

Rural Evangelism Network

Autumn 2011

www.ruralevangelism.net

The National Forum for Churches and Mission Agencies
concerned for the evangelisation of rural Britain.

Encouraging good practise through sharing knowledge and experience.

Re-Evangelising Rural Britain—a Vision and a Passion

The history of rural evangelism in England is an interesting one. 100 years ago, apart from what was taking place through local Parish Churches, most non-conformist churches seemed to have had an evangelical identity and their presence in rural areas had come about through evangelistic activity. For the Methodists *Cliff College* was producing significant numbers of people with a heart for preaching the gospel who engaged in mission at home and abroad, with many in rural locations. I am not sure exactly when their famous evangelistic 'treks' started but thousands of people in rural areas heard the gospel each year through this amazing work. The *Church Army* had some sixty mission vans (presumably horse-drawn) working in rural areas. William Knights had established the *Caravan Mission to Village Children* (later absorbed into Scripture Union). *Spurgeon's Colporteurs* were often to be found in villages distributing tracts. No doubt there were many other local and regional initiatives, with similar things happening in the other parts of the United Kingdom, not least of which was the work of the *Faith Mission* in Scotland and Ireland.

Evangelical Quakers formed the *Friends Evangelistic Band* in 1919 conducting itinerant missions and setting up mission stations in rural areas. In 1947 Brother Edward launched *Village Evangelists* with many Anglo-Catholics using their holidays to be part of this mission movement. Other organisations including *Mission for Christ* and *Datchet Evangelical Fellowship* emerged around the middle of the last century. Some 19th and 20th century initiatives and organisations have passed away and some have continued with a fresh identity.

Today rural churches that engage in evangelism seem less inclined to draw on para-church organisations, though these are still playing a valuable part. Instead, initiatives such as Alpha, Café Church and Messy Church and their variants seem to be more common. But it seems to me that overall there is less rural evangelism taking place than even 50 years ago. It would be interesting to know whether the number of rural churches engaging in evangelism is increasing. I have not seen a great deal of evidence that this is happening but if you have useful evidence please feed it in. Is there a lack of vision and passion for rural evangelism?

The survey conducted earlier this year, while insufficient in size to be statistically accurate, indicated that the main impediments to evangelism in and through rural churches include a lack of personal engagement with the gospel of Christ by those within our churches, a lack of understanding of the nature of evangelism, and concern about the image of the local church. It is only when the gospel has made its impact on our lives such that we are transformed by its power that sharing this with others becomes important.

Rural society has changed significantly since 50 years ago but the need for rural evangelism is as great today as ever. It would be good to gather the views of all members as to the need, opportunity, encouragements and discouragements regarding the re-evangelising of rural Britain. I would welcome receiving your views in no more than 100 words.

Barry Osborne

Sharing in God's Mission

Good Practise and Safe Practise

Normally news of any fresh initiative in rural evangelism would be welcome, but there was considerable concern related to news that a new organisation called *Countryside Community Mission* was about to be launched. The reason for this was that one of the principal people behind this initiative is a man who set up a similar organisation in the past and then used it to provide opportunity to gratify and cover up his sexual proclivities. Several allegations of abuse and inappropriate behaviour resulted in him spending time in prison.

Whether or not others seeking to launch this new initiative might be considered 'safe', they have been advised of this man's past, and it is clear to most people familiar with safeguarding that his involvement at any level is inappropriate.

This is the second time in the history of the *Rural Evangelism Network* that we have been able to identify an unsafe organisation. But REN is not only about 'safe practise' it is also about promoting 'good practise'. Where this applies to mission agencies, being part of this Network gives assurance that those involved understand the sensitive nature of rural communities and can be trusted by the churches.

All churches and organisations these days are expected to have appropriate child and vulnerable adult protection policies. Perhaps some thought should be given to developing some kind of statement of standards for good practise in rural evangelism. If we were to do so what would you want to see in it?

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Country Way and You

The latest issue of *Country Way* comes in the mailing with this newsletter.

REN collaborates with others in producing this quality magazine. It provides useful information for you and also provides a means of getting information and inspiration to rural Christian all over the country. It is YOUR magazine. Here are four ways in which you are invited to engage with it.

- Send your stories in via the REN office. A few short paragraphs and a couple of supporting photos is all that is needed. We cannot guarantee it will be published but we are always looking for good stories.
- Tell the REN office what articles you like to read in the magazine. Is there something you would like the magazine to feature?
- Could you become one of our 'stringers'. We cannot employ journalists so we are creating a network of stringers. A stringer is someone who is recognised as a source of relevant information in their local area. If not you, do you know someone who has a nose for news?
- Please introduce *Country Way* at every opportunity—especially to the rural churches you work with. Why not write your own strategic plan for growing our readership. Good news is for sharing!

You are Represented

REN is a member of the Churches Rural Group and also represented on the Churches Group for Evangelization, both part of Churches Together in England.

Please pass this sheet on

You can download further copies from the website. If you represent a Church nationally or regionally please ensure that a copy reaches your Rural Officer or equivalent and whoever is responsible for evangelism. If you represent a Mission Agency please ensure that a copy reaches your Chief Executive and any others concerned for strategy development and implementation. Thank you.

Directory and Members' News

Also in this mailing is a copy of the current Directory of Members. **Please note that this information is provided for the use of the representatives of member bodies and must not be copied, passed to a third party or used to create data for another database such as a mailing list.**

You will see that there are some old names missing and some new ones added.

Elizabeth Ingram has been appointed Chair of Mission for Christ. It's good to welcome back Richard Zair who previously represented CPAS—now representing the Diocese of Oxford. Colin Draper is no longer representing Scripture Union, though he is still doing children and family ministry. We welcome in his place Helen Franklin. Declan Flanagan has stepped down as Chief Executive of Rural Ministries and we welcome in his place Simon Mattholie. Eric Kyte now resides and works in New Zealand. Derek Hollis has moved from being rural officer for Southwell and Nottingham and is serving a benefice in rural Suffolk. We also welcome Brian Kennard and Tim Woolley representing the Northampton District of the Methodist Church. Ron Spillards now represents the Baptist Union of Wales in addition to the Fellowship of Evangelists. We wish all our 'old friends' well.

Many of our member bodies now have two representatives and several others are in the process of appointing a second representative. One of the representatives should always be a person with responsibility for evangelism.

A Special Offer!

Rural Ministries is offering grants of up to £3,000 to help local outreach from rural churches. This is a competitive offer with three winners. For more details go to <http://www.ruralministries.org.uk/what-we-do/outreach-grants>.