

Younger and Deeper



‘What would you say to setting up a residential community of 20s-30s in Charlecote’s vicarage?’

Two years ago this was the question Coventry Diocese’s Archdeacon Missioner posed to me. I was half-way through ordination training and the question was completely unexpected. My response was, ‘Are you setting me up for a fall?!’ While I was excited by the proposal, I was also concerned about the magnitude of such a task. I had previously formed, led and lived in communities. I had been involved in pioneer and young adult ministry. I had discerned a calling to rural ministry. But could I really play a part in re-imagining rural mission and ministry?

Thankfully others had faith! After much negotiation and many set-backs, I moved to Charlecote, five miles from Warwick, in July 2016. The Field Community officially formed when my first community member moved in at the beginning of 2017.

Why ‘The Field’? Because ‘the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field’ (Matthew 13:44). From the outset I was keen that people should not perceive the community to be the treasure, as if we were a solution to declining numbers in pews. My hope and prayer is that those God calls into the community, and those affected by our life and witness, may discover the treasure of faith and give up everything to follow Jesus.

Through a life of hospitality, generosity and humility, the vision for The Field is to grow the rural church younger and deeper. This means we are seeking out 20s and 30s who are not yet disciples (mainly through chaplaincy in the local college specialising in land-based studies, ministry in the local primary schools and contact with wedding couples) and endeavouring to affirm and inspire the local Christians; many of whom are weary after years of faithful service, and fearful for the future viability of their churches. Already I have been surprised by the difference we have been able to make just by living, praying and ministering together. Being young, enthusiastic, and mission-minded counts for more than I ever imagined!

We pray regularly for the local churches and villages, and respond to requests from the local churches for support. We are also exploring ways of being church in the vicarage. Currently we are hosting a fortnightly dinner and discussion group for people interested in Christian community, and are contemplating launching ‘Wild Church’ in the extensive, over-grown vicarage garden.

I am not on my own in all this. I have external advisors experienced in community life and ministry who check in with the community regularly. Also, I am a member of Acceler8, a team of pioneers in Coventry Diocese funded by a grant from the Church Commissioners and tasked with discipling people in their 20s and 30s. The majority of the team are based in urban areas, so I have the privilege and challenge of representing a rural perspective in the diocese, while being given permission and freedom to explore new ways of ministering in the countryside.

My hope is that more people will come to hear of this initiative, God will be calling the right people to join The Field, the money I’ve recently received from a local trust to fund a college chaplaincy intern will be put to good use and the community will flourish under God’s direction.

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