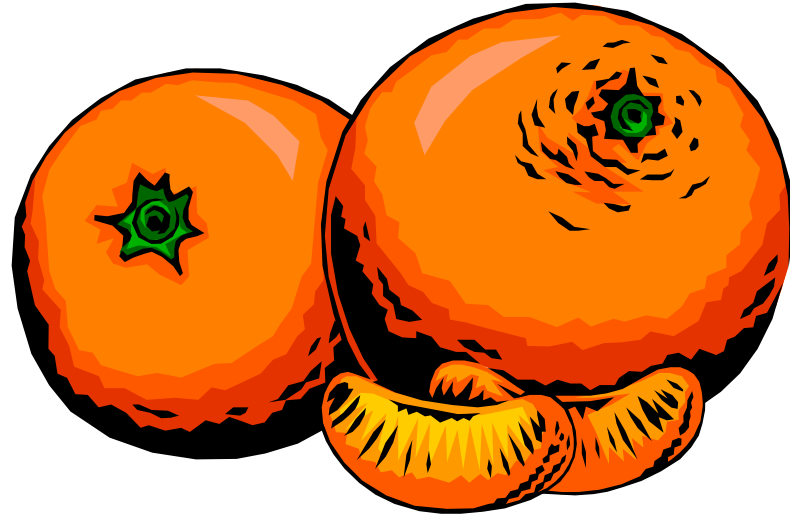
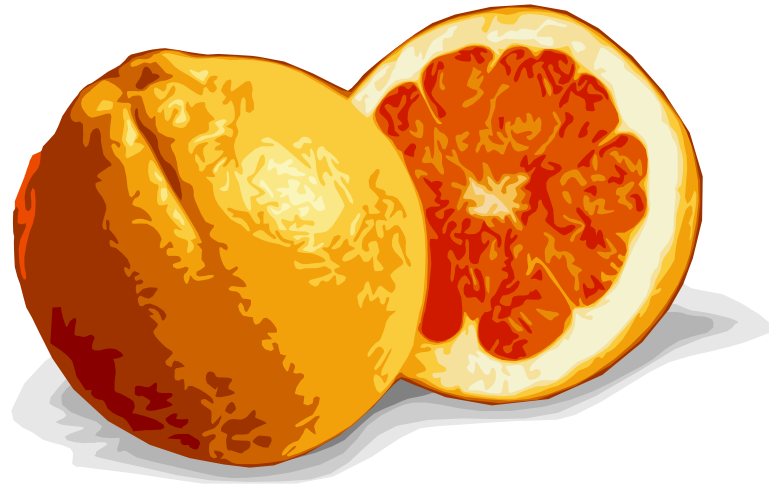






The Mission of the Rural Church – what are churches contributing to their communities





Research Aim



To identify the contribution of rural faith communities to community vibrancy and to set out implications for policy and practice

What do we mean by Community Vibrancy?



- a learning community, gaining knowledge, skills & confidence
- fair & just
- an active & involved community
- an influential community where people are consulted & their voices heard
- economically strong
- caring
- green with a pleasant environment
- safe & free from crime
- welcoming & happy
- lasting, well established & likely to survive

What do we mean by Social Capital?



- *Bonding* with like minded people
- *Bridging* to those who are different
- *Linking* to those with influence

- Relationships matter!

Case studies:



- Acle, Norfolk
- Austwick and Clapham, Yorkshire
- Bridge Sollars, Herefordshire
- Fence, Lancashire
- Iddesleigh, Devon

Research Findings 1



- Significant contributions through church based activity and role in the rural community
- People of faith volunteer to lead and organise
- Informal caring is normal
- Expression in everyday living: it's part of life
- Boundaries between church and community life often blurred

Things people do - bonding



Informal

- Visiting friends and the sick
- Helping out older people
- Providing transport
- Voluntary work with young people
- Childcare and family support
- Baking for special events!

Things people do - bonding



Formal

- Involved in PCC, churchwarden
- Fundraising and administration
- Leading worship
- Church activities – flowers, bells, churchyard etc
- Prayer groups, Alpha groups, home groups
- Activities for children and young people
- Pastoral care
- Social activities

Things people do – bridging



- Meals on wheels volunteer
- Organise village events: fetes, carnivals etc
- Village Hall committee
- WI
- Parish Council
- Sports clubs, darts,
- Local history society, drama
- Parent – Teacher groups, school governors

Things people do – linking



- Local Government – district or county councillor
- Justice of the Peace
- School governor
- Diocesan roles
- National Park volunteer
- Prison Visitor
- Young Farmers Club
- Youth organisation
- Charity Trustee or volunteer
- Sports and leisure clubs

Research Findings 2



- Work of ministers valued
- Church building a focus for identity and sacred space
- Cycle of prayer and celebration important
- Rites of passage help give meaning



“People who attend church are from a variety of different backgrounds and walks of life, but they do work together on projects. That’s not always true of other agencies that tend to work on their own.”



“People do not perceive a boundary between the faith community and the village community. These projects benefit the whole community. However, people are not necessarily conscious of the work being put in or the difference it makes, until it stops!”



Research Findings 3

But there are constraints

- Age profile of church goers
- Access to housing for younger people
- Commuting to church as well as work and shopping
- Some less willing to acknowledge issues of exclusion
- Mixed views on local governance



“Whenever you go to anything, you see the same faces. Sometimes we say it is a sad thing because we wish more people would become involved.”



Research Findings 4

Motivation

- Emerges from the spiritual life
- Faith leads to action
- A social obligation
- Keen to volunteer
- “just part of living here”
- Issues of justice



“The vast majority who are involved in the church keep this a throbbing, thriving community – and if they weren’t here, it would be dire. They are the ones with the motivation to do things in the village, because they want people involved. They are the ones who push and drive and build the community. Without it the village would be dead really.”



Belonging



- Activities
- People
- Events
- Places

Third places...



- A place to relax with friends
- Separate from home & work
- Somewhere to meet, interact & make friends
- Part of community life

Third places should be...



- Free/inexpensive
- Include food & drink
- Easily accessible
- A friendly place of welcome

Valuing this contribution...



- Regularly prayed for as part of intercessions
- An interview or talk during a service
- Special service of celebration
- A short course to help people share their faith with others
- How can the church assist
- Working in partnership with others