WELCOME FROM BISHOP ROBERT

2018 was quite a year for Growing the Rural Church (GtRC). From welcoming ‘Champers’ to the first Champing™ site in Devon, to sharing our learning so far through hosting a national conference in Coventry, the GtRC team and their colleagues in the Diocese of Exeter have consistently provided a high quality, professional service to individuals and communities across a range of projects.

As GtRC engages with rural mission communities, the team seeks to join in with the story of individuals, of churches and of communities, supporting where God is at work, and enabling new vision and energy to emerge. GtRC aims to:

• Develop sustainable uses of church buildings in partnership with local communities;
• Increase local capacity for mission;
• Share our learning with others so all can benefit from the project’s resources.

GtRC’s work is enhanced by collaborating with some wonderful partners, and we are grateful for the way they bring fresh insight and ideas to individual projects.

We hope you enjoy catching up on what GtRC has been up to in the past year, and that our learning provides food for thought and ideas for your own context.

MISSION STATEMENT

Growing the Rural Church works with rural mission communities to develop their resources and, in particular their church buildings, to enable them to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy.

We do this by supporting rural mission communities to partner with their local communities and external agencies to find sustainable missional, community, commercial or cultural uses for their church buildings, which benefit the whole community.

When we do this, we ensure that the public spaces offered by our rural church buildings, both for worship and extended missional, community, commercial or cultural use, are sustainably managed, and we seek to draw more people into the life of our rural mission communities.
TEAM UPDATES

Marian Carson
Project Manager

Marian is a project management professional with a background in delivering government funded programmes at both local and national levels. She is experienced in community engagement, partnership working and change management. Marian is married to a priest in the Church of England and has two primary-school aged children. Over the last year, Marian has enjoyed seeing our pilot projects come to fruition. Across our county, more people are now involved in our rural churches, thanks to a partnership between local congregations, communities and the GtRC team. Marian is looking forward to building on this in 2019.

Sarah Cracknell
Project Officer

Sarah has many years’ experience in community development work and working with vulnerable and marginalised groups in the community, as well as working on a wide range of projects. She has a passion for supporting others to achieve things they think seem impossible. In the past year, Sarah has met with 16 churches and embarked on an exciting journey of engagement and development with 7 of them. She is looking forward to continuing this in 2019, as well as meeting and starting projects with many more churches and communities.

Sophie West
Executive Officer

Sophie arrived in Devon for university in 2002, and – despite the odd period away – has never quite managed to leave! Having studied Modern Languages, she taught French and Spanish in various universities and schools before arriving at the Diocese in 2014. Sophie joined the Growing the Rural Church project in early 2018, and key pieces of work this year have included practical organisation of the GtRC conference, production of project publicity and surveys, and development of strategic projects around pilgrimage and welcome. Sophie will be on maternity leave for much of 2019.

Katharine Otley
Executive Officer (Maternity Cover)

Katharine has a degree and MA in Early Modern History. She has worked within the heritage sector as a Visitor Services Manager for the National Trust, and is experienced in volunteer training and management, events planning, marketing and historic interpretation. She has lived in Devon since 2013 and enjoys discovering new pockets of Dartmoor with her two boys, or trawling antique and charity shops with her husband. She also enjoys baking and taking an active role in her church.
OUR IMPACT THIS YEAR

OVERVIEW OF GTRC ACTIVITY

In addition to continuing our 8 pilots from 2017, GtRC commenced work on 29 additional projects in 2018. As with any large scale programme, some projects get off to a strong start and continue in this way, some take a little longer to gain momentum, and some lose traction, for a variety of reasons. Through closer work with the diocesan Mission and Ministry team, we have also referred some mission communities to our colleagues for initial support with mission action planning before engaging with GtRC. This ensures that the support GtRC can offer grows out of a clear understanding of how a rural mission community wants to use its church buildings to support its local vision for growing in prayer, making new disciples and serving the people of Devon with joy. A summary of GtRC activity can be seen in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GtRC Project Activity in 2018</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commenced in 2018</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed in 2018</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GtRC Projects Status as of December 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritised Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awaiting Prioritisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Hold (including projects referred for Mission Action Planning Support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Informal Advice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AIM 1: INCREASING THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF RURAL CHURCH BUILDINGS

Supporting rural churches to engage their communities in conversation forms a large part of GtRC’s work. Of our 19 live projects at the end of December 2018, 5 were supported to undertake community consultations in 2018 and a further 9 have community consultations taking place in Spring 2019. The focus of each consultation varies according to the local situation, but all make use of tools drawn from appreciative enquiry and asset-based community development. This means that the conversation starts with noting the good things about the church (both people and building) and the community. This leads into conversations identifying where the needs are in a community, discussing how the church building might be better used to meet these needs, and then creating church-community partnerships to take ideas forward.

This last point is key to the success of the projects GtRC supports. Our work is not about generating community conversations which result in more actions being added to the already very long ‘to do’ lists in rural churches. Rather, it is about naming the sense of belonging communities often already
feel towards their local church, and providing opportunities to shape the future of the building’s use collectively.

One of our learning points from 2018 is that church-community conversations take time to develop, mature and bear fruit. As we look at our current projects, we are excited by the ideas emerging for the use of rural church buildings but, whilst a community consultation can be planned and delivered in a matter of months, the outworking of the resulting conversation is a longer process. Nevertheless, we are seeing more sustainable futures emerge for rural church buildings and, whilst a lot of our work is qualitative, there are some more tangible metrics that indicate our approach is delivering positive results. For example, following a community consultation, we look at whether a church-community partnership, project team, action group or friends organisation emerges. We then track the activities of that group, whilst supporting them to realise their aims. The table below provides a summary of activities in 2018 of a 25% sample of our completed and live projects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Church</th>
<th>Community Involvement Resulting from Consultation</th>
<th>Principle Activities</th>
<th>Fundraising Total in 2018 (where relevant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alverdiscott</td>
<td>Friends Group</td>
<td>Refreshments at Services Community Events Faculty Applications</td>
<td>£3307 towards building repair/conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bratton Fleming</td>
<td>Church-Community Partnership</td>
<td>Community Meals Churchyard Biodiversity</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntshaw</td>
<td>Friends Group</td>
<td>Community Events Building Maintenance Grant Applications</td>
<td>£29000 towards building repair/conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meshaw</td>
<td>Church-Community Project Team</td>
<td>Grant Applications</td>
<td>£10000 towards Feasibility Study into reordering the church to provide community space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monkleigh</td>
<td>Church-Community Project Team</td>
<td>Project to reorder church to provide space for primary school and community activities</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkham</td>
<td>Anglican-Methodist Project Team</td>
<td>Project to reorder both church buildings to meet faith and community needs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AIM 2: INCREASING CAPACITY FOR MISSION**

GtRC’s approach is based on national Church of England research papers including *Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church* (2015). This states that ‘Church buildings can be both a blessing and a burden, which falls primarily on the congregation and clergy. Urgent attention needs to be given to a strategy for their future management, as well as continuing the work to sustain buildings through extended community use.’

A direct consequence of supporting rural churches to engage their communities in conversation is that worshipping congregations are brought into increased contact with a wider group of people from their locality. Working together on joint church-community projects also builds new relationships and
strengthens existing ones. As more people become involved in the life of our rural churches, we can see that the ‘burden-blessing’ imbalance of our rural church buildings is being redressed.

As a result, existing worshipping communities are finding they have more capacity to think about their missional role in their community, rather than the majority of their time being taken up as custodians of an ancient building. For example, following a public consultation, GtRC recently supported the development of a new Friends Group at a church on Dartmoor. An inaugural meeting elected a committee of 6 community members who immediately began to shoulder some of the responsibility for the fabric of the building and its use by the community. The excitement of the PCC in response to this was palpable. They could see space opening up for them to reflect on how they might further develop opportunities for people to engage with the worshipping community and consider questions of faith.

Very often, local clergy and lay leadership teams are adept at seizing the opportunities that increased capacity for mission creates, but GtRC also refers individuals and groups to our colleagues in the diocesan Mission and Ministry Department for specific support around mission, starting new congregations and developing lay discipleship.

AIM 3: SHARING OUR LEARNING

Sharing our learning was a major focus for GtRC in 2018. On a local level, we saw an increase of peer learning rural church visits where, facilitated by GtRC, members of one church visited another rural church to share experiences of community engagement, re-ordering opportunities and mission. A number of connections were supported by our diocesan network of Mission Sheds, geographically based meetings that bring people together, often from rural areas, three times a year to share stories, learn from each other and be inspired about mission.

On a national level, we held a conference entitled ‘Building Conversations: Churches for Rural Communities’ in October 2018. Bringing together delegates from across the country, we were able to share something of what we have learnt so far with parish members and clergy, diocesan officers, bishops and national officers, as well as ecumenical partners. Below, we share some of our key messages from that day.

INTENTIONALITY

The Church of England reports From Anecdote to Evidence (2014) and Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church (2015) tell us that meaningful mission and growth is possible in rural churches where clergy and lay people have a clear mission and purpose and are intentional about the life of their church and its engagement with the community around it.

Our experience in GtRC bears this out. There have been occasions where, on engaging with a mission community, we have encountered a lack of clarity about how that group of churches is seeking to be intentionally missional. Our learning from working with these churches is that, while the GtRC team brings skills in community engagement
Very often, local clergy and lay leadership teams are adept at seizing the opportunities that increased faith develops opportunities for people to engage with the worshipping community and consider questions for the fabric of the building and its use by the community. The excitement of the PCC in response to the development of a new Friends Group at a church on Dartmoor. An inaugural meeting elected a committee, involving laymen, to manage the group.

We seek to draw more people into the life of our rural mission communities. We do this by supporting rural mission partnerships. Below, we share some of our key messages from that day.

On a national level, we held a conference entitled From Anecdote to Evidence based on a report published by the Church of England. That was followed by a year of the practical organisation of the GtRC conference, production of project publicity materials, and surveys, and development of strategic projects around pilgrimage and place-based activities.

In GtRC’s experience, the conversation around the future of rural churches usually involves a recognition of the need for change to a greater or lesser extent. This can, at times, be painful for those involved. We recognise that the feelings experienced during a period of change are part of a natural human process for adapting, and what is needed for progression towards problem solving is a lot of listening and, crucially, time. We genuinely see the passage of time as our friend, and have learnt to balance the necessary need for momentum with that of allowing time for the change process to work itself through in our project planning.

Growing the Rural Church works with rural mission and Ministry teams, collaborating with partners to develop thinking, share best practice, and support projects that allow our rural churches to value their assets and use them as a great place to start a conversation with their wider community.

VALUE YOUR ASSETS

In any project involving a rural church building, we have found it invaluable to start with appreciating the good things and engaging the wider community in that conversation.

Community consultation usually highlights that people who attend irregularly actually identify as belonging to churches through one-off events such as Harvest and Christmas services, through the faith and witness of people known to be part of the church and through a sense that the church building in their community is ‘theirs’, however often they actually enter it. For more on this, see God’s Belongers (2017) by the Right Rev. David Walker, Bishop of Manchester.

These thoughts are enormously encouraging for our rural churches who do one-off, festival services really well, whose people are woven into the fabric of any rural community and whose building draws people to it through its sense of holding the spiritual and community history of the place. Where we encounter energy-drain, we aim to turn the conversation around, enabling our rural churches to value these assets and use them as a great place to start a conversation with their wider community.

CHANGE IS A PROCESS AND PROGRESS IS TO BE CELEBRATED

GtRC’s experiences have taught us to work in a way that recognises that change is a process, that the time needed for projects is generally more than we anticipate and that it is, therefore, worth celebrating progress at milestones along the way.

In GtRC’s experience, the conversation around the future of rural churches usually involves a recognition of the need for change to a greater or lesser extent. This can, at times, be painful for those involved. We recognise that the feelings experienced during a period of change are part of a natural human process for adapting, and what is needed for progression towards problem solving is a lot of listening and, crucially, time. We genuinely see the passage of time as our friend, and have learnt to balance the necessary need for momentum with that of allowing time for the change process to work itself through in our project planning.

Consequently, as we deliver projects with our mission communities, we have learnt to recognise and celebrate progress. The people living and working in a rural community are only the current custodians of that place’s spiritual,
social and economic health. They pass on, and new needs and new projects emerge. Any finished piece of work we do with a mission community is never the end of the story, so it's important that we celebrate progress as we share part of their story with them.

CONCLUSION

Being part of any GtRC project with a rural mission community is a privilege. Time and time again, as we engage with rural churches and their local communities, we find resilience and hope. If you live over an hour from the nearest city and 40 minutes from a market town, resilience is part of your DNA. We are learning to value this and harness it as we support local communities to shape what church looks like for them in rural Devon. And hope? Despite the gloomy narrative of reduced employment, increasing house prices, and retreating public services in our rural areas, GtRC encounters a surprising amount of hope. In one recent community survey we conducted, we asked the question, 'In 3 words, how would you like this village to be described in 20 years time?’ This is what people living in an isolated coastal community said…

This collective vision of hope is not uncommon in GtRC's work and we value the opportunity to be part of the journey towards brighter futures in the rural communities with whom we engage.
WHAT’S HAPPENING NOW?

Our 2017 Annual Report included project stories from our pilot programmes. Here’s how some of them are getting on…

SHIRWELL MISSION COMMUNITY

In 2017 we reported on our partnership with Shirwell Mission Community and Mosaic Creative to explore Stories on the Street, a six-part resource that uses creative Bible study, art and drama to help church members gain new insights and give them energy and passion for working alongside their community. Members of all 7 churches in the Mission Community took part in the sessions between January and July 2018, out of which have grown four church and community projects. One of these is in Bratton Fleming, a large village which supports a primary school and a community shop. Despite these facilities, community mapping and consultation showed church members that people in the village were eager to have a place to meet, to share skills and get to know each other better across the generations. As a result, a church-community partnership is now being explored. So far, events have included a biodiversity survey of the churchyard, a community meal and a repair café.

TWO RIVERS MISSION COMMUNITY

In 2017 we reported on the early work we had done with four parishes in Two Rivers Mission Community. Through 2018, the word spread across the area, and we have now engaged in 8 of the 11 parishes. In each we have run a community consultation, seeking to understand what local people value about their churches and offering opportunities to be part of the ongoing life of the church. One of these is St Mary’s Huntshaw. Set deep in of one of our many rolling valleys, the church is located next to a couple of houses and the parish hall, but is otherwise surrounded by farmland.

When we first visited Huntshaw, we met the remaining three PCC members, all of whom were also members of the free church in their local market town. Despite being part of a thriving worshipping community elsewhere, they felt it really important that there was a Christian presence through the church in their parish. However, they were feeling despondent – very few people attended the monthly service, and the building was feeling a burden. So, we supported them to consult with their community about the future of the church. At a well attended public meeting, two strong themes emerged. The first was that people wanted the church to remain open and were prepared to get stuck in to fundraising and maintenance to ensure this happened. The second was that they wanted a church that was relevant to them. One lady said,
OUR PROJECTS

Two Rivers Mission Community

Hartland Team Mission Community

- Live GtRC Mission Communities
- Live GtRC Parish Projects within Mission Communities
- Completed GtRC Parish Projects within Mission Communities
- GtRC Mission Communities Commencing in 2019
When we do this, we ensure that the public spaces offered by our rural church buildings, both for worship and extended missional, community, commercial or cultural use, are sustainably managed, and serve the people of Devon with joy.

As GtRC engages with rural mission communities across a range of projects. Growing the Rural Church works with rural communities to partner with their local congregations, communities and the GtRC team. Marian is looking forward to seeing our pilot projects come to fruition. Across our county, more people are now involved in our rural churches, thanks to a partnership between local communities, and enabling new vision and energy to emerge.

We hope you enjoy catching up on what GtRC did in 2018 was quite a year for Growing the Rural Church.

GtRC aims to:

- Share our learning with others so all can benefit from the project’s resources.
- Learn from others, so we can continue to improve our quality, professional service to individuals and communities.
- Build new partnerships with other organisations, so we can grow and take on new challenges.
- Build on the story of individuals, of churches and of mission communities.
- Join in with others to develop new ideas, so we can work together, bear witness and challenge the status quo.
- Work together with others, so we can learn and benefit from their experiences.
- Be part of the national conference in Coventry, the GtRC to the first Champing™ site in Devon, to build on our learning and build on this in 2019.

The GtRC team seeks to join in with others to develop new ideas, so we can work together, bear witness and challenge the status quo.

Marian is a project management professional with a background in delivering and planning, marketing and historic interpretation. She has lived in Devon since 2013 and enjoys discovering new pockets of Dartmoor with her two boys, or trawling antique and charity shops with her husband. She also enjoys baking and taking an active role in her church.

Sophie arrived in Devon for university in 2002, and – despite the odd period of international travel! – she has now been ‘nowhere else’. Sophie was a school teacher for many years before arriving at the Diocese in 2014. She joined the Growing the Rural Church team in 2016 and is looking forward to continuing to work with 16 churches and embarked on exciting journey of engagement and development with 7 of them. She is looking forward to continuing this in 2019, as well as meeting and starting projects with many more churches and communities.

Sarah has many years’ experience in community development work and working on a wide range of projects. She has a passion for supporting others working on projects around the County and meeting and becoming involved in church across the Diocese. She has been working on a number of projects and has gained a lot of experience and knowledge.

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Katharine has a degree and MA in Early Modern History. She has worked within the heritage sector as a Visitor Services Manager for the National Trust, and is experienced in volunteer training and management, events planning, and taking an active role in her church.

Sophie will be on maternity leave for much of 2019. Katharine has a degree and MA in Early Modern History. She has worked within the heritage sector as a Visitor Services Manager for the National Trust, and is experienced in volunteer training and management, events planning, and taking an active role in her church.

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‘I was baptised and married in this church, but I can’t bring my kids here because the services aren’t suitable for them.’

So, a number of things happened. The team vicar, the PCC and members of the community got together and planned a new, monthly all age service which commenced for a three month trial in January 2018. This was so well received that it is still going, with an average of 25 people attending. The traditional service is also continuing, with numbers growing from a handful to 15 regular attendees. GtRC supported the development of an independently constituted Friends Group with responsibility for fundraising and maintenance. This has held a programme of events – cream teas, safari suppers and the like – throughout 2018, and has secured various grants totalling £29000 towards repairs.

The PCC has grown to 6 people and good links are maintained between the PCC and the Friends. PCC Treasurer, Peter Denard says, “Through our community consultation, we learned that we would increase attendance if a more modern service was available. The Friends enhance the profile of the church and are also bringing the community together. The future is now very bright.”

NEW IN 2018

GtRC has also been busy getting to know some new mission communities in the last year. Here are some of their stories...

HARTLAND TEAM MISSION COMMUNITY: St James’ Church and the Methodist Chapel, Parkham

At the start of the year, GtRC and the Diocese of Exeter’s Mission and Ministry Team ran a joint Vision Day with representatives from each of the churches in the Hartland Team Mission Community. One of the recommendations from the day was that GtRC would begin working in Parkham with the parish church and Methodist congregations to consider how the churches could better use their buildings to serve the community.

A project team was formed with representatives from both St James’ and the Methodist church. People from both of the churches had a stall at the annual Village Fete in August, where they asked for people’s ideas about what might be needed. From this, a second survey was sent to all households in the parish asking further questions about some of the themes that had emerged, and
it is planned that this will be followed up with a drop-in consultation event in the New Year.

The Project Team has also begun the tendering process to engage an architect on some changes already identified in St James’, and will be applying for funding to support a full feasibility study over the first six months of 2019.

When asked to comment on their experience so far, the Project Team said: “GtRC has enabled us to identify our aims and, guided by our Project Manager’s expertise, we’re engaged in a coherent plan of action to realise our vision for St James. We’re excited and encouraged to see our ideas start coming together.”

LITTLE DART MISSION COMMUNITY:
Meshaw Together

Little Dart Mission Community is made up of 12 rural parishes in the heart of beautiful North Devon. One of its smallest parishes is Meshaw, with only 62 homes and a population of 170.

There are no community spaces within the parish and early in 2018 the PCC in Meshaw were approached by the committee of their Parish Meeting asking if they might consider working together to develop the church building more creatively for the whole community to use.

GtRC were approached to support the project and have once again partnered with Devon Communities Together. Early on in the project the joint team, drawn from the PCC and the Parish Meeting, decided to adopt the project name Meshaw Together to acknowledge the joint partnership. Having already undertaken an initial survey, they have held a drop-in community day to gather the community’s ideas. They applied to the National Lottery ‘Awards for All’ Fund and were successful in receiving £10,000 funding for a feasibility study which they will undertake in the first half of 2019. This will cover all the practical aspects of the development including architect’s drawings, and will enable them to refine their plans for wider community engagement.
Autumn 2018. This built our confidence to bring art, visual reflection and interactive tools into our Mission and Ministry Development team attended a Stories on the Street Train the Trainer course in 2017 and into 2018. Consequently, members of the GtRC team and colleagues from our diocesan involved in the Stories on the Street resource in action with Shirwell Mission Community through resource offers churches a reflective yet fun way to.

specialising in community development and with a passion for seeing the church being relevant to its community. Using performance and the visual arts to unlock creative potential, their Stories on the Street resource offers churches a reflective yet fun way to engage with their wider community.

Mosaic Creative is a small training consultancy specialising in community development and with a passion for seeing the church being relevant to its community. Using performance and the visual arts to unlock creative potential, their Stories on the Street resource offers churches a reflective yet fun way to engage with their wider community.

The GtRC team were extremely impressed by being involved in the Stories on the Street resource in action with Shirwell Mission Community through 2017 and into 2018. Consequently, members of the GtRC team and colleagues from our diocesan Mission and Ministry Development team attended a Stories on the Street Train the Trainer course in Autumn 2018. This built our confidence to bring art, visual reflection and interactive tools into our conversations with churches and communities. The fun-factor in what we do has definitely increased as a result, and is developing into flourishing church/community joint activities.

Champing™ is a fundraising initiative developed by the Churches Conservation Trust. It enables members of the public to experience a night sleeping in an ancient church.

In St Mary’s, Walkhampton, on Dartmoor, we successfully brought Champing™ to an open church in partnership with The Churches Conservation Trust and the Dartmoor National Park Communities Fund. A grant from the Communities Fund supported the purchase of equipment and the Champing™ team handled the booking processes. Meanwhile, GtRC supported with legal fees to resolve planning permission queries. This collective effort resulted in 13 sets of Champers staying at St Mary’s between April and September 2018, generating an additional £1000 of income for the church. St Mary’s have already signed up for the 2019 season, and we are hoping to explore additional churches with the Champing™ team in 2019, especially as part of our Pilgrimage Programme.

Devon Communities Together is an independent charity with over 50 years’ experience of community development work. Always keen to work in partnership, Devon Communities Together brings a wealth of experience in helping communities resolve and progress matters that are important to them.

Building on our partnership work in Two Rivers Mission Community in 2017, in 2018 GtRC has worked with Devon Communities Together to support a joint initiative between the Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council in Meshaw, Little Dart Mission Community, in north Devon. The joint project team is working to explore the use of the church building as a multi-functional community space and, through Devon Communities Together’s support, successfully applied in late 2018 to the Big Lottery Fund for £10,000 to conduct an in-depth feasibility study.

PARTNER UPDATE

Throughout 2018, we continued to work with some excellent partners:
GOVERNANCE

GtRC reports to the Diocese of Exeter’s Church Buildings Strategy Committee (CBSC) which meets quarterly. The committee comprises lay and ordained diocesan staff and volunteers, who bring a wealth of experience to the GtRC project, as well as fulfilling the group’s other statutory functions. Meetings include scrutiny of the progress of GtRC’s work with mission communities, and of our budget. We share challenges, evaluate risks and prioritise the ongoing work of GtRC.

New CBSC Members 2018

Cate Edmonds  
Bishop’s Nominee & Assistant  
Curate of Axminster, Chardstock, All Saints, CombePye with Rousdon and Membury

Nigel Pratt  
Senior Church Buildings Adviser

Simon Franklin  
Chair & Rector of Moretonhampstead, Manton, North Bovey and Lustleigh

Reflection from Simon Franklin, Chair of the CBSC

I took over as the chair of the Church Building Strategy Committee, to whom Growing the Rural Church reports, in the Summer of 2018, following the wonderful work of my predecessor, the Rev’d Preb. Mike Partridge. Though chairing a Committee doesn’t sound the most attractive use of time, I was delighted to accept this role! This is because I am a person who, like many others, is passionate about Rural Ministry. I am, therefore, excited not only by the commitment to rural churches that the GtRC project implies, but also by what the GtRC team are achieving through their work.

The future health of our rural churches depends on whether local communities find new ways of being church and new ways of encouraging stewardship of their church buildings. GtRC is an imaginative and timely project that is working towards answers that will encourage hope and offer possibilities to country churches of all sizes.

Indeed, as someone who has been a country vicar for many years, I feel enthusiasm that the Strategic Development Fund [national Church of England funding which supports major change projects which lead to a significant difference in dioceses’ mission and financial strength] has sponsored a project focused on imaginative solutions to the common dilemmas that all rural churches face, and whose brief is to promote good practice in parishes. In so doing, the spirits of faithful Christians who see their calling to help their local rural church flourish are being lifted across our Diocese and beyond.
In 2018, GtRC spent £180,629 against a budget of £279,971. The majority of the underspend can be accounted for in three areas.

Firstly, our Communications Officer departed to run her own business in April 2018. Recruitment into this vacancy has been delayed due to the departure of the Diocesan Communications Director in the summer. GtRC is looking forward to working with the newly appointed Diocesan Communications Director from February 2019 to refresh communications support for GtRC.

Secondly, we had a healthy budget for engaging external consultants on projects to support, for example, with feasibility studies and management of large-scale projects. We found, firstly, that projects are taking longer to reach a stage where external consultancy support is required and, secondly, where it is needed, that we have been successful both in working with externally funded partners and applying for grant funding in lieu of using the GtRC budget.

Thirdly, while the GtRC team covered many, many miles of Devon lanes in 2018, we overestimated our travel budget, so significantly underspent in this area.

2018 gave us a much clearer understanding of the costs associated with employing a full staff team and running a larger range of projects. We are, therefore, more confident in the accuracy of our budget forecast for 2019. Within this, there are a number of areas which merit further explanation.

Firstly, part of the funding secured through GtRC was specifically to support the development of missional activities in rural churches, through the employment of Mission Enablers. The diocesan Mission and Ministry team already employs a number of people that support mission communities in developing their vision, mission action planning and enabling missional action. In consultation with GtRC’s governance body, the Church Building Strategy Committee and the Strategic Development Fund, GtRC’s resource will be used to increase capacity of the Mission and Ministry team, rather than employing additional people to undertake a duplicate role within the GtRC team.

Secondly, our Pilgrimage and Welcome Programmes, which you can read about on pages 18-19, include the development of a website and the piloting of digital donations units in rural churches, both of which means GtRC’s IT budget has increased for 2019.
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**BUDGET 2019**

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OUR YEAR AHEAD

Throughout 2019, GtRC will continue to support our rural mission communities on individual projects, but alongside these, we will be developing three strategic programmes, which seek to engage multiple churches in our rural areas:

FESTIVAL CHURCHES

During 2018, GtRC worked with senior clergy and staff to develop the concept of Festival Churches in the Diocese of Exeter, something we committed to as part of our funding application. We are now clear that a Festival Church will typically be supported to offer the following:

• Be open (or actively working towards being open) during daylight hours.
• Provide a well-signed welcome with resources for personal reflection and prayer.
• Offer a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 9 services/activities per year including:
  ◊ A celebration of the church’s patronal festival
  ◊ A service or activity during the Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter seasons
  ◊ A celebration of the Eucharist in one third of services
• Continue to offer baptisms, weddings and funerals.
• Be publicised throughout its mission community as a resource with special services/activities where everyone is welcome.
• Provide signposting to other services and events across the mission community.
• Be kept clean and well-maintained, often through a partnership with a friends group or other local community group.

As part of the support available to Festival Churches, we will be working with our diocesan Worship, Prayer and Spirituality Group to develop a range of resources to support worship. From early 2019, we will be piloting our approach by supporting two churches through the process of becoming Festival Churches, learning from their feedback as we go. We hope that we will be in a position to open up applications to every mission community from the autumn.

WELCOME

Devon is visited by thousands of people each year, and many of these individuals will venture into a rural church building at some point during their visit. At the same time, local people may come into our church buildings throughout the year, perhaps to a special service or to seek a moment of quiet. For GtRC, this raises two questions. Firstly, how do we make our visitors feel welcome, sharing with them something of the kingdom of God through their encounter with our church buildings; and secondly, how do we support rural churches to make the most of the opportunities that visitors bring in terms of increasing financial sustainability, particularly in our increasingly cashless society?

Our Welcome Programme aims to support church leaders and PCCs to evaluate and improve the welcome that their church offers, with a particular focus on providing a strong welcome when a church building is open but unattended. In 2019, GtRC will produce a ‘Welcome Audit’ toolkit, which
FESTIVAL CHURCHES

Church building is open but unattended. In 2019, GtRC will produce a ‘Welcome Audit’ toolkit, which welcome that their church offers, with a particular focus on providing a strong welcome when a seeker seeks to draw more people into the life of our rural mission communities.

We do this by supporting rural mission communities to partner with their local church building at some point during their visit. At the same time, local people may come into our church buildings throughout the year, perhaps to a special service or to seek a moment of quiet. For GtRC, this raises two questions. Firstly, how do we make our visitors feel welcome, sharing with others what our church is all about? Secondly, are our church buildings being managed in a way that allows for both core and extended missional, community, commercial or cultural use, are sustainably managed, and in terms of increasing financial sustainability, particularly in our increasingly cashless society?

Growing the Rural Church works with rural communities, the team seeks to join in with the story of individuals, of churches and of congregations, communities and the GtRC team. Marian is looking forward to seeing our pilot projects come to fruition. Across our county, more people are getting in touch with GtRC to explore the Christian faith, to explore the Christian faith, and to explore the Christian faith, building on this in 2019.

A celebration of the church's patronal festival can be worked through by PCCs individually or as part of a session with GtRC. It will include a series of questions for reflection around everything from opportunities for personal reflection to accessing a warm drink. Using case studies demonstrating good practice from around the Diocese, the toolkit will enable rural churches to identify points for action, and access support to take these forward.

Alongside the ‘Welcome Audit’ toolkit, we will be jointly running a pilot project with our diocesan Mission Resources Team. Where visitor footfall is already high, we will offer opportunities for churches to trial a range of digital solutions to manage donations to church funds. Options include text giving as well as static and mobile units that use both offline and online technology.

While the toolkit will be designed so that church leaders/PCCs can work through it individually, we will also develop a guided session where PCCs will complete the audit in a more interactive way, with guidance and input from a GtRC team member and careful consideration of possible next steps.

PILGRIMAGE

Recognising the increasing interest in rediscovering old and creating new pilgrimage routes across the country, our Pilgrimage Programme aims to create opportunities for people, both local and visitors, to explore the Christian faith, local landscapes and Devon’s rural churches. Building on exploratory meetings in 2018, GtRC will work to develop and promote two pilgrimage routes across Devon in 2019.

The routes will seek to maximise opportunities to pass through rural churches, and GtRC will work with these under our Welcome Programme to evaluate and improve the welcome that they and their buildings offer, and to explore different ways of sharing something of their story and faith with visitors. We will also support churches on the pilgrimage routes to maximise opportunities for gaining revenue, whether through engaging in enterprise or trialling digital ways of accepting donations. To support and promote the pilgrimage routes, we will develop a central ‘Devon Pilgrim’ website, showcasing the new routes and providing space for existing and future routes to be added.
FINAL THOUGHT

GtRC’s encounters with an increasing number of rural communities have led us to reflect a great deal on the changing nature of rural life in Devon.

For many people, perhaps especially those accustomed to a more urban lifestyle, their picture of rural life might well be a little warm and fuzzy, perhaps something akin to this:

While such communities do exist, the reality in much of rural Devon is rather less idyllic. Typically, a rural mission community might have one slightly larger settlement with a traditional ‘centre’ and historic amenities (which may be in decline as the profile of such settlements changes), alongside several much smaller and more isolated communities, which might look something like this:

In spite of the challenges faced by some communities, there is a great deal of hope and positivity for the future, which we encounter frequently in our work with churches and their local communities. Crucially, even the most isolated rural communities often have a church building in their midst. The key question, then, for church congregations and local communities in their work with GtRC, is that of how we can use these church buildings effectively to serve the community in whatever way is needed, drawing more people into the life of the Church in the process. We look forward to seeing what God has in store for GtRC and all those with whom we are working in 2019!

PROJECT CONTACTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We hope you have enjoyed reading ‘Our Year 2018’. Please do keep in touch with us for news of our progress in 2019:

@GtRCDevon
Call us on: 01392 272686

Growing the Rural Church
Find out more at: exeter.anglican.org/resources/growing-rural-church

Email us on: gtrc@exeter.anglican.org

‘Arrow’ graphic (p.1 and p.18) and map (pp.10-11): Tim Roberts at TRG Design
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