

Premier Christian Radio Interview notes 30_1_29

Some random jottings

For / from a conversation on 'Inspirational Breakfast with Michael Fanstone'
on *Premier Christian Radio* (Fri 30th Jan 2026 - 7:30am ish to 8am)
a Rural Dean to talk about rural ministry through storms, literal and figurative

C of E vocab: Rural Dean are called Area Deans in some diocese (not always rural)

Cf. Dean of the Cathedral

A deanery is the unit between a parish or benefice and the diocese

So our diocese of Chichester basically covers Sussex and is made up of 21 deaneries

Our deanery of Dallington – 12 clergy – 23 church buildings

Government definition by population density

Semi-rural

Rural

Deeply rural

Connected rural / isolated rural

A large town or city next door or not?

Storm

Road flooded and closed

Electricity went off very briefly

Church boiler room had to be bailed out

FB groups and WhatsApp groups pinging away about the driving conditions

My little car was fine – someone with a Landrover did kindly offer me a lift if I needed it

Townies

Excited by pheasants in the garden or spotting a deer

Peacock on the roof

A very beautiful place we're privileged to live in

Kipling was right about Sussex!

Especially lovely in Summer – rather wet and muddy today

Quite often a stream running down the road

Pot holes!

Infrastructure a bit more fragile

Trees down

Power cuts – shower at church members houses

The Christmas Turkey in the garden as we wondered about how to cook it with no electricity

Water main burst the other day

Water sometimes interrupted or brown

Cost of living in rural areas 25% greater

Cars
 No gas
 No mains sewage

Farmers
 Isolation
 Financial pressures
 If the farm has been in the family for generations, you don't want to be the one to lose it
<https://fcn.org.uk/>

People in rural areas are still people!

Jesus
 Doesn't spare us storms
 With us through the storms
 If we build our lives on Jesus and his word, our lives will stand through the storm

Often we can't solve their problems – weep with those who weep
 Pray!

Ministry everywhere has its challenges.
 It would be easy to speak at great length about the challenges of rural ministry, some of them distinctive and some of them shared with other contexts.
 What too of the opportunities?

Smaller churches
 People know one another well and are good at looking out for one another
 WhatsApp group – people share prayer needs and encouragements – feel more connected
 Someone brought cake to church the other day to mark 2 years of her involvement in the church and to thank people for the welcome and kindness
 Supporting one another e.g. in the face of difficult medical diagnoses

Small is beautiful!
 Sometimes people are used to things being smaller in the countryside.
 They love the village shop as it is – everyone accepts it is not and can't be Tesco Extra.
 Likewise your church is unlikely to become the cathedral or Holy Trinity, Brompton or St Helen's, Bishopsgate or...
 Are there ways that small can be okay, or even an advantage?
 What could you do with ones or twos or in a small group?

Stable population
 The real locals have three generations in the churchyard
 Evangelism slower?
 Cf. outer estates
 A particular opportunity when people move house

Very grounded in a place

What will people travel for or not?
Co-operation between parishes?

People often have a hands-on, can-do attitude
Used to getting on with things and helping one another out

More connected to our communities than in towns
The boundaries between church and village are more porous
People have a tremendous attachment to their parish church, even if they only come at Christmas (and Easter – Remembrance very well attended)
Sometimes it's the same people keeping the church, the village hall and the pub going

Challenge of church buildings
The countryside has cleared out over the centuries
Don't really need 3 church buildings for a population of 2000 in my three villages
Sometimes smaller older congregations
Financial pressures (asset rich, cash poor?)

More connected to creation and the seasons
Harvest!
Plough Sunday etc.

Vicar of Dibley understated!
Three lunches one Sunday – which was fine by me!

Pet Service – rates of dog ownership! Very important to many

Tradition

Being there for people – to listen and pray

No silver bullet or secret programme
Friendly consistency

Intentionality offering Jesus
Ready to speak good news
Crossing that pain line to speak – not just being nice people

Also interviewed was Bob Goody, CEO of Rural Missions <https://ruralmissions.org.uk/>
He talked about showing up consistency, building trust etc.
Serve your community with Jesus' name at the forefront

Our Rural Officer in East Sussex in the Diocese of Chichester is The Revd Canon Gary Cregeen
- https://www.chichester.anglican.org/glitter_news/2021/06/24/new-rural-officer-appointed/

<https://www.ruralministries.org.uk/>

<https://arthurrankcentre.org.uk/>