Agricultural Festivals
Resources for churches, youth groups and schools
Introduction

This resources pack has the following aims:

• Firstly, enabling rural churches to celebrate the four agricultural festivals which are included in Common Worship: Times and Seasons, by providing a set of resources including details of where to find further information.

Those four agricultural festivals are Plough Sunday, Rogation, Lammas and Harvest. Most churches will be accustomed to celebrating Harvest, but might be less familiar with the other festivals.

• Secondly, encouraging urban and suburban churches in our diocese to engage with rural issues, reconnect with food and farming and appreciate the life and work of our rural parishes.

The Diocese of Chelmsford describes itself as ‘The Church of England in Essex and East London’. Rural, urban and suburban churches and communities are held together by this shared belonging. But there can be a lack of understanding of the realities, challenges and opportunities within the rural context. Essex as a county has a relatively large area of land (72%) that is classified as rural, of which 69% is farmland. This is made up of 2,323 holdings covering some 250,000 hectares of agricultural land, with a significant proportion given over to the cultivation of arable crops. It is also one of the most densely populated counties with some 1.9 million people.

• Finally, many churches from both rural and urban settings are increasingly thinking about environmental issues, signing up to Eco Church and wanting to mark Environment Sunday, Creation Time and other special times that focus on our relationship with the earth, our ‘Common Home’. It is hoped that the resources in this pack and the links to other materials, will facilitate such explorations and celebrations.

This pack has been put together and trialled by:

Revd Janet Nicholls, Rural Adviser and Agricultural Chaplain, Diocese of Chelmsford
Mark Tiddy, Bradwell Area Youth Adviser, Diocese of Chelmsford
The Venerable Elizabeth Snowden, Archdeacon of Chelmsford
This resource has been split into 5 documents consisting of an introductory document and then one document per agricultural festival (Plough Sunday, Rogation, Lammas and Harvest).

Each agricultural festival document contains an overview of the festival, some suggested resources for worship and resources for using with children and young people.

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My family farmed in Essex for 48 years, providing me with a personal insight into the realities of farming and a deep commitment to those who work our land to produce our food.

In my role as Agricultural Chaplain I visit farms and agricultural organisations throughout the diocese, providing pastoral care for the farming community as well as speaking and preaching at events. I contribute regularly to the BBC Essex Sunday Morning programme, including a ‘Faith on the Farm’ series recorded on a farm throughout the seasons. These opportunities aim to encourage people to think more deeply about the links between faith, food and farming.

I seek to raise the profile of the Agricultural Festivals by organising large diocesan services and supporting individual parishes in celebrating Plough Sunday, Rogation, Lammas and Harvest. These festivals praise God for the great gift of fertile land to feed humankind and hope to affirm, guide and strengthen our farmers and producers.

The bible records events in the lives of many people who were deeply connected to the land. Their lives were shaped by the annual agricultural calendar and we sense their perception of God amidst their daily activity. In celebrating the Agricultural Festivals today, our churches provide the opportunity for our generation to connect with the annual cycle of the land and, in turn, to personally sense God’s activity in the midst of this.

In the joyful celebration of Plough Sunday, Rogation, Lammas and Harvest in churches, schools and youth groups across our diocese, I pray many will be nourished and sustained by the riches of both physical and spiritual food.

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My grandfather, born in 1895, was a farmer born into a family of farmers. The countryside and life in general was very different from that of today. Nowadays in Britain our supermarkets are stocked with an incredible choice of food. In our towns and cities we are surrounded by places to eat and drink plus a vast array of fast food outlets. Yet we are ever more divorced from the where and how our food is produced. Food is essential to life, but most of us have very little awareness or knowledge of the realities of food growing and production.

Chris Elliott from Queen's University Belfast delivered the 2017 City Food Lecture at London Guild Hall. His subject was ‘Does it matter where our food comes from?’

During his lecture he explored three interrelated questions:
Does it matter where in the world our food is grown/produced? Does it matter what type of agriculture systems are employed to produce the food? Does it matter that there is a disconnect between citizens and where their food comes from? He concluded, ‘We must have a food supply system that we trust in. We must trust all the multiple actors that play a role in providing our families with food each day of the week. Thus to have a national food supply system that is based on transparent, short, sustainable and ethically sound supply chains must be a national priority.
(a pdf of his lecture can be downloaded at http://www.cityfoodlecture.com)

At the heart of our faith is a shared meal ‘The Eucharist’. Before the prayer of consecration we present bread and wine, both of which are produced from crops grown in Essex. How do we make the bridge in our thinking from our act of worship to the context in which we live? In doing this how do we also begin to develop Christian perspectives about the land on which we live, the places where our food is grown and produced and our consumption of it. In other words, does it matter to us as Christians where our food comes from?

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This pack contains a series of resources for use with children and young people.

These resources have been put together by Mark Tiddy who works as the Bradwell Area Youth Adviser for the Diocese of Chelmsford. Prior to moving to the Diocese in 2016 Mark trained as a youth worker in London and has worked as a youth worker in both rural and urban settings and has a passion for resourcing churches to work with young people and to support them as they do this.

Mark’s role in the Diocese is to encourage and support ministry amongst young people (those aged 11-25) across the Bradwell area and he works with individual churches and groups of parishes to help them explore this further and can also offer specific training for those working with young people.

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Primary School Visit Resources - Introduction
Many churches have close links with their local communities and local primary school(s).

These relationships can provide great opportunities for churches to help deepen links between schools and others in the local community. One ideal way to do this in a rural context is through connections with local farmers and the agricultural year.

This pack contains 3 sessions which provide a selection of ideas for a local church to engage with their local primary school at 3 key times in the agricultural year (Plough Sunday, Rogation and Harvest). These sessions are designed to last around an hour (with the exception of the harvest session) and can be delivered to one or two year groups depending on the size of the school throughout the year.

The ideal way to use these sessions is to focus on one year group throughout the year (starting with Plough Sunday), this will enable a group of children to journey through the agricultural year together and see the link between the different festivals.

All Age Service/Messy Church Service Resources - Introduction
Lammas falls within August and therefore all schools and many children’s/youth groups have broken up for the summer. With this in mind we have put together a list of ideas/activities for Lammas that could be used as part of a Messy Church, Holiday Club or All Age Communion.

Youth Group Resources - Introduction
There are 3 sessions contained in this pack for exploring Plough Sunday, Rogation and Harvest with young people aged 11-16.

These resources can be used as part of a Sunday School session or mid-week youth group and aim to help young people develop an understanding of these Christian feast days but also to explore how they fit into their own lives.
Further Resources

Websites
Anglican Communion Environmental Network
http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/resources/acen-document-library.aspx

Church of England Common Worship Resources
https://www.churchofengland.org

Arthur Rank Centre - http://germinate.net/
The website of the Arthur Rank Centre. In the resources section on this website there are prayer and liturgical resources. The magazine Country Way contains resources and information for rural congregations which can also be downloaded.

The Agriculture and Theology project - http://honeyandthistles.uk

The John Ray Initiative is an educational charity. Briefing papers and studies are available to download from the website.

Farming Community Network - http://www.fcn.org.uk/resources
The home of Farming Community Network which provides support to those from the farming community. The site also includes briefing papers about agriculture.

A Rocha - http://arocha.org.uk/resources/environment-resource-packs/ including a pack produced for 2013 Just Food? This resource pack includes short films, bible studies, sermon material and resources for use with children. It provides material both for worship and for theological reflection.

Books
Atkinson D, Renewing the Face of the Earth (Canterbury Press 2008)
Ball B. C, The Landscape below Soil, Soul and Agriculture (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications 2013)
Boockless D, Planet Wise (Nottingham, England: IVP 2008)
Burgess R, Winter liturgical resources for November, December and January (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications 2016)
Burgess R, Bare Feet and Buttercups (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications 2008)
Deane-Drummond C, Eco-Theology (London: DLT 2008)
Dow, G, Leading Rural Churches For Growth (Cambridge, Grove Books 2015)
Jones C. and Martin J, Honey and Thistles, Biblical Wisdom for the renewal of farming (Agriculture and Theology Project 2015)
Orme R, Rural Children Rural Church Mission Opportunities in the Countryside (London: Church house Publishing 2007)
Spencer N.and White R, Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living (London: SPCK 2007)
The Staffordshire Seven, Seasonal Worship and the Countryside (London: SPCK 2003)
Valerio R, L is for Life Style (Leicester, England: IVP 2004)
Acknowledgements
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Common Worship: Times and Seasons is published by Church House Publishing and available via www.chpublishing.co.uk and is also available on the Church of England website www.churchofengland.org

Other liturgical material is adapted from resources found on www.germinate.net

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