

RURAL CONSULTATIONS – IDEAS TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH OF RURAL CHURCHES IN THE DIOCESE OF COVENTRY

Responses to the document listing all of the comments from the first round of consultations in June 2015 were overall very positive. Although long, people appreciated that their views had been heard, and accurately reported. People were generally surprised at how upbeat and positive many of the comments were, though those in situations that did not reflect this sometimes felt worse now that they realised other places were actually in a good place!

The second round of consultations in November 2015 asked for initial feedback on the first document, and then some practical suggestions on what parishes, benefices, deaneries and Diocese could practically do to help rural churches flourish. These suggestions were divided into those which could realistically be implemented within 18 months, and those which would probably take longer than 18 months. Every person who attended had the opportunity to speak and make suggestions.

This current document summarises the suggestions emerging from both the first and second round of consultations. It is a discussion and working document for the Diocese of Coventry. It may make challenging and uncomfortable reading in parts for both parishes and Diocese, but it tries to honestly reflect the thoughts of those who attended the consultations, many of whom pulled no punches! It is now envisaged to have a period of time where PCCs, Deaneries and Diocesan committees can reflect on these suggestions. Some suggestions at all levels could be implemented without further ado (eg with this consultation as a catalyst the Diocese is already submitting a further Strategic Development Funding Bid for Lay Training in October 2016). Others are more complex and will require more reflection and debate. A further round of consultations will take place in May/June 2017 to hear any further feedback on the suggestions after this period of wider reflection.

One comment from the second round was that differing sizes of villages had different needs and so we have grouped the suggestions below into a table format accordingly, including a separate section for parishes which have schools (not just CofE schools). In reality, however, most suggestions could apply to most contexts, which is why there are asterisks in almost every box.

There are some assumptions which are not mentioned – for example that parishes do wish their churches to be healthy; that prayer and serving Christ are vital; and that the 8 Essential Qualities do have relevance even in small rural churches. This document has not grouped suggestions under the 8EQ headings. Rather, we recommend that all 8EQs are applied in applying any of the suggestions.

This document therefore seeks to offer parishes, benefices, deaneries and the Diocese some practical suggestions for discussion coming from people living and worshipping in our rural areas on how we can together help rural churches become healthier. These are real issues faced by real people on the ground. We hope the document is not only interesting, but can act as a catalyst for change and action.

God bless

Morris Rodham, Barbara Clutton, Jill Tucker, and Martin Saxby (October 2016)

	Suggestion	Very Small Village (under about 100 residents)	Small Village (about 100-400 residents)	Medium Village (about 400-1,500 residents)	Large Village (Over about 1,500 residents)	Parishes/benefices with School(s)
	PARISH					
	Short-term (next 18 months)					
	<p>Many rural parishes need to engage in a radical re-think and culture shift in attitudes about what church actually 'is', and about allowing strong individuals to hinder or block necessary progress. There is a need to think much more in terms of discipleship and a healthy spirituality than church attendance or 'getting them into church'. There are some narrow and unhelpful views about what 'church' means. It is not helpful to look down on 'churches' or 'services' which meet in village halls, people's homes, schools, or even the pub! They are all legitimately 'proper church'. Indeed, in many benefices, these alternative churches/services have more people 'attending' than what had previously been regarded as the 'main' Sunday service. The consultation heard that these services were popular, but that some negative attitudes towards these 'newer' forms of church could be held by a vocal minority, who could block things because they themselves do not want to change. Such people can often exhibit bullying personalities, and so others wanting change were actually afraid of challenging them. The consultation therefore highlighted two things from this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of self-awareness in strong individuals and their effect on the church. It seems to be common that many people who believe their vocal zeal in keeping the church the way it is, are potentially killing it and blocking growth without realising this! • If a church hasn't challenged such people, perhaps it is time to do so! The future of the rural church may rely on challenging unhelpful behaviour patterns in 'control-freaks'! The Diocese has been asked to run some training for both clergy and laity on how to have these 'Difficult But Necessary' conversations with individuals who can be the primary barriers to church health and growth. 	*	*	*	*	*

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	<p>Number of PCCs. PCCs need to seriously start thinking about whether having a PCC for each parish/church is the most ‘functional structure’ for rural churches, given the workload and number of officers legally required. We can’t complain about how much work there is to do, and then refuse to hand-over or hand-on because actually we still want to hold all of the power. A further reality check is that younger people, especially those previously unconnected with the life of a church (the majority!) are not on the whole interested in looking after buildings. Expecting them to ‘do the work we have done for years’ is a naïve and a false expectation, more likely to drive away than attract! So, parishes need to think about forming a benefice PCC rather than individual PCCs, creating Chapels of Ease for smaller churches, which reduces the need for multiple PCCs, Wardens, office holders, safeguarding officers, Treasurers, accounts, APCMs, meetings, etc. This will also make clergy posts more attractive and do-able, as currently multi-parish benefices with lots of PCCs are not attractive in a market where a shortage of clergy means clergy can choose the context in which they wish to serve.</p>	*	*	*	*	*
	<p>More interesting/varied worship/events. There was a strong cry from enthusiastic people in villages for more interesting and varied services/events, and at different times to Sundays. This was especially true for the younger generation. We need to stop complaining about people doing other things on Sundays, and instead try new/different services/events at different times. Successful examples from the consultations include: Messy Church, Party Church, Café Church, Saturday Afternoon Church, Film Church, Breakfast Church, Tea Services, Music and Meditation Service, Holiday Clubs, ‘Who Let the Dads out!’, Scalectrix with fish and chips evenings, Outdoor Service, ‘The Story’, Flower Festival, Christmas Tree Festival, local talent show, ‘chat in church’ (monthly wine/beer and chat in church), Treasure Trails, etc. These can be at ANY time of week, not just Sundays. People found that having good food at events tends to be an attractive feature! <i>In many churches/benefices, these newer services are now the largest attended services so have become the ‘main’ service.</i> ‘Proper’ church now might mean people <i>never</i> even enter the traditional church building. The oft-said phrase ‘We need to get them into church’ may no longer be appropriate.</p>	*	*	*	*	*

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	<p>Encourage Innovation! The consultations gave a consistent message of: ‘Please don’t despise, look down upon or undermine innovation!’ A few mis-placed words (‘Why would you want to do that?!’, ‘No-one will come!’, ‘We tried that before’, ‘We can’t afford that’, etc etc) could be the words that kill off the much-needed enthusiasm of people churches need, and remove the potential for growth by demoralising the very people who could help churches deliver it! Our first consultation found considerable frustration amongst innovative people that their ideas were being squashed by (usually) older, more traditional and reactionary people who were unwilling to accept change. Ironically, it is often these same criticisers who then complain that younger people don’t want to be involved or that the church isn’t growing! Funny that?!</p>	*	*	*	*	*
	<p>Music – think quality. For music in worship, think about its quality. If there are few musicians, or not very good ones, think about whether live recorded music (downloaded from Itunes, Spotify, YouTube, etc) played through a reasonable portable speaker system (doesn’t need to be big for most rural churches) is better than an old organ played badly, or guitar/piano played badly. Some people have projected words on a screen saving on using books, and some have used YouTube videos which have words, tune and background images all supplied, saving lots of work!</p>	*	*	*	*	*
	<p>‘Inspiring’ Worship. Ensure the entire worship service experience on offer is ‘inspiring’! The quality of music, liturgy, sermon/talk, heating system, welcome, how to make seating comfortable, toilets, refreshments (don’t use cheap coffee, tea, or biscuits...make people feel special!), are all very important. Think about how we evaluate a restaurant? It is not just about the food, but cleanliness, service, toilets, décor, ambience, etc. We are unlikely to go back to a restaurant if a number of things are of poor quality...and in fact we are probably going to tell our friends about it as well...nowadays all over Facebook! A bad reputation for poor quality services of any sort in a village therefore, with a much smaller catchment area than the average restaurant, will not help attendance or reputation! So, put the effort into making the whole experience ‘inspiring’. Our worship is our shop window.</p>	*	*	*	*	*

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	Attitudes of and to Younger People. Younger people on the whole do not have the same attachment to the buildings, legal responsibilities, formal services, liturgy, or loyalty to an organisation etc as the older generation. Just think how often they are encouraged to swap 'service providers' like banks, mortgages, utilities, etc always seeking the best offers. They are encouraged to shop around all the time. So, to try to force a younger generation to just 'accept' the status quo, or force them to take on inappropriate roles, or to sit through 'boring' services, will just result in them 'shopping' elsewhere!	*	*	*	*	*
	Better Web Interfacing. Churches need to advertise themselves and their activities better. Anyone even remotely astute nowadays looking for a church community will look the church up on Google, and/or on Facebook. If there is no web-site, or a poor web-site, it is unlikely that you will attract people, especially the younger generation. The site 'A Church Near You' is not enough! The rural consultation has revealed that most churches would like help in achieving this, so it will be a Diocesan action point as well.	*	*	*	*	*
	Facilities. Good facilities are essential in this day and age. A church without warmth, a toilet and at least a small food preparation area will struggle to attract and grow. If you believe the church has a sustainable future in the modern world, make it a <i>priority</i> to install these things! There is a suggestion arising from the rural consultation that the Diocese should make this a priority for rural churches wishing to become sustainable, so this is a Diocesan action point as well.	*	*	*	*	*
	Use other buildings. If the church is not well endowed with toilets etc, consider using other community buildings for services/events, or people's houses. The village hall, pub (if available), or a house is likely to be a lot warmer and with toilets! Village halls may also be more accessible for people than a church building because they use the hall for other village events (depending on your context).	*	*	*	*	*

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	<p>Reduce the number of Holy Communion Services. Think about how often you ‘need’ Holy Communion. As one person wrote in the first consultation: ‘The biggest group of losers in this new IT world are the children who are so well acquainted with IT in all its exciting and educational manifestations that Grandparents depend upon them for help, but are offered a 500 year old repetitive monologue to provide their only church attraction.’ The ‘Parish Communion’ movement of weekly, or daily, services of Holy Communion is a relatively late development, and when there were plenty of clergy around, and then became enshrined in CofE legislation. Previously, services of Holy Communion were much less frequent. Realistically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of clergy is declining fast (about one third of all clergy due to retire in next 10 years and not replaced at that level). • Whatever your theological views on lay presidency, the CofE is most unlikely to pursue this option in the next few years! • Our Bishop prefers ‘Communion by Extension’ to be used sparingly, not regularly. • There are no longer enough clergy to perpetuate this relatively recent innovation which has quickly become a ‘tradition’. • The role of parochial clergy in the Diocese of Coventry is to deliver our Diocesan Mission Purpose of worshipping God, making new disciples, and transforming communities, via the delivery of the 8 Essential Qualities. Reference to ‘worshipping God’ is much wider than services of Holy Communion, and the role of priests is not to provide several services of Holy Communion each Sunday. <p>There appears to be only one answer to this at the moment: churches need to seriously consider reducing the number of services of Holy Communion, and if people wish to receive Communion then they will need to travel. To try to continue a system no longer sustainable with excuses like, ‘people here won’t travel to a different village for a service’ is no longer an acceptable response. People are going to have to get used to travelling elsewhere for spiritual nourishment, or do without. This is a discipleship issue, and pandering to selfishness dressed up in spiritual terminology is no longer an option.</p>	*	*	*	*	*

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	Visit other churches to see what works. Go and visit other churches which have good examples of things your church needs (eg worship, exploring Christian faith courses, Messy Church, lay led services, 'Fresh Expressions', etc).	*	*	*	*	*
	Social Action: what can your church do (by itself or in partnership with others) to reach the most deprived, isolated, lonely people in your village(s)? People expect churches to serve 'the poor'. A church which is purely inward focused is not an attractive community, especially to a younger generation. They want to be part of something that changes the world for the better. So how is your church community helping to transform the wider community, especially those who are most hurting, most isolated, most disadvantaged, etc?	*	*	*	*	*
	Use a Questionnaire. Send a questionnaire to village residents asking them how they think the church building could be used better.	*	*	*	*	*
	Friends of... Investigate the potential of creating a 'Friends of St...Church' charity, from people in the village who would support the upkeep of the church building for the sake of the village. Other villages have tried to undertake this sort of route (with varying degrees of success).	*	*	*	*	*
	Use church building for other things than services: concerts, comedians and carols; Church Café; leave church open; use for smaller village groups (eg coffee for mums).	*	*	*	*	*
	New housing/new people moving in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed any knowledge about new housing developments into the Area Dean so that it can contribute to Deanery/Diocesan strategy for new housing. • Be very careful about objecting to new housing developments. Once they are built, it may not help your ministry towards them for them to know that the members of the church didn't want them there in the first place because you all objected! Don't complain if you publicly object to new housing and then find that the people in those new houses don't want to come to your church! • Drop Welcome leaflets through doors. • Visit new houses and take a small gift from the church as people move in. • Drop prayer cards offering to pray for them. 	*	*	*	*	*

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	<p>For rural areas, where clergy are seen in the community more, relationships develop and attendance seems to increase. However, we need to be realistic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To afford one stipendiary vicar, with stipend, NI, tax, pension, housing, and a training share, costs about £56,500 per year in 2016). The administrative requirements of the vicar’s role have increased hugely (as with most other professional occupations). The more parishes, the more the administrative requirements. We need to think seriously about providing administrative support for clergy. Unless a vicar is solely responsible for one or perhaps two villages of about 1,500 people, it may be unrealistic to expect them to be ‘seen’ in every village by every person. It is however unlikely that a village of 1,500 will be able to afford a full-time vicar. There is a strong feeling in some circles nationally that rural parishes are vastly over-resourced per capita of population. A rural person is significantly more likely to meet and know their vicar than in an urban context of often between 12,000 and 20,000 people per parish. As often in the UK, it is the larger numbers of poorer people in larger urban parishes who in reality get much less clergy resource, and we are likely to see increasing pressure from the central CofE to reduce clergy numbers still further in rural areas. This is NOT a policy of this Diocese but parishes need to be aware of the wider context. <p>We therefore need to think seriously about our expectations of clergy being ‘seen’ in rural areas with lots of villages per clergy person, and how parishes invest in this to make it possible if it is essential for growth.</p>	*	*	*	*	*

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	<p>Schools Ministry – opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the school a ‘no-strings-attached’ financial grant each year. • Assemblies • Governing body • Volunteer ‘Chaplain’. • Welcome schools into church. • Open the Book in schools. • Offer to help as a volunteer. • Start a service or event in the local school. • Employ a schools link worker as part of a Benefice/Deanery initiative. <p>NB: School services or services in schools are ‘their’ church. We need to change attitudes which say that people/children need to come into the village church building in order to worship!</p> <p>However, ‘attendance’ is not the same as ‘discipleship’. As proselytising is not allowed in schools as part of everyday education, some work needs to be done in how the significant local congregational effort going into schools (eg governing bodies and assemblies) is not limited to ‘Worshipping God’ and ‘Transforming Communities’, but also results in some staff and children becoming ‘new disciples’.</p>					*
	<p>Stewardship. Giving in rural areas can be improved. The small size of some collection bags which get handed round, or passing plates expecting cash donations, can mitigate against a healthy view of Christian giving as a percentage of overall income, and using Standing Orders etc. If Standing Orders were the norm (not many people in rural areas do not have a bank account?!), there would be no need to worry about having to have services in order to have a collection to keep the money coming in?! This puts giving rightly in the area of ‘discipleship’ rather than ‘when I attend’. It also puts stewardship into the area of ‘discipleship’ rather than ‘paying a couple of quid for receiving my Communion’.</p>	*	*	*	*	*

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	Honour the older. In trying to attract younger people, we also need to honour the 'good' older ones who have served long and faithfully, who love the church, and who tend to be the ones who at the moment pay the bills! No-one in the consultation however explained what 'honour' meant in practice! Ideas welcome!	*	*	*	*	*
	Clergy/Laity Relationships. We received some feedback that some clergy were not treating their laity as well as they might, and to realise that laity are volunteers and not paid staff at the clergy's bidding! More 'thank you's and encouragement would be appreciated!	*	*	*	*	*
	Use all the skills/gifts available, not just a few. Some churches have discovered that, under 'Gift-oriented Ministry', they have people in the congregation and village who have gifts that can be used in the life of the church, but these may not be in the obvious areas looked for (PCC, wardens, music, flower arranging, etc). However, they can add value to the life of the church, often in many of the newer expressions mentioned earlier.	*	*	*	*	*
	Grasp the sustainability nettle. If, despite all of the above suggestions, your church is realistically unlikely to be sustainable for the future, then grasp the nettle, if appropriate for your context, and consider other options for the future (eg Chapel of Ease, Festival Church, or even closure). The Diocese can help with discussions of these options.	*	*	*	*	*
	Longer-term (18+ months)					
	Creative thinking about posts. Think about having a 0.5 vicar with a 0.5 admin worker rather than a full-time vicar? Parishes are likely to see more of a 0.5 vicar with admin support than a full-time vicar without? Outreach depends upon relationships, and relationships depend upon time spent with people, so there is a need to enable others to do the paperwork if you want the vicar to spend time with people.					

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	Just stop?! Many people are really tired! They have been doing the 'job' (whatever it is) for years and are getting older, with no-one obvious to take over. So.....if you think there is no-one to take over your role, and you haven't trained or attracted some-one else to do it,.....take the plunge! Just stop! Stop complaining about it and just resign, and be prepared for your role not to be filled again. Sometimes these gaps create the space for people to come forward. And if they don't....well....so be it! The world won't end!	*	*	*	*	*
	Adjusting Parish boundaries. Some parish, benefice and even deanery boundaries need to be more logically associated with current residential, school and civic boundaries. If this is appropriate for your parish, seek the advice of the Area Dean and Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee. Almost anything is possible nowadays, so don't assume it just has to stay as it was 200 years ago!	*	*	*	*	*
	Lay Leadership of Churches. It may be appropriate in your context to train and empower laity to lead the church? There has been a request for significant lay training from the Diocese (see below), and helping laity to effectively lead their local church may be an aspect of that.	*	*	*	*	*

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	BENEFICE					
	Short-term (next 18 months)					
	<p>Clergy as leaders: the rural consultations (as well as a previous consultation on leadership in the Diocese) indicates strongly that the role of clergy as a leader is pivotal in the health of parishes. Without exception, where clergy empowered laity, and led well, parishes were positive. Where clergy were inhibiting growth, stopping laity develop and/or doing everything themselves, or were leading mediocre worship etc, morale was much lower. Many laity were astounded that priests could not be moved on, and could just ‘sit tight’ on Common Tenure whilst their parishes were falling apart around them. The message from the rural consultation is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are in the former category, people love you and appreciate your work. Thank you!! • If you think you may be in the latter category, please acknowledge that there may be a problem and seek help now on how it might be possible to improve things. Start with an honest conversation with your Area Dean or an Archdeacon. We are genuinely here to try to help! 	*	*	*	*	*
	<p>Reducing number of PCCs. As with the suggestion for individual parishes, start to think about joining PCCs together to create one Benefice PCC rather than separate parish PCCs. This would save multiple ‘officers’, eg Safeguarding Officers, wardens, Treasurers, etc. For Benefices with lots of PCCs who do not wish to give up their PCC status (though one has to ask what is behind that desire), consider having a Benefice Council to decide on more strategic benefice matters, with PCCs concentrating on buildings/finance. The Diocese can give advice on this (contact Archdeacon Pastor or Director of Operations).</p>	*	*	*	*	*
	<p>Administrative Support. Create an admin role across the benefice to assist with administration.</p>	*	*	*	*	*

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	Smaller, more manageable units? For larger benefices which have not ‘gelled’ together, start to think about becoming smaller (two manageable half-time posts are better than one unmanageable full-time one?).	*	*	*	*	*
	Twinning. Create a twinning ‘link’ with an urban inner-city church, for mutual befriending and learning. Offer a rural experience to people in urban deprived churches, and vice-versa. Some rural/urban schools already have such twinning arrangements?	*	*	*	*	*
	Numbers of Churches. Think: If we had to have only one church in the benefice, which one would it be? Do we need to insure the others for re-building costs? Can we reduce the number of services at others? Do we need to consider Chapels of Ease options? As an example, one group of 4 churches with separate PCCs has decided to create a new group of churches with one PCC, one ‘central’ church which will provide the majority of worship across the group, and 3 Chapels of Ease with more occasional services.	*	*	*	*	*
	Cherish Volunteers. Give more encouragement and thanks to all your volunteers!					
	Attracting 20s-30s generation. Invite one of the Acceler8 workers down to your benefice to speak about obstacles and attitudes churches subconsciously put in the way of attracting people in their 20s-30s. It might help explain why churches are having difficulty attracting and keeping this age range, and help to improve our attractiveness.	*	*	*	*	*
	Longer-term (18+ months)					
	Ecumenical Relationships. Think about working ecumenically.	*	*	*	*	*
	Invite others in. Arrange pulpit swaps with good clergy from other benefices, or other good speakers etc, so that people get a variety.	*	*	*	*	*

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	Plan for reality. The number of clergy available is going to drop dramatically in the next 5-10 years. Trying to continue in the same way as before is naïve. Multi-parish benefices with lots of church buildings, lots of PCCs, Churchwardens etc, are not popular choices for vicars in a ‘buyers-market’. Benefices will need to think about how you need to change to become an attractive proposition for an ordained leader, and even then, might fail to attract one. One question to stimulate reflection and potential action is: ‘How you would function if you never saw a vicar again?!’	*	*	*	*	*
	DEANERY					
	Short-term (next 18 months)					
	8EQ Networking. Think about how the 8EQs apply in a small-church, rural context, and network examples of good practice. Appoint a ‘best practice’ co-ordinator for each deanery, whose role will be to search out best practice within and beyond the Deanery, and create network opportunities for the sharing of best practice and initiatives.	*	*	*	*	*
	Deanery Networking Days and Quiet/Retreat Days.	*	*	*	*	*
	Run Deanery-wide courses: ALPHA, Emmaus, other training, etc.	*	*	*	*	*
	Longer-term (18+ months)					
	Employ a Deanery Youth worker and a Deanery Children’s worker to train laity how to work with youth and children in a rural context.	*	*	*	*	*
	Create a schools ‘link worker’ or ‘school community pastor’ post.					*
	Sustainability. Think about the missional viability of Multi-Parish benefices as they are. Is there a different way of re-structuring or staffing parishes?	*	*	*	*	*
	Re-adjust Deanery boundaries? Deaneries vary in size, so should there be some re-structuring of Deaneries?	*	*	*	*	*

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	DIOCESE					
	Short-term (next 18 months)					
	Greater Affirmation of Rural Ministry and Visibility by Bishops and Senior Staff in Rural parishes. There was highlighted a need for greater affirmation of Rural Ministry by Bishops, Senior Staff, and Vocations.visiting, services, messages from the Bishop able to be downloaded and projected during services? Possibility of having a rota to ensure ALL rural benefices are visited by a member of senior staff, which also gives an impetus at joint services to draw people together.	*	*	*	*	*
	Empowering Laity. There were strong calls for laity to be trained and empowered in a range of areas (more fully covered under ‘Longer-term’ below). [<i>Please note: this has already led to the proposed submission of a Strategic development Funding Bid for lay training across the Diocese to the Church Commissioners in October 2016</i>]	*	*	*	*	*
	Reduce Legal Requirement for Services of Holy Communion. Give permission for parishes not to be required to have services of Holy Communion every week in a parish church, or even a benefice. The stress on having Holy Communion services is one of the big logistical problems Rural Areas face (especially but not exclusively in interregna). With very few clergy on the ground even when Deaneries are ‘fully’ staffed, the pressure in interregna is huge. Also, the consultation has shown that services of Holy Communion can often be the least attractive services, and not just to the people who are newer. The Diocese should therefore cut down the requirement for services of Holy Communion, and/or give wider support to Holy Communion by Extension (there was a wide level of frustration at the limits imposed on this practice). It was also suggested that Readers could become licensed to take ‘proper’ services of Holy Communion. Some suggested that lay people ought to be able to celebrate Holy Communion.	*	*	*	*	*
	Web Development Help. Many rural churches were desperate for help to construct and update web-sites and other social media platforms which are good, user friendly and informative. There was also a suggestion that we should have a common ‘branding’.	*	*	*	*	*

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	Improving Church Facilities. There should be a Diocesan strategy to support the installation of toilets and a kitchen facility in every potentially sustainable rural church.	*	*	*	*	*
	'Pressure' from Diocese to restructure is requested from Deaneries/Parishes. The Diocese needed to strongly encourage Multi-Parish Benefices to re-think their structures. There was a feeling that unless something came 'top-down' some of the more awkward, reactionary and negative people, who block growth in smaller parishes, would never do anything to change. Vicars and laity alike were asking for this 'top down' approach from this 'bottom-up' consultation! There was a recognition that it is generally unwise to change structures before changing attitudes and values, but many felt that rural ministry needed such an urgent and radical re-structuring that we cannot wait for the patient transformation of the reactionary culture and values which have prevented progress. We need to act now, and challenge unhelpful attitudes now.	*	*	*	*	*
	Help with Options. In line with the above, the Diocese needs to produce materials explaining the various options available to parishes in relation to structures and buildings.	*	*	*	*	*
	'Ineffective' Priests. Although most parishes were grateful for their priests, some (perhaps exacerbated by hearing about the positivity and success of other parishes!) expressed concern about 'ineffective' priests. Many laity said that the leadership quality of the priest was critical in the health of a parish. Many expressed surprise priests could not be moved. Appointments processes therefore needed to minimise the risk of such appointments, and increase the potential of recruiting high quality priests, who are gifted leaders, able to bring the often 'high-powered' and very capable people living in our Warwickshire villages to faith and discipleship, and lead them.	*	*	*	*	*
	Support for Rural Clergy. Improve support for clergy in rural situations (in addition to training days on rural ministry, some more ideas from clergy on what this support should like would be welcome). Identify potential rural clergy and invest in them.	*	*	*	*	*
	Re-define clergy roles in rural areas. Need to be more 'episcopal' and training/empowering in nature.	*	*	*	*	*

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	Organise Rural Networking Days , with sharing of ideas and best practice (eg on topics under 'Additional Training' below?). Churches could be asked, 'Have you got anything that is working that you would like to share?' Senior staff of Diocese to attend.	*	*	*	*	*
	Understanding DAC. Put on a DAC Road-show around the Diocese (see also suggestions under 'Longer-term' on DAC.)	*	*	*	*	*
	Spiritual Support for Churchwardens. Have an away day for rural Churchwardens.	*	*	*	*	*
	Financial guidance to Deaneries/Benefices/Parishes about use of reserves (some parishes have large reserves and some none)	*	*	*	*	*
	Annual returnsensure they cover ALL services, not just Sundays?	*	*	*	*	*
	Appreciation. Send letters/e-mails of thanks to Parish Officers.	*	*	*	*	*
	Arthur Rank Centre. Use their resources.	*	*	*	*	*
	Longer-term (18+ months)					
	<p>Additional training for laity in rural areas. <i>This is one of the biggest things to come from this consultation, and was mentioned time and time again.</i> There was a general feeling that the Bishop's Certificate courses, although good, were not scratching where it was itching for most laity in rural areas. Additional training in the following areas is requested, delivered in local units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping Accounts / supporting Treasurers. • Training for Parish Officers – Churchwardens, Treasurers, Parish Secretaries, etc. • Outreach and evangelism training. Exploring Faith courses. 	*	*	*	*	*

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for church wardens/PCCs from DAC, to show what can easily be achieved, e.g. removal of pews, provision of toilet & kitchen, churchyards as nature reserves, etc • Training on upkeep of buildings. • ‘How to flourish without clergy support in an interregnum’ • Administration of a parish. • Baptism visiting. • Funeral follow up visiting. • Web-site design and upkeep. Use of Social Media • Messy Church Training • Advice on ministry to new housing in rural areas • Leadership Training and Development • Attracting 20s-30s • Small group formation and development. Small group leadership and literature for small groups and their leaders to use, including how to assess the health of a small group. Setting up a system of e-home groups for people who cannot attend ‘normal’ groups. • Pastoral Visiting. • Clergy in management of volunteers. • Eco-systems in rural churches. How ‘green’ can we be? Advice and training needed. • Funding help for churches. • On-line ideas. • Need-oriented Evangelism: help with researching spiritual and practical needs in our community. • Help with prioritising tasks. • Dealing with ‘awkward people’ • How to have ‘Difficult But Necessary’ conversations. 					

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to identify and use people’s gifts (essential in a rural context). • How to claim Gift-Aid and VAT. • Children’s Work for small churches. • Develop a system of mentors for rural parishes • Practical aspects of both leading worship (eg use of multi-media, communion by extension, collective worship in schools) and preaching / teaching. <p>Make many of the above internet based as well as ‘live’ so that they can be accessed by anyone.</p> <p><i>We also need to train vicars how to train their lay people in these things, so that in the end this becomes the vicar’s, not the Diocese’s, role. This ‘training of laity’ aspect should be built into all role specifications for future vicars. [It is also, prompted by this consultation, the basis of another bid to the Church Commissioners in Oct 2016]</i></p>					
	Recruitment of High Quality Incumbents for Rural Benefices. Need to inspire and recruit more high quality people to want to be vicars in rural areas, and the role needs to be significantly more of training laity than doing oneself.	*	*	*	*	*
	Lay Minister Accreditation. We need a simple system of accreditation, authorisation and commissioning for lay people ministering in villages (eg leading worship, preaching, small group leaders, etc), perhaps after some of the above training, but without the need for lengthy courses like BCCM. This will include the need for DBS checks where appropriate.	*	*	*	*	*
	Reduce and simplify number of legal and other demands on people, especially vicars and Church Wardens. Need a system of explanation of role and support. Increase in administration is phenomenal and can all be justified but it all takes time and reduces time available for other things. Also, if a vicar/churchwarden does so many things, when they leave it creates a big hole for others to have to fill. It would be better if the role could be divided into smaller aspects and shared out. Parishes need advice on how to do this.	*	*	*	*	*

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	Wider use of Readers. Readers to be available across different benefices. Readers should also be allowed to take Holy Communion services, or at least Communion by Extension.	*	*	*	*	*
	Use the Resources from Resourcing Churches. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use excellent lay preachers from resourcing churches to tour around the rural parishes. • Use musicians occasionally from resourcing churches. 	*	*	*	*	*
	Help related to DAC. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an architect recommends work in a Quinquennial that should automatically count as a faculty. • One suggestion was that the Diocese could have a centrally funded architect to do Quinquennials, who, if acting with the authority of DAC, can ensure their recommendations have the force of a faculty. • More rural representation on DAC. • Far too many hoops to get through to get changes in a church. • Templates for Faculties and HLC grants. Provision of resources and support for CWs/Fabric Teams, inc faculty and grant applications. • Interest free loans needed to help churches make changes • Employ specialists • Old buildings are not 'green' or energy efficient. • Put on a 'road-show' around the Diocese. • Chancellor should come to Deaneries to meet people. • Create templates of successful faculties (toilets, kitchens, removal of pews, etc) and funding applications (eg Heritage Lottery Applications) etc to avoid parishes having to re-invent the wheel. 	*	*	*	*	*
	Grants for Rural Areas. Money needs to be made available specifically for rural areas, eg grants and support to make churches useable (take out dry rot, repairs, toilets, kitchen, heating, removal of pews, etc).	*	*	*	*	*

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	A Bishop's Study Day on Rural Ministry with invitations to national institutions like Arthur Rank centre.	*	*	*	*	*
	<p>Parish Share Adjustments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parish Share and building maintenance have become a 'burden'. What can be done to reduce the impact of this 'burden'? Consider re-adjustment of Parish Share System to take into account numerous buildings linked to one stipend. Suggestion of Multi-parish benefices having share reduced to 80% to allow for costs of numerous buildings? Or should number of buildings to be maintained per benefice feature somewhere in the calculation of Parish Share? Transitional relief from parish share is likely to be needed if new models and structures for parishes are commenced, as some people will vote with their feet and their pockets! <p>[NB: Suggestions to reduce parish share during interregna have been heard across the Diocese, not just rural areas. However, as Parish Share covers the cost of clergy and training, and there are no 'Diocesan Reserves' for clergy costs, doing this would only result in an overall increase in Parish Share to take account of the reductions in interregna, so it would be giving with one hand and necessarily taking in the other]</p>	*	*	*	*	*
	Provision of high quality sermons/podcasts/videos from good speakers on YouTube or equivalent which could be projected during services. These could possibly be strategically done to cover the 3 year Lectionary Readings?!	*	*	*	*	*
	Apprenticeships in Rural Ministry. Develop some apprenticeships in rural ministry [NB we are trialling something like this in Charlecote with the Acceler8 scheme].	*	*	*	*	*
	Wider Reflection on Structures for Rural Ministry. Reflect on whether the parish/benefice model is still fit for purpose in rural areas. This will include grasping the nettle about closing churches.	*	*	*	*	*
	Health and safety Support. Diocese to have a H&S expert to produce policies, risk assessments etc to save each parish having to do the same thing over and over again.	*	*	*	*	*

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	Group Policies/Bulk Buying? Can Diocese negotiate and/or organise group bulk-buys (eg insurance, electricity, etc) instead of individual churches?	*	*	*	*	*
	Assistance with considering Options for Rural Parishes. Create template of options with advantages and disadvantages for smaller churches (eg creating fewer PCCs, Chapels of Ease, Festival Churches, Closure).	*	*	*	*	*
	Spiritual Refreshment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people in rural areas are tired out by having to do so much, including in worship. It would be very helpful to provide some worship opportunities in rural areas where people can simply come and receive and not have to do anything! • Organise quiet/retreat days. 	*	*	*	*	*
	Significantly increase the number of Ordained Local Ministers: making the selection and training process much more accessible and realistic for ordinary people.	*	*	*	*	*
	Curacies in Rural Areas. Give more curates rural placements.	*	*	*	*	*
	Don't downsize rural vicarages. Clergy need the large gardens and the space for entertaining!	*	*	*	*	*
	Use retired clergy to help out in rural benefices, including paying them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many rural benefices are already using retired clergy significantly, as volunteers. • Clergy rules of service (Common Tenure) are highly complex and would not realistically allow the stipendiary deployment of retired priests after the age of 70. • Note: With an increasing retirement age (now 68), and with the number of priests retiring in the next 10 years nationally, the number of priests seeking House for Duty posts will fall dramatically. 	*	*	*	*	*
	Should there be a 'Dean of Rural Ministry', or a 'Super-Rural-Dean' for Rural Areas (not based in Coventry!). Some suggested this should be a full-time post. This would be a pro-active post for rural ministry.	*	*	*	*	*

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	National CofE					
	Radical Change of Recruitment Processes. Recruitment processes for clergy (Incumbents and Associate Ministers) is no longer fit for purpose. Criteria need reviewing, time taken is too long, and training not appropriate for rural ministry.	*	*	*	*	*
	Strategic Funding for Rural Areas. Church Commissioners believe too much CofE clergy and financial resource is going into rural areas. However, the answer to this should not be under-resourcing, but enabling rural areas to develop sustainable strategies. Some Strategic Development Funding should be allocated towards helping Dioceses to ‘solve’ the rural problem.	*	*	*	*	*
	Allow Lay Readers to celebrate Holy Communion.	*	*	*	*	*
	Heritage Building Upkeep. How can CofE help relieve some of the burdens of heritage buildings? Increasing message from people in parishes, especially the younger generation, is: ‘WE WILL NO LONGER PAY FOR BUILDINGS!!’	*	*	*	*	*
	Closing Churches. Processes far too complex. Grasp the nettle about closing churches.	*	*	*	*	*
	Reduce number of legal and other demands on Church Wardens.	*	*	*	*	*
	HLF Grants. ‘Urgent repairs’ is wrong title. Grants need to help anything towards sustainability.	*	*	*	*	*
	Ecumenical Relationships. What is being discussed at a national level about ‘A Christian presence in every community’? To what extent should there be more mergers?	*	*	*	*	*