

CHANGING CHURCH FOR A CHANGING RURAL SCOTLAND
Paper delivered to the Scottish Churches Rural Group Seminar
St Mary's Kinnoull
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I was asked to share some stories and reflections from my work as Local Collaborative Ministry Officer for the Scottish Episcopal Church, a job which involves supporting congregations as they experiment with new ways of being church in the twenty-first century. Much of this work occurs in what is termed by demographers 'remote rural' parts of Scotland

This slide shows the Scottish Executive's six-fold urban rural classification as used by the Scottish Household Survey of 2002¹ and you can see that the vast percentage of the landmass, 89% in fact, is denoted as 'rural' (the mustard yellow areas), with the urban areas being largely in the Central Belt and along the east coast between the Moray Firth and Firth of Forth. The vast proportion of LCM's work occurs in the Highlands and Islands area, a term first coined in the Crofters Act of 1885 which refers to the northernmost half of Scotland – a very sparsely populated area with a huge, highly fragmented coastline and numerous islands; an area comprising half the Scottish landmass but accounting for only 7% of its population.

In what follows – both in what I say and more importantly in the discussion period which follows - I would like us to think together about what the role of the church *in general* might be in these fragile and far-flung rural locations, and to reflect upon some of the ways in which Episcopalian congregations *in particular* are beginning to live out such a vocation.

But first, something about rural Scotland - a changing scene if ever there was one. In preparing this talk I looked back at the Scottish Episcopal Church's *Rural Commission Report* of 1995 and the *Rural Commission Review* of 1996, documents presented to The General Synod for consideration in those two years. Out of those deliberations came the impetus for Local Collaborative Ministry and other mission initiatives. Rereading those documents was like looking into another world! Much has changed on the Scottish rural scene in those ten or eleven years.

The policy papers upon which much of the Commission's work was based were published by a body called 'The Scottish Office', a department of the UK Government which exercised a wide range of functions in relation to Scotland under the control of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Now, of course, our nation has its own Parliament, a devolved democratic legislature, locally autonomous yet set within the wider political frameworks of the UK and the EU, with responsibility, amongst other areas, for health, education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry and the environment. The workings of this new parliament are characterized by three values: access, fairness and the sharing of power.² It is a very democratic parliament, which remits much of its work to cross-party committees whose work in turn is underpinned by a strong ethos of active civic participation.³

Earlier this month I was in the Ardnamurchan peninsula (in the extreme west of Argyll) and picked up a copy of the local community magazine in the village shop. Nestling in amongst the advertisements for the services of, variously, an electrician, a book keeper, a mortgage advisor, and practitioners of Reiki and reflexology, was this advert: "Your chance to get involved with the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament is holding two open public meetings – an opportunity to learn more about the parliament, what it is and how it works... and ways in which local community groups and individuals can become involved with the parliamentary process. This is an opportunity to find out more about how your community can have its voice heard in at Holyrood."

Notwithstanding all the wrangling over the spiralling cost of Miralles's building, the Scottish Parliament is bringing a new flavour to the workings of our nation, and particularly to those rural areas that previously felt marginalized and disenfranchised before.

There have been other shifts during the decade. While the primary employment sectors of the region – agriculture, forestry, extraction and especially fishing⁴ - continued to decline, rural communities have succeeded in transforming

¹ *Social Focus on Urban Rural Scotland* A Scottish Executive National Statistics Publication (2003), 4

'Accessible Rural Settlements' are categorised as those comprising less than 3,000 people and within 30 minutes drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more, while 'Remote Rural Settlements' are those less than 3,000 people and with a drive time of over 30 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more.

² Graham Blount "A new voice in a new land?" in Storrar, W. and Donald, P. eds *God in Society. Doing Social Theology in Scotland Today* St Andrew Press (2003) 37;

³ see William Storrar "Democracy and Mission. The New Context for Doing Social Theology 10-34 in Storrar, W and Donald, P. (2003) 10, 24

⁴ "Countryside alliances; rural Scotland" Torcuil Crichton in Hassan, G and Warhurst C. eds *Anatomy of the New Scotland: (2002) 267-269*

their local economies in ways that have sustained a viable population; in place of these primary sectors have sprung up the 'complex services' sector: public sector services such as health, education and administration, transport and tourism, and recreation. In addition there has been important growth in **renewable energy**, especially (the contentious) wind farming and hydro power. This growth has been phenomenal. Back in 1995, there were none of these windfarms on Scottish soil. In the past decade, 40 have been built, accounting for about 40% of Scotland's renewable energy production. 50 more farms are in process of being built or set to be given planning permission, 80 schemes are at the planning stage and 70 more are in early stage development. At present, Scotland generates about 16% of its total energy from renewable sources; its goal is to reach 18% by 2010 and 40% by 2020. Wave power, too, is set to be a big new employer; there is one such plant operating off the Isle of Islay at present and a £10 million pound scheme is due to start operating off Orkney next year, one of nine such wave and tidal schemes in the pipeline. It is estimated that thousands of jobs could be created by supplying wave and tidal power systems to other countries and that this could be 'as significant to Scotland as the discovery of North Sea oil.'⁵ Added to this yet another form of renewable energy is being piloted near Aberdeen – subsea tidal stream power; Scotland is set to lead the world in harnessing this new form of green energy,⁶ indeed is set to become 'the marine renewables capital of the world'.⁷

Then there have been huge and significant changes in **population patterns** too. Back in 2004 it was argued that Scotland needed to attract more than 635,000 migrant workers over the next twenty years if the age balance of the population was to be preserved at current levels. Rural Scotland, beyond the commuting belt, had a higher crude death rate than birth rate and required in-migration to maintain the population. The expansion of the EU in 2004 was the answer to this prayer; 32,000⁸ people found work in Scotland in the first two years since the EU opened its doors to the eight accession states⁹, and the total continues to mount into this year. The majority of these newcomers come from Poland, Lithuania and Estonia, and have found jobs largely in the hospitality, agriculture and food processing. Not only does the increase in the migrant worker population help to address stagnation or decline in the total population; it also helps to negate, at least in part, the problem of an ageing population.

Scotland has long been used to seasonal agricultural in-migration – one only needs think of the tattie howkers of Ayrshire, the raspberry pickers of the Carse of Gowrie, and the herring lassies who followed those shoals around the east coast waters from Lowestoft to Shetland¹⁰. But *this* influx has brought new tensions, with these migrant workers no longer being seasonal but instead wishing to stay long-term due in part to attractive wage differentials; the increased numbers of migrant workers looking for long-term accommodation around small rural settlements, for instance, has put pressure on local markets for rented housing. 800 migrant workers from Eastern Europe have already registered themselves as homeless in Scotland.¹¹ Citizens Advice Bureaux advise that support and public services are struggling to keep up, with education, training support and language skilling services failing to meet demand.

And finally there has been the **digital communication revolution**. In the past decade the Highlands and Islands region has experienced an exponential increase in the use and application of digital technology for communication. The ever-widening provision of broadband is enabling widespread distribution across the region of teaching and research resources at primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels, and also the provision of medical services to remote areas. Perhaps more significantly for our purposes, however, are the effects this communications revolution is having on the relationship between work, residence and commerce; there has been 'a wide-ranging shift in the relationship between work and place, between virtual exchange and material production'¹². With this shift to a service economy in which knowledge-based and information industries play an increasing role, and the formation of a

⁵ Nicol Stephen Deputy First Minister *The Scotsman* 21 February 2007

⁶ *The Scotsman* 16.3.07

⁷ Nicol Stephen *The Scotsman* 21.2.07

⁸ BBC News 22/8/06

⁹ Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia

¹⁰ *In a World A Wor Ane. A Shetland Herring Girl's Story* SusanTelford Shetland Times (1998)

¹¹ Calum Macdonald www.scotland.com/forums/scottish-politics/

¹² Gillian Munro and Keith Hart "The Highland Problem". *State and Community in Local Development* Arkleton Research Papers 1 (2000), 5

'translocal' society, it is not inconceivable that in time space and distance will be thought of differently and the Highlands and Islands no longer be deemed - or feel – 'remote and marginal' relative to the rest of Scotland.

I have painted this picture with very broad brush strokes, but however crudely described, it is clear that rural Scotland has undergone massive change in the past decade, in patterns of governance, habitation, commerce and communication. Read any of the reports produced by the Scottish Executive, Highlands and Island Enterprise or voluntary sector agencies, and you will be struck by a sense of **vibrancy and optimism**, of things moving forward in a good and hopeful direction. Scotland, if not 'the best wee country in the world' as Visit Scotland and First Minister McConnell like to boast, is certainly a rising star within the EU constellation, playing its part as an autonomous nation within a larger, interdependent world.¹³ And one of the planks of these forward-looking strategies is an emphasis upon enabling and empowering people to take greater control of their own lives through bottom-up development approaches that involve local people in the planning. There is a new **partnership culture** abroad. Gone is the top-down style of governance alone;

*"the formulations and implementation of rural policy now involve a more integrated approach to rural development, in which the 'top-down' initiatives of public sector agencies are combined with more 'bottom-up', community-led activities. Major policy developments, whether national or supra-national, now incorporate a requirement for partnerships to be formed at the bidding stage, and the rhetoric and practice of partnership working now dominates much of rural policy.... The inclusion of organisations and individuals that represent those who live in a place is seen as especially important because 'action must be tailored to local circumstances and take account of local needs'."*¹⁴

This is in keeping with the Cork Declaration of 1996, which stated that "the emphasis must be on participation and a 'bottom up' approach, which harnesses the creativity and solidarity of rural communities. Rural development must be local and community-driven within a coherent European framework."¹⁵ Thus, for instance, the recently published *Poverty in Scotland* report produced last month by the Child Poverty Action Group commends the Executive for 'using a model of implementation (to tackle rural poverty) that is fit-for-purpose, (whereby) **communities (are) defining their own priorities**'.¹⁶ The emphasis is upon putting 'local people in the position of subjects of their own development rather than objects'.¹⁷

Now that is exciting language, reminding us as it surely does of the ethos and methodology of the theologies of liberation. But the more Scottish Executive and other agencies' documents that I read in preparation for today, the more depressed I became in one regard – namely how marginal the church appeared to be in the redevelopment of the Scottish rural economy through this culture of partnership. Much is made of the contribution of the *voluntary* sector in the delivery of services in rural communities, indeed to its centrality; a report by the *Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group* commented that "in the absence of mainstream services in many rural areas, we consider voluntary sector provision to be crucial to the continued wellbeing of many rural residents."¹⁸ But nowhere in this literature is the church mentioned as a partner in this rural renaissance.

Much has been written in recent years south of the Border (and indeed in Northern Ireland¹⁹) about the church's contribution to social capital and the importance of church-going as a strong socializing force. A study of Christians in rural Shropshire, for instance, indicated that 'belonging to a church is associated with a distinctive set of values and

¹³ "The new movements of identity politics do not intend to create sovereign states as independent entities but rather envisage new institutional arrangements for regulating power in the interaction between nations and the global community" Gregory Baum quoted in William Storrar "Where the local and the global meet" 405-430 in *Public Theology in the Twenty First Century* ed Storrar, W and Morton, A (T and T Clark (2004), 419

¹⁴ Mark Shucksmith *Exclusive Countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas* Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2000) 39-40

¹⁵ *The Cork Declaration - A living countryside*. The European Conference on Rural Development Cork (1996), Point 5
[//ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/cork_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/cork_en.htm)

¹⁶ John McKendrick 'Rural poverty' pps 158-162 in *Poverty in Scotland* ed McKendrick J, Mooney, G, Dickie J and Kelly, P (Child Poverty Action Group) (2007), 160

¹⁷ Scottish Office *Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland (1998)* www.scotland.gov.uk/deleted/library/documents/tdsrs-02.htm

¹⁸ *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Scotland* A report by the Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group (2001), 2.1.6 and 2.5.3

¹⁹ *Communities, Churches and Social Capital in Northern Ireland* CVAS (2003). See also Robert Putnam's seminal work *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community* Simon and Schuster (2000) for a consideration of the equation between religious involvement and civic engagement in the USA

attitudes, which result in practical caring and community involvement,²⁰ thereby contributing to the common good. The recently published report to emerge from the Arthur Rank Centre *Faith in Rural Communities: contributions of social capital to community vibrancy*²¹ likewise concludes that people of faith make a significant contribution to community vibrancy through their engagement in church-based activity and their role in their local community. In its recommendations it urges a wider recognition of this contribution amongst all stakeholders - DEFRA and other central government departments, regional agencies and local authorities, as well as the churches themselves. A similar plea for recognition was made by the Church of Scotland's Board for Social Responsibility in a report made to the 2003 General Assembly: "Policy makers", it said, "should recognise the substantial contribution that Church of Scotland congregations make to social capital in Scottish communities"²². However this was based on research undertaken by the department of *Urban Studies* in Glasgow University. The only study to look at the issue of the church's contribution to social capital in *remote rural areas* of Scotland is that of Mark Shucksmith and his colleagues at Aberdeen University and these are their conclusions, based on qualitative and quantitative research undertaken in the Outer Isles and Wester Ross:

(Whilst the clergy were seen as the last of the *in situ* service providers and therefore welcomed) respondents considered that the history of 'division' in the Churches meant that the Churches were a source of division rather than integration in rural society. The limited commitment to social activities in the churches in scattered communities, combined with the four Presbyterian denominations who engaged in little ecumenical activity, led the majority of respondents to view religious observance as an exclusive rather than inclusive activity.²³

A divided and an excluding sign! No wonder the Government documents did not recognize the churches' contribution to Scotland's rural renaissance if *that* is the image that we give. If the Church in the Highlands and Islands is going to be a partner in the transformation of rural Scotland, then it needs to look very hard at itself and discern what it is exactly that it has to offer into this mix. How are we to sing the Lord's song in this strange new land of ours?

And that is what I would like us to do here. I am going to offer a number of suggestions about what the unique contribution of the Church might be and then illustrate how some wee Episcopalian congregations are putting these values into practice at present - but I offer this list merely as an 'aunt sally' for you to discuss, amend and add to in the discussion period that follows. And you will quickly see that these values are not primarily *practical* suggestions (though the living out of them may be expressed very pragmatically.) They are **theological** values, ways in which the church mirrors the being of God in Her life together, for that surely is what we have to offer into the mix. The Church is not simply some social work body, the *in situ* provider of additional social care in contexts where those provisions - the local Post Office, GP surgery, village shop and so on - are fast being depleted, (though that may be a spin-off.) Any speech about the Church must ultimately be rooted in the being and acts of God; the Church is first and foremost the people of God, brought into being by God, bound to God for the glory of God.

So let us look then at the four marks of the church, acceptable to all of us in this room regardless of denomination, I'm sure, and see what they have to say. **The Church is One**, (see *Eucharistic Presidency*²⁴) in that, through sharing by the Spirit in the redeemed humanity of Christ and in his communion with the Father, she participates in and grows deeper into that unity which characterizes the triune God. Belonging to the Church is about belonging to a body that believes in the oneness of distinctive persons-in-relation who discover who they are through relationships of giving and receiving.

In rural areas there often isn't a great deal of choice of congregation; you go to that which is nearest to you, regardless of churchmanship, unlike in the cities where increasingly people shop around to find a like-minded place. Rural congregations tend to be more of a hotch-potch of members than urban churches. Moreover you are thrown very closely together with others in these congregations, as rural churches tend to be small and intimate, at least in

²⁰ Alan Smith "Listening to the People" Chapter 11 in *Changing Rural Life* eds Martineau J., Francis, L and Francis, P (2004), 210

²¹ Farnell, Richard et al *Faith in Rural Communities. Contributions of social capital to community vibrancy* ACORA Publishing (2006)

²² Church of Scotland "Social Capital Report: A Summary" Report of the Board of Social Responsibility. *Reports to the General Assembly* (2003), 11, 19-21

²³ Shucksmith, M. Chapman, P. and Clark, G.M. *Rural Scotland Today. The Best of Both Worlds?* Avebury (1996) 403, 501

²⁴ *Eucharistic Presidency: A Theological Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod* CHP (1997) 2.24

the parts of Scotland that I am referring to²⁵. These are congregations in which 'everyone knows your name', communities 'of the face', to use David Ford's lovely phrase. So being part of a rural congregation is quite a counter-cultural experience, flying in the face of an increasingly anonymous and networked society where like congregates with like through choice, but often only through cyberspace. Does the experience of being part of a small, heterogeneous family-sized congregation have anything to say to a rural community? (where increasingly, in the Highlands at least, there is an uneasy standoff between long-time residents and incomers, be they holiday-homers, commuters, those seeking 'the good life' away from the cities, or the migrant workers of whom we spoke earlier.) Has this experiment in – and experience of - living according to God's being got anything to offer to others?

The Church is Holy: she is summoned to a life of dedicated loyalty to God through the Spirit, a life of 'set-apartness' for God. 'Through the Spirit we are given to participate in the holiness of Christ, living in God's world as God's people'.²⁶ That means espousing an alternative way of living in the world, a Christian social ethic, embodying and promoting just relationships with each other and with all created things, being agents of Christ's healing and reconciliation in a fractured world. It means practicing a different quality of life as regards power, natural resources, agriculture; it means living in a sacramental universe, regarding the things of the earth as gifts from God to be stewarded and cared for equably.²⁷ It means hallowing the everyday and learning to reflect theologically upon it - work, commerce, family and community life - and seeing what God is saying in and through it. What has this experiment in an alternative way of living according to Kingdom values of wholeness and 'fullness of life' for all got to offer others, who likewise are engaged in the promotion of 'Healthy Living'?²⁸

The Church is catholic: she shares in the communion of Father, Son and Spirit whose fellowship is itself turned outwards to the world in grace. 'Thus (her) members are intrinsically related to each other as members of one vast community, a community which reaches out to embrace every generation, race, colour, gender or class.'²⁹ Living under grace, she is the servant of *all*, welcoming *all*, reaching out to *all* without constraint or self-seeking, and making *all* whom she encounters feel valued and of worth. Living as a servant community at the service of others, not needing to be in control but happy to work in partnership, offering her resources selflessly that others might have fullness of life. How might this kind of inclusive, partnering, sacrificial living manifest itself in the life of a congregation within the local community in which it is set? What might it entail on both sides?

The Church is apostolic³⁰ in that she is grounded in and summoned to be true to the apostolic faith in every generation to which she is sent. Christians are not related simply to a *past* Christ but, through the Spirit, to the *living* Christ in whose continuing ministry we participate. The Spirit enables fidelity to and continuity with apostolic faith but constantly makes this tradition afresh in the present, so that the truth of Christ is brought alive for every new missionary encounter. The Church has a profound experience of the 'management of change' to share, the management of the tension between changelessness and change, constancy and adaptability; an experience of reconfiguring the old so as to meet the challenges of the new while remaining faithful to the core values of that truth. That she constantly struggles with and mishandles this tension doesn't matter; that very struggle is in itself a valuable resource to bring alongside the experience of others in the community who are seeking to adapt to new circumstances likewise. How might a congregation enable the wisdom of God to come to bear upon situations of change in a local community?

'One, holy, catholic and apostolic'; four 'marks' of the Church. Ways of being which mirror the inner life of God..... I want to turn in conclusion to sharing some cameos of ten wee Pisky churches in the Highlands and Islands. In all except one, less than 30 people gather on a Sunday for worship. Few have money to spare and fewer still have a church hall or other premises to enable activities to occur on the premises; indeed most lack loos or kitchens, thus

²⁵ In remote rural parts of the SEC, 70% number less than 25 on any Sunday

²⁶ *ibid* 21, 2.26

²⁷ see Michael Northcott "Farmed salmon and the sacramental feast"; how Christian worship resists global capitalism" 213- 230 in Storrar, William and Morton Andrew, eds *Public Theology in for the 21st Century* T and T Clark (2004)

²⁸ Islay, for example, has been nominated as a "health promoting island" under the Islay and Jura Health Promotion Project. Scottish Office *Towards a Development Strategy for Rural Scotland* (1998) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/deleted/library/documents/tdsrs-02.htm>

²⁹ *ibid* 21, 2.27

³⁰ *ibid* 19, 2.28

seriously inhibiting what can happen outwith worship. Yet all in their own way are contributing their widow's mite to the wellbeing of their communities in the way they try to live out these 'theological virtues', these four marks of the church.

All of them are engaged in Local Collaborative Ministry. If you ask me to say in a phrase what that is about, I would answer that it is about 'equipping the people of God to be all they can be as apostles and disciples in the whole of life'. Empowering them for their lives of participation in what God is doing *where they are* – at home, at work, in the local community, in the gathered church community. Mobilizing them for mission. Through the provision of congregation-wide theological education right where they are, *all* members of the body are offered the opportunity to grow as reflective theological practitioners, people who can engage intelligently with the pressing issues of daily life at local, national or global level, and bring the demands and the challenge of the Gospel to bear on them with confidence and theological fluency. In the process of engaging with this theological education, people experience (perhaps new) ways of open decision-making, consensus building, power-sharing, collaborative leadership, self-evaluation and mentoring, thus equipping themselves for the new ecology of active citizenship and participative democracy at local level that is abroad in our land.³¹ In short, Local Collaborative Ministry's thrust is very much in tune with what we saw being described in the government documents cited above; there it is called 'building community capacity'³², increasing the confidence and competence of people to effect change at local level.

So let me share some stories. Here is the Church building of **St Paul's in Kinlochleven**, nine miles up a narrow glen from Ballachulish and Glencoe. The village of Kinlochleven is known as 'The Electric Village' as it literally grew up around the hydro plant and smeltery that was built there in 1901 for the production of aluminium. The plant with its ancillary industries was the primary employer in the village. Indeed the village was created by the then North British Aluminium Company and is totally composed of company housing – it looks a bit like a suburb of Glasgow set in the midst of magnificent Highland scenery. Then with the advent of globalization, and the increasing costs of transporting the raw material from this remote area, the new parent company, the Canadian-owned Alcan Smelting and Power UK, closed down the plant in 2001. Many people were helped to find jobs in the new leisure industries that grew up in the village – one of the old smelteries was converted into an ice climbing wall, the largest in Europe, and other jobs were created in the tourist industry sector, the village being on the route of the West Highland Way. Nevertheless there was a high level of unemployment in the community and a sense of mourning and bereavement. Little St Paul's has endured, testimony to a hope beyond despair, calling a member of its congregation, previously employed by Alcan, to serve as their OLM. Nor is it focussed in on itself; this is a congregation that reaches out to the community around it, the resident community of the village, (lunches) those who visit from time to time (bikers) and the wider world in need (Chernobyl children). In all these ways it gives of its own resources sacrificially, and is a powerful sign in the village. When Donald was ordained in Oban Cathedral two years ago, many of those who travelled to the service were simply folk from the village – who significantly called Donald 'their man'.

Further south you come to the congregation of **St Kieran's in Campbeltown**, again situated in an area which has seen massive unemployment in recent years with the demise of Scotland's white fish industry, the winding down of activity at the nearby air base and the closing of the Jaeger factory – though the manufacture of wind farm components looks set to offer hope to the area. St Kieran's has been working very hard over the past six or seven years to equip its people for this changing world, engaging in the skilling of its people as reflective practitioners. It has engaged in a long programme of congregational development for mission, with all its members (many in their eighties) attending sessions on Reflective Practice and Contextual Bible Study. A year ago they rearranged the interior of their building so as to make it more flexible for community usage, replacing the old pews with chairs and

³¹ "The churches must equip their members to be active in that moral and spiritual battle for the health and wholeness of the new democratic processes. So they must practise similar ways of working in their own internal life and politics as working models of open government to educate their members into the ethos and mores of active citizenship". Storrar, W. "Democracy and mission; the new context for doing social theology" in Storrar, William and Donald, Peter ed *God and Society. Doing Social Theology in Scotland Today*. St Andrew Press (2003), 29

³² "Building such capacity means developing programmes which improve the skills and confidence of individuals; and strengthening the capacity of local groups to develop and manage their own rural regeneration strategies." Shucksmith, Mark *Exclusive Countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2000), 50; see also Scottish Executive *Delivering Social Justice in Rural Scotland: Barriers and Solutions* Report on the Conference in New Lanark (2002), 12

creating a social area at the back, and are now seeing how they can build on their particular strengths - music in particular, and their garden space at the rear of the building – to make connections with the local community. This goes side by side with the ongoing skilling of their members; here we see them during the sermon slot on a Sunday engaging in a lay-led CBS as part of the Ministry of the Word. Moreover they are a congregation that has changed their way of being and organizing themselves from 'board table' to 'round table', with their priest as one who serves amongst them; the process they used in the reorganization of the church's interior was a model of consensus building; lengthy and time-consuming, but right.

All Souls Inveraray – a tiny congregation, three at most on a Sunday - meets monthly in a building which they share with the local Catholic congregation. It is a building that also sees thousands of visitors per year walking through it because it has this feature – a world famous belltower and working bells. So little All Souls asked itself; how can we connect with these tourists and help them to become pilgrims? They thought about their strengths – they didn't let their numbers dismay them, nor the fact that the three who attend worship do not live locally – but focussed on the fact that they are a praying community, and so hit upon the idea of setting up a Prayer Tree in the church. Hundreds of tourists leave prayer requests on this tree and these are gathered up and prayed for regularly - there is a weekly lay led mid-week service during the summer as well as the monthly Eucharist - and now the instigator of this idea has been licensed as a *Lay Chaplain for mission* in the area. This is the first time anyone has been licensed such a way in the SEC, and it is a sign of hope for the future of rural mission in our church.

St Mary's Ullapool, a congregation whose resident priest left in 1998. The clergy accommodation had previously been in the upstairs of this building, the Chapel of St Mary downstairs. The congregation (seen here) thought about what they had to offer and came with idea of providing a quiet haven for busy stressed people – so they renovated the interior of the flat with help from the local community and now let it out on a nonprofit-making basis to those who need a space for rest and recuperation. They are a fully-blown Local Collaborative Ministry congregation with a Constitution that reflects their new way of being – a very exciting wee congregation that is going places.

Again focusing on that special ingredient of being a praying community in a busy world, here is a picture of the prayer tree constructed by the little congregation of **St Moluag's on the Isle of Lewis**. Again they are deliberately tapping into the zeitgeist, connecting with their surroundings – this is an area that sees a lot of folk in the summer who are retreating from the mainland looking to connect with the spiritual, perhaps in the Stones at Callanish but also in the stones of this twelfth century building. It is a building which lacks heating and lighting, but again they use this to advantage. Their Christmas Carol Service is very atmospheric and attracts people from far and wide who would otherwise not come to church. Being true to themselves; doing the one or two things that they can do well but doing them in a mission-shaped way.

Little **St Margaret's on Arran** – a congregation whose 'angel', to use Rob Warren's terminology, is that of *hospitality*. A congregation which recently came to the mature realization that their strength did not lie in offering children's work or a choir or any of the other things that folk think churches must have – they agreed to be light on structures and committees and instead focus on offering a contemplative space for seekers of the Transcendent.

St John's near Aviemore, an LCM congregation set in the Rothiemurchus forest, one that has recently called and trained alongside its own OLM, the local Primary School head-teacher, a woman firmly rooted in the midst of the community. A very mission-oriented congregation, who have bought a candy floss machine and take a stall at the various local Highland Games in the locality every year, meeting folk through interactions there. Going to people where they are and meeting them there – a church without walls. Discovering that it is called to live out the three baptismal promises equally; not just concentrating on '*continuing in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers*' and '*proclaiming the good news by word and deed*' but also on working for justice and peace, honouring God in all creation' and being good stewards of God's earth; being a prophetic community. And crucially doing this in partnership with other agencies in the locality; here we see them engaging in a local furniture recycling scheme.

St Mary's Strontian: a congregation that had to sell its building some twenty years ago and has found a home with another congregation; this time it is the local Church of Scotland congregation that has provided a worshipping home,

and there are excellent links between the two congregations. Indeed rather than having two women's groups for instance, they share one Guild, with the Co-ordinator being drawn from either congregation. They to have an OLM in the shape of Charles Tongue who owns a local plumbing and heating business; again a well-kent figure in the region who combines a priestly-pastoral and a practical ministry in his circuit in this van. A congregation that is thinking hard about how to reach out to the increasing number of young folk coming into the area, the Ardnamurchan and Morvern area being one of increasing inward migration and investment.

And our two most far-flung congregations; firstly **St Magnus in Lerwick** on mainland Shetland. Early on in their five year programme of congregational education for mission they engaged in a project called *Listening to the Context* and found out not only about their environs, its needs and gifts, but also that as a *congregation*, they were not connected with it in any way whatsoever! Out of this came a very intentional programme to make connections with the community of Lerwick, building on their main strengths of (i) premises in the very centre of the town, and (ii) a history of engagement with the arts, as seen in their beautiful stained glass windows. Three years ago they held a week long festival with a display of the history of the congregation in the church hall and an exhibition of the St Magnus banners that normally hang in the eponymous cathedral on Orkney. Through the engagement of this woman, who was a guide with the Lerwick tours for tourists wishing to find more about the Viking history of the town, they now offer hospitality to tourists during the summer months. They offer their premises as a much-needed facility for a local Play Group, and as a consequence of connections made therein, their Sunday School is seeing growth.

And finally **St Colman's Burravoe**, on the island of Yell off the Shetland mainland, the most northerly Anglican congregation in the UK. An island that has seen a lot of change in recent years with the rural way of life that had continued basically unchanged for generations being turned upside down with the advent of the oil industry and attendant population at nearby Sullom Voe from the 80's onwards . At its peak in the late 1990s, Sullom Voe Terminal handled more than a quarter of the United Kingdom's petroleum production, and employed about 500 people. This is a congregation that works hard at demonstrating how long-time residents like Barbara, (shown here) a former primary school head teacher on the island, who valued the sense of community that the island had to offer in the days when there were only five cars on the entire island and the steamer from Lerwick only touched base three times a week, can form harmonious community with incomers who came north to live and work on the island, bringing different norms and experiences with them. A case study in the formation of *koinonia* in changing world – if you want to read more, then I would highly recommend Bruce Cameron's chapter in *Changing Rural Life*.

A reprise of the questions for the discussion period: 'thinking of the rural community you inhabit...

One: *What does the experience of being part of a small, heterogeneous, family-sized congregation have to offer?*

Holy: *What has the church's experience of 'alternative living' got to offer others?*

Catholic: *How might a congregation's inclusive, partnering, sacrificial way of being manifest itself with regard to the local community in which it is set? What might it entail on both sides?*

Apostolic: *How might a congregation enable the wisdom of God to come to bear upon situations of change in a local community?'*

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