

Village Hope's aim is to proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in the villages of Britain, in order to establish effective Christian witness. We seek to encourage and enable village churches in Bible teaching, prayer, worship and evangelism.

Though the vision tarry...it will surely come

By Peter Carruthers, Executive Director

Our vision for Village Hope's future is built around 'prayer', 'understanding', 'teams' and 'centres'.

I first shared this vision at our annual conference in April last year. Then, in last Autumn's issue of Village Link, I described how we had begun to put some content into this framework through several projects and partnerships.

Now, almost a year since the conference, I report on both the progress we have made and the setbacks we have encountered as we have sought to move forward in the direction we believe the Lord has called us.

Prayer

Prayer is seldom a 'best seller' and prayer events seldom 'sell out'. Nevertheless, we are encouraged that our objective of placing sustained, shared prayer at the centre of our work is beginning to be achieved. The Village Hope Fellowship, which is at heart a prayer fellowship, was launched last autumn and now has more than fifty members. Tim Prince coordinates this and provides a monthly 'Prayer Framework', with morning and evening prayers and short articles by Fellowship members. The Fellowship also has its own online forum - a place to share insights, experiences and prayer needs. If you are not already a member, then please consider joining.

Hope for the Countryside, a partnership between Village Hope, Agricultural Christian Fellowship and World Prayer Centre, aims to mobilise and resource prayer for rural Britain. It was launched in November 2017 with a prayer gathering at the farm of our trustee, John Plumb. Since then, Top Barn, the ministry of David and Di Harper, has joined the partnership. From April 2018, we plan to issue a monthly 'Seeds of Prayer' prayer guide. If you would like to receive this regularly, then please contact us. In addition, we continue to provide a focus for sharing prayer needs among our prayer partners via 'Village Prayer', also issued monthly.

As Spring struggles to take hold this year, we hope this edition of 'Village Link' will lift your spirit as we seek to continue our witness for Jesus Christ in the villages. Our annual conference is just around the corner, and we would appreciate prayer for good fellowship and for good weather!

I have heard many Christians saying



that this past year has been one of struggle, where nothing of spiritual value seems to come easily and the horizon ahead appears to be darkening. The Bible encourages us to keep looking to God, walking with

perseverance and praying without giving up. It is imperative that we strengthen our relationship with God and with each other at such times. May this edition both strengthen and encourage you as you seek to be a witness for Him wherever He has placed you.

Tim Prince, Editor

Three monthly prayer guides might seem somewhat confusing, but each covers different ground and has a different emphasis. The 'prayer framework' provides a basis for the daily prayer of a growing Fellowship. 'Seeds of prayer' addresses broad issues in the countryside and aims to mobilise and resource a wide community of prayer. The emphasis of 'Village Prayer' is on individuals, families and churches associated with Village Hope.

Understanding

God's people always need to 'understand the times and know what to do' (1 Chronicles 12: 32), and developing and communicating an understanding of rural church, communities and mission is an important part of our remit. This encompasses studying biblical principles and precedents, identifying examples of 'good practice', and collecting 'good-news' stories. Over the last year or so, we have developed these areas and shared our findings internally and via Village Link and our annual conferences. At this April's conference, we plan to launch our new website, as a platform to share these insights and signpost resources for rural mission and ministry. We recognise that there is still a gap

in intelligence as to the condition of rural communities and churches and the approaches to mission that are working best, and we are working with others to seek ways to plug this gap.

Teams

Mobilising 'apostolic teams' to support and strengthen rural churches is at the centre of our vision, but realising it has proved very challenging. As I reported last Autumn, we had begun to develop partnerships to take this forward in Hampshire and rural Wales. However, our partners, in both cases, have since concluded that they are not ready for the planned developments and have put things on hold. Nevertheless, we remain committed to the vision and convinced of its urgency. As I shared in the last Conference edition of Village Link, we believe that the Lord wants to deploy His 'eleventh-hour workers' (Matthew 20: 1-16) to work in His 'white fields' (John 4: 35-38), to connect 'Antiochs' (Acts 13: 1-3) and 'Macedonias' (Acts 16: 9-10). So, we are now pursuing new ways to make this happen. If your church or group might benefit from a small team coming alongside to support your mission and ministry, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Centres

We remain committed to our vision of centres of prayer, study, training and equipping springing up across rural Britain and continue to work with our associates and friends to identify and resource rural 'beacon churches'.

Team and trustees

Our Mission Enabler, Joe Farnand, left us at the end of last year and is now pursuing new ministry directions. In January this year, we said goodbye to our chairman Tim Shelley, after more than ten years as trustee and then chairman of FEBV/Village Hope. Tim plans to keep in touch, however, and will be attending this year's conference. He is succeeded in the chair by John Plumb.

Conference

Finally, there are only a few weeks to our annual conference on 13-15 April at Malvern. Our theme this year is 'Strengthening fellowship for mission' and our special 'external' prayer focus will be on the villages of Bulgaria and the Ukraine. Our guest speakers are introduced below. At time of writing, there are still a few places left, so if you would like to join us, please contact Helen at the office.

Hope for the Countryside

By Tim Prince

On Saturday 25th November 2017 we held the first 'Hope for the Countryside' prayer event.

'Hope for the Countryside' is a partnership between Agricultural Christian Fellowship, Village Hope, the World Prayer Centre and Top Barn. Our aim is to mobilise and resource prayer for rural Britain, our vision is of beacons of prayer lighting up across our

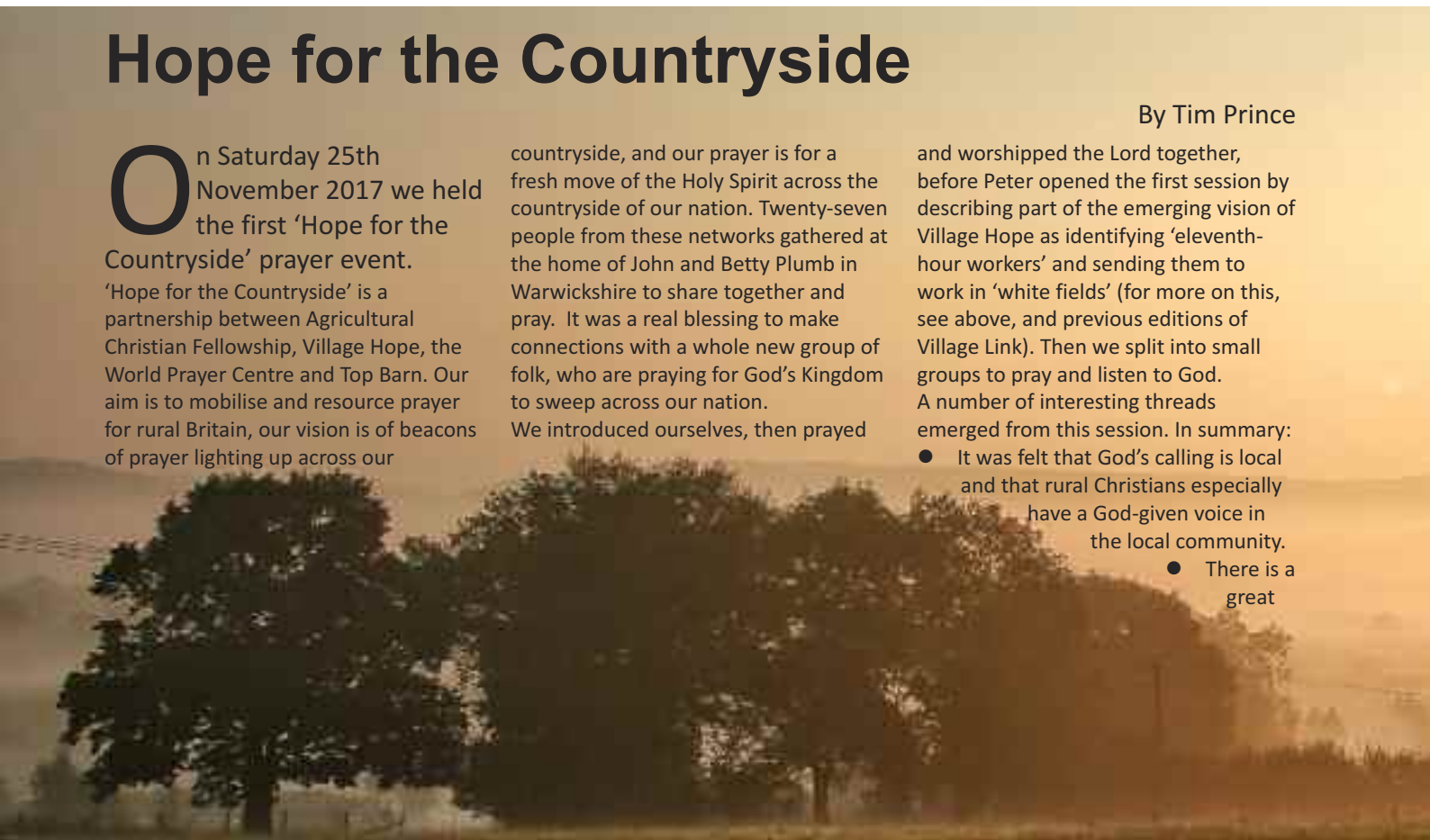
countryside, and our prayer is for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit across the countryside of our nation. Twenty-seven people from these networks gathered at the home of John and Betty Plumb in Warwickshire to share together and pray. It was a real blessing to make connections with a whole new group of folk, who are praying for God's Kingdom to sweep across our nation.

We introduced ourselves, then prayed

and worshipped the Lord together, before Peter opened the first session by describing part of the emerging vision of Village Hope as identifying 'eleventh-hour workers' and sending them to work in 'white fields' (for more on this, see above, and previous editions of Village Link). Then we split into small groups to pray and listen to God.

A number of interesting threads emerged from this session. In summary:

- It was felt that God's calling is local and that rural Christians especially have a God-given voice in the local community.
- There is a great



Village Hope Annual Conference, April 13-15 2018, West Malvern

This year we will be sharing around the theme ‘Strengthening fellowship for mission’.

This will build on last year’s theme of ‘strengthening the churches’, and reflects our vision for supporting and encouraging strong fellowships of believers in rural Britain, committed to prayer and with a heart for sharing the Gospel with those around them. Our guest speakers this year will help us explore this theme in interactive sessions, drawing on their own experience of rural church and mission.

Sally Gaze

Sally is ‘Dean of Rural Mission Consultancy’, in a partnership between the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and ‘Rural Ministries’. Previously she was, for 15 years, a rural minister



with seven churches in south Norfolk, including a new plant, the Tas Valley Cell Church. She is author of ‘Mission Shaped and Rural’ (2006, Church House Publishing). Sally describes herself as “passionate about people coming to know Jesus as their Saviour for the first time and about flourishing church communities in the countryside.”

Magnus Proctor

Magnus has his own accountancy practice in Barnstaple, and is Village Hope’s accountant.

He is married to Leah and they have two grown-up children. He has pastored village churches for 14 years in Yorkshire and 3 years in Devon. In his own words, Magnus has “a



passion for the Gospel, which has more recently been focussed on Eastern Europe where there are over 250,000 towns and villages without an evangelical witness.” He seeks to encourage churches, particularly in Ukraine and Bulgaria, to reach out in mission and in planting churches.

Andrew and Kath Close

Unfortunately John and Dot Burnett, who were due to lead the children’s and youth work, have had to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances. However, we are pleased that Andrew and Kath have stepped in, and we look forward to having them back with us again. They live in Rogiet, South Wales with their two sons. Andrew is a telecoms engineer and Kath is a stay-at-home mum. They attend a little village church in Caerwent, where Andrew is the Secretary and they both help lead the midweek children’s clubs. Andrew is a big Cardiff City fan and Kath loves sport and baking.

heritage of Christian endeavour and worship upon which the rural church can build.

- Unlike the culture, we are on a long-haul journey and need patience!
- God is establishing houses of prayer in the countryside.
- God is breaking down the barriers that tradition can erect, but is also calling us to be secure in who we are.

After lunch, John Plumb led us on a walk around the farm, where we prayed for God to use and bless the agricultural industry.

John reminded us that farmers have a unique sense of ‘place’ and intimate knowledge of their own land, an understanding of the seasons and the weather, and are good problem solvers, needing to be

inventive when dealing with unique problems.

He explained some of the effects on the land of intensive farming, and of the sin of generations that have lived on the land, but also pointed out the restorative power of being outside on the farm for people who are used to city living and who need open space.

The theme that Jane Holloway, from the World Prayer Centre, presented to us in the third session was ‘Villages: the missing link’.

She has been working for the World Prayer Centre for a number of years, and testified to

the fact that there has been a great move towards intercessory prayer across the country in towns and cities. Many large churches and organisations have come together in prayer networks, and groups of churches in urban situations have cooperated around the subject in both teaching and doing prayer.

She hoped that this gathering was the beginning of adding villages to that list.

The day finished with prayer and we left with a renewed sense that God was gathering His people to pray in unity for the villages of Britain.

The importance of place

By Tim Prince

People living in the countryside tend to have a greater sense of their physical surroundings and therefore are often more rooted in a place than those engaged in a modern transitory lifestyle.

This is carried through into the rural church as well, with its old families, traditions, buildings and stories often providing a unique sense of belonging that promotes stability and engenders a spiritual responsibility for people *and* for places.

While we must always focus on the New Jerusalem as our permanent dwelling place, it can comfort us to realise that many people in the Bible were also attached to places, and perhaps even for the same reasons. The agreement that God struck with Abraham was linked to the land under his feet from the very beginning (Gen

13: 14-17). King David longed for a drink from the well in his home town, but when his men risked their lives to fulfil his desire, he poured it out on the ground (2 Sam 23: 13-17). It is only when they were cast out of their land that the Israelites truly understood what they had lost (Psalm 137: 1-6). Even Jesus Himself demonstrates these very human qualities. Right at the start of His active and itinerant ministry, once He had been rejected in His home town, He chose the little fishing village of Capernaum to be His base of operations (Luke 4: 31). He clearly preferred the quiet country around

Bethany to the bustle (and danger) of the city (Matthew 21:17). John tells us that Judas knew where to find Jesus to have Him arrested because the olive grove of Gethsemane was a place where Jesus often met with His disciples (John 18: 2).



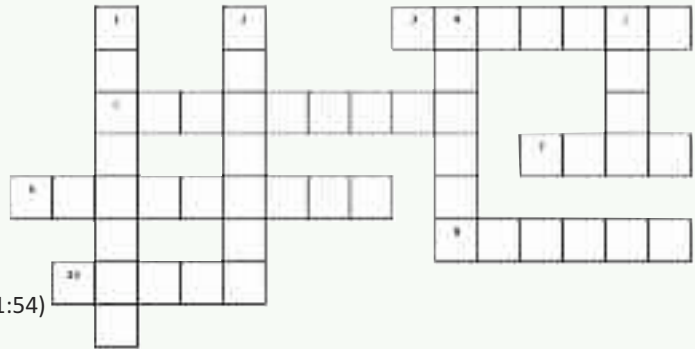
Places in the gospels crossword

ACROSS

3. Village where Lazarus lived (John 11:1)
6. Birthplace of Jesus (Matt 2:1)
7. Place of Jesus' first miraculous sign (John 2:11)
8. First destination of the Magi (Matt 2:1)
9. Place where Jesus met the Samaritan woman (John 4:5)
10. John baptised near here (John 3:23)

DOWN

1. Boats from here searched for Jesus (John 6:23)
2. Jesus withdrew here when His life was threatened (John 11:54)
4. Destination of two disciples after Jesus' death (Luke 24:13)
5. Place where Jesus raised a widow's son (Luke 7:11)



The Mallards in Kolkata, India. Christmas 2017

Christmas this year was a very different experience. We were in the busy bustling city of Kolkata in West Bengal.

We celebrated, of course, but in warm conditions without the things we associate so much with this season – cold midwinter darkness, turkey dinner, lots of presents, TV and chocolates.

We went to a beautiful early morning service at the Cathedral. The message, music and all the worship pointed exactly to the Christian message of Christmas. Then we went to be with the 46 children and young people of Snehakunja Children's Home at the Arunima Hospice where we were spending 10 days running a children's programme and being alongside these AIDS/HIV/TB affected orphans. The dust and squalor, beauty, colour and vibrancy of Kolkata contrast with the order and cleanliness of UK life.



Christmas Day also included taking a Singer treadle sewing machine to a village, as part of a community peace and women's empowerment project. This included a spontaneous response to the request made that "Ruth is now

going to dedicate the sewing machine"! Prayers of thanks to God and a few inspiring sentences in a language the villagers don't understand followed.

We truly saw God's love in action in many social projects run via the Cathedral Relief Service (CRS) and the sacrificial way Christians are caring for and serving others, especially the most marginalised people. We were enriched by relationship building and trust within our Christian family on the other side of the world. Amidst abject poverty and life challenging situations there was so much hope and potential. Thank you to everyone who prayed for us during our time in India; we value this greatly.

Ruth, Joy and Christian Mallard.