



Changing community, changing church?

November 2007 saw the Rural Theology Association (RTA) annual get-together, at St. Deiniol's Library, near Wrexham. This meeting was a consultation, with the intention to allow substantial discussion sparked by keynote presentations.

What emerged was less a series of conclusions, than a recognition and affirmation of the spectrum of tensions experienced within contemporary rural communities and their churches.

Some of the tensions highlighted and discussed included:

- Between community members who "know things can't be changed" (often long-standing residents) and those who "think things must be changed" (often newer arrivals)
- Between those committed to using and serving the local church and those prepared to travel to market town or cathedral centre to meet their spiritual and worship needs
- Between regarding the countryside as "pretty", a place for passive appreciation, and seeing it as "productive", a place of employment and economic activity
- Between living as much as possible within the community and needing to access services that are increasingly absent
- Between churches able and willing to use the gifts of all their members, however few, and those happy to depend upon the passion and enthusiasm of the few (or even the "one"), whether lay or ordained
- Between closing church buildings for sound economic and demographic reasons and realising that some of the worshipping community will not then worship elsewhere.

All of us will see hints of our own churches or communities in these descriptions, though in every case they represent the extremes of a spectrum of attitudes or actions. Throughout the discussions, RTA members – across wide geographical and broad church ranges – were able to bring their own experience to bear, providing illustration ... and counter-illustration.

There were no earth-shattering outcomes, and certainly no general solutions for such situations. But two points might be highlighted:

- "One size does not fit all" when considering rural communities and their churches
- Rural community change is happening and it is irreversible

The wise rural church, and its practitioners, will incorporate these as key foundations for ongoing mission and ministry. ■

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Holy Convenience

It's a case of relief all round in Wilby. No longer will parishioners sit crossed legged in St Mary's following the installation of a unique environmentally friendly compostible toilet, a first for the diocese. Developed in the Canadian backwoods, the loo, located in its own inconspicuous wooden hut, needs no water or septic tank, only an electricity supply.

"Wilby's showing the way. This is a very modern and responsible solution to the problem of providing toilet for a medieval building," says Lay Elder Sheila Pipe. "It enormously expands the use the community can make of its church." The green



convenience cost about £2,500.

"We are keen to embrace modern technology into medieval buildings," says James Halsall our DAC Secretary. "It's a cheap option with a minimal footprint, that is removable if necessary. It makes it very much easier to grant permission for it to be installed." ■