



# CULTIVATE

A Newsletter for rural  
parishes across East Sussex  
WINTER 2021

## Welcome to this first edition of CULTIVATE!

It is now two months since I began serving as Priest-in-Charge of Ashburnham with Penhurst & Rural Officer for East Sussex. This joint role is the result of a visionary partnership between the Diocese and the Ashburnham Thanksgiving Trust. The benefits of being rooted in a community, knowing at first hand the challenges of and opportunities for ministry and mission in a rural context, will hopefully enable me to engage, support, understand, advise and get alongside rural parishes across East Sussex in an informed way. During the first six months I have resolved to listen to, and learn from those, living, working and serving rural communities. It's been a real delight and insight to meet with individuals, be it clergy and lay colleagues or those who share a passion and commitment to all things 'rural' across the county. I've been struck by the creativity and dedication of individuals to their local church and community. I've also become aware of the feelings of isolation and hardship that exist in some of our rural communities, often hidden in the stunning scenery in which we live. Hence, the aim of this 'CULTIVATE' Newsletter is to provide information, to raise awareness of both the challenges and opportunities we face as rural communities in East Sussex, to exchange ideas, and to share 'good news' stories which will hopefully inform, inspire and encourage.

The word 'cultivate' means to tend, to care, to prepare, to give special attention to, and to grow. It resonates with our calling as Christians, to cultivate our relationship with God, and to enable others to do the same. At the heart of my faith, and the greatest satisfaction of my ministry, is the attempt to communicate the grace of God and the love of Christ, in whatever context I find myself - **'To know, love and follow Jesus'** personally and to invite others to do the same. Effectively, to 'join in' with what God is already doing in our communities through *'telling and showing the people of Sussex that God loves them and wants the best for their lives, not just now, but for eternity'* (Chichester Diocesan Vision).

I hope you find this Newsletter useful and that we will have an opportunity to meet in person - my contact details are overleaf, please do get it touch, it would be lovely to hear from you. *With thanks and in Christ, Gary Cregeen*

## Celebrating Advent & Christmas Outdoors!

Last year's covid restrictions meant that many of the events leading up and celebrating Christmas needed to be cancelled. It was disappointing not to be able to host the usual Candlelit Carol Services and Christingles in our church buildings. However, the situation did provide an opportunity for churches to explore different ways of celebrating Advent and Christmas, both in relation to content and geography. As a result events were 'taken to' people and, as many were in the open air, the Church became more visible and accessible than might always be the case for some people.. For example, one village held an **'Advent Calendar Trail'** which included window or garden displays in 24 locations around the village. The trail could be followed on foot or via Facebook, as a different display (each organised by individual residents or groups/organisations within the community) emerged each day! A number of villages took their **carol service onto the village green**, with others having different stations or displays depicting the **Nativity Story** (often involving those who would not ordinarily attend church but were keen to be of help), thus the



Carol Service moved around. Elsewhere wooden life-size figures were produced and the local school was invited to create a nativity character - these were then displayed and enjoyed by the children's families as well as others. While a **pop up Carol Service** in one village attracted over 60 people. **How about you?** *It would be great to hear how your village church is celebrating the 'Good News of great joy' which is at the heart of Christmas. If you're able to take any photos please forward these to Gary, our Rural Officer. Thank you!*



## R.A.B.I.'S mental health finding a 'wake-up call' for farming

A recent major survey by the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution has revealed the extent of agriculture's mental health challenges. The farm charity's findings, published last month, have been described by its president, the Duke of Gloucester, as a "wake up call to all who want to build a better future for the farming community".

More than 15,000 responses from farm communities across England and Wales revealed that more than a third of respondents (36%) are "probably or possibly depressed". While more than half of the farming community (52%) experience physical pain and discomfort which has a profound impact on mental health. The major causes cited for stress among the farming community are: regulation, compliance and inspection; the coronavirus pandemic; volatile weather; the loss of subsidies and future trade deals; and rural crime.

Like many in rural communities, respondents to the survey expressed feelings of being often or always lonely, this was especially prominent in younger age groups. Indeed, feelings of isolation and loneliness rose significantly during lockdown, especially when the usual opportunities to socialise with others, at the local livestock market, the agricultural shows or at the local pub, ceased. Also of note, 59% of respondents believe their business is sustainable over the next five years.

*Source: Farmer's Weekly*

## Café Church for Farmers and Growers!

Recognising the isolation and challenges felt by many in the farming community, while also affirming the importance of what farmers and growers are doing and a desire to help them find solutions, compelled one local Vicar to set up a 'Café-style Church for Farmers & Growers' at Wartling.



The Rev Richard Steven has a rural background as a Tenant Farmer near Sevenoaks in Kent until the age of 45 when he was ordained into the C of E. Because of the vital importance he sees in the farming, horticultural and related industries he has held services for those working in these sectors, and those interested in them, since before the pandemic struck. A new bi monthly Café-style Service was launched recently at Wartling Church to assist farmers and growers of all kinds. The purpose is to "help in the sharing of wisdom & Christian support in these complicated and challenging times, and to share the Gospel" says Revd. Richard. **The Next Rural Café at Wartling is on Sunday 16 January 2022 at 3.30 pm. Why not pop along?**

*If your parish hosts outreach events or would like to explore possibilities please let the Rural Officer know!*



PLOUGH SUNDAY is a traditional celebration at the beginning of the agricultural year which has seen a revival in recent years. A growing number of churches celebrate Plough Sunday after the twelve days of Christmas, on the first Sunday after Epiphany. This year it falls on SUNDAY 9 JANUARY 2022. Although the nature of farming has changed over the centuries Plough Sunday is seen as a way of generally celebrating farming, the work of farmers and asking the Lord of the Harvest to bless the labours of those who tend the land. When local churches celebrate Plough Sunday it is hoped that those who work on the land will sense God's blessing and know that they are supported in that. *If you are celebrating Plough Sunday please send any photos to the Rural Officer for East Sussex (details below).*



## HAILSHAM LIVESTOCK MARKET CAROL SERVICE

led by Revd Gary Cregeen,  
Rural Officer for East Sussex

**FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER AT 7 pm**  
(mince pies and mulled wine served from 6.30 pm)

*Proceeds to R.A.B.I. & FCN*

RURAL RESOURCE MORNING - SATURDAY 19 MARCH 2022

## 'THE CHURCHYARD : a means of outreach?'

In many communities the churchyard is a 'window' to the local church, yet few regard them as a means of outreach and mission. This resource morning, at Ashburnham Place, will help us to know not only how to care for 'God's Acre' but to share through it.

More details to follow. **Book the date!**

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