a way inherent. Pre-Christian examples include the stone settings at Stenness and Brodgar in Orkney, and the line of prehistoric monuments in the Kilmartin Valley in mid-Argyll, where the pre-existing quality of the place is evident. Early Christian places with inherent sacredness include Iona; St Ninian's Cave, Wigtownshire; and St Blane's Chapel, Isle of Bute. Others have become sacred by long

association with worship, such as Dunnet and Canisbay, Caithness; Lyne, Peebles-shire; and Dunlop, Ayrshire. Yet others owe their sacredness to the realisation of a spiritually-inspired intent. These include the tiny chapel at Hoselaw, Roxburghshire. A modern example is the little Scottish Episcopal Church of St Donnan's, Lochalsh. Sacredness can be enhanced by association with a burial ground, with evidence of long association with a community – especially one in which the grave markers show evidence of having been made by local craftsmen, rather than being the products of large commercial firms.

Reading what I have written so far, I realise that what I have been struggling towards is essentially that the sacred place is born of the serious engagement of humans with the divine. This may be a recognition that in a particular natural setting one is notably conscious of the 'otherness' of God, or that a place long associated with worship brings one in a sense into communion with those who have gone before, and through that to an enhanced relationship with God. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the future, it seems to me perfectly possible to create new sacred places, or to enhance the sacredness of an existing place. To achieve this there needs to be a real will to engage at a profound level with what has historically been involved in making a place sacred. It is also necessary to recognise that physical creation is genuinely a part of the relationship of the people of God with the divine, and that the usefulness of church buildings is secondary to their primary purpose of allowing people to engage with God as well as with their fellow beings.

'Sacred Space' Present and Future

This is all very well, but what does this mean for rural congregations in 21st century Scotland? I believe that there is still an important role for church buildings in the countryside as part of the life of the Church in Scotland, and that the 'de-churching' of rural areas is something to be resisted, and resisted with vigour. The present vogue for seeing church closure as positively virtuous seems to me to be seriously misguided. Rather than seeing church closure as 'good', it seems to me that the emphasis should be on finding ways of involving local communities in keeping church buildings open and in use.

I see the importance of the rural church as in fulfilling a whole series of roles. The most obvious is as a place for gathering for worship, and a focal point for a caring and sharing congregation. It should also be a place for individual prayer and contemplation of God and the 'good', and of remembering those we love and have loved. The role of the church as a place of pilgrimage, of interaction of members of local congregations with visitors, is also an important one, giving the opportunity for the exercise of hospitality. The interaction of the church community with the wider community can be fostered by encouraging the use of the church for 'secular' activities, without losing the sacred quality of the place.

In practical terms this emphasises the importance of ensuring that rural churches are maintained in sufficient numbers, and in appropriate places, to allow these functions to be maintained and developed. To make this happen, finding new ways of keeping churches open, accessible, worshipful and welcoming is essential. New forms of ministry, probably non-stipendiary, need to be developed, and basic needs, such as property maintenance, shared, perhaps at regional level.

Churches also need to be made fit for the variety of purposes needed in changing circumstances. Among possibilities are removing gloomy or poorly-designed furnishings, re-painting, and re-lighting. The objective should be to make the church a 'must be at' place, offering a genuine caring welcome to members and non-members alike. It is worth considering making space for displays of local creativity, and keeping doors open.

Finally, I identified the importance in sacredness of evidences of long periods of association with worship. Such features as canopied pulpits, box pews, well-designed furnishings, and interesting monuments are all worth caring for. So, too, are such small objects as Communion and offertory ware (including ladles), and Communion tokens, and the provision of display cases should be considered.

Last of all, please, please give up the notion that by closing churches we are furthering the mission of the Church. The business of the Church (as opposed to the Business of the church) is to be there for all the people of Scotland, and that means the people of rural Scotland as much as the people of urban Scotland.

Suggested Bible Readings*

Psalm 84

01 How lovely is your dwelling place
O Lord of hosts!
02 My soul longs, indeed it faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh sing for joy
To the living God.
03 Even the sparrow finds a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young,
At your altars, O LORD of hosts,
My King and my God.
04 Happy are those who live in your house,
Ever singing your praise. Selah
05 Happy are those whose strength is in you,
In whose heart are the highways to Zion.
06 As they go through the valley of Baca
They make it a place of springs;
The early rain also covers it with pools.
07 They go from strength to strength;
The God of gods will be seen in Zion.
08 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah
09 Behold our shield, O God;
Look on the face of your anointed.
10 For a day in your courts is better
Than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than live in the tents of wickedness.
11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
He bestows favour and honour.
No good thing does the LORD withhold
From those who walk uprightly.
12 O LORD of hosts,
Happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Psalm 122

01 I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go to the house of the LORD!@
02 Our feet are standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem.
03 Jerusalem – built as a city
That is bound firmly together.
04 To it the tribes go up,
The tribes of the LORD,
As was decreed for Israel,
To give thanks to the name of
The LORD.
05 For there the thrones for judgement were set up
The thrones of the house of David.
06 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
'May they prosper who love you.
07 Peace be within your walls,
And security within your towers.'
08 For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, 'Peace be within you.'
09 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

Questions for Discussion

In Psalm 122 we read of the Psalmist's joy and anticipation of going to worship in 'the Lord's House'.

> What are the things about our church building which encourage us to come, and enable us to worship? On the other hand, are there things which make worship difficult?

> Do we see our building (and possibly its grounds) as a tool which can be used to serve the wider community?

> Is our church left open or could it be opened for some of the week,for prayer, contemplation or reflection on its purpose? How could this be developed?

> Are there things which can be done to make the building more user-friendly? e.g. Is disabled access as good as it could be?

> Is it possible to encourage understanding of the history of the building and the church community which uses it?

SACRED SPACE

Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.
Matthew 18:20

Sacred Space: Gathered for Worship

Rev Jim MacEwan

"Thank you very much, that was very tranquillising", said one worshipper as she shook my hand after a Communion service, leaving me wondering whether we had shared the body and blood of our risen Lord, or simply Valium. It emphasised for me – yet again – how varied are both the motives and the experiences of those who come to worship, and they are often far less profound, or even religious, than we like to think.

Why do people gather to worship, and wherein lies the sacredness? The ancient Israelites' 'sacred space' - the ark of the covenant - was portable, and there is even a hint of a question over the propriety of building a temple, when God points out that he has never asked for one. The psalmist reminds us that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it", so there is a good Biblical basis for a sense of worship on the mountain-top, in the garden, or, dare I say it, on the golf-course. Even so, it is a deeply ingrained trait of humanity to want buildings which are set apart for worship: almost every group which starts off using a 'secular' building soon decides to seek its own dedicated place of worship.

Today in Scotland, we are both blessed with and suffer from a vast heritage of church buildings for which the original motivation for their construction appears to have vanished, and the instinct to worship in any traditional sense has largely disappeared from our midst. In today's world of multiple choices, gathering weekly in church is low on the list of preferences, so let's look at the motives for worship which we see in the Bible; at what has changed in each case, and at what some are doing to meet the changed situation.

Awe

... is at the heart of worship. Worship and wonder are closely related. At the burning bush, Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration, we see worship compelled by an awareness of the presence of the living God. Today there are few who find that sense of awe in the weekly worship of their local kirk. Awe – or a substitute – is more commonly found on the football terraces or a packed concert hall, or even in the taking of recreational drugs, any of which can 'take one out of oneself'.

Only rarely, perhaps in the celebration of Holy Communion or at Christmas or Easter, do we capture, or are we granted, that sense of awe. Some of us feel it in particular places. I made a pilgrimage by bike and on foot from Nethy Bridge to Iona, stopping for a time of prayer at every church on the way, and in some of the remotest found a deep sense of worship and an awareness of the small worshipping community which met there. Somehow, either in our usual places of worship or by visiting other places, we need to make space for the Spirit to 'overawe' us. As ever, people differ in what touches them, which is why in my own church in Nethy Bridge we emulate some much larger congregations by offering two morning services of very different styles.

Rites of Passage

Jesus' presentation in the temple, and presence at the marriage in Cana, remind us of the centrality of rites of passage, though Jesus' involvement was more with the party than the service. Today, church marriages are fewer and the number of baptisms is in free-fall. Only church funerals are still the norm, especially in rural areas. Those uncommitted to the faith now realise that they do not need a baptism as an excuse to party, and a sense of occasion can be engendered for a wedding in the Caribbean or by a registrar in a local hotel.

The increasing practice of blessing or dedicating infants, seen by some as creating a two-tier situation, can equally be recognised as an honest way to welcome the children of uncommitted parents. Similarly, willingness to conduct weddings in a variety of settings can be a real opportunity to speak to many we will reach no other way. I have written a preamble to the service which seeks to speak to 'where people are' – or at least most of the younger people attending – and I am sure many others do the same. Honesty at funerals is also important and it is essential neither to assume nor pretend that those present have all come to worship. They haven't – they are there to 'pay their respects' to the deceased and/or support the family. A few may even just have come "for the bylt ham"! At the same time we have one of the best opportunities we will ever have to share the Gospel by our words and our attitude. To paraphrase Oliver Goldsmith, those who come to scoff may stay to pray, and the space will indeed be sacred.

The Done Thing/Habit

Worship varies through the Bible, but the temple sacrifices were regular, and we are told that Jesus went as usual to the synagogue. Habits are not to be despised – there are good as well as bad ones.

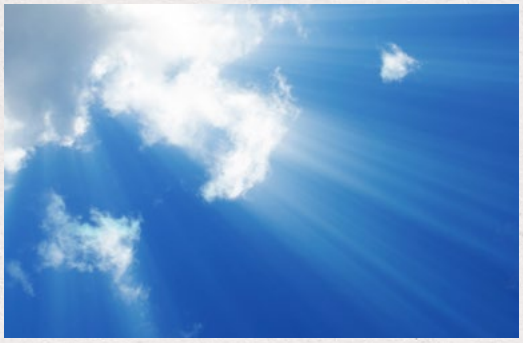
Today, regular worship is only the habit for a small percentage of people; it is certainly not the done thing. On the contrary, there is a widespread scepticism, and a real suspicion of religion, bordering at times on fear or hostility. Although there is as yet little sign of the tide turning, attempts to tackle this are not lacking. They usually involve either small groups – Alpha, house groups, Cell Church and the like – or larger events like the ecumenical 'Unite!' gatherings, bringing around 500 people together in the Aviemore Highland Resort.

The Word

The reading and exposition of 'the Word' was at the heart of the worship Jesus grew up with. At twelve, he was in the temple, questioning and learning. He 'took the scroll' early in his ministry, and based his work on the passage he read. Later on we read that 'the common people heard him gladly'. Scripture was at the heart of sacred space.

Today the vast majority care not a jot for the scriptures. Perhaps that is not surprising in view of the Church's very public disagreements over how the Bible is to be used and understood. We should be clearer and more up-front in pointing out that the Bible itself is full of disagreements – we are simply being Biblical, unpalatable as that may be. We should acknowledge that in the course of the Bible the understanding of many subjects changed (marriage, sacrifice and the law, to name only three), and that since the Bible was written many other beliefs have changed (e.g. our attitude to slavery and the place of women). We should proudly proclaim that these changes are legitimate for 'Biblical' Christians (is there any other kind?), not least because Jesus said that he had more to teach his people, but that at that time it would be too much for them, so the Spirit would come, to lead into all truth. God is eternally the same, but we are not.

This approach would allow a much more open and guilt-free exploration of controversial topics, and go some way to counter the fiction that Christians should always be unanimous. Our commitment is not to agree, but to love one another.



Fellowship

Part of the harvest worship of Israel centred on a lavish feast, and Jesus not only attracted criticism for his sociable habits but left a shared meal as the sign of his presence among his followers. It has been well said that we are called individually, but into fellowship.

Our usual Holy Communion services bear little resemblance to Jesus with his friends coming to the end of a meal. I read years ago of an American who spoke of finding understanding and warmth in his local pub when it was singularly lacking in the Church. I winced when I read his comment that "they've put the cross on the wrong building", and it still rebukes me.

The sacred space may sometimes be where the boundaries of worship and fellowship are blurred, or where one leads naturally into the other. It may even be in the midst of a fundraiser - not 'junk for Jesus', as I have heard it scornfully dismissed, but a venture which brings us into contact with many who would not normally darken the church doors. I spend a good deal of time during our annual week-long charity shop simply talking to people, and the conversation often goes beyond the weather.

Whatever brings folk together for worship or fellowship, the spirit of God can make the space sacred, and bring blessing to the people.

Suggested Bible Readings and Questions for Discussion

Psalm 100, Psalm 117

> Why do we come to Church?

> What benefits do we derive from attending worship and participating in Church organisations?

> Do we see the Church as being there primarily to benefit the core group or the wider community?

Awe

> Is there a sense of awe in our worship - at least at times? How is it desirable (and is it possible) to enhance the element of wonder in our worship?

Rites of passage

> How do we develop the marking of rites-of-passage to enable people to engage with their spiritual life? Recognising 'where people are', how can we communicate gospel truths through such special family events?

Habit

> What alternatives could we offer to Sunday-morning worship, to encourage people to `get the habit` of worship?

The Word

> How can we use Scripture in worship in a way that is faithful to our consistent God, yet open to the promised leading of His Spirit into new truth?

Fellowship

> Often worship and fellowship are seen as distinct and planned separately. How could we more often combine them, as in the Old Testament harvest celebration or Jesus' Last Supper with his friends?

As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The Kingdom of Heaven has come near'.
Matthew 10:7

The Dispersed Church

Rev Christine Sime

The sacred space of Church enfolds us for worship and offers support, encouragement and the security of like-minded people. At the end of a service the gathered are 'blessed', the doors open, and we spill out into the world – dispersed to different homes, different work places: into a 'secular' world where we are perhaps best to keep our Christian heads down!

The 'world out there' however, is as much God's and therefore 'sacred space' as anywhere else. This is in accord with the Celtic understanding which denies the existence of a secular world because it ALL belongs to God, who created it – every living creature, every rock and stone.

Our role as those blessed in worship, identified with Christ, is to take him and the blessing he gives out into the midst and let the faith pervade conversations, work and social events. We need not necessarily preach at folks, but show them through our word (language), action and perhaps even more by our re-action, what it means to believe in God. Thus the faith can be naturally dispersed along with the congregation.

In his book, *Courageous Leadership,* Bill Hybels writes, "the local church is the hope of the world". It makes sense, and while Mr Hybels' local church is vastly different from those around here, the truth remains. If local Christians (the dispersed Church) are not going to help local people hear and see God's life-giving love and hope, then who is, and how better to help them know than to be amongst them?

Jesus gives us the best example. He himself lived and worked in rural areas where he started sharing a new revelation of God, offering a wonderful opportunity to return to him. His stories, parables and teaching are, in the main, rural based, where he went out to the people. Jesus did not wait for them to come to him. He walked the countryside and met people on their land, in their context. That, it seems, is the best way to spread the gospel and share the faith. Jesus was himself 'the dispersed Church' – getting alongside, non-judgmental, never giving up on anyone, always open to listen, giving of himself in time and skills.

What Does it Mean For Us To Be 'The Dispersed Church'?

As we reflect upon the practicalities of how we act as the Dispersed Church, do we perhaps feel our spirits ebb? Let me offer you a glimpse of what the people in my own church try to do. No-one who is involved would see this as anything special, most would be quite surprised to think that their efforts actually counted, let alone were noticed. Yet the one reality in rural areas is that YOU and YOUR ACTIONS will be noticed, be sure of that!

I serve two parishes, both rural, and the context here is broadly similar to many rural communities. The best strategies have – we have found - come from looking at the positives and developing and using them to outweigh and drive out the negatives. Rural areas have many positives, for example:

The pace of life tends to be less frenetic than that of cities – which is not only very pleasant, but the way life was surely meant to be. That does not mean it is not a busy life – dairy farmers, shepherds, all sorts of people work long hours, every day, but there are often more opportunities to encounter each other. Social life also tends to be buzzing. The joy of rural communities being that church and community mix readily. Folk tend to be involved in more than one group or committee, and so the community is permeated naturally with the Christian faith.

If the opportunities exist, the question is whether the Christian faith is allowed to permeate. Does the Dispersed Church have an effect as dispersed Christians? Our experiences seem to indicate that it is possible. We have members who take out Meals on Wheels – with the chance to make sure all is well with our older neighbours, to ask about family, or tell them news of the parish. Talk may include the Church if asked, and many do ask when they realise their visitor is involved in the Church.

Meetings, wherever you are, can decline in dignity at times, but the people around know who are church folk. They watch and listen to how these people react in such circumstances, and then a patient word, an attempt to reconcile or even silence can speak volumes. On the other side of the coin, when a church member is first to join in with the rancour and backbiting, that also is noticed and marked up against the Church and the Faith. In rural areas, Christians are known – there is no hiding-place and neighbourhood watch is nowhere as observant as in rural areas.

Another positive is in being observant ourselves, noticing where there is a need – personal, or for a group – a meeting place required, a venue for a concert or sale, some help with transport, or young families needing a place to gather with pre-school children for chat and rest. Having seen such a need, our church initiated a Toy Library where young families swarm in for an afternoon of play in a safe environment. Some church ladies help out, mainly playing with the children and nursing babies (they love it). As it is in church premises, the minister can also drop in, play with the children and if there is time chat with the parents or carers. This gives the minister the opportunity to be around for anyone who wants to ask a question, being seen if anyone wants to 'suss out' what the minister is like!

Such activities give the opportunity to invite someone to a church-organised event, whether social or spiritual. New neighbours, old friends. Church-organised film nights for the community and fund raising for community groups are much appreciated, as are reading groups (church-member organised) with 'secular' novels to be discussed. The development of a shared new venture such as hand bell ringing can enable a 50/50 mix of church and non-church. The group here has just bought their own brand new set of bells to play at church services and concerts. They are now involved with the next community's drama group production – being put on in one of our churches.

Social events are great ways of being the dispersed church as folk get to know you for you, and then somewhere along the conversation realise you are a Christian – even though you do laugh, do enjoy life, even when you are an elder, even when you are the minister! Everyone likes to know you are human and when they do, it does not negate the faith, it underlines its power. Being seen as human makes us all more approachable, allowing others to see that God's love could be for them too, and makes the faith something that perhaps they could have.

Dedication in care and love are also give-away signs that will eventually point to God. Not giving up on the folk who are awkward; not stopping visiting the people who are rude, or even nasty; not giving up the visits to a bereaved person after a set time. Not judging. All noticed and noted.

It is quite simply being the yeast in the dough. Yeast doesn't make a lot of noise about its work. It starts slowly with a getting-to-know, settling-in phase, before the exponential growth occurs and a difference is seen. The yeast is itself changed in the process of growth. Sometimes it stretches as the cells prepare to divide, before each cell starts again. Being a proactive Christian takes effort, and can stretch us in many ways.

In a resource like this, it's important to realise that truly there is little that is 'new', nor are there any quick-fix answers. The Dispersed Church needs to take time to get alongside, get to know and be known. It does demand consistency, vulnerability and commitment, or as a wise old shepherd advised when I asked him about training my collie – patience and perseverance.

Questions for Discussion

In rural areas, everyone tends to know everyone else –

> Do 'they' know of your faith?

> Do they know how important it is to you?

> Have you ever shared with anyone locally either how you came to faith, or some difficult/uncertain time when your faith was very important?

> In what ways are church members involved in service to the wider community – both through paid employment and voluntary service?

> In what formal or informal ways can we build bridges to the wider community?

> Is it possible to develop our relationship to people in the community with whom we have occasional contact and to make them feel welcome?

The Church of Scotland

God's Own Country

A Practical Resource for Rural Churches

Connecting with your Community

CONNECTING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Rural Churches: Mapping the Future

Dr Donald Smith

There is a long tradition of recording rural communities. When, at the end of the eighteenth century, Sir John Sinclair set about the first statistical account, he turned to parish ministers through Scotland to describe their area and its inhabitants. These, of course, were the historic 'civil parishes' recognised by Church and state alike.

Since then, the game has become much more complex. A mass of central and local government records exist along, of course, with census returns – a direct descendant of Sinclair's Statistical Account – but it is not easy to relate these sources directly to the modern rural parish. On the secular side defining rural is not always straightforward (see Rural Scotland, an Overview) while from the church perspective multiple reorganisations (including schisms, unions and linkages!) have also complicated the picture.

In most circumstances statistical information will be helpful but not sufficient for local planning in a fast-changing environment.

Community – A Shared Project

If one Scottish Enlightenment luminary, Sir John Sinclair, began the numbers game another, Patrick Geddes, can claim to be the founder of local planning.

For Geddes community participation is vital, but such involvement is only possible when we have formed a shared picture of the area under discussion. Ideally this would be an actual visualisation as a map, a photo-montage, a real or virtual model, an artwork – or a combination of all four! One local example of Geddes' technique is the Camera Obscura on Edinburgh's Royal Mile.

Supplementing this visual panorama in Geddes' day was an exhibition illustrating Edinburgh's place in Scotland, Scotland's in Europe, and Europe's in the world. At the top alongside the camera obscura chamber was a separate enclosed space for meditation and spiritual reflection on the significance of it all. Apparently, though, he took people through it at such a pace as to leave both him and his students completely breathless at the top!

However, visualisation as a method is invaluable and today we have more sources than ever to build the picture.

For Geddes a community map needed to identify Places, People and Activities.

Places	Key physical features, symbolic locations (eg war memorial, burial ground), meeting places, community focal points and service centres.
People	Their numbers, locations, activities, key roles and personalities.
Activities	Means of livelihood, key social and leisure activities, their relationship or non-relationship to places.

And so on.

There are lots of ways to build a picture but the critical factors are:

01 Mapping should be a group activity involving people with different insights, perspectives and experiences.

02 What should emerge from the mapping are the vital relationships between places, people and activities.

03 Mapping is a people-centred project, not a committee. Community mapping is an invaluable first step towards 'taking stock'. It is great fun and should always involve a creative sense of play. Needless to say, the whole exercise would be invalidated if only church activists participated. The visual element lends itself to exhibitions and displays, inviting further input and comment.

Next Steps

Many things will be reinforced by community mapping rather than discovered or overturned. New perspectives may also open up however and one of these could be the implications for the churches: the way they operate and express themselves within the wider community.

Obvious issues will include

a Are the churches relating across the make-up of the community?

> place-wise

> people-wise

> activity-wise

b Are church activities and church places in balance? This may consider not only church-owned buildings.

c Are there denominational issues of overlap and/or gaps in provision?

d Is the timing of church activities driven by clergy availability or community need?

Is there a match or a mis-match between local people in the community and those involved in church leadership ?

The project group will come up with many other questions, some specific to the local circumstances.

It is, I think, fair to predict that in many rural communities today, a significant proportion of the population will not be actively involved in church life. It is therefore vital that the next steps should include some form of engagement with those who are not currently making any contribution to shaping or sustaining the church's presence. Otherwise any potential outcomes will be one-sided and possibly one-dimensional or inward looking.

How could this be done? Here is a mix of options, which may be used in combination.

a A community meeting to reflect on the map and its implications for the churches. This should include small group discussion and feedback.

b A community questionnaire, asking about existing church activities and people's ideas for future ones. This might be best done face-to-face as a visit, depending on individual households and local circumstances.

c A storytelling project, gathering people's perspectives and experiences on community life past and present, within your area and/or reflecting their experiences elsewhere. This could provide a way of getting to know people better across the community.

Storytelling Project

Stories could be gathered through interviews, by involving a school or other community organisation, or through a series of internal sessions in which someone feeds in the first stories in order to encourage others to contribute. Everyone's perspective, whether an anecdote, reminiscence or personal story, is to be welcomed and valued. A pattern for storytelling group work is illustrated in an appendix to this article - it can be adapted and altered to meet local circumstances.

It could be argued that stories provide a rich fourth dimension to the Places, People and Activities of community mapping – an emotional and experiential dimension which touches directly on people's values, beliefs and spirituality.

Christian Presence

All of the steps outlined above are, of course, a sham if you do not have a need or a readiness to develop or reshape the expressions of Christianity in your area. The exercise will be all the more rewarding if you are ready to contemplate radical change 'from the bottom up'.

What might such changes involve?

> Creative investment to change buildings.

> Better communications.

> Partnerships involving giving a share of control to people not already inside church structures (such as young people).

> Real and practical ecumenical sharing.

> New links with other churches (neighbouring, urban, international).

> Challenging centralised plans and developing creative alternatives.

It is realistic, however, to highlight the shape of ministry as central to the future of the rural church. If the life of rural churches is based solely, or even primarily, on the work of a paid professional ministry then rationalisation and reduction are likely to predominate for the foreseeable future, in the United Kingdom at least.

If, on the other hand, the Christian presence in any community is the expression of a shared and diverse ministry of talents, then anything may be possible. In the words of Attie Mackechnie (1921–2005), the great tradition bearer of the Ross of Mull,

"I was brought up to see ministers as awesome – to respect the cloth. But I know now everybody has a ministry. It's up to you what you make of it."
(from Conversations with Attie by Jan Sutch Pickard)

Moving On

Nothing is more constant than change. There was never a rural golden age. Lowland, Highland and Island areas in Scotland have experienced successive waves of economically-driven changes in recent centuries, including migration, emigration, clearance, urbanisation and the havoc wrought by war. Ironically, any sense of rural prosperity last century was a by-product of the two World Wars which deprived rural communities of a disproportionate number of their young people and precipitated social change.

The past was not all good and, for every rosy memory of rural church life, there are records of religious disputes, isolated clergy and social snobbery. The journey of discipleship begins now and leads forward. As a wise theologian once remarked, "Christianity is written in the future tense". Re-shaping the rural stories can begin now.

Appendix: Introduction to Storytelling – Programme outline – Principles

A Storytelling course or workshop requires creative interaction between the facilitator and the participants. Participants should experience first and then reflect upon their experience to realise general principles or themes.

People need to be affirmed in, and then encouraged to develop, their contribution.

The course should not presume any outcome or result, but be based on the value of the sharing and communication in its own right.

Structure

The programme includes four two-hour units which can be used over a weekend or over four weekday sessions. In addition, any unit or combination of units can be expanded to provide a day long programme.

Please note that if the group exceeds ten in number, a longer time will be needed so that the contribution of each participant can be heard and a response given.

Alternatively, activities could be divided over an increased number of sessions.

Session 1

a Begin with an ice-breaker, or introduction, for example ask each group member to say something about their name – where it comes from, why they were called this name and any other name they might use, such as a middle name, maiden name or birth name.

b Ask participants to recall a story, anecdote or memory about their family. Then reflect:

> Who told them this story?

> How/when did they hear it?

> How did they remember it? An image, a person/character, a saying, a tone of voice, a personal experience.

c Connect this discussion with the key features of an oral story, that is, a story that has to be remembered in order to be told. Imagery, clear characters, voices, clear structure.

d Ask participants to bring a story connected with a particular place to the next session. The sense of place should be significant in some way in the story. Emphasise that participants are not being asked for a polished performance - the story is the thing! Give people a length guideline, e.g. 5–6 minutes (this can be expanded if you have a longer session).

Session 2

a Open the session by presenting a short story of place. This is purely a 'warm-up' but make sure that your story exhibits the key characteristics of an oral story and is appropriate to the group.

b Invite participants to share their stories. After each story, affirm the storyteller and their contribution and invite other participants to say what they liked or found interesting about the story and ask any questions.

c How did the group remember their stories? Did anyone use notes or read their story? Use this to introduce the topic of oral memory – how do we remember things and what is it that sticks in our minds?

d Tell a local story to complete the session.

e Ask participants to bring a short local story, anecdote or memory to the next session and to tell it without notes, in the oral style. A guideline of 5–6 minutes should be given unless you have a longer session.

Session 3

a Invite each group member to tell their chosen story from Session 2, in succession.

b Invite positive comment and discussion. Let participants say a little about why they have picked this anecdote or story.

c Circulate a set of postcards or post-its to group members. Ask each person to write down on an individual post-it or card what they think the important part or meaning is of at least half of the stories they have heard.

d Assemble the cards or post-its and see what similarities and differences there are between the stories.

e Ask participants to prepare for the last session a personal experience, incident or story that relates to your local community or locality.

Session 4

a Welcome participants to this session as if it were a storytelling event at which you are the host. Let everyone have a drink as they arrive.

b Invite participants to present their stories. Affirm each one with comment/response in between but allow only informal reaction from the group.

c Close the session with a general feedback and discussion on the course programme as a whole.

d Forward each participant an overall written feedback on what it has revealed about the people who live in your community, the stories and any connections or things that have emerged.

For an overview of storytelling in Church life, with group work, discussion topics and examples, see Shaping Stories, Year Two in the Art of the Parish training series published by the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

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COMMUNITY VALUE TOOLKIT FOR RURAL CHURCHES

Introduction

At the 2006 Church of Scotland Rural Conference, Jill Hopkinson (National Rural Officer for the Church of England) highlighted that "a small church is not a failed large church". There is a danger that small rural churches attempt to measure their success or lack of success against the standards which would normally be applied to large urban churches. This can be misleading and discouraging.

In a rural area the church is very much part of the community and even for people who do not attend, the presence of the church is still important. The threatened closure of a church building highlights just how important that building is to a particular community even if interest in it had seemed to be dormant.

In a whole variety of ways, rural churches 'add value' to their communities. If we only count the numbers attending worship on an average Sunday, we might well think our impact is very limited. It can be a struggle to maintain regular Sunday worship, but our influence is greater than we think, both through the impact of the congregation as a whole and individual members in their lives and work. We need to reflect on the different ways in which we already make our mark on our community and ask in what ways we could improve our impact. This Community Value Toolkit is intended to help you to identify and highlight the widening influence of the church in the community, like the ripple from a stone thrown into a pond.

Some statistical background to this exercise is helpful (you may wish to consult your local council website), but it should be left to a small group to gather this basic information and avoid the whole group becoming 'bogged down' with figures. The numbers do not need to be wholly accurate. They are intended to provide an approximate statistical background to the discussion which will follow in small groups.

Interpreting the Results

When everyone has answered the questions in Section 2 individually, the group leader (or a small group) will collate the responses by placing one tick for each person's score in each of the boxes. This will give a visual representation through the balance of where the ticks fall. (For example, if 6 people score 4 for question 1, then 6 individual ticks are placed in that box.) If there are a large number of responses, then the ticks should be grouped in 'fives'. If the group wishes to see its high and low score for each question, then the ticks can be added up, with an extra 'Total' box added after the 'A lot' column.

For presentation purposes, a copy of the questions, with ticks, can be placed onto an overhead projector acetate or a PowerPoint slide.

Questions

- Is there anything that surprises you about your responses?
- What are you most encouraged by in your responses?
- From what you see, what is your greatest opportunity for outreach into your community?
- Share some stories about how your congregation is already working with and adding value to its community.

Part Two - Church Involvement

Introduction

This part of the toolkit deals less with figures and more with our understanding of the impact and place the church has in the life of the community. It is more subjective, and should be filled in initially by individuals, but the figures will be gathered together at the end to give a basis for discussion. This should help you identify and value the strengths and distinctiveness of your congregation and perhaps indicate potential areas of growth.

Please put a tick in the box in the grid which best reflects your assessment.

	What involvement does our church have in	Not very much	A little	Quite a bit	A lot
01	Enabling people who have different life experiences to get to know each other?				
02	Making welcome those who are often excluded (eg people with enduring mental illness, asylum seekers, homeless people)?				
03	Helping people to make sense of the changes in society and our communities (eg rural depopulation, diversification, influx of 'incomers')?				
04	Helping people to identify ways in which the local neighbourhood could be improved (in terms of amenities and general wellbeing of residents)?				
05	Helping people take better control of their lives as a result of their involvement in the church and their exploration of faith?				
06	Supporting people in bereavement and illness?				
07	Encouraging or enabling others to take on commitments in the local community or through voluntary activity?				
08	Helping people prepare for marriage, and supporting them within marriage (marriage enrichment, counselling etc)?				
09	Offering an accessible (physical) space which enables people to reflect quietly and express their spirituality?				
10	Helping people reflect on values that underpin their life and encouraging a sense of purpose?				
11	Being alongside people in a crisis?				
12	Helping people relate better to one another in forgiveness and reconciliation?				
13	Helping people to have a wider experience of life outside the local community (eg pilgrimage at home or abroad, volunteer work overseas)?				
14	Helping people take account of others in the way in which they live their lives (eg being aware of environmental issues)?				
15	Making a helpful contribution in emotionally charged situations such as national or community crises or periods of intense media attention?				
16	Enabling people to develop leadership potential or specific skills (eg public speaking, use of gifts and talents)?				
17	Helping people to work on the things that they feel 'pull them down' (eg unhelpful habits and behaviour)?				
18	Helping children and young people to explore and develop a personal faith?				
19	Helping children and young people develop a sense of personal responsibility and attentiveness to the needs of others?				
20	Being generous, hopefully in a way that affects others?				

CONNECTING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Pastoral Care and Social Capital

Rev Dr Richard Frazer

The perception of what it means to be rural has changed dramatically in the last 50 years. The Scottish countryside has been the provider of food, leisure, a glimpse of nature, natural resources and cultural identity. In one sense rural Scotland continues to provide all of these things and many more; however, the extent to which it provides these 'public goods' has shifted. Agriculture has become less important whilst tourism has boomed, for example, and many of the characteristic ways of life traditionally associated with rural Scotland have vanished in the shift to a more 'global' culture. More people are prepared to commute to the cities for work and have moved into the countryside where; in some places they have actually stemmed the tide of de-population.

In many of the discussions that take place about rural life in Scotland, the focus is often on the contribution that the rural economy makes to the nation's overall wealth. There is however another capital contribution that can readily be overlooked and that is in the form of 'Social Capital' which can be described as the creation of an "attitude, spirit and willingness of people to engage in collective, civic activities". The time involved can often be measured in generations as Social Capital builds an infrastructure of shared perspectives and collective cultural values.

Informing National Character

Many people have understood that there is a degree to which the qualities that shape national identity are frequently derived from rural ways. We all take pride in Scotland's diverse landscape, but it is important to realise the degree to which those who have lived from it shape it. 70% of Scotland's land area is deemed to be agricultural land. We have very little truly pristine, wild areas - Scotland is a managed environment, and we owe our pride in Scotland's beauty to those who have tended it down the centuries. Similarly, whilst Scotland is rightly renowned across the world for its Enlightenment thinkers and pioneers in science and engineering - often based in urban centres -many of the values and characteristics that have shaped Scottish identity and cultural perspectives have emerged out of rural ways. Robert Burns, the ploughman poet, epitomises a personality shaped by the land and rural values. Equipped by that rural based "Social Capital" and his own scholarship as well as a deep-rooted spiritual vision, he became a poet of humanity, universally acknowledged as one who speaks to the very heart of what it is to be human.

Pastoral Care and Social Capital

The consequence of change in the shape of rural life carries with it the potential for loss of what I call "Social Capital" - the cultural currency that enables community. It is a delicate pastoral challenge for the church to honour the cultural, moral and social heritage of Scottish life, whilst at the same time acknowledging the inevitability of change and the potential for conflict and loss that goes with it. How do we build new forms of "Social Capital" that will strengthen community and help to build the networks on which our wellbeing as a society depends?

Let me illustrate now with a story about loss that emerged out of a pastoral encounter during the Foot & Mouth outbreak of 2001. George is a farmer in the Scottish Borders. He is a tenant whose family have stewarded the same land for generations, at least since the mid 19th Century. George, his wife, Ruth and their children constitute a traditional rural Scottish family; their farmhouse is solid, plain and utterly unostentatious. They are hardworking, thrifty people, who take a pride in the care of their land, the health of their livestock and the wellbeing of their community. They are the sort of people to whom it is possible to attribute many of the noblest aspects of Scottish culture. They have not sought to make a fortune from farming but their strong sense of who they are provides its own moral and spiritual capital.

In the immediate aftermath of the Foot & Mouth epidemic of 2001, George was a broken man. He was in grief not just for his cattle, all of which had been slaughtered the previous week - a harsh enough burden to bear - he lamented something that ran far deeper. He was in mourning for the end of a way of life. Foot & Mouth was just one factor in what he recognised was the end of an era for his family and many others like him. He doubted that his way of life would be able to continue.

George had seen his demise coming long before Foot & Mouth took away his livestock. He had heard politicians frequently talk down agriculture. Agriculture contributes less than 2% of GDP, employs only a tiny number of people and many a politician has made some cheap political capital by lamenting the fact that 40% of the EU budget goes to agricultural support. Many farmers in Scotland today approaching retirement age remember a time when they were told that they were public servants, contributing to Britain's food security in the aftermath of two World Wars in which the nation had nearly starved. Now, in the global economy, those who had helped feed the nation and care for the landscape were being discarded.

Managing Change

What we continue to witness in rural Scotland is change. People frequently say about rural life that they welcome newcomers and that for schools and communities to continue to thrive, fresh ideas and people are desperately needed. But people often say that whilst they welcome new blood they do not want new people to transform their community into a version of the place they have left. In a context in which traditional rural occupation is experiencing steep decline, preservation of a former way of life is not an option. However, managing change is a challenge for the churches. There is an important task for the church to identify the stresses that change brings and an opportunity for the church to become the lubricant that helpfully eases transition.

If Social Capital is the currency of communal life, then the church must be at the heart of nurturing and building it. If a community of people moves to a new situation, it is important not simply to lament the loss and feel nostalgia for the old ways. What is required of us is to identify those indispensable tools that contribute to Social Capital and make sure that we take those tools with us to the new place and do not leave them behind. The church has many of the tools for generating Social Capital at its disposal. It has communal space available not just for worship but countless other gatherings. It is committed to being a constant presence in even the remotest areas. The church has chosen not to abandon rural areas just because the economy is on the down turn or the population has declined. The church's very presence is an affirmation of worth.

In addition, the church has been the heart and soul of rural communities in the past. Sometimes and in some situations it has found itself being more the soul of a changing community than its heart. The challenge is to find ways in which the church can be at the heart of rural communities once more and not be just a remnant of the "old order." The Arthur Rank Centre (www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk), based at Stoneleigh Park, has pioneered a huge range of resources and initiatives for the churches in England and Wales to do just that, and in Scotland we are tapping into that resource and developing our own.

The church is a theological and cultural resource for a community, enabling it especially in a time of change to reflect through the lens of spiritual and moral insight. The churches can ask the questions and invite people to discuss what it means to be a community and what is required of us to build new communities of trust, respect and diversity in the emerging cultural landscape of 21st Century Scotland. The theological insights of forgiveness, compassion and justice enable the church to be at the heart of situations of conflict that always accompanies change and offer wisdom and safe space to build cohesion and renewed spiritual capital.

People constantly ask the question, "what is rural?" The answer is that increasing numbers of people who live in rural areas are only "rural" in the sense that they live in the countryside. In every place, however, there is an identified need to rebuild and facilitate a sense of community and shared values. The church must be in the vanguard of articulating what tools we require to do this.

As we seek to offer pastoral support and care to those who live within rural Scotland it is important that we understand the contribution of traditional rural culture to our national character. The timeless and invaluable wisdom of rural values have contributed down the centuries to what I have characterised as our Social Capital. In a world increasingly shaped by homogenised global values, there are subtleties and insights that come from a people in touch with the rhythms of nature and the landscape that we overlook at our peril.

Our society is driven today by the pursuit of endless economic growth but the values and structures that contribute towards lasting wellbeing, based on thrift, sufficiency and a willingness to engage in shared cultural activity that creates community, have no price. In our pastoral care and support we help people best when we honour, understand and appreciate the extent to which Social Capital as much as jobs and livelihoods nurture us as individuals and as a community.

The Church of Scotland

God's Own Country

A Practical Resource for Rural Churches

Mission Opportunities

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
Hebrews 13:2

Welcome, Worship and Tourism

Mr Andrew Duff

There is an ancient spiritual heritage to the practice of hospitality:

The earliest recorded incidence (Genesis 18:1-8) conveys a strong sense of something God-ward about the act of welcoming strangers.

Following the shipwreck of St Paul, the kindness of the people of Malta who "kindled a fire, and received us every one," is recorded in scripture (Acts 28:2), and resonates to this day in the traditions of that island. Hotels and hospitals evolved from early Christian community practices.

Christian hospitality is not self-serving but focuses on the needs of the guest – whether for a place to stay, something to drink or eat, a listening ear, or simply for acceptance. Hospitality simply means making other people feel accepted and welcome. It can happen in inauspicious places and unlikely times. It can happen around a meal table, of course, but also when a visitor chances to step into an old village chapel to dodge a rain shower and gets chatting to a friendly local!

The Visitor Potential of Churches

It seems that fewer people today wish to attend formal church services, yet more than ever are choosing to visit churches as part of a day out or holiday visit. Why is this, and what might this mean in terms of the opportunity to show hospitality towards such visitors?

Some Reasons for Visits

Increasing numbers come as part of a family history quest. The Internet makes family research easier, but many people then want to come and see where their forebears came from. The village church and its graveyard is one of the few places to offer tangible continuity between past and present.

Of course many come for baptisms, weddings, funerals and other family events. A visitor-friendly church may be a small but helpful part of their own spiritual journey.

Some visitors come specifically for historical or architectural interest, guide book in hand. Others may be walkers or cyclists, for whom country churches can be welcome points of interest en route.

It seems that most visits to churches are 'un-premeditated': not coming intentionally to visit the church, but as a spur-of-the-moment decision when they happen to be in the vicinity or passing by.

Most tourists visit churches at some point in their trip – including people who would say they have no religious faith. Some estimates say more toutists visit churches than all other visitor attractions put together. However, most people have come to expect church doors to be firmly locked so will not attempt to visit unless there is an obvious sign of life and interest. It is not surprising, then, that the number of visitors generally increases significantly when there is a welcoming 'church open' sign outside!

This is not just about buildings: churches are story-boxes filled with tell-tale evidence of people and events that have shaped our land. Our churches are integral to the story of the places and communities within which they have evolved, and the parish church is often the oldest building in the locality. Churches are signposts of our heritage, points where you can touch history, as well as places of visual and spiritual significance.

Potential Benefits of Church Involvement in Visitor Hospitality

You may not (knowingly) entertain angels or a St Paul, but there may be other ways in which a visitor hospitality initiative might bring local benefits.

There is a natural tendency to associate tourism with economic benefits, and it is true that an important trend in rural areas has been the increase in spending and employment in tourism and leisure-related services. Tourism is now a major contributor to the economy in many rural areas, benefiting far more than just those directly involved in providing accommodation and food. Tourist boards reckon that every £1 spent by visitors generates another 23-33 pence of local 'knock on' benefit via local retailers, suppliers of services, wages and so on. This effect is greater where trading links between local firms are strong.

Jobs directly related to tourism are often seasonal, part-time and/or relatively low-paid. Whilst these may seem to be drawbacks, they can also benefit those seeking supplementary income to support family, semi-retired or other lifestyles, or to complement other part-time work.

Other potential benefits are also worth considering. A tourism initiative might help to:

- Increase the local impact of visitor information, encouraging visitors to explore further.
- Bring out local distinctiveness, culture and heritage – and mobilise more local people in support of these.
- Promote local products and services, and increase networking between local businesses and community groups.
- Encourage interest (amongst visitors and local people) in the local environment and conservation of buildings and landscapes.
- Create opportunities for development of volunteer skills, confidence and community 'capacity building'.
- For the church, an opportunity to engage with people in new ways, and to provide a demonstration of the Christian faith as something alive and relevant.

Whilst the contribution to any one of the above might be modest, the overall effect would be an incremental enriching of both the visitor experience and local quality of life.

Looking at Your Church

Don't be put off from developing a visitor hospitality initiative just because your church is not on some list of 'must-see' national heritage, or your community feels lacking in the resources to lay out a welcome for visitors.

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

Also, don't forget to think about the scope for local schools visits – this can help to build relationships with young people who might otherwise have little contact with church life. Perhaps a parish map or trail could be researched and produced as a local school project then displayed in the church for visitors to enjoy?

Questions to Consider About your Church

- Would visitors feel they are welcome, and that you are not simply after their money?
- Would strangers sense that this is a well-loved place, of special significance in the community? Or is there an air of neglect about it?
- Does it say something understandable about faith to someone largely ignorant of Christianity?

There are a number of ways in which a church can make visitors feel welcome – these need not cost a lot of money, but do need an effort of imagination and commitment. There are some good sources of practical advice available (see suggestions at the end), but here are a few points to start with:

> Advertise consistent open times, and display a 'Church Open' notice outside when it is. An open door into a church looks welcoming and may intrigue passers-by to investigate.

> Could you offer refreshments? Some churches have set up excellent church cafés, whilst others in quiet rural locations have simply provided basic tea and coffee making facilities and a little sign to invite visitors to make themselves a cuppa – a great way to say 'visitors welcome'. Some, in areas popular with walkers, have provided small bottles of water free or on a donation basis.

> A friendly steward certainly helps, perhaps offering a leaflet guide then leaving the visitor to look around, and ready to answer queries if approached. This might be the only chance a passing visitor has to meet and talk to a local person!

> Some country churches have timed light switches, others use light sensors which come on as the door is opened – both help to convey a sense of visitors being welcome.

> Provide a specific prayer area. Some churches provide a board and sticky notes and invite visitors to leave prayer requests. Other creative ideas include prayer leaflets, flowers, candles or contemporary sculpture to encourage quiet reflection.

Enriching the Visitor Experience

Many visitors are interested in finding out about the church and its environs, and most people enjoy a good story. Here are some ideas for making the most of this:

> Start with a simple free leaflet to welcome visitors to the church, summarising key points of interest and emphasising that this is a living Christian community.

> Prepare a short inexpensive guide to the church and the stories associated with it. Make sure it is well presented and interesting to the uninitiated.

> Stewards or other helpers should feel comfortable welcoming visitors and chatting to them about points of interest and stories about the church and local area. They don't need to be experts, but a friendly welcome and a little local knowledge can make a real difference. Some churches have used 'storytelling' workshops to prepare helpers for this. (Ask local tourism officials, community arts officers or other agencies if any help is possible with informal training.)

> Provide some useful information on local facilities, including visitor attractions, nearest cash-point, toilets, local cafés, pubs, accommodation, shops, garage, etc. This could be a visitor information point helping to promote the local business community, and may in turn encourage them to support or advertise in your visitor trail, guide, etc.

> Offer something to take away, such as a bookmark or prayer card to reflect on (inviting donations at this point would be acceptable, as visitors will feel they have received something in return).

> Many churches provide a bookstall (with local interest as well as Christian literature), postcards, craft items and souvenirs for sale. In the right location, the combination of tearoom, bookstall and tourist information can be quite a draw for visitors!

Questions for Discussion

Look up the Bible passages quoted at the beginning.

What can we learn about the practice of hospitality?

The Bible suggests the possibility of entertaining angels without realising it, whilst St Paul brought gifts of healing. Can we think of possible blessings (or benefits) a hospitality initiative might bring to our community?

Does the church already have points of contact with local tourism service providers?

Is there scope to encourage stronger local relationships with – and between – local businesses, or to join forces with others to develop a local tourism initiative?

Is there scope to present and use the church more actively as a place of welcome for visitors?

Can you imagine doing something different to 'kindle a fire' for visitors?

Further Reading

'Open For You – the Church, the Visitor and the Gospel' by Paul Bond

'Exploring Churches', an educational resource by Virginia Johnston and others, published by the Churches Conservation Trust

'Church Cafes – explored and celebrated' by Robert Davies

The Scotland's Churches Trust offers useful advice on welcoming visitors and publishes a guide to churches to visit in Scotland at www.scotlandschurchestrust.org.uk

The Churches Tourism Association provides information and advice on church tourism initiatives on its website: www.churchestourismassociation.info

Partnership in Social Action

Rev Dr Dane Sherrard

Partnership is at the heart of rural ministry – fair enough, rural life is all about partnership. Few farmers believe that they can do everything themselves – they plant, irrigate and tend fully aware that they are engaging in a partnership with God's forces of nature. So our very setting speaks to us of partnership.

Rural life is filled with challenges not presented to the urban dweller. Rural bus services make travel difficult. The distance to local shops, banks and petrol stations mean that people get into the habit of working with each other and helping each other, acting in partnership. Yet in the Church we often find partnership to be harder – not partnership between members of our congregation because that partnership is usually the greatest strength of what we are – minister and Kirk Session, Church and School, the caring partnerships between congregational members, and so on. There are however, so many other partnerships waiting to be discovered. If I sound like an expert, I'm not – but I am someone who has discovered the value of partnerships in recent years and, like any convert, I am sold on their value.

A Buildings Challenge

I came to minister to two small village communities eight years ago. One had a broken-down church with a presbytery-inspired demolition order. Rebuilding was not to be allowed: the little hall with room for a dozen or so was reckoned to be large enough for the congregation's future. So instead of turning inwards and arguing with Presbytery, we turned outwards and invited the local farmers and business folk to help. They set up a Community Trust (a charitable company) and agreed to rent the church building for nineteen years at five pounds a year from the General Trustees. The immediate crisis was over. Next our Community Trust called all the trades folk from the area together and invited them to rebuild the church; all immediately agreed to provide their skills without charge if money was available for materials. A lady from the church went out with a collecting tin and, in no time at all, £20,000 had been raised from the parish; people wanted to help and their imagination had been caught by this partnership between Church and community. One of our local hotels contacted us and offered to pay the material cost of a new roof; another telephoned to offer new doors and carpets. Soon everyone was bringing their skills and a 'cathedral' was created. The re-opening day was wonderful, but nothing to the occasion six weeks later when twenty-eight folk (almost all of whom had been involved in the rebuilding programme) 'joined the Church' by profession of faith. Something wonderful had begun.

Meanwhile my other village was also in turmoil because its church was closed for a year for urgent repairs. This too was partnership, but of a very different kind. Because of the historic nature of the church, 80% of the cost was met by Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund, with significant additional funding from the local authority and Scottish Enterprise. Don't be afraid to ask these bodies for help: churches are important to the fabric of rural life and people will want to offer assistance.

We gained enormously from the year out of our church – rather than using the village hall, we toured local churches together, held services in the open air and generally learned that we didn't always need to do things the way we had before. Rebuilding our churches made us realise that we also had to rebuild our mission strategy. Church Without Walls encouraged us to look at ourselves – our situation and our skills. We discovered that our story was of pilgrimage and of welcoming pilgrims and strangers in our midst. A Celtic saint had been martyred here and centuries ago, pilgrims came to pray. Our skills were of hospitality honed through bed-and-breakfast provision, and of building (through reconstructing our churches). As a resource we had a set of old broken-down outhouses. If our task was to transform the many visitors in our midst into pilgrims we needed a base, a welcoming centre.

A Pilgrim Mission Project

We turned to Scottish Enterprise. I telephoned, said who I was and what I wanted – a little money to help us create a Visitor Centre. The lady who spoke to me was doubtful, but I persevered. I told her why this was a good idea and why they should be helping us. She promised to consult and later that day returned to me with an offer of £20,000 'to get us started.'

At this stage we made the most important decision of our recent adventures: we decided to set up an independent steering-group to guide our project. Right at the start we agreed that there would be only two members of our congregation on the group: the rest would come from other organisations. Some of our folk needed a little persuading about this because it would mean that we were no longer 'in control', but if we were 'in control' it wouldn't be a real partnership – and partnership involves mutual trust. So we invited two members of the National Park in whose area we sat. Then we found out about the Rural Funding Programme which existed to disperse European monies to Scottish rural communities and invited them to take part, and Scottish Enterprise as well; everyone expressed themselves delighted to help. We knew technology would be important so we also invited a computer expert, and representatives of local business and industry and ended up with a steering-group of a dozen.

Together we worked out a strategy and it grew because so many of our partners were used to thinking in bigger terms than us. It didn't take long for our Centre to be constructed (by our labour-force which had rebuilt our other village church). Our Visitor Centre had grown to include a computer studio which also provided Broadband for everyone in our village, a pottery (maybe we could create a permanent job for someone) and a candle-making workshop for the children. Our Centre quickly became the heart of village activity with a cinema, a local heritage society, and as home to our Guild and Bible Study Group.

The Vision Grows

Our steering-group continued to dream. We cared for a twenty-five acre glebe on the banks of one of Scotland's most famous lochs, inaccessible for twelve years since its bridge had been washed away in a flood. If we could rebuild the bridge we could take the whole idea of pilgrimage forward by creating a pilgrimage pathway to which folk from all over the world could come and walk and think and be challenged by what they saw.

On our own we might have had the idea, but without partners we could as well have tried to fly as make it happen. Together, however, we could create something extraordinary. Who could build us a bridge? The obvious answer was the army, but we would need definite plans to show how we could make the 'Pilgrimage Pathway' a reality. The European funders told us that they could bring parties of young people from Europe to help us build the pathways, but how could we pay for everything involved? Our partners put us in touch with Scottish Natural Heritage who had funds just for that purpose, and with so many prestigious partners already they would take our application seriously.

It was at this stage that the Church of Scotland Parish Development Fund stepped in, awarding us funding to appoint development staff for three years. Our partners whooped with delight at the Church contributing substantially to what in their minds was something of real significance for the area. Our European funding partner immediately doubled the Church's money and staff were appointed.

Things began to happen at once – the Royal Engineers agreed to rebuild our bridge and through the building a new partner was brought into the team – a local government contractor to the Navy who procured all the materials, paid for much of them, and seconded a Clerk-of-Works. Meanwhile another government contractor volunteered to give us an accommodation block surplus to their requirements to house our visitors, while still another offered to pay the cost of transporting it. It is amazing what a few phone-calls can achieve and how many people are keen to help. At the same time, Europe produced parties of young folk from Finland, Italy and the Czech Republic who wanted to come to spend the summer working with us. Placed into our hands was not only the way to build the 'Pilgrimage Pathway' we had dreamed of, but a youth programme which would enable us to create a community based on the banks of our loch. Our aim was unmistakeably a missionary one: 'to introduce young folk from Scotland to faith in a setting which brings together young folk from all around the world.' Thanks to our partners that is now happening.

Many Partners in a Good Wedding!

Meanwhile another partnership was also bearing fruit. When I first arrived I was contacted by one of our local hotels who were spending several million pounds to create a new facility in our village. They were employing local people but it was going to be a struggle for them to make it work – wedding receptions were helping them greatly: would I consider celebrating weddings on a Sunday? I thought about it and then agreed.

In time Scottish Enterprise came to discuss our weddings with us. As economic developers they were interested in the fact that the overseas weddings we conducted each brought between £40,000 and £44,000 directly into the local economy. Could they help us to bring more weddings into the area? Now that was their question reflecting their needs and interests: it wasn't ours. But we turned their question around: was there anything they could do for us which might enable us to improve the wedding experience? The downside of coming to be married from Canada, for example, was that your friends who would normally take a day off work to attend your wedding wouldn't be able to do so, and then there were the aged relatives unable to travel. With this in mind, we persuaded Scottish Enterprise and Europe to fund a sophisticated television system enabling those back home to watch weddings live through the internet. This was a great example of partnership: each of the three partners got something different out of the exercise but together created something special:

- Scottish Enterprise wished to encourage more people to come to our village to be married so that business in our area would develop and prosper.
- European funders wished to be involved in a high technology project which would provide training and employment for a young person in a rural community.
- The Church wished to make the wedding experience as good as we could.

If only we had known. We got more than we could possibly have imagined, as our TV system then enabled us to broadcast our services, sharing them with the hundreds of visitors to our Centre, with the youngsters who worked on our pathway, and with all those who come to be married. Finally and recently it has enabled us to prepare and broadcast a weekly TV programme through the internet to all those who consider themselves to be part of our church family no matter where they live. It has opened up for us a missionary opportunity such as we had never imagined.

We could never have done it alone. We have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit at work – but we have also experienced the joy and the blessing of working with partners whose insights and hard work have enriched our lives.

Lessons Learned

01 Partnership is not about recruiting people to help us – it is about sharing in work together.

02 Entering into Partnership means relinquishing control, or rather giving our partners equal ownership of what we are doing together.

03 Partners bring skills, visions and energy which are different from and complementary to our own.

04 Partner organisations have aims to achieve which may be different from ours and the skill of partnership working is to enable all parties to benefit from the relationship.

05 Partners make huge commitments to shared arrangements, and we have a responsibility to them once we have entered into such an arrangement.

06 There are so many people and organisations 'out there' just waiting to be invited to share in our adventure and to welcome us into theirs.

Suggested Bible Reading

Acts 10: 9-16

Questions for Discussion

In the reading, Cornelius, a centurion in the Italian Regiment, felt called to send to Joppa for Simon. Without his own vision, Simon Peter would have felt it inappropriate to share his work with people from such a different background, even though they were both devout and generous in their worship of God. Are you challenged by concerns about sharing your ministry with partners from out-with your congregation? Does this passage have anything to say to you? In particular, what preconceptions and prejudices do you have about accepting other people as partners? Are these similar to the preconceptions and prejudices of Peter?

Do we have a need to be in control? Notice that as the passage progresses, wonderful events unfold as Simon sets off for Caesarea. Is there something here for you? What will partners enable you to achieve that you cannot achieve alone? How might working with partners unlock doors similar to those unlocked by Peter at Caesarea and later at Jerusalem as he talks of all that this vision meant to him?

I remember the huge impact as our congregation came to accept that there was a place for everyone within it, and I wonder what God was teaching me through those he chose to be my partners. What might those who enter into partnership with you learn from you? Does it matter if your partners have different motivations or is it sufficient that you have shared aims and can work together?

The Church of Scotland

God's Own Country

A Practical Resource for Rural Churches

Youth Outreach

YOUTH OUTREACH

Youth Work in a Rural Setting

Introduction

For each generation the Christian Church has to find new ways of sharing the Gospel. It's a characteristic of youth that we don't just want to do things the way our parents did, whether it's tastes in music or life-style choices. Things keep moving on, and for an organisation where tradition is important particular challenges arise. In this section you'll find examples of youth work from different parts of the country, and from different denominations: the common thread is that there's no common thread! Each venture has looked at the character and needs of the young folk of their community, and responded in an appropriate way. Using what is available locally is important, and what also emerges from experience is the need to gather – to enable young people to go to regional or national events where they can share their youth culture as a generation together, an experience which compliments the close friendships of the small groups who meet together in rural areas.

If you are looking for youth work ideas, let these articles help you to think 'out of the box' - particularly the denominational box. Working together and sharing successful strategies from our rich and diverse Christian life in Scotland will support and encourage our young people and build bridges between traditions.

A Strategy for Young People in a Rural Context

Steve Mallon

'Young people in rural areas face particular barriers in relation to provision of transport and housing, access to employment, training and education, as well as the opportunity to express their views and be directly involved in matters that affect them in their communities.'

Rural Youth Network, 2007

I've been working with young people from rural areas for a long time. They often talk about the issues raised in the statement above, but alongside those, they talk about the real advantages of living in small towns and villages: The sense of belonging, of people knowing your name, of being missed if you don't show up at church. These can all have their down sides but the positives always seem to outweigh them.

A key issue for young people, however, is the general lack of things to do and people their own age to do things with. It's hard to be one of the few 16 year olds in your village. It's harder still being the only person under 65 in your local church! Often young people I work with simply talk about being bored. There's nothing to do. There's nowhere to go. Young people from other types of community contexts might say the same thing, but for the rural teenager it happens to be true!

Many churches I visit in rural areas bemoan the fact that there are so few young people around; they fret about the young people who leave to find work, or go to university and they worry about trying to get enough leaders to work with young people. Rarely do I visit a rural church and find them in good spirits about their work with young people.

Opportunities Revealed by Community Audit

I visited a church recently in a small rural town. As in all such conversations I tried to get a sense of the rhythm of the community. Where do the young people hang out? Where do they go to school? Do they leave when they go on to university or when they are ready to find work? Do they return when they are older and ready to settle down and build a family? In this particular situation, it became clear that the key time of the day for that church to make contact with young people was at around 4.00pm. Why? Because at that point the school buses dropped off the young people from the many schools they attend well outside the confines of their community. The church had already realised that this was an important time in the day. What they needed now was some way of making contact with the young people as they stepped off those buses, and then somewhere for those young people to go that would help them to develop a relationship with the church.

On another visit to a small church in a very rural setting, I asked the same questions and in this case the answer was that children and young people were passing by the church building every day, on their way (by and large on foot) to and from school. That conversation opened up the possibilities of the church running a breakfast club or an after-school homework club.

These are just two examples of the kind of reflection on patterns of community life that rural churches can and should engage in to work more strategically with young people in their communities. There is no doubt that policy on youth matters has by and large been set – in most spheres – by people who live in large towns and cities, and the urban agenda is one that dominates peoples' thinking. For young people in rural communities we all need to do better and try harder to reach out to them and make them a higher priority.

I've visited many rural churches where the priority – perhaps out of necessity – has become repair of the old organ or some other building-related issue. Preserving the past has become more important than looking a present needs. There is no doubt that there is massive potential in tourism for many of our rural charges, but young people and effective work with them should not be squeezed out because it's easier to fix a building and greet tourists for half an hour than it is to work with local young people day in and day out.

Finding a Strategy

When we were researching the issues and ideas that would underpin the Kirk's Strategy for Young People we deliberately went to rural parishes. We split the responses into those coming from rural towns and those in much smaller settings. Here are some of the findings from that study:

A very large percentage of the rural churches that took part in the study said that the reason they were involved in working with young people was because they were 'the church of tomorrow'. Any endeavour that is aimed at our own survival will surely fail. The famous proverb suggests that where there is no vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18), and to see youth work as a means of survival is one indicator of a general lack of vision. We need to work with young people for their sakes, not for ours; to care for them out of love and a desire to share the gospel with them.

There was a general recognition that the church was still at the centre of the village's or town's life and that this presented an enormous opportunity that churches in cities might not have.

There were some churches that said they didn't have many young people and some that said they struggled to get leaders. These factors are common to churches in all kinds of location in Scotland.

On a more positive note, many churches talked of trying new types of work – for example using internet cafes or new types of clubs, or moving things away from Sundays and doing them mid-week. Some churches speak of using email as a way of keeping connected to young people who leave home for work or to go on to further or higher education.

There were also hints that churches are starting to work ecumenically with other congregations in their communities to meet the needs of young people.

May churches talk of drawing young people into a greater involvement in the life of their congregation, and one spoke of having a young person on "the Nominations Committee who feels she can speak for the others in her age bracket and put forward their ideas and concerns. She also acts as an advocate for the younger members of Sunday School. Therefore the young people feel appreciated and know they will be listened to and their opinions valued." This is a good example of a local church finding ways to make young people feel valued and more involved.

Encourage Involvement

These responses, along with the all the others from around the country, led us to agree the following set of key strategic statements for our work with young people:

> Every young person matters.

> We want to introduce young people to Jesus Christ.

> We want to give young people a good experience in the Church.

> We will treat young people with respect.

> We will listen to young people and give them a voice in the church and community.

> We will give young people opportunities to be fully involved in the ministry of the local church.

These are straightforward statements and they are clearly connected to the evidence we collected from the churches in rural and other areas. The young people in your church need to know that they matter. That's not something you can expect them to assume!

As congregations, the work that we do clearly needs to be distinctly Christian in its nature. It's fine for us to offer safe places for young people in our communities, but if they never get a sense of what lies behind what we are doing then is that the best we can do for them? Perhaps we need to remember that the Gospel is good news for young people. Many of these statements talk about how we empower young people to take up places in the body of Christ and how they can move from there to have a positive impact on their local communities and beyond.

Think National, Think Global

Another strategic idea for churches in rural settings to consider is that we are all linked together in a wider denomination or the wider Christian family in Scotland. While that might not matter to those of us who are so familiar with the denomination that it has become the equivalent of an old auntie, gathering dust in a corner, it can be significant for young people. Getting your young people involved in national events, organised by the Church, is of vital importance for the young people who take part – particularly from rural areas.

I have lost count of the times when young people have told me that they feel like they are the only person aged under 100 in their local churches and just how encouraging it is for them to be part of an event or process that brings them together with other young people who are involved in the Kirk. The Youth Representatives at the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, the Impact Mission teams, the Crossover Festival, the National Youth Assembly, organised pilgrimages to Israel and Palestine – these are just some of the options that young people from rural settings can take up. In doing so, they will get a bigger vision of their church and a bigger vision for their own lives. In turn this can have a positive impact on the local church when they return to it full of enthusiasm and challenging questions.

Good Resources

Another key initiative that works well in any setting is the Cosycoffeehouse. This is a coffee house kit in a box. The idea is that you use your church building to provide a regular place for young people to come along and hang out. They get to buy fairly traded tea, coffee or hot chocolate and on each table are specially-designed menu cards that aim to stimulate conversation about important issues relating to life and faith. If a coffee house raises more money than it spends the young people are encouraged to distribute profits to projects in the developing world and in their local communities. This gives the whole process an ethical and practical dimension. The Cosycoffeehouse kit contains all you need to get going – mugs, t-shirts, aprons as well as the menu cards. It could be a good way for a rural church – or a group of churches – to begin to reach out to young people.

Like urban churches before them, rural churches need to find the confidence to speak up more and make their voices heard. They need to encourage their central church structures to make more resources available to them to enable them to face their particular challenges and meet their particular needs. In doing so, I hope that more of our rural churches will work with young people to remove the barriers mentioned at the beginning of this article so that they can experience a better quality of life; in the process of doing this they will be introduced to Jesus Christ, and to a vibrant and dynamic church at the heart of their communities.

Rural Youth Work with Small Numbers

Rob Whiteman

The Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) is organised as congregations, dioceses (7) and Province (Scotland) and the Church's youth work follows the same pattern. In the rural and remote parts of Scotland the sheer lack of numbers brings pressures particularly on young people. One such example is the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles which runs from Cumbrae to the Butt of Lewis and is thus geographically large. Some of the congregations, however, are very small; indeed, the total membership of the diocese is smaller than the Episcopal membership in several towns in Scotland. The Bishop sees his role not as an administrator but as a Missionary travelling with and to his people. In a number of congregations there may be only one young person or one family of young people but that does not mean that there is no option for Youth Work. The approach is to focus on what is possible by bringing people together, either virtually or actually, to share. This is done through the work of a diocesan youth officer and chaplain, sometimes one person, and almost all in a voluntary capacity, under the authority of the Bishop. The diocesan Youth officers meet together to arrange inter-diocesan and provincial work in a Provincial Youth Network. The Network also has two young people from each diocese so that the young people themselves form the majority in the committee that makes the decisions on strategy, priorities and budgets for Youth Work in the SEC.

Summer Camps

The SEC Youth Network has run an annual camp in August for well over a decade. It has become so successful that two weeks are now held to meet demand without sacrificing the features that make it so special. Over the years it has become obvious that the Youth Weeks have a particular value for those in small churches and those in rural and remote areas. They have performed a particular and valuable function for those who are the only, or one of very few young people in their church. The camps have shown them that they are not alone; there are others in a similar situation, so the camp is not just about the week itself. They form the basis of a much wider interaction throughout the year. In a number of dioceses the Diocesan Network arranges weekends that include visits to small churches that have few or no young people as part of a wider weekend. In this way the experience of young people in the church has been widely shared. These are often attended by young people from outwith the diocese who have met through the Youth Weeks.

Keeping in Touch

For the young people themselves, the camps have become the root of social networks that flourish through texts, emails, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other websites. In some years reunions have been held to bring people together from all over Scotland. The success of the camps is not just in the weeks themselves; possibly their greatest value lies in what happens outwith the weeks in terms of social interaction. The weeks provide a huge fillip to young people's faith but the contacts carried on throughout the year are what sustains it.

This is not the end of the process however, as part of the philosophy of the Network has been to develop its own leadership. In rural areas this has been very successful with a number of the younger leaders emerging from all over Scotland – Oban, Kelso, Arbroath, Moray, Lewis. Furthermore events outside the Youth Weeks have been held in rural areas including a number of 'Down on the Farm' events in rural Aberdeenshire, run by local leaders bringing young people together from across Scotland.

Personal Stories

An SEC Youth Week Delegate reflects:

"I was asked on the last day how long it would take me to travel home. I feel that the reply – seven hours – stunned one or two people. However, travelling from the Isle of Lewis to Perth, a journey involving two buses and a three hour ferry journey, is a hassle gladly suffered under the circumstances. The congregation I attend is small to the extent that I am one of only two young people, a situation which will change for the worse when I leave for university in four months' time. The Youth Week provides an excellent opportunity to meet other young Christians, and to explore our common faith together.

The atmosphere was almost unique. It was that rare atmosphere which conveys the feeling of a deep spiritual presence, and I wonder if it was something resident in the buildings there or, as I suspect, something which came about through the gathering of so many young people eager to share their spiritual experiences. I still have friends whom I met nearly six years ago at the first such event I attended, and I am certainly considering returning as a leader in years to come, or rather hoping for the opportunity.

Quite apart from my eagerness to return each year, I am equally eager to stay in touch with some of the great personalities I have met there. This mainly takes place via email, with the occasional phone call breaking the silence induced by the various communication barriers involved in living in a remote corner of rural Scotland. Although actually meeting any of them in person is a rare occurence, the odd time when I do is often the highlight of the year for me, especially when returning to the camp itself – which has an influence far beyond the two weeks of the year during which it takes place."

A Missing Generation

Susan Andrew

"So you're one of the few who came back to Caithness then?" asked a local gentleman who had approached me after a youth presentation I'd given in a small village called Reay. To appreciate the significance of this statement you have to realise that there is a huge generation missing from rural Caithness, especially in the churches. At the age of 18, the majority head for the city for further study. Only years later and with the thought of settling down and having a family somewhere quiet would the option of coming back to Caithness pop into their heads. I am an exception to this rule. After completing University in Edinburgh, I came home to the small town of Wick and now am employed as the full-time youth worker for the church I grew up in – Pulteneytown Parish Church.

Knowing the Benefits

It is a great privilege to be a servant of Christ in the place that offered so much to me in terms of spiritual nurture and development during my youth. After coming up through the Sunday school, I attended the Sunday night Youth Group which offered a varied programme of quizzes, speakers, games and bible studies. Sunday night was the highlight of my week. The Youth Group provided a comfortable, safe, fun atmosphere which was a refreshing change after the difficulties and pressure of school, where it felt like you were the only Christian! Although not everyone in the Youth Group were committed Christians, there was an understanding of what was expected. The leaders taught us the truths of the Bible in a fun and challenging way and the youth members treated the room and leaders with respect. The youth group today has 30 members and although they are from different years in High School, the group gel well because of an annual away weekend in February.

I attended the very first away weekend to Alltnacriche in Aviemore. Our weekend away is now in its 10th year! The first year consisted of 15 teenagers and five adults. I remember feeling so excited about the prospect of going away and getting to do all the adventurous activities the programme promised. There was skiing, snow-bobbing, swimming, ice-skating and an assault course, plus it's every teenage girl's dream to sleep in a dorm with your friends and chat until the small hours of the morning! We had four spiritual/lifestyle talks over the weekend as well as attending the local church in Aviemore. It was a great time to be rid of distractions or peer pressure from friends and just to hear more about God and spend time in his presence for a whole weekend. Since that first year the group has grown and we take 30 young people and 10 leaders away with us. However, the experience is very different now that I'm a leader! It is still a powerful weekend and this year we had 11 of the 30 young people sign up for 'Going Deeper' classes after the weekend was over. God is good!

Use the Resources You Have

Another outreach event I attended when I was young was the annual Summer Holiday Club that Pulteneytown Parish Church ran. 170 children enjoyed an amazing week crammed with activities, teaching, videos, singing, outdoor pursuits and of course juice and biscuits! The Holiday Club is open to primary school aged children so once too old for that, I moved on to 'Breakout', the teenage version of Holiday Club run in the evenings. It was at Breakout that I became a Christian – after being brought up through the church I finally came to understand what the gospel message meant for me personally. It was during one of the evening talks that the true impact of what Jesus' death on the cross meant hit me and I couldn't help but cry and pray to God to forgive my sin. Other teenagers have felt God speak to them through this mission week, which is extraordinary as it attracts about 70 teenagers, most of whom have never set foot in a church before. When I became a leader of Breakout I realised how dependent on God the leaders truly are. The great thing about Breakout is that even though we are not based in a city with access to resources, we use what we have. We take the group fishing on boats around the harbour, we go out in fields quad biking, we have bonfires on our beautiful beaches and we play wide-games in the forests nearby. We are able to do all this because of the promise in God's word: "God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19) God helps us to use what we have and to build on that. The leader's enthusiasm to work with young people and their obvious relationship with God makes Breakout a really special event and I think all the young people attending can see that, as I did when I was a member.

Finding Confidence

There are so many youth-orientated activities going on in Pulteneytown Parish Church which would never have been successful without God and a faithful core group of people. A verse that has stayed with me is 1 Timothy 12: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." Young people are often looked down upon and seen as a problem to be solved, but the Church should see their potential and their gifts; after all, Joseph, David and Mary were all young when God used them in miraculous ways! I came to see God's love for me through my experience of my local church as I was growing up. They accepted me and used my gifts in the church. Now, as a youth worker, I am in turn encouraging my youths to feel accepted and to use their gifts, such as the youth praise band we are setting up, as well as nurturing their spiritual needs with the 'Going Deeper' classes. Youth work is often hard, pioneering work but at least as I develop it at Pulteneytown Parish I know I'm building on a good foundation which was laid down when I was younger.

In answer to the gentleman's question, *"So you're one of the few who came back to Caithness then?" I would have to say, "Yes, and it's because there is a lot more work God wants done here!"*

YOUTH OUTREACH

What can we do?

Ewen Munro

Church folk in Oban were concerned for the young people of the town who spent a lot of time hanging about the streets. A few people gathered monthly to pray for a vision of how to develop a project, where to find people with the right talents and how to find financial partners. Meantime visits were paid to youth work schemes around Scotland – many in very different contexts, but with lessons to teach and advice to give. At an early stage, partnership emerged as the best way forward, and out of the kind of close links enjoyed in a rural community came a willingness to meet and develop a strategy which involved the local High School, the Police, The Social Work Department, local businesses, the Leisure Centre and all the church denominations. From this came H2O, an unashamedly Christian youth work charity constituted in 2003 to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the young people of Oban and surrounding areas. With at least two full time youth workers and a team of volunteers, we meet with young people of high school age but are keen to stretch our definition to include primary age children.

Part of the High School

We now have an enviable relationship with the local high school and consider that we are blessed in this as the school authorities have welcomed our youth workers with open arms and they have free access throughout the school during the school day. This hasn't happened overnight, or even since 2003, as we are frequently humbled when we realise from conversations that what we are doing now (and seeing the fruits of) is a result of fervent prayer for generations. Speaking to older members of our congregations, we frequently hear them saying apologetically that they never would have believed that they would ever see what is happening now, even though they prayed for it all those years ago.

A Business Model

The structure of H2O is made up of an overseeing Board of 12 'hands on' Directors and it is formally constituted as a limited company. The Directors are local men and women, many are parents, some professional, others in business, who bring their many skills and talents to the table.

Five teams feed into and report to the Board:

- Youth
- Prayer
- Events (local and national)
- Business (planning, funding applications, line management of staff)
- Local Fundraising

There is a selection of denominations represented on the actual Board, but all the churches in the area are involved in some capacity, especially amongst our volunteer base on whom we rely heavily for activities. They are crucial to the work and share a wide range of skills and talents. We have our visionary characters but these are complemented by a hard core of people who are able to work with the wacky ideas and try to put them in place. Our business folk have an aptitude for successfully seeking funding sponsors – which is great, because they seem to enjoy it and the rest of us can't really be bothered with that sort of thing.

We have two full time Christian youth workers plus at present a youth work trainee on secondment from Youth For Christ.

Partnership working is crucial to our work and here is a sample of our current partners:

Strathclyde Police, Scottish Rocks, Stramash, Alpha Scotland, Oban High School, Westward Quest, Scotland Against Drugs, Play Sport, Girls on the Move, Fusions and SSC.

We have a big advantage over many areas as we only have one high school which serves a large catchment of rural Argyll including several of the Inner Hebridean islands. This means that it is relatively straightforward to make contact with all the young people of the area by meeting them in the High School.

We have a loose target of apportioning the youth workers' time as High School 60%, Church 20% and Street/ Community 20%, and in practice we are able to keep close to these guide figures.

Benefits for the Churches

The whole work is underpinned by prayer and a monthly Prayer Supper is organised which also delivers much needed fellowship and allows real-time updates to be given to supporters. One of the benefits of this isn't related to youth work at all, but as all the churches in the town are actively involved in the work inevitably friendships across the churches are made and fellowship deepened. We have found that H2O becomes a trial ground for activities which folk maybe haven't explored before and they can come and try it or see it in action in a non-threatening way. This has given confidence to go back to their own churches and try out different methods with boldness, having seen it in practice. An example of this is the prayer times where we have spent time together in a number of different styles of shared and individual prayer.

Looking back, the story of H2O is much like the proverbial runaway snowball going downhill, gathering pace, but instead of falling apart when it got too big we have been careful to shed or evolve areas which clearly were not part of the core work; we have had the courage to postpone other items until the time is right or we have the resources to deal with them. Much of what we do has evolved from a desperate need which was obvious, to a planned delivery of youth work to meet developing needs in the area. Some requests have come in from outlying areas and we have been able to respond with support and activities. Feedback from the Police and Social work has been positive and encouraging.

Questions for Discussion

- What new ideas did you find encouraging in this section?
- Which young people in your congregation at present, could you draw into practical involvement in church life?
- What activities would attract younger children to enable you to 'grow' young people in church?
- Do you know how to access help and advice from your denomination?
- Do you have a support worker or staff member from any of the Christian churches in the area whom you could consult?
- See the How to Use this Pack section for Resources information.

The Church of Scotland

God's Own Country

A Practical Resource for Rural Churches

Rural Scotland

Rural Scotland: An Overview

Prof John M Bryden

Introduction

Rural Scotland is changing, and it is diverse. The goods and services it provides to the nation as a whole have changed, and so too has the composition of its people's livelihoods. Formerly an important source of farm and fishing produce, timber, labour for industry, and minerals, it is now to a greater extent a source of tourism and recreation, general services, specialised food and drink, biodiversity and renewable energy, and a chosen place of habitation of commuters and retired people. This is reflected in its changing employment and enterprise structure. The character of its communities, ranging from commuting villages that largely empty during the day, to functioning local economies more remotely located from the cities, has been transformed. There is even a debate about whether indeed rural communities can be thought of as at all separate from the cities. Rural demography has also changed in significant ways – from being a net supplier of people to urban and industrial areas, and indeed other countries, up until about 1980, rural Scotland beyond the commuting belt now has a higher crude death rate than birth rate, meaning that it needs annual net in-migration to maintain the population. That is the broad backcloth for this and subsequent chapters of this guide.

Defining Rural Scotland

The term 'rural' is filled with meaning – it is as sociologists say 'socially constructed'. 'Rural' is used in different ways: as a practical division of national space, as in the 'urban-rural divide'; to denote a different kind of society or culture which is more 'traditional', or 'communal', and less 'materialistic', having different values and beliefs; as a distinct kind of economy, usually 'agrarian', and as a different kind of environment such as 'wilderness'. We therefore usually think of rural communities as being 'different' from urban communities, even if the evidence about whether or to what extent such differences exist today is hotly debated.

Even if the rural-urban differences have diminished, most notably in the now much more extensive 'commuting zone' around our main cities, the interest of policymakers in rural issues seems to have increased. In 1980 it was hard to find a conference or seminar on 'rural development' in Scotland – rural development was seen as something that happened in the 'third world'! Today, hardly a week passes without some announcement or event concerning rural development in Scotland.

Yet rural Scotland remains hard to pin down. The only widely acceptable international classification of urban and rural territories is that of the OECD[1], based on population density at ward level, wards being defined as 'rural' if they have less than 150 inhabitants per sq km^2. The classification of wards is aggregated to the regional level, regions having over 75% of wards thus defined as rural being classified as 'predominately rural'. Those with over 75% of wards being defined as urban are thus 'predominately urban', and those in between as 'significantly rural' or 'intermediate'. In Scotland the predominately rural regions are the Highlands and Islands and the South West. However, the OECD definition takes no explicit account of 'peripherality' or distance from main markets, often regarded as a key criterion for 'rurality'. The logic of a double criterion of population density and distance from main markets is based on the idea that costs of transport matter for 'competitiveness', and that density of settlement and distance both affect the costs of delivering public and private goods and services.

Density of population has also been an important criterion in rural-urban delineations within Scotland. John Randall's definition was based on population density at district level, the cut-off being 100 persons per sq km. This was superseded in 2000 by the new Scottish Executive six-fold urban-rural classification for use in the analysis of the Scottish Household Survey, using settlement size and remoteness at the postcode unit as the two criteria.

The Scottish Executive, Scottish Household Survey 'Typology' of Rural and Urban Scotland	
Area type	**Postcode units in**
'The four cities'	Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh (settlements sized over 125,000)
Other 'Urban'	Other settlements over 10,000 population
'Small, accessible towns':	Settlements 3,000-10,000 population and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
'Small, remote towns'	Settlements 3,000-10,000 population and more than a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
'Accessible rural'	Settlements less than 3,000 population and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
'Remote rural'	Settlements less than 3,000 population and more than a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more

Using this classification of rural and urban Scotland, the distribution of population looks like this:- Population in Scotland's Rural and Urban areas, 2001		
Area type	**Population, 2001 census**	**% of Total Population, 2001**
'The four cities'	1,972,466	39.0
Other 'Urban'	1,483,478	29.3
'Small, accessible towns'	527,748	10.4
'Small, remote towns'	133,615	2.6
Source: Social Focus on Urban Rural Scotland, Scottish Executive 2003		
'Accessible rural'	663,166	13.1
'Remote rural'	281,538	5.6

Depending on how we cut the cloth, then, the 'rural population' of Scotland is somewhat variable. How, for example, should we treat 'accessible' rural areas and 'small towns'? If we exclude both, then the rural population would be as low as 5.6% of the total, but if we include them both it would be 31.7%.

How to deal with the 'commuting belt' is probably the key question here. Functionally speaking, these areas are mainly part of the urban core, even if residents prefer to think of themselves as living in the rural idyll! The economic and social circumstances of the 'commuting belt' are still very different from those in the rural periphery, where social and economic problems caused by poverty, lack of economic opportunity and high costs of living and transport tend to be relatively severe. Such problems explain the very different demographic experience of 'proximate' and 'remote' rural communities – the former generally having a growing population which remains relatively young; the latter having a declining and ageing population.

The key idea is diversity. Rural Scotland is wonderfully diverse in people, communities, culture, landscapes, economies, density, remoteness, religion, and even language! 'One size' can never 'fit all' in this context!

The Scottish Rural Economy

One of the most important features of our rural economy has been the fall in employment in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, hunting, mining and quarrying. All of these activities have been important in different parts of rural Scotland. In 1950, the primary and extractive industries accounted for 10.7% of total employment in Scotland, and 23.6% of employment in the Highlands and Islands[3]. Today they account for less than 5% of employment in Scotland, and 8% in the Highlands and Islands[4].

At the same time, many – if not all – rural communities have succeeded in transforming their local economies in ways that have sustained a viable population. Outside the main commuting areas, the main substitute for the primary sectors has been the complex 'services' sector, the important elements here being public sector services (especially education, health and public sector administration), transport and tourism and recreation activities[5]. In addition, there has been an important recent growth in renewable energy, especially wind farming and hydro power. The latter are obviously linked, with our important rural cultures, archaeology, history, landscapes, and natural environment including wind and water! Even if such 'assets' are often public goods, commercial activities have often been able to develop around them in our rural areas. It is often in such activities that we find innovation happening, even if we are frequently deluded into thinking that all innovation and growth takes place in our cities![6]

A second changing aspect of our rural economies is that economic inter-relations and linkages between sectors have become weaker or 'thinner', implying that any consumption or investment expenditure in a rural community has a lesser economic impact than formerly. Economic 'leakages' are now much larger, because of a changing regulatory framework, cheaper transport, and centralisation and concentration in many industries such as food processing, retailing, building and construction, and financial services. Most often, the food grown in a Scottish rural area is no longer consumed locally, but travels to a large purchasing depot in the central belt, or a distant food processor. Local slaughterhouses, dairies and local public markets are generally things of an increasingly distant past. This is despite recent efforts to restore local food circuits (for example in Skye and Lochaber), especially linking the quality end of the growing tourism industry, but also through occasional farmers' markets and 'box' schemes. Similarly, the building industry and related trades are less 'local' than they were, with contractors often travelling from the larger towns and cities, and even from other countries in the case of large scale projects. And of course retailing is dominated by a few supermarkets, located or around towns and cities and with global sourcing of their products. The original 'one-stop shop' – the village store with post office and a petrol pump – is an endangered species in rural Scotland today.

This growing internal economic weakness of local rural economies has been compounded by centralisation of local government, health, education, and other social services over the past 20-30 years, to the detriment of people without personal motorised transport.

Rural Community Institutions

Alongside such changes, there has been a disappearance of many, if not all, former rural 'social capital-building' community institutions and practices, such as 'neighbouring' for harvesting, threshing, shearing, gathering, also usually a time for social events. The socialisation of the young, and the non-formal education of older farmers, through the young farmers clubs and the farmers clubs and associations has also diminished as the age structure of farmers has advanced, young people diminished and diversified their activities, and succession has become less certain. The role of the Churches has also weakened. It is nevertheless the case that volunteering is particularly strong in remoter rural areas.

The consequence is that rural communities are to a lesser extent than formerly places where people live, work and play together – people increasingly have to move to find work, consumption and investment goods, and recreational or cultural opportunities. Their radius of activity and interaction has widened. In an era of declining public transport provision (at least beyond the commuting belt of the larger cities), that means access to private transport, commonly the motorcar. Since rural participation rates for women as well as for men have increased in this period, this often means two cars in a household. In fact, car ownership is extremely high in rural Scotland, and necessity rather than prosperity is the reason.

Nevertheless there has also been a growing use and inventive application of digital communications in rural and remote areas of Scotland since the early 1980's[7]. We are now assured by politicians of ubiquitous potential access to high speed 'broadband' telecommunications. This technology is also one of the keystones of the new University of the Highlands and Islands, with its decentralised structure linking existing colleges and learning centres scattered throughout the region, and beyond. It is also playing a role in the provision of medical services to remote areas, and in the training and continuing education of doctors and nurses.

Rural Poverty and Deprivation

Rural poverty has sometimes been described as 'invisible' because of the dominant idea of a 'rural idyll'. However, most empirical work has demonstrated the existence of significant poverty in rural areas, especially those beyond the 'commuting belt'[8]. This poverty is not always reflected in social security uptake because, as Shucksmith and others demonstrated, uptake of benefits is lower in rural areas.

'Rural disadvantage' and how to measure it is controversial. There are varying approaches to devising indicators and developing appropriate intervention strategies. More recently, the development and the adoption of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) has given cause for concern amongst rurally located agencies for two main reasons: Firstly, because it fails to take into consideration 'dispersed poverty' in rural areas – for example, 90% of the income deprived households in the Highlands live outwith the 15% most deprived areas; secondly, because SIMD is being used to allocate resources. Key issues in rural disadvantage revolve around housing and access issues. Housing is a question of availability, affordability and property rights, the latter being highly skewed in rural Scotland because of traditional patterns of landownership in most areas. Accessibility to key public and private services has become an increasing issue because of the general trends towards centralisation, the costs of fuel and associated costs of car ownership and the lack of public transport. Poverty and disadvantage are concentrated in certain groups of the rural population – especially the elderly on limited pensions; and single mothers.

Land Ownership

The ownership of land and natural resources has been a source of conflict and disadvantage for people living in rural Scotland, where ownership has been highly concentrated in a few, often absentee, hands[9] (MacEwen, Whiteman). Recently, as a result of prior campaigning and the work of the Land Reform Policy Group from 1997-99, the issue of ownership of land and natural resources that often underpin local rural economies has come to the forefront of policy in Scotland. Two important examples are the place of local community ownership within the Land Reform legislation – the community right to buy – and the involvement of public development agencies in the 'community land unit' and the 'community energy unit'. With the help of the Scottish Land Fund, rural Communities now own over 5% of all Scottish land[10].

Government and Governance

I understand 'government' to be about the organisation, structures, powers and functions of the State, and 'governance' to be about the way that public decisions are made, which also often involves non-State bodies (civil society, interest groups, etc). Both have changed markedly in recent years, and these changes have had particular rural implications.

From a rural point of view, and leaving out Scottish devolution itself, the most important changes in government concern the reforms of Scottish local government in 1974 (the 'Wheatley Reforms') and 1994. The Wheatley reforms abolished town and county councils, and replaced them with regions and districts with variable shared responsibilities. While Districts often had the same or similar boundaries to old counties, their powers were diminished. The main exception was the western isles which gained new all-purpose islands authority (the islands were previously shared between the counties of Inverness-shire and Ross and Cromarty). The stated rationale was functional efficiency, based on arguments of economies of scale, but in practice the reform was highly political, and certainly driven by urban concerns, particularly those in the declining industrial area of the west central belt.

The second reform was also deeply political, and equally driven by urban concerns, although once again couched in the logic of functional efficiency, although arguably even less convincingly than in 1974. This time it was the massive political power of the labour dominated Strathclyde region that was the main target, on this occasion of a Conservative government. Now districts

were abolished, and the larger regions like Strathclyde and Grampian divided into a smaller number of all-purpose authorities. The islands remained as before. However, the mainland rural areas now faced a huge diminution of local political representation and of local authority jobs, especially in the decision-making areas. As the evidence of the DORA research project clearly identified, rural people in now abandoned former counties like Caithness and Sutherland in the Highlands and Islands, and Wigtown in the South-West felt marginalised by this reform.[11]

In addition to local government reform, yet more powers were steadily transferred from at least nominally democratic local government to new centralised unelected 'Quangos', for example powers over water and the environment, and housing.

Despite the rhetoric, there has therefore been a period of considerable centralisation of government, and its removal from the democratic arena. Thus 'rural communities' – parishes (Parish Councils did exist in Scotland until 1929!), small towns, even counties – do not now have the kind of democratically elected local government taking decisions about local matters that is present almost everywhere else in Europe, including England, as well as in countries as diverse as the USA and India. In fact, in this respect at least Scotland is somewhat unusual among countries normally regarded as 'democratic'.

The vacuum has been partly filled by the 'community trusts' that have sprung up since the pioneering acts of the communities of Assynt and Eigg in the early 1990's to acquire their own land. But, although such Trusts sometimes look like democratic bodies, with locally elected directors, and proper voting procedures, they are not regarded as part of local government under the Local Government Acts. More such organisations seem likely to emerge in future.

The fragmentation of powers across space and agencies in Scotland and the lack of an adequate local government system compound the governance problems arising from the shift from 'agricultural' policy to 'rural development' policy within the European Union generally. Whilst the relationship between the sectoral interests (represented mainly by the Scottish National Farmers Union) and government (SEERAD, formerly DAFS in Scotland) was fairly clear, the shift to engagement of wider rural interests involved in 'rural development' policy as a territorial project has thus far largely failed to occur in Scotland[12].

Conclusion

Rural communities still matter to Scotland, even if they are hard to pin down! They are important for our economy and its transformation in a globalising world, and equally important for our identity and quality of life. They will underpin our renewable energies of the future. They are sources of innovation and new ideas. Yet, although the keys to the future are to a large extent in their own hands[13], they cannot realise all of their potentials without appropriate political and policy support. As they look inwards, they must simultaneously look outwards, seeking new allies in the cities and global networks of solidarity and knowledge.

Please refer to page 8 for a full set of References accompanying this article and the following article.

Addressing Disadvantage in Rural Scotland

Philomena de Lima

Introduction and Background – Making Rural Deprivation Visible

The definition and measurement of concepts such as disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion are highly contested. While much has been written about these terms, including the similarities, differences and associations between them, this has mainly taken place within the urban context. However, from about the late 1980's the romantic myth of the 'idyllic rural countryside' and the strong tendency to perpetuate predominantly 'romantic' and homogenous views of rural communities was increasingly challenged. Evidence suggested that by emphasising a 'romantic' idea of rurality there was a danger of endorsing the urban/rural dichotomy and creating an impression that people in rural areas do not face many of the same difficulties as those in the wider society. (Milbourne 1997; Shucksmith et al.1996).

Two key issues emerged from the work undertaken by academics such as Shucksmith et al (1996) which continue to be salient in present discussions on rural disadvantage. Firstly, that despite the evidence that a high proportion of rural dwellers fall within the standard definitions of ' poverty', many reject the 'objective assessment' of their position, emphasising the advantages of rural life in terms of 'crime free environment and good communities'. (Rural Forum (Scotland) 1994, p70) Secondly, indicators of deprivation used to allocate resources by government agencies fail to capture the dispersed nature of rural disadvantage which characterises rural communities.

Consequently, research has consistently highlighted that 'area based' approaches do not reflect the complexities of rural disadvantage. The view expressed by Shucksmith et al (1996), and which continues to be echoed, highlighted the problems in attempting to pinpoint specific rural areas that appear to be suffering from disadvantage:

'The use of urban derived indicators is inadequate to the identification of rural disadvantage. Moreover rural disadvantage tends not to be concentrated, in the manner of urban disadvantage, but dispersed. Indeed one of its dimensions is frequently that of social isolation. This makes rural disadvantage less visible and less obviously tractable.' (Shucksmith, 1996, p27-28)

Definitions and Concepts

Bearing in mind the contested nature of concepts such as poverty and deprivation/ disadvantage, it is nevertheless widely acknowledged that:

'Deprivation is a multi dimensional concept, concerned not only with material goods but also with the ability to participate in social life. It is a relative concept where standards are defined in relation to social norms or expectations. Poverty and deprivation are interlinked as cause and outcome.' (Bailey et al. 2003, p.2)

Furthermore, writers such as Shucksmith et al (1996) have argued for a preference to use 'rural disadvantage' on the grounds that:

'The term 'deprivation' has become associated with emphasis on individual's own failings , rightly or wrongly, in contrast to the notion of disadvantage , whereby individuals or households are seen as systematically disadvantaged by economic and social restructuring and by the exercise of power in society.' (Shucksmith et al 1996, p 8)

As Shucksmith et al (1996) have argued, trivial though these distinctions might appear, the emphasis on one or the other suggests not only different attitudes but also the potential for different interventions. The use of a term which emphasises individual failings may not only result in stigmatising those who are deprived, but also likely lead to policies which withdraw support to those labelled as 'un-deserving'. By contrast terms such as 'disadvantage' draw attention to the ways in which social, economic and political factors interact to create barriers whereby some individuals and groups are unable to access the same opportunities and quality of life as those available to the majority. It is much more closely associated with the term 'social inclusion' drawing attention to the multi-dimensional aspects of disadvantage and the importance of context.

Measuring Deprivation: The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

Another continuing source of debate has been the methodologies for measuring disadvantage, and the pros and cons of developing an index of deprivation (Bailey et al. 2003; Shucksmith et al 1996; UHI PolicyWeb April 2005). These discussions take on a particular significance when decisions are made to target resources at specific areas based on an index, which research has shown has favoured urban areas and led to a neglect of rural deprivation. (Shucksmith et a. 1996)

The SIMD is the official measure of area deprivation at ward level in Scotland (UHI PolicyWeb, April 2005). In 2003 SIMD was based on five domains or aspects of deprivation. (Bailey et al 2003) In 2004, this was increased to 31 indicators in the six individual domains of current income, employment, housing, health, education, skills and training and geographic access to services and telecommunications, and to 37 indicators in seven domains, with a new crime domain in 2006. The SIMD is presented at data zone level, and data zones, which have a median population size of 769, are ranked from most deprived (1) to least deprived (6,505) on the overall SIMD and on each of the individual domains, presenting a picture of relative area deprivation across Scotland. (Scottish Executive, 2006a)

Although taking as their starting point Townsend's concept of multiple deprivation, the Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice (SCRSJ), who were commissioned by the Scottish Executive to produce a long term strategy for measuring deprivation, emphasised deprivation and its measurement in narrower terms and recommended: '... that poverty or lack of financial resources is the central cause of deprivation and that both should be captured in deprivation measures'. (Bailey et al., 2003, p v)

This definition of deprivation combined with the emphasis on including indicators which could be established as 'causes of deprivation', resulted in Bailey et al (2003) rejecting suggestions that factors affecting rural areas such as economic decline, or out-migration should be included within the index. Whilst recognising diversity within both urban and rural categories and deprivation as affecting both urban and rural areas, they argued that the basic dimensions of deprivation across Scotland were the same and recommended the application of a single measure in the form of the SIMD. (Bailey et al. 2003, p18)

Another principal recommendation emerging from their work, which has not been implemented and which may have helped to address one of the main criticisms of the application of SIMD in rural areas was that the Scottish Executive in addition to the 'area-based measures' should also develop a measure of deprivation at the 'individual level' which would assist with making '...comparisons between individual, group and area deprivation, exploring the extent to which different deprived groups are more or less concentrated into particular locations'. (UHI PolicyWeb April 2005, p5)

The overview of deprivation based on the SIMD 2006 report published by the Scottish Executive suggested that while Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, and South Lanarkshire experienced relatively large decreases in their share of data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland, Fife, Aberdeen City, Highland and Inverclyde experienced relatively large increases in their share of data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland between the SIMD 2004 and SIMD 2006. Local authority areas with the largest national shares of the 15% most deprived in Scotland were mainly in the Central belt (e.g. Glasgow City North Lanarkshire, City of Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire). Local authority areas with the largest local share of the 15% most deprived in SIMD 2006 were Glasgow City, Dundee City, West Dunbartonshire, Clackmannanshire and North Lanarkshire. By contrast, Eilean Siar, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands were reported as having no data zones in the SIMD 2006 15% most deprived, it was acknowledged that this did not mean there was no deprivation in these areas but that it was ' not concentrated in small areas'. (Scottish Executive 2006a and b)

Despite the improvements in relation to SIMD there continue to be concerns that the size of data zones are not sensitive enough to the dispersed nature of rural disadvantage: 'The SIMD does not capture or reflect the scale of the problem within rural areas. The index itself shows that in Highland 90% of income and employment deprived people live outwith the areas where deprivation is concentrated.' (Scottish Affairs Committee, 1 December 2006, EV57)

There have been initiatives taken in different parts of Scotland to address the weakness in SIMD and to develop a better understanding of rural disadvantage. For example Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP), commissioned a study to develop more effective ways of measuring deprivation by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. (Bailey et al 2004) Shetland Islands Council also undertook research in 2006 'to develop understanding of social exclusion and deprivation in Shetland, and other remote rural areas'. (Shetland Islands Council, 2006) The research combined quantitative and qualitative methods to build on the SIMD 2004 domains by adding additional statistical indicators. One of the main conclusions of the study (also supported by the Argyll and Bute study) was that focusing on spatial measures alone does not give an accurate picture of rural disadvantage:

'There are higher numbers of deprived individuals in the more remote areas of Shetland and spatial pockets of deprivations discernable within the concentrations of local authority housing. Nevertheless deprived individuals and households are fairly even distributed throughout Shetland, indicating factors beyond location in operation'. (Perring, Spring 2006, p59)

Who are Disadvantaged in Rural Areas and Why?

Despite the on-going debates on definitions and measurement, research has consistently shown that some groups are more vulnerable to deprivation than others. These include older people living alone; the self employed; low paid workers (and increasingly in this context migrant workers who are taking up much of the low paid employment in rural areas), notably in agriculture and tourism; individuals with no access to private transport even in households with a car; and 'those detached from labour markets' for a variety of reasons, including those formally unemployed or those registered as longer term sick or disabled. (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; Rural Poverty and Social inclusion Working Group, 2001;Shucksmith 2000)

Whilst recent monitoring reports have acknowledged that there has been some progress made on poverty generally across the UK, it is also recognised that the risks of poverty for adults of working age in both working and workless households have increased in the past decade. For those in work low pay was identified as a key factor. In addition low pay was reported to be most prevalent in Dumfries and Galloway, Moray and Clackmannanshire. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, December 2006). Although not extensively researched, it is also acknowledged that gender and ethnicity also impact in varying ways on the extent to which individuals may feel disadvantaged in rural contexts. (de Lima, 2001; de Lima 2002; Perring, 2006)

Research has also consistently highlighted a number of factors giving rise to disadvantage in rural areas (Chapman, et al 1998; Shucksmith, 2000, Commission for Rural Communities 2006). These include:

- Low pay associated with limited employment opportunities generally.
- The predominance of small work places, as well as low wage sectors such as agriculture, food processing, and the tourism/hospitality sectors seasonal employment.
- Low take up of benefits reflecting a combination of poor access to advice and information, 'different perceptions of poverty' and concerns about stigmatisation and 'a culture of independence', as well as issues of eligibility as individuals move in and out of seasonal employment.
- Changing demography and the growth in the older population in particular, who are considered to be at risk due to lack of support – either because they have recently moved into an area, or because the younger members of their families have moved out of the area, resulting in isolation and little or no access to support.
- In addition, it is widely acknowledged that issues of access (e.g. transport, Information Communication Technologies and child care amongst other services), affordability of housing, visibility (the desire not be conspicuous) and the hidden nature of rural poverty combined with a tendency towards a 'culture of independence', all serve to compound the inequalities experienced by those living in rural areas.

Conclusion – Role of the Church

This chapter has sought to briefly illustrate the contentious nature of the discourses on rural disadvantage as well as some of the implications of their use. It has also attempted to reflect the debate around the development of a single measure of deprivation that is being applied to rural and urban contexts, and which research evidence has consistently shown has failed to capture the dispersed and diverse nature of rural disadvantage. These issues are relevant for faith groups and Churches to take into account when allocating resources to rural communities.

Developing a picture of disadvantage is complex given its multifaceted and dynamic nature. Whilst some people may be disadvantaged over a long period of time, there are others who may move in and out of being disadvantaged several times during their lifetime (Chapman et al 1998; Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). Factors such as demography, economic growth levels, transport and accessibility issues and housing are some of the key drivers in rural areas, as well as factors that have an impact on rural disadvantage (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). Addressing rural disadvantage requires solutions at different levels – from fiscal changes at the UK level to local level initiatives. With regard to the latter, there is a need for more joined -up working , so that the issues faced by those considered to be disadvantaged can be addressed holistically rather than in 'silos '(Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group,2001; Scottish Executive,2002).

There has been acknowledgement of the important role that the voluntary sector plays in the 'wellbeing' of rural residents and in developing 'holistic' approaches to service delivery (Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group, 2001; Scottish Executive, 2002). However, with the exception of the Shucksmith et al (1996) study there appears to be a dearth of literature on the role that faith groups/churches play in relation to supporting individuals and groups who are disadvantaged in rural communities. The Shucksmith et al (1996) study on rural disadvantage found that the role of the church and how it was viewed among rural residents varied across Scotland, and depending on historical context, it was viewed as either an integrating force or divisive force. However, overall the presence of the church in rural communities was seen as 'the last of the in situ service providers' who were very much involved in assisting rural residents in coping with 'many aspects of "hidden" rural disadvantage'. In addition to their formal roles and duties, increasing demands were being placed on rural Ministers, especially for their social work skills, as they were being called upon to take on an increasing wide range of 'informal social work ' roles. Respondents in the study:

'...suggested that individuals facing difficulties viewed the local Minister as the only high profile 'service provider' who could be approached in an informal way, for help or advice, and Ministers in all areas were being used increasingly as a first point of contact to assist rural residents with personal, financial or social difficulties.' (Shucksmith et al 1996, p 404)

More recently, there has been growing evidence of the 'informal social work' role played by faith groups, ministers and priests in relation to migrant workers in rural areas (de Lima et al., 2007 forthcoming). Despite the important role played by faith groups and the churches in rural communities, they are rarely mentioned or are visible in local authority /regional initiatives such as the Community Planning Partnerships or Community Regeneration initiatives in rural areas. Indeed it would seem there is little acknowledgement of their role and work in supporting individuals who may be disadvantaged in rural communities. If rural disadvantage is to be tackled 'holistically' and not in institutional 'silos' it is important that the role of faith groups and churches is acknowledged and that they are more visibly engaged in local initiatives established to address disadvantage in rural communities.

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Prof John M Bryden

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2 John Randall (1985). Randall then worked in the Scottish Office, and later became Director of the General Registers Office for Scotland (GROS).

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5 See Atterton and Bryden ,2001, and more generally Bollman & Bryden 1986.6 The 'city regions' idea that has become so prevalent, and which lies behind the current Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise emphasis on the development of our Cities.

6 For the earlier period see Bryden & Fuller, 1986 and, later, Bryden, Fuller and Rennie, 1996.

6 Most notably by Shucksmith et al in Scotland, and Cloke et al in England.

6 See the pioneering for of John McEwen (1976) based on Millman's earlier maps, and the updates by Andy Whiteman.

6 See Bryden & Geisler (2007)

6 Bryden and Hart 2004

6 The farmers' interests are still consulted, but the gap in rural community representation is largely filled by urban based environmental lobbies.

6 see Bryden, 1994, Moseley, 2003;, and Bryden & Hart, 2004, for example.

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