

Rural Evangelism Network

Summer 2012

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.

The Challenge of Change

During the time that I have been involved in rural mission activities there have been substantial changes. One of these has been the degree to which the focus of responsibility for evangelism has moved from para-church missions to local church initiatives. Another change has been the movement away from the high profile intensive programmes over a week or two towards more low key activities but run throughout the course of each year.

Of course para-church organisations still have a very important role to play, as do intensive outreach programmes run over several days or a couple of weeks. But the general trend is clear and many believe that this has been a change for the better for several reasons.

Then there has been significant change in rural communities in Britain. Fifty years ago the majority of people living in most villages in Britain were people who could trace their ancestors back in the same village or at least the same area. The UK is the only country in the world that currently has inward migration into rural areas. Consequently the majority of people living in rural settlements are not the people who were living there fifty or even twenty years ago. Though this is not seen in every village.

With the change of rural population have also come other social changes so that today's villagers are, in the main, sophisticated, relatively affluent and mobile. But there are some villages that operate still as they did in the past. Also poverty and lack of personal transport are far from uncommon.

Meanwhile the church scene has changed. Many free churches have closed and been sold. The Church of England and Methodist Church between

them account for probably 90% of the churches in rural Britain. Clergy are fewer, churches are clustered, services less frequent and less varied.

As I research the practise of rural evangelism today I am keen to discover the degree of change being experienced in different parts of the country, and how churches and organisations are responding to the constraints and opportunities that such changes bring. I am encouraged by what I learn about the approaches of mission organisations as they seek to remain effective and useful to the churches.

One aspect of change I would like to particularly explore is behavioural traits. In the past these have been significant determining factors in effective rural mission. Sociologists identified several distinctive characteristics among indigenous rural people some 30 years ago. It was also noted that incomers at that time often developed these. I hope to discover just how distinctive these are today, and whether they might affect how we engage in rural evangelism.

So in the near future I will be sending out a simple questionnaire and would be grateful for your help in getting as many respondents as possible. It will be available on-line only. Meanwhile here are some of the key behavioural traits identified back then:

Rural people tend to be **insular** with a strong identity with the place where they live. They are then **suspicious** of people, ideas and suggestions that come from outside. They are often **cautious** and like to have time to think things over before acting. They are **conservative** and prefer to do things as they have always been done. They are **intransigent** (or stubborn), **diffident** (i.e. not pushy), and tend to **lack imagination** (i.e. fail to see the value of innovations).

Is this still part of the cultural context today? Your observations will be valued. *Barry Osborne*

Sharing Together in God's Mission

From FEBV to Village Hope

In 1919 George Fox founded the *Friends Evangelistic Band*. The work was undertaken by itinerant evangelists using horse drawn caravans touring villages. Some would claim that the work pre-dates this being birthed in a prayer movement that commenced towards the end of the 19th century.

Over the years its work had a more settled appearance with a number of centres or mission stations around the country (though mostly in East Anglia). Along the way its immediate association with the Quakers declined and it was clearly seen as truly un-denominational or inter-denominational.

Later still the use of the word *Band* also became anachronistic and children would sometimes be surprised that there was no one playing a trumpet! But they kept the "FEB" element warping into *The Fellowship for Evangelizing Britain's Villages*.

This year it has a new constitution, a new name, and a new (though still being developed) website. So we welcome **Village Hope** and point you towards www.villagehope.org.uk.

It has been an interesting journey of metamorphosis. While it would be unkind to describe earlier stages as caterpillar and chrysalis, we hope that today's organisation will have the beauty of a butterfly and bring delight to churches that welcome it into their 'gardens'. Of course butterflies play their part in pollination. No doubt those who make up *Village Hope* also hope to help produce a harvest.

God bless you all. We look forward to our continued journey together.

Rural Evangelism Network

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Change and Representation

"Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. " (Exodus 1:8)

Periodically change takes place within churches and organisations that affects representation within the Rural Evangelism Network. Often new people coming in are unaware of the value of this Network and the riches it can bring to them and the value others place upon their representation. Consequently links get severed and people even try to create new links for which the Network already exists!

This is more likely to happen at national and intermediate representation of national Churches. So if you are relatively new to a post which also means you are the link with REN please take time to visit the website and familiarise yourself with those that are the Network.

If, on the other hand you are retiring or moving to a new situation please ensure that whoever takes your place is briefed about REN. We will enclose a couple of leaflets you could put in the file of papers to be passed on to your successor.

If you are planning a gathering for your diocese, synod or area association why not invite someone to attend to represent the Rural Evangelism Network and make others aware of the resources that are available to them?

Baptists and Budgets Issues

The intention of the Baptist Union of Great Britain to close its Mission Department has caused us some concern. A new *Church and Society Department* will pick up on some aspects but we understand the plan is to encourage each of its Area Associations to assume responsibility for promoting mission among its churches.

Over the years the BUGB Mission department has introduced us to such initiatives as the *Big Welcome* and *Get in the Picture*. Then there is the Baptist Rural Network, national representation here in REN and in the Churches Rural Group.

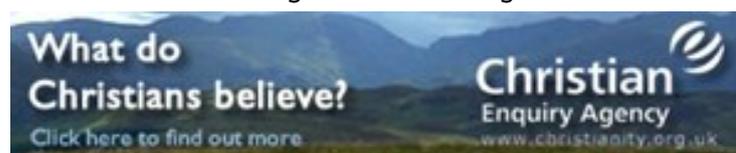
We are also concerned to learn that other national Church bodies, constrained by current economic difficulties, are cutting mission budgets. All too often it is evangelism and aspects of partnership that are affected by such decisions.

With roughly ten million people in rural communities with population smaller than 5,000, and the need to see our rural communities re-evangelized, we need to pray for one another's decision makers.

Online Evangelism

We continue to recommend the Christian Enquiry Agency to our members. We recently received an excellent report from CEA including some wonderful testimonies from those who are being drawn to Christ through the website www.christianity.org.uk

This is a partner resource through Churches Together in England and the Group for Evangelization. Please encourage the use of the URL in church magazines and on your website. The artwork can be copied from the REN website. Let's work together for the kingdom.



You can download a copy of this newsletter at www.ruralevangelism.net. Please forward copies to key people in the Church or Organisation you represent. (e.g. General Secretary, Rural Officer, Secretary for Evangelism) and to other churches and colleagues.