



CULTIVATE

A Newsletter for rural
parishes across East Sussex

SUMMER 2026



Welcome to this latest edition of CULTIVATE!

"Make hay while the sun shines" - this familiar proverb is about seizing the moment - acting while conditions are right, because they won't last forever. Our farmers know this only too well, not least in ensuring they cut and dry hay 'while the sun shines' before the rain returns and spoils it. Needless to say, harvesting locally has been well underway for some time and it's rain that is now needed. Farmers tell me they are having to feed their livestock on winter feed, as grass for grazing has ceased growing, and this is a real concern. That said, our wine producers anticipate an even more successful year than last year's bumper grape harvest. Yet, despite unpredictable and conditions the business of sowing, planting and nurturing continues, and this 'act of faith' each year can be an example to us. As soon as harvest is over farmers focus on establishing crops for the next year - even though weather and commodity prices may well be against them, they 'press on', not allowing past disappointments, failure, or fears for the future, to delay their plans. In essence, they 'sow in faith' and as Christians we are called to do the same. In the case of those of us living in the countryside, it's about **'Being Rural and Being Fruitful'**, being faithful and trusting God will bring about a harvest: *'Even so, Lord, quickly come, bring thy final harvest home; gather thou thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin. There, forever purified, in thy presence to abide; come, with all thine angels, come, raise the glorious harvest home!'* Amen!

Wishing you a blessed summer! Gary Cregeen
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To submit rural news items or if you wish to be added to our mailing list for future editions of Cultivate and Rural Events, please email:

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CHICHESTER DIOCESAN RURAL CONFERENCE

'BEING RURAL : BEING FRUITFUL'

Friday 9th October 2026 (9.45 am to 4 pm)
at The AgriCentre, Plumpton College, BN7 3AE

Keynote Speaker: Revd Dr Mark Scarlata
author of 'Wine, Soil, and Salvation...'

Have you signed up for this year's RURAL CONFERENCE yet? If not, then either use this QR Code or follow the details on page 3 and book your place... and invite others to come along too! **'BEING RURAL : BEING FRUITFUL'** promises to encourage, inspire, and provide practical advice and ideas, on how we can be both rural and fruitful in our shared mission and ministry. More details can be found on pages 3 and 4 of this edition of Cultivate, including the planned Breakout Groups, offering an opportunity to hear, discuss and engage with those in similar rural settings. **'BEING RURAL : BEING FRUITFUL' is open to all.**



Rural Missions is an independent charity dedicated to supporting rural churches at no cost. They aim to serve churches across the UK to think and be more missional within their own communities, recognising that every context is different. A representative of Rural Missions will be at the forthcoming Rural Conference; however, why not visit their website and see if they could be of help to you? Visit: www.ruralmissions.org.uk

WHAT'S IN YOUR HANDS? Rural Mission Learning Review

"What's in Our Hands?" was commissioned by the Church of England's Vision & Strategy Team, to understand the opportunities and challenges of rural mission. Focusing on projects in eight rural dioceses the review, completed last year, analyses lessons learned from six Strategic Development funded projects and 4 ongoing projects, and explores how these could contribute to the church's vision for rural areas and how to assess their achievements. The review also highlights the importance of discipleship, community engagement, vocation, and collaboration in rural mission. To view a helpful 45 minute video, and the actual Report visit: <https://churchsupporthub.org/all-resources/learning-review-on-strategy-for-rural-mission/>



CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

DANEHILL: Josh Watson,
*Families, Children & Youth
Worker*



A while ago, our churchwarden and I discovered that we both enjoyed playing board games, some classics like Monopoly but mostly games with miniatures to paint, like Warhammer. We started meeting regularly to play and chat, and over time we found a few other guys that were into those kinds of games too. These haven't been people from church but those we've bumped into at work, or on the school run or in the park with our kids. We invited them to join us, and now we all meet together most weeks to play.

This is something that is growing organically, through personal invites, and has become a key community space for those of us who come. It's a place of genuine friendship; besides playing games and chilling out we often end up talking about life, sharing parts of our lives and, those of us who are Christian, sharing that part too. It's all very relaxed and has become a highlight of all of our weeks and something we're happy to make the time for. We keep finding more people in our village who are keen to join us, so it's looking like we might need to book a bigger venue!

There is something easily accessible about playing board games, and a 'Board Games Evening' doesn't take too much organising. In our case it is a gathering for men, but could be for anyone. Here it's been especially popular for Dads, as it's something that's easy to squeeze into an evening, and provides a sometimes much needed social connection.

At the moment, this group's main focus is on growing a genuine community and building relationships, but it's also showing itself to be a space where Christians and non Christians meet around another shared interest. Where a trip to church on Sunday might be too much for some, an evening sitting around a table with friends who happen to be Christian feels natural. Especially in the interconnected web of rural living, we all cross paths at other points of the week, and an invite to a church BBQ or Sunday service is more welcome when it comes from a friend.

SEDLSCOMBE

& WHATLINGTON: Revd John Hawkins, Rector

Bible Study in a Rural Community Before he left our diocese, Bishop Martin declared that this year would be the **Year of Matthew**, marking the beginning of a four-year programme, *Living the Mystery of Faith* (2026–2030). I have to admit that ideas from 'the centre' do not always seem easy to apply in a small rural parish with an older congregation. However, one aspect did catch my attention: the opportunity to help people become more familiar with the Bible. Increasingly, I meet people who do not even have a Bible at home.

People have very different views about the Bible. Some see it as the inspired word of God, others as an important historical and cultural collection of writings, while some dismiss it as outdated or simply fiction. Whatever our starting point, it is hard to deny that the Bible has shaped our history, our language and our faith.

During this church year, our Sunday readings come mainly from St Matthew's Gospel. A weekly sermon can only touch briefly on each passage, so I invited anyone who was interested to join a series of Friday evening Bible study sessions. Matthew's Gospel is particularly well suited to study, as it combines stories about Jesus with clear blocks of teaching. I was delighted when a dozen people came along. We met for five evenings during Lent, and I prepared notes for each session so that anyone who missed a week could catch up. I even wondered whether refreshments would be needed, but in the end they hardly seemed necessary. People came because they genuinely wanted to learn more about the Scriptures. What surprised me most was what happened next. Once we had started meeting together, people asked if we could continue. We now gather in someone's home and have recently been exploring the Book of Esther. It is a book that many people hardly know, yet it tells a remarkable story of courage, wisdom and faithfulness. Although God's name is never mentioned, we discovered how doing the right thing, even in difficult circumstances, can make a profound difference.

We shall take a short break over the summer while people are away on holiday, but I hope this small group will continue to grow in both confidence and faith. It is encouraging to see people in our rural communities discovering the riches of the Scriptures together, and I look forward to seeing where our next study takes us.

WOOLLY WONDERS AT WEST WEALD:

Carol Pickering, Rural ALM.



"God gave me the gift of crochet in 2013 when I was first diagnosed with ME and was in a period of enforced rest. I didn't think much about how God might want me to use His gift until during lockdown when, whilst listening to an online sermon the words **"What's in your hand?"** spoken to Moses, became a turning point. In my hand at that moment was a crochet hook! I started thinking about how my gift could be used in our small village & began to make displays for our post box!

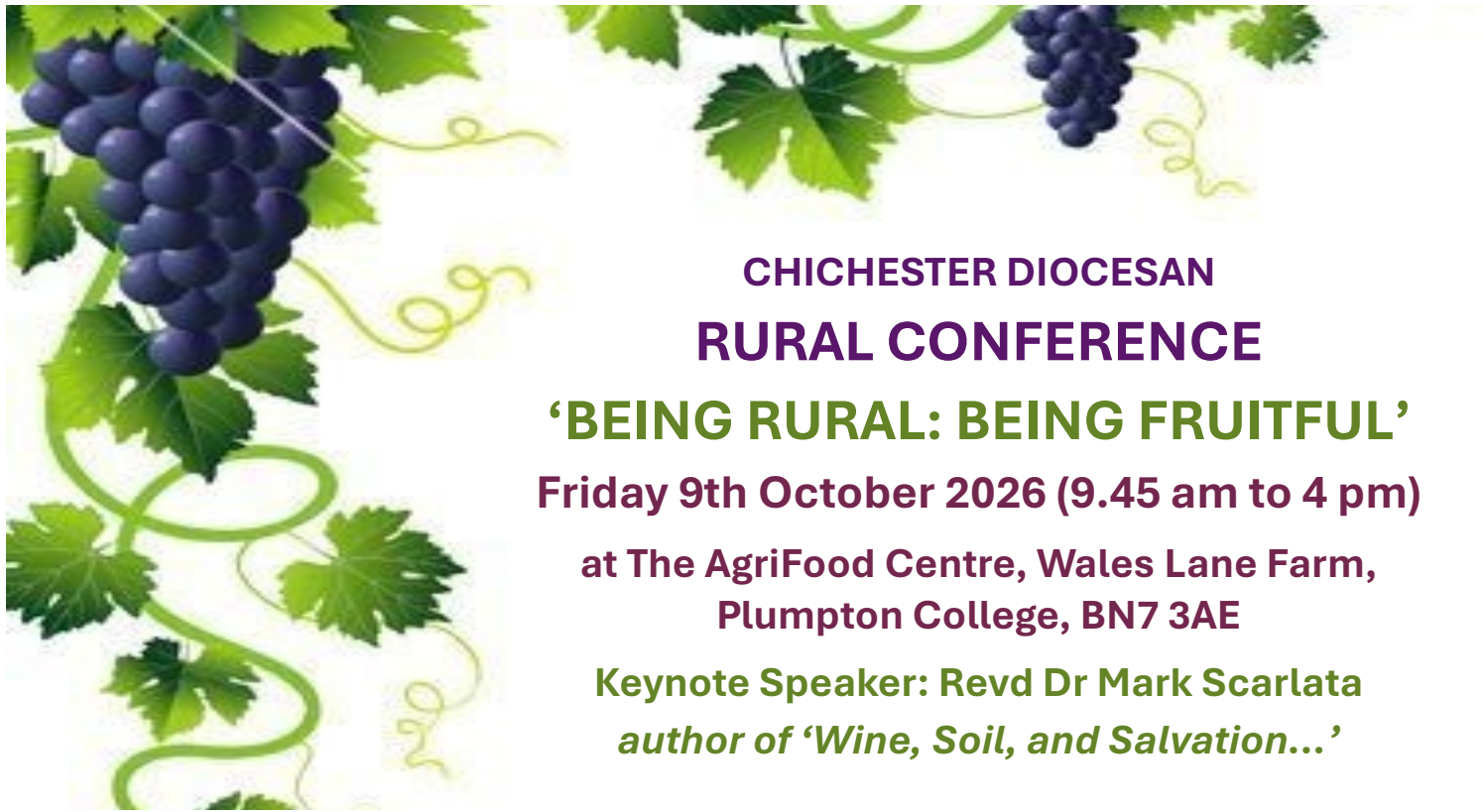
People said they enjoyed seeing them, so I continued until in early 2024 I was thinking about ideas for the year, especially for Remembrance Day & my husband suggested making a carpet of poppies for the village. Unbeknown to him, I had been thinking about the same idea for some time and had disregarded it as I knew it wasn't possible for me to make it on my own, however within a few months the "Crochet Gang" (subsequently renamed Woolly Wonders!) was born, as I spread the word that crocheters, knitters and sewers were required for a village project!

I ensured there was a job for everyone - I offered crochet lessons to anyone wanting to learn, and made sure that others were involved in the sewing of the poppies to the display net as well as encouraging all levels of knitters and crocheters to be involved. By the time we finished over 40 people, young & old, (and to my delight some men too) had contributed & the village had taken the project as its focus.

During those weeks many conversations were had and people shared more of themselves. Many, like me, had been through difficult times and hurts, and found a place to belong and feel their contribution was valued. Friendships were made and community grew, as our poppy carpet took shape with 3,000 poppies.

On Remembrance Day 2024 over 70 people stood in silence by the poppy carpet displayed in the village, that was made by members of the village in order that we could remember those from our village who laid down their lives.

As we stood, I thought about how God had used something very small and seemingly insignificant to create a moment which many felt but probably couldn't put into words. A community together and united."



CHICHESTER DIOCESAN RURAL CONFERENCE

‘BEING RURAL: BEING FRUITFUL’

Friday 9th October 2026 (9.45 am to 4 pm)

**at The AgriFood Centre, Wales Lane Farm,
Plumpton College, BN7 3AE**

Keynote Speaker: Revd Dr Mark Scarlata
author of ‘Wine, Soil, and Salvation...’

Wine holds a powerful and multifaceted symbolism in Scripture, reflecting both the goodness of God’s creation and the complexity of the human experience. It often represents joy and celebration and is associated with feasts and weddings, symbolising the abundance and happiness that come from God’s blessings. Wine symbolises God’s covenant blessings, and carries deep spiritual significance, often representing the blood of Christ - a powerful symbol of sacrifice and salvation.

This year’s Rural Conference, **‘BEING RURAL : BEING FRUITFUL’** will pick up on these themes from a rural perspective. For example, how does the vine’s planting, growth, pruning, and tendering relate to rural ministry? And how do we create the best spiritual ‘soil’ to enable rural churches to thrive? As well as a keynote speaker, a variety of rural practitioners will facilitate a number of Breakout Groups, focussed on the practical outworking of these themes. These will provide an opportunity for all, lay and ordained, who have a heart for rural mission and ministry to be inspired and encouraged.

The venue for this year’s Conference is Plumpton College, itself an award-winning producer of wine and celebrating its 100th anniversary. Hence, the Conference will include a visit to the viticulture (wine-making) centre, as well as wine tasting! The Conference will conclude with a short Holy Communion Service.

COST: £35 per person* (covers refreshments on arrival and before departure, a buffet lunch, wine-tasting, admin. costs, etc)

**We do not want anyone to miss out! If cost is an issue, contact the Rural Officer (see details below)*

For more information please contact:

Revd Gary Cregeen, Rural Officer For East Sussex

Tel: 07749 904887 Email: Gary.Cregeen@chichester.anglican.org

To book visit: [Trybooking: Rural Conference](https://www.trybooking.com/uk/events/landing/114927)
(<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/events/landing/114927>)



RURAL CONFERENCE

‘BEING RURAL: BEING FRUITFUL’

PROGRAMME

9.45 am	Registration & Refreshments
10.15 am	Welcome, Introductions & Opening Prayer
10.30 am	KEYNOTE ADDRESS: ‘FINDING MY ROOTS...’ - <i>Revd Dr Mark Scarlata</i>
11.40 am	Introducing Winegrowing and Wine Production at Plumpton College
11.50 am	Breakout Groups and Vine Centre/Land Visits
12.55 pm	Lunch
1.45 pm	Breakout Groups and Vine Centre/Land Visits
2.50 pm	Wine-tasting
3.30 pm	Shortened Holy Communion in St Michael’s Church, at the heart of College
4.00 pm	Final Blessing

BREAKOUT GROUP 1: PLANTING & ROOTEDNESS - Revd Canon Anne Dunlop

How do images of the vine and being rooted help our faith and cultivate rootedness in the wider community.

BREAKOUT GROUP 2: GROWING & PRUNING - Bob Goody (Rural Missions)

What can we do to support growth in our rural churches? What might we need to prune (let go of) in order to grow?

BREAKOUT GROUP 3: ABIDING & HARVESTING - Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

What does abiding (constant presence and connecting) and harvesting look like in rural churches?

BREAKOUT GROUP 4: FEASTING & CELEBRATING - Revd Tom Pelham

How might we include these more in our local communities, i.e. agricultural celebrations, such as Rogation and Easter. Also, signs and symbols of wine in the Holy Communion.

BREAKOUT GROUP 5: WINE-MAKING & THE SOIL - Revd Dr Mark Scarlata & Revd Elly McKay-Smith

Half hour visit to Plumpton’s Viticulture Centre and half hour outdoors, reflecting on soil and the balance of life between plants, microbes, carbon, etc. especially as a model for church. Also, the miracle of life that happens underground before a plant ever comes to the surface. How might this encourage us when growth is often unseen and slow?

Prior to the Conference decide which TWO BREAKOUT GROUPS you would like to join, and sign up on arrival - numbers in each Breakout Group will be limited, so it’ll be a case of ‘first come, first served’.

OCTOBER - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH: The Hidden Reality of Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas

When we talk about domestic abuse, most people picture city life, close neighbours, public services, and quick escape routes. But what happens when that same abuse is unfolding in a remote village, away from the nearest town, and without a soul around for miles? Such circumstances can be a breeding ground for what is known as ‘Captive & Controlled Domestic Abuse’ where victims feel isolated, unsupported and unprotected. The sad fact is, domestic abuse exists everywhere, including rural areas, and its effects are often far-reaching. It is important to be aware of what is going on and to understand the challenges faced by those affected.

Abuse in remote areas is frequently a subtle, hidden force rather than simply a violent act. Many people think that rural areas provide a secure haven because of their beautiful scenery and connected communities. For individuals who are abused, however, the situation is quite different. Lack of privacy, lack of support options, and transportation barriers make it more difficult for victims to escape their situation. In reality, survivors of abuse in rural areas frequently encounter more barriers when attempting to get assistance. In tightly connected communities where privacy is limited and people are frequently more focused on maintaining their reputations than resolving underlying problems, the stigma associated with domestic violence is intensified.



For more information contact the National Rural Crime Network (NRCN), who provided this article.