

## Churches Rural Group

The Churches Rural Group (CRG) is established as a Coordinating Group within Churches Together which unites in pilgrimage those churches in England which, acknowledging God's revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and, in obedience to God's will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves:

- to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is his body; and
- to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world

to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### Purpose

**In 2014 CRG described its purpose as** *“to provide ecumenical space for Churches with presence in rural areas, and related Christian agencies, to reflect theologically and practically on the life and mission of UK rural churches; to offer mutual support to one another; and where appropriate to present or speak to the member Churches and Bodies in Association of CTE key issues affecting rural churches and the context in which they serve.”*

It is not our purpose in CRG to promote ecumenism for its own sake but rather to encourage a healthy respect for one another and each other's distinctiveness, and to cooperate where appropriate.

CRG has no desire to be a mere *'talking shop'* but does desire that by our shared participation synergy is created for the benefit of the *Missio Dei*.

### Wider Membership

Inevitably some of those who take part in CRG are Churches whose life and witness extend beyond the boundaries of England. CRG has always welcomed participation by those in other parts of the United Kingdom with common concern and aims.

CRG has also been pleased to welcome the participation of Churches, Associational Bodies and Organisations that are not necessarily members of CTE. For example, a number of smaller Churches from the Free Churches Group have been represented for several years, as have also various organisational bodies.

CRG recognises that certain Christian networks and organisations exist with a common rural focus but distinctive purposes. These occasionally have some overlapping concerns. CRG offers a forum where these distinct emphases can be recognised and encouraged, thus avoiding possible unhelpful duplication or inadvertent conflict. For this reason CRG extends a warm welcome 'to the table' to any such body. We are able to enrich one another through our participation and create mutual benefit and serve our common cause.

### Past Shared Projects

Members of CRG have agreed to promote various campaigns and activities of which the following are examples:

- Shared major rural conference have been held every two or three years;
- A campaign to raise awareness of modern slavery and the exploitative abuse of migrant labour in rural areas,
- A campaign to ensure the continuance of local Post Offices in rural areas, sometimes by accommodating these within churches;
- The promotion of Foodbanks in rural areas;
- The promotion of the work of Farming Community Network (formerly Farm Crisis Network) and Agricultural Chaplaincy;
- The encouragement of dialogue and where possible mutual action regarding the deployment of ordained ministers in rural areas.
- Promoting helpful resources such as “Faith in the Countryside” and “Country Way”

## The Relationship between CRG and the Arthur Rank Centre

The relationship between CRG and ARC is symbiotic. The ARC is a member of the CRG. Other members of CRG recognise the excellent work done by the ARC. CRG elects someone to serve as a trustee of ARC. Since CRG does not employ staff it relies upon the ARC to act in a ‘servant’ capacity in order to accomplish some of its aims (for example in the organisation and management of its major conferences and its campaign against exploitative use of migrant labour).

In turn CRG provides some practical support for the work of the ARC and serves as a forum for discussing its strategies, and a useful vehicle for their promotion.

## Ongoing Concerns

CRG maintains a continuing concern to monitor the health of the churches in rural areas and to map relevant developments (both positive and negative) and to draw attention to opportunities and needs related to the life and mission of rural churches locally, and to encourage appropriate missional strategies.

At CRG meetings news is shared and representatives are encouraged to report on the general health of the rural churches within their tradition, whether there is overall growth or decline, whether there any new church plants, and whether there any geographical aspects to comment on (e.g. a diocese or part of the country where there is something to note).

We are concerned to understand the key challenges being faced and how respective Churches are responding to these and what resources are being made available. We are particularly concerned to understand if any trends have affected the rural mission in any way, and to learn about lay involvement and new patterns of ministry and mission.

In exploring these issues we consider how CRG might respond, whether between us we have useful resources or experience. Some situations may be helped by an ecumenical response or the use of our collective voice.

In addition to the above we seek to be conscious of special situations facing the rural communities in which churches are located and how churches are responding to needs beyond the four walls.

Our concern is for the growth of the Kingdom of God in the rural areas of these islands.

The life and work of rural churches often seems marginalised within the wider Christian context in the UK. Together we seek to raise awareness by the provision of a stronger collective voice both within the life of Churches Together in England (and other similar national bodies) and to the various constituent members of CRG. We can do more together.

## **Looking Beyond our Shores**

CRG has found that often things that concern us are echoed in other parts of the world. CRG has become a significant participant within the International Rural Churches Association. Our participation has helped to ensure that key issues are on the agenda for the European Union, the Conference of European Churches, and the World Council of Churches. Such bodies have large agendas and it is all too easy for rural matters and the valuable contribution of rural churches to be overlooked.

## **The Annual Budget**

CRG appoints three officers: Chair, Secretary and Treasurer who serve in an honorary capacity. By using ITC costs can be kept low but there are still some operational costs.

Currently an income is provided from the members of CRG on a sliding scale determined at a CRG meeting. For many Churches and organisations these are difficult days financially so our individual budgets are often strained. While it is important that each participant in CRG seeks to act responsibly and proportionately towards meeting our agreed budget, financial limitation should never prevent someone from participating.

## **Current Members of CRG**

The following Churches and organisations are represented as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014.

The Church of England

The Baptist Union of Great Britain

The Methodist Church

The United Reformed Church

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

The Salvation Army

A collective representation of smaller Free Churches including the Congregational Federation, The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, the Free Methodist Church, the Independent Methodist Church the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyan Reform Union, the Moravian Church and the Churches of Christ.

The Scottish Rural Churches Group

The Arthur Rank Centre

The Agricultural Chaplains Association

The Rural Evangelism Network

The Rural Theology Association

Farming Community Network (formerly Farm Crisis Network)