

Rural Evangelism Network

Autumn 2013

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.**

WHERE HAS THE PASSION GONE?

A reflection by the Secretary of the Rural Evangelism Network.

It would be interesting to explore whether in 2013 Christians in rural areas of Britain are as passionate about evangelism as our predecessors were a quarter of a century ago. I suspect that we would discover that we are not as passionate. A supplementary question would be whether at a personal level a past passion for evangelism has been lost or whether today's Christians in rural Britain are less passionate about evangelism generally.

Of course, those who have a calling to evangelise are those who will be most passionate about sharing the story of Jesus and encouraging people to put the trust in Jesus, but research into the not too distant past would demonstrate that many more churches expressed a concern for evangelism by periodically engaging the services of individual evangelists and specialist mission organisations. I have witnessed a steady overall reduction in the number of such engagements over the past 30 years. In many cases this is because rural churches have assumed direct responsibility for sharing the gospel within their local communities. A related factor is that the number of men and women working in para-church evangelistic missions has declined.

Some rural churches have recognised the value of affirming someone among them in an evangelistic role but these are a minority. All too often an emphasis on 'unspoken evangelism' through presence (valuable as this is) has replaced the sense of need to articulate the message. Evangelism might be done differently these days but is it being done effectively, and is there a passion to see people come to faith in Christ?

Another aspect is the relationship between a passion for evangelism and the quality of life of a local church. When I come across churches that exhibit a passion for evangelism, whether in rural, urban or suburban contexts, these tend to be where the life of the local church is exciting and members of that church feel it is a good place to be part of. A church does not have to have a large congregation led by a worship band with contemporary charismatic worship in order to be exciting. There are other aspects of rural church life that can make them exciting places to attend.

These reflections leave us with a number of questions, and it would be helpful to have responses from members of the Rural Evangelism Network. Should all Christians and every church exhibit a passion for sharing the story of Jesus? How might this be expressed so that we measure or quantify such passion? Does the conversion of others feature regularly in our intercession in church services? Is our experience of church a significant factor in encouraging a passion for evangelism? If so, what steps are needed to both improve the quality of rural church experience and the number of rural churches that are exciting places to attend?

Current research within our Network's membership is exploring these issues. If you would like to assist in this, or if you have opinions on the topic please send these in so they can be shared. Personal reflections and anecdotal evidence is welcome. It would be especially interesting to hear from anyone whose area of ministry suggests a situation contrary to that described here. We need your help to paint the bigger picture so please email your response to ren@ruralmissions.org.uk. Please try to keep this no longer than one side of A4.

Thank you.

Sharing Together in God's Mission

HOPE IN OUR VILLAGES

REN was happy to support the Hope08 initiative. In some villages this worked well but it failed to take root in the majority of situations. "Hope Together" the successor of Hope08 continues to use the strapline, "in our villages, towns and cities". Hope14 has had a high profile and we are keen to encourage rural churches to be aware of this interdenominational and national initiative.

Information is included with this mailing.

We have already been asked to promote ideas specifically relevant to rural situations. If Hope14 is on your agenda already please let the REN office know. We shall develop a section of our website within *Knowledge Exchange* to share great ideas and good practise.

If you have already considered the Hope14 agenda but have decided not to be involved we would also like to hear from you please.

THE 2014 BIG CONFERENCE

Please ensure that you have 11th October 2014 in your diary. REN is part of the group planning this conference and you will find all the information currently available on our website www.ruralevangelism.net. The venue has yet to be confirmed but it will be in the Coventry area. The event is one day only. There is a lot of interest and care has been taken to maximise the value to those attending. More information will come in the New Year.

GOOD NEWS AT CHRISTMAS

While writing this news letter a phone call was received from a village Christian working in a Care Home who has planned a series of events in Advent to share the true story of Christmas. It was great to hear such news.

What is happening in your churches or your organisations? We are opening a section on the website and looking for creative ideas to populate it. Please send yours.

COUNTRY WAY ONLINE

Almost all our members responded to the enquiry we sent out as to how you wish to receive *Country Way* in future. A big thank you to those who responded. Approximately half opted for the online version, and this

will be the last hard copy of the magazine that we will be sending to them. Please remember that whether you get it as a hard copy or use the online access it is intended that you do everything you can to encourage others in rural churches to draw upon this excellent resource full of ideas, inspiration and encouragement. **Who will you pass this current edition on to?**

REGIONAL RURAL CONSULTATIONS

Small one-day affordable consultations are still being held. One is taking place shortly within the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. The format varies to suit local needs but includes a focus of practical suggestions to help those in rural church leadership in planning mission. This includes the use of local resources to create sustainable activities. These occasions also raise awareness of the wealth of resources available through REN. The feedback from these events is very encouraging. Contact the office if you would like to hold one in your area.

LOCAL RURAL MISSION NETWORKS

One spin-off from consultations is the forming of local rural mission networks. Typically these meet four times a year and are open to both ordained and lay leaders from rural churches. Lunch time meetings have proved most popular. Opportunity is given for each person to share a recent encouragement and current challenge, news of what happened during the past quarter, and sharing plans and dreams for the opportunities in the coming quarter. This would include such events as Advent and Christmas, Easter, Summer outreaches, Harvest and Remembrance Day. REN can give support to get local mission networks up and running. They need to be 'local' (e.g. a ten mile radius from where meetings are held).

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

A new directory will be available early in 2014. Please ensure that we are up to date with who represents your Church, Diocese etc or Organisation and that we have the correct contact information.

In 2012 we offered a year free from subscription and used accumulated funds to offer free attendance at our residential conference. **Subscriptions for 2013/2014 are due now.** Invoices are being sent to appropriate people. In some situations this is your Treasurer or Director of Finance. The subscription for 2013/2014 remains at £45.

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