

session one why church?

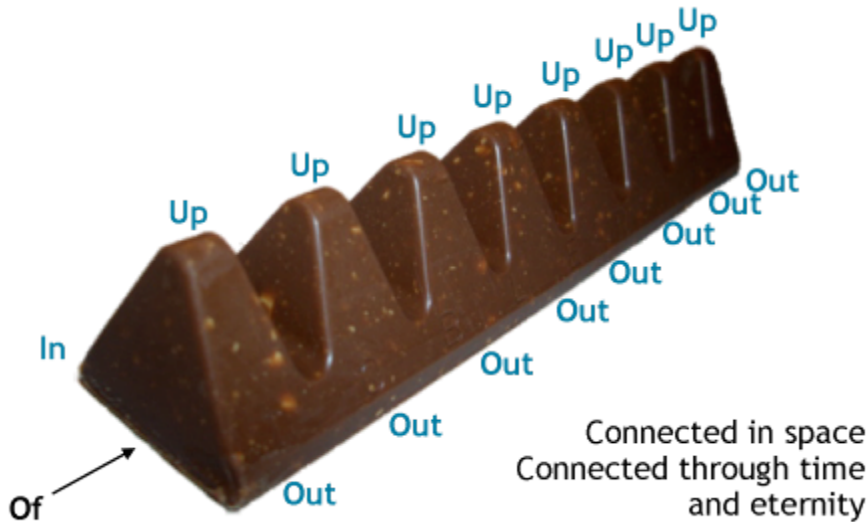
“Yes minister” clip

Fresh expressions clip
(note that two of the four are rural)

1. Why church?

Worship: Community: Mission : Inter-connection

Up: In : Out : Of



(Image taken from mission shaped ministry course)

Think about your church. Imagine breaking up your Toblerone into bits. How much of your energy is how many bits would go into worship? community? mission? inter-connection?

2. Why Biblical (rural) church?

2. a) Festival rural churches

Israel in the OT was primarily rural. How did they gather?

Psalm 122:1-2

¹ *I was very glad when they said to me, "Let us go up to the house of the Lord."*

² *Jerusalem, our feet are standing inside your gates.*

How did they gather? Through a pattern of festivals three times a year.

Deuteronomy 16:14-16

¹³⁻¹⁵ *Observe the Feast-of-Booths for seven days when you gather the harvest from your threshing-floor and your wine-vat. Rejoice at your festival: you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maid, the Levite, the foreigner, and the orphans and widows who live in your neighborhood. Celebrate the Feast to God, your God, for seven days at the place God designates. God, your God, has been blessing you in your harvest and in all your work, so make a day of it—really celebrate!*

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ *All your men must appear before God, your God, three times each year at the place he designates: at the Feast-of-Unraised-Bread (Passover), at the Feast-of-Weeks, and at the Feast-of-Booths. No one is to show up in the Presence of God empty-handed; each*

man must bring as much as he can manage, giving generously in response to the blessings of God, your God.

Luke 2:41ff

Every year Jesus' parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover ... they found him in the Temple seated among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions.

For discussion: In this church - How is worship - community - mission - connection occurring?

2. b) Peter's rural churches

Church as wildflowers - distinctive, bright, sharing that with the world.

1 Peter 1:2

I am sending this letter to you, God's chosen people. You are strangers in the world. You are scattered all over Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

These were rural churches, scattered around vast distances. These were churches with no buildings. People met in homes.

Distinctive

1 Peter 2:9 But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises. He brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Bright (in lifestyle)

1 Peter 2:12 People who don't believe might say you are doing wrong. But lead good lives among them. Then they will see your good works.

Normal Greek word for good is agathos. But the word used is kalos - beautiful, fine, good, noble, a magnificent way of living that marks you out as different."

"In 1 Peter 2 it is envisaged that living well and being good is a significant method of sharing the good news." (John Went, 2009)

Sharing (in voice)

This will lead to questions and "This is evangelism, faith-sharing that is contextual, prompted by the questions that people ask." (John Went, 2009)

1 Peter 3:15 Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect.

For discussion: In this church - How is worship - community - mission - connection occurring?

3. Rural fresh expressions

If 'church' is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other, there is plenty of theological room for diversity of rhythm and style, so long as we have ways of identifying the same living Christ at the heart of every expression of Christian life in common.

Archbishop Rowan Williams, Mission-shaped Church, page vii

Sally Gaze, *Mission-Shaped And Rural: Growing churches in the countryside*, Church Publishing House, provides 14 different examples of rural churches.



For discussion: In these churches - How is worship - community - mission - connection occurring?

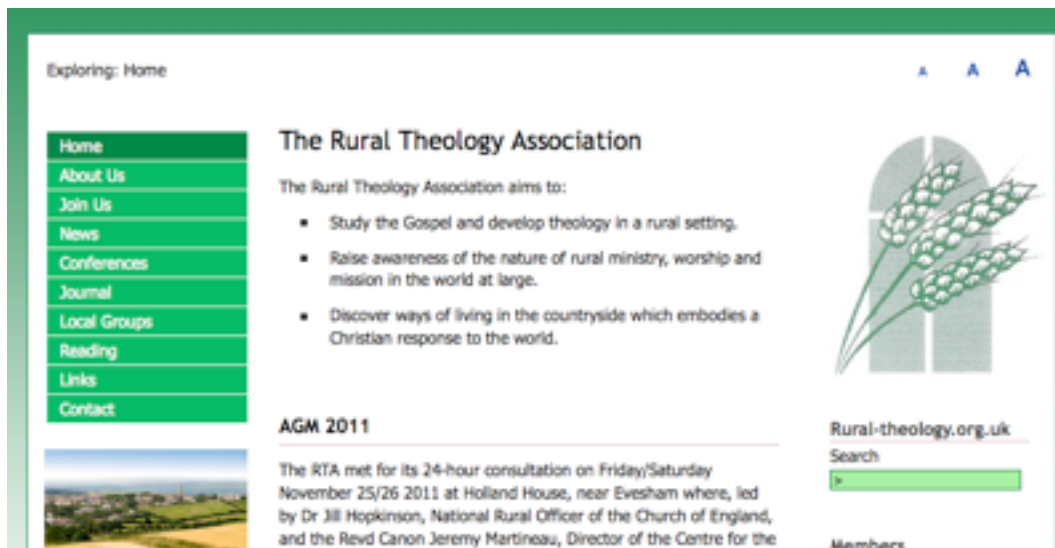
To takehome

Think about your church. Imagine breaking up your Toblerone into bits.

How much of your energy ie how many bits would go into worship? community? mission? inter-connection?

Now distribute the Toblerone segments.

Rural Toblerone time



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The Rural Theology Association

The Rural Theology Association aims to:

- Study the Gospel and develop theology in a rural setting.
- Raise awareness of the nature of rural ministry, worship and mission in the world at large.
- Discover ways of living in the countryside which embodies a Christian response to the world.

AGM 2011

The RTA met for its 24-hour consultation on Friday/Saturday November 25/26 2011 at Holland House, near Evesham where, led by Dr Jill Hopkinson, National Rural Officer of the Church of England, and the Revd Canon Jeremy Martineau, Director of the Centre for the

Rural-theology.org.uk
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Worship:

David Walker, "The Social significance of Harvest Festivals in the countryside: an empirical enquiry among those who attend," *Rural Theology* 7 (1), 3-16, 2009,

Walker surveyed people who came to rural church Harvest festivals. Among the 27 churches he surveyed, 16% were visitors, while 25% of those attending said they attended less than monthly. He concluded that as a mission event (not a activity or a people or a place), "Harvest till reaches out beyond the locality of the congregation." (Walker, 2007).

"a pub landlord suggested hosting a Harvest Festival in his pub after a successful Christmas Carol Service had taken place there." (Rolph, Rolph and Cole, *Methodist Fresh Expressions: Listening to Leaders of Specific Rural Initiatives in England*" *Rural Theology* 9.2 (2011), 139)

Worship question: What one thing we already do in worship that could enhance our mission life?

Community:

David Walker, "Belonging to rural church and society: theological and religious perspectives," *Rural Theology* 4, 85-97, 2006.

Walker 2006 suggests that today, rural folk belong in four different ways:

- activities - organisations and groups in which a person can participate
- events - one occasion at a time
- people - kinship and friendships; particular 'public' people
- places - buildings and spaces

He suggests that our problem is that we are often activity focused - Did these people turn up to our church?

"By presenting 'place', 'event', and 'people' as three significant alternatives it opened the way for a critique of the 'activity' based model that underpins much present writing about

and practice of church ministry and mission but which in some rural parishes has led to significant misunderstandings within congregations, (as for example when weekly churchgoers doubt the commitment and faith of those responding to God in different ways)." (Walker, 2006).

Community question: How can we provide ways to connect that are not only activity, but event, people and place?

Mission:

Leslie J Francis and Sue Pegg, "Psychological type profile of volunteer workers in a rural Christian charity shop" *Rural Theology* 5 (1), 53-56, 2007

They looked at the personality of volunteers who helped a local rural church run a Christian charity shop. Of the 30 people who did the survey, 27 were extroverts, while 3 were introverts.

They conclude that": "While church services seem to provide an environment preferred by introverts, volunteering opportunities within this Christian charity shop seemed to provide an environment attractive to extraverts ... rural Christian charity shops ... extend the range of people in contact with the Christian gospel." (Francis and Pegg, 55)

Mission question: How can we offer ways for people to serve in and with us, as part of mission?

Mission

Inter-connection

Sue Pegg and Lewis Burton, "Local Festivals in two Pennine villages: the reactions of the local Methodist church congregations." *Rural Theology* 4 (1), 11-22, 2006.

They explored two rural communities, who had started secular festivals. One was a jazz festival, another was an an arts festival. They surveyed church folk about their thoughts.

"Five main themes emerge from this study of two Pennine villages which may have wider implications for rural ministry. First, local secular festivals provide evangelistic opportunities for local churches. Second, traditional attitudes and practices can prevent churches making the most of such evangelistic opportunities. Third, some discernment is required as not all secular festivals are equally compatible with Christian values and expectations. Fourth, with open and welcoming attitudes built between the church and the village community at festival time, benefits for both church and village can ensue. Fifth, festivals enable the church to be perceived as an integral part of village life, rather than something apart, if the opportunities created by festivals are securely grasped." (21)

Inter-connection question: How can we make links and connections with other groups?

session two

church and mission

My hunch is that in the Uniting church mission gets the least Toblerone pieces

3 ways to develop your mission. Choose one. Explore it (put some Toblerone energy) through the year. When we meet again at the end of the year, let's share what we have learnt.

But how to start?

First, listen

Four rural fresh expressions were interviewed. They "emphasized the importance of getting to know and understand a community's culture, language and perceived needs rather than assuming that those in the local church know and understand the culture of their community." (Rolph, Rolph and Cole, Methodist Fresh Expressions: Listening to Leaders of Specific Rural Initiatives in England" Rural Theology 9.2 (2011), 134-5)

In one interview, the minister was inspired by "ideas for outreach that came unexpectedly from a non-Christian contact in the village." (136)

How to listen - grab a pack of resources. Invite folk to join you.

Second, discern

"The origins of the four fresh expressions of church examined in this study were many, varied and unexpected. One of the clearest messages from all four locations was that we need to be continuously alert to discerning God already at work in our communities." (136)

How to discern - use the postcards. Collect them, pray over them. Ask each other these questions ...

What is God doing? Where are we seeing the kind of life Christ lived? Where are we seeing healing, forgiving, reconciling, and creating work?

Third, tack

"In all our [four] locations, we were given examples of how one fresh expression of church can give rise to another." (135)

The church in the pub -> film club; the fresh expression -> cookery club for widows; the holiday club -> weekly gatherings for parents and children that included worship.

Tack. Do something for a while. Pause. Take time to listen, discern, then tack again.

3 types of directions in which to tack

3 ways to develop your mission. Choose one. Explore it (put some Toblerone energy) through the year. When we meet again at the end of the year, let's share what we have learnt.

a) Loving

These are the programme and events that show our compassion, listening. For example

- op shop
- kids club

- food banks
- spring clean
- mainly music
- listening

b) **Living**

We are all called individually to be salt and light. Like 1 Peter, to live “kalos” lives that invite questions.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJP35eEKGIs>

For example

- pray for your workers
- form a collective that meets every 2 or 3 months to share challenges and opportunities
- do a Walk across the room or Uniting College Engaging in culturally appropriate mission course in order to explore how to “be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have.”

c) **Creating - collective -**

While living is individual, there are collective ways to keep alive the God presence in our communities. Historically the Uniting Church has employed chaplains. These people enter hospitals, visit schools, chat with Police. By their very presence, they remind people of God. By their listening, they build relationship. As they listen, they bless people’s experiences of God, the “traces of grace.”

Creating invites us to think about how we “chaplain” our community together. For example

- a small church in Hamilton who set up a booth at their local agriculture show, inviting people to light candles as prayers.
- Park prayers - church that worked with council to care for their local park. This included outdoor labyrinth
- Christmas nativity outside church
- Quiet garden beside a rural church
- http://community.thisiscentralstation.com/_Mysterious-paper-sculptures/blog/4991767/126249.html

To takehome

3 ways to develop your mission. Choose one. Explore it (put some Toblerone energy) through the year. When we meet again at the end of the year, let’s share what we have discovered, how God has surprised us.