

The Listening Ear

No. 14

May 2020



ACA

The Agricultural Chaplains Association

The Rectory, Holwell, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 5LF

01963 23570

info@agrishoplains.org.uk

www.agrishoplains.org.uk

Richard's Scribblings

My wife Liz said to me a couple of days ago, "It's funny, this year will go down in history as a lost year - for some folk, a year that stood still, or didn't happen". I reflected on that and what people keep saying - that we are entering "a new normal", whatever that might be. Suddenly the thought hit me. People talk a lot about having 20-20 vision, or perfect sight. Perhaps this year (2020) will be one where people see through their 2020 lenses and see something very different. A new world and new life emerging! Perhaps if we go onto YouTube and follow the link, you'll see what I mean!!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrHxhQPOO2c>

No matter what, I'm sure that God will have his hand on it!

In this issue we have a *Thought for the Day* from Emily Brailsford, Rural Chaplain to Young Farmers in Derbyshire. In addition, we have articles on coastal towns feeling fear; The Agriculture Bill; proposing a 5% VAT cut for rural tourism; funding for rural projects, and more....

As usual, we are grateful to the Rural Services Network, the TFA, Alan Spedding and RuSource for their contributions. Whilst there is a lot in this edition, it would be very good to hear from chaplaincies or individuals about their ministry context. We would welcome all contributions.

Thought for Today by Emily Brailsford, Derbyshire Rural Chaplain to Young Farmers

Recently I took part in a Zoom meeting with members of clergy from Derby diocese and Bishop Libby (*Bishop of Derby*). Bishop Libby talked about the fact that, whilst we cannot access the church building, our homes become a sacred space for us during this time of lockdown. I have always acknowledged the sacredness of the land around me. Having been lucky enough to have had horses when I was younger, I have always felt a strong connection to the land. Checking the grazing for the horses, making sure they had good quality hay, out riding and being early enough to experience a sunrise or late enough for a sunset. Exploring the Derbyshire countryside on horseback and the beautiful landscape which greets us each day. Everything was connected to the land and to me it *was* and *still is* sacred.

In the book "A World Made Whole" by Esther de Waal, I have been reading about the Celtic tradition of Christianity, which is very much focused on creation and the world around us. Many of the prayers are from people who are busy from dawn to dusk and don't have time for long, formal prayers. Instead they do what they have to throughout the day, giving it their full attention and making it an occasion for prayer. I found this prayer, which made me think about our farmers. They are more likely to be driving a John Deere (other tractors are available) than holding a scythe, but here it is:-

God, bless Thou Thyself my reaping,
Each ridge, and plain, and field,
Each sickle curved, shapely, hard,
Each ear and handful in the sheaf,
Each ear and handful in the sheaf.
Amen



Coastal towns fear lockdown easing

During the Number 10 COVID-19 press conference on Tuesday 12 May, a reporter from the Lincolnshire Echo raised concerns from residents worried that the relaxation of lockdown guidance would drive visitors to coastal areas and expose them to a greater risk of infection. The journalist argued that the visitors would bring 'minimal economic benefit', as hospitality and tourist venues will largely stay closed.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma MP responded that people should not be going to stay somewhere 'overnight' and maintained that the Government has been clear about how they should interact with people outside their household as well. To support the hospitality industry, the Government has provided a one-year business rates holiday and support through £9 billion of grants for small businesses. The Lincolnshire Live website covers the response from the reporter, who stated that he did not feel his question about 'the worry coastal communities are feeling' was answered 'adequately'.

Elsewhere, rural communities were pleading with the millions of people that were planning on enjoying green spaces during the first weekend since the easing of lockdown. Residents in towns and villages dotted around beauty spots, which have largely managed to isolate themselves from COVID-19, are anxious about being overwhelmed if people suddenly journey to rural areas. There was unrest inside one of Devon's coastal towns after second-home owners travelled to the seaside, leaving the full-time population of largely elderly residents 'frightened' about becoming infected.



Calls to slash VAT on rural tourism firms

I applaud this idea from the Country Landowners and Business Association (CLA) as a good basis on which to think about supporting the emergence of tourism activities from the virus.

A call has been made for VAT on tourism businesses to be slashed to 5 per cent in order to boost the rural economy post-Covid-19. Figures show tourism firms in the countryside will see revenues fall by up to £17.6 billion this year due to the virus outbreak. The CLA has suggested a drop in VAT from 20% to 5% as a measure to soften the blow, highlighting the fact that the UK's rate is far higher than those in other countries, including France (10%), Spain (10%) and Greece (13%). The call comes as the group, which represents 30,000 rural businesses, released a raft of new suggestions to get the rural economy moving.



CLA President Mark Bridgeman said: "When the restrictions are lifted, we are encouraging everyone to book their family holiday in the beauty and safety of the British landscape. We hope that people are looking forward to enjoying the tranquillity and space that the rural and coastal areas have to offer and enjoy." A

reduction in VAT to levels seen in other countries would ensure that domestic tourism is competitive and affordable, he said. Competitive pricing would also significantly boost the economy and keep the UK's carbon footprint down.

The CLA's paper 'COVID-19: Re-starting the economy in rural areas' argues that rural areas have an advantage in social distancing thanks to lower population density, more space and less reliance on public transport. Other proposals in the report include the tapering of furloughing schemes and other business support measures slowly to avoid a cliff edge.

Funding for Rural Projects

The ACA has connections to a list of funders for any rural projects that you might have. If you think that any might be appropriate, please email us and hopefully we will be able to point you in the right direction for grant applications. Some, of course, will be topic specific, but others are more general.

For more information please contact us at info@agrichaplains.org.uk

The Agriculture Bill passes through House of Commons

Having completed all its stages in the House of Commons, the Agriculture Bill now heads to the House of Lords for scrutiny. Despite valiant attempts by leading Conservative backbenchers, including the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, Neil Parish MP, the Bill left the Commons unamended.



Amendments had been tabled to include within the Bill safeguards against our high food production standards being undermined by lower quality products imported from abroad. Sadly, the Government used its majority to vote those amendments down.

Many organisations, such as the NFU, TFA, Rural Services Network and others, have placed pressure on Government not to 'sell out' on food and safety standards. We, as an Association, submitted our views through the consultation process and various MPs. We hope the House of Lords will return it to the House of Commons.

We're here for you...

We are working in extraordinary times at the moment, but we wanted to take this opportunity to let you know that, although we are not working out and about, we are still here to provide services to you. We know that you, the members, have a hard and sometimes very difficult role to play in ministering to farming and other rural businesses and families. Equally, we are here for you, to support you and hopefully make your job easier. Never be afraid to contact us either by email, or telephone.

And finally...

Trying to make a living out of farming is like wrestling with a gorilla; you don't stop when you get tired, you stop when the gorilla gets tired!

