

Worship for Rural Contexts

Challenges and Opportunities

Issue	Digest	Challenges	Opportunities
CULTURE			
Long-Established Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Long memories ○ Established traditions ○ 'Our' community (who really belongs here?) ○ Resistance to incomers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Minister as 'interloper' ❖ Slow ownership of change ❖ Time for incomers to be 'allowed' to belong and take lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Long-term commitment ✓ Core members with much experience
'Class'/Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many of population are used to having power (being in charge) ○ Big cultural divides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Can bring serious challenges to leadership ❖ Teamwork can be difficult! ❖ Can shut out some from worship (style) and leadership (ability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Confident, trainable lay leadership ✓ Acceptance of need for church to invest in training? ✓ Often willingness to take responsibility
Conservatism & Wealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ With both C and c! ○ Incomers are usually well-off ○ Some big houses ○ Rich/poor contrast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Resistance to 'political' teaching ❖ Charity begins at home ❖ Limited view of mission ❖ Suspicion of Gospel for the poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Church as place/family for all? (Sociological miracle?) ✓ Big homes with big rooms for groups to meet ✓ Wealth can be released?! Money for resources & training
Community & Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Much of community 'owns' their church and believes in its value ○ Reckoned to be a community building which belongs to all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Moving 'nominal faith' further on ❖ Keeping/making worship accessible to 'occasional' attenders (Back to Church – 'I didn't know I'd been away!') ❖ Whose church is it when it comes to re-ordering, replacing pews etc?! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Large numbers will come to worship on special occasions ✓ Church invited to 'bless' civic/community initiatives and occasions ✓ Many use an open church for prayer

CONTEXT			
Agriculture & Countryside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many farming families are 'ex-officio' members of Church ○ Some (most?) of population are at least aware of the agricultural year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Agricultural festivals must be done 'just so' ❖ Some church 'traditions' need to be sustained to keep farmers on board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Possibilities for special worship celebrations ✓ Awareness of God in nature/rhythms
Ecumenical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many are keen to support their local Church ○ Eclectic backgrounds of many church members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Impossible to please all the people all the time ❖ Strains over content and style of main 'family' worship services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Variety of worship experiences can provide rich resource for leadership ✓ Can provide helpful challenge to status quo, mission, accessibility etc
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Distances for people to travel to church ○ Parking/access difficulties ○ Membership scattered ○ Many villages have no other social focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Less mobile can get left out ❖ Some depend on others for transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Pastoral coordination to ensure all are included ✓ Local homegroup 'cells' as worship focus for some?
Groupings of Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marriages of (ecclesiastical) convenience can make no sociological sense ○ Belonging is local, parochial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Establishing sustainable patterns of worship appropriate to each community ❖ Who does the minister most belong to? (NB Vicarage/Manse) ❖ 'We will support our church but not the others' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Economies of scale for worship training ✓ Group of churches can supported by central team of ministers ✓ Occasional united resource-rich celebrations with decent-sized congregations?

RESOURCES			
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Church can offer a community meeting place – perhaps the only one available ○ Churches are often old, beautiful - and uncomfortable ○ Small congregations using large worship space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Church membership resistance to adapting church buildings (eg pews!) ❖ Devising appropriate layout for different-sized gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A community used to using church for non-worship events will find it easier to come to share in worship? ✓ Visual aids often ready-made ✓ House of Prayer for all
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Often small congregations, but committed to seeing worship sustained in their 'local' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Quality of worship with small numbers ❖ 'One size does not fit all' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Training local laity to lead worship (& personal growth through taking this responsibility) ✓ Experimenting with appropriate liturgies and layouts
Clergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spread thinly ○ Distances to travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Realistic workload and boundaries ❖ Accepting role as manager, enabler/trainer, overseer ❖ Sustaining quality of relationships with different congregations ❖ Adapting (eg sermon) to several different contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sharing worship leadership (being ministered-to by others) ✓ More gifts released?! ✓ Laity more readily accept their responsibility to own their worship?