

# Wakefield Diocese – rural and farming officers

## Revd Dennis Handley



My name is Dennis Handley, and my area of responsibility is farming. I do this alongside my work as vicar with Ripponden with Rishworth, and Barkisland with West Scammonden. This fits in well as the parishes under my care have many farming communities within them. This has proved extremely helpful for it has enabled me to balance out the need to come up to speed with the current issues facing farmers and the farming industry, with the need to see at first hand the practical effects these issues are having on the farming industry, by visiting and talking to farmers.

Recently, my main focus has been the current DEFRA (Department for Farming and Rural Affairs) policies, such as:

- The Rural Strategies 2004
- Single Payment Scheme 2005
- The Environmental Stewardship Scheme

One of my dreams connected with having responsibility for farming is to discover an old MG TD in a barn somewhere, in desperate need of TLC. Please let me know if you find one!

## Revd Hugh Baker

My name is Hugh Baker and I am the other half of the Wakefield Diocese Rural Officers team an appointment that I fit into my work as Vicar of Middlestown with Netherton. Dennis, the other Rural Officer, has the task of keeping an eye on issues that directly affect the farming community in the diocese and I refer you to his introduction for more on that. My brief on the other hand is "Rural Affairs". Broadly speaking this is a catch all term which recognises that far more goes on in the countryside than can be accounted for by looking simply at farming and farmers. In fact farmers account for only 1.2% of the rural population. Many rural communities these days are dominated by commuters, those networking from home, the retired and second homeowners. The countryside too is a resource that is used by more than simply those who live in it. Government recognition of the many changes affecting the countryside can be seen in the recent reorganisation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to the new Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Rural living and the countryside in general have much to attract and have a natural draw for many people. The quality of life in the countryside under the right circumstances can be very good, but as we can see in farming in general rural life can also present many challenges and problems. Lack of affordable housing, isolation, poor public transport, lack of access to amenities, breakdown in traditional community structures, closure of Post Offices and local shops are just a few of the things that can make rural life difficult for some who live there. Many of these issues are being given a high priority by Government and much is being made of Rural Regeneration. Rural Community projects are being encouraged and given financial support.

In the midst of all this rapid change, many challenges and recent opportunity is the church with her mission to the poor and marginalized and outreach to all. Part of my role as I see it is to help the church in this rural mission and outreach by identifying relevant issues and helping to bring research, and information about resources to those who would benefit. This web site, I hope, will prove to be a very valuable tool for this.