

The Listening Ear

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ACA

The Agricultural Chaplains Association

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Richard's Scriblings

As we head for September, the month to begin Harvest Thanksgivings, we know that some farmers in this country will not have a harvest, as the weather prevented them sowing in autumn last or spring in this year. I know such a farmer, who, at the gentle age of 66, will not get the combine out of the shed. He has no cereal harvest! Our farmers need love and support during these very tough times.

This month we have articles from Rural Services Network talking about Affordable Housing and Care Homes (based on a report by the Local Government Association); the Tenant Farmers Association; the Welsh Government, on their Rural Payment Support Scheme; and Alan Spedding. Thank you to all those for their help.

Please pray for our farmers as, with Brexit looming, they have a tough few years ahead.

Just a thought...

During the lockdown, the various groups that make up the Churches Rural Group of Churches Together in England have been taking it in turns to write a reflection for the week. As the Association is a member, I thought you might like to read a reflection from myself on one particular Psalm, the Psalm for the day it was published. This reflection also was intended to be a profound nod to the other 149!

The glory, majesty and wonder of God - Bible Reading: Psalm 8 (NSRV)

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!



continued...

Reflection

If you were to ask a lot of people who do not go to church regularly about the Psalms, generally they might not know too much about them. If you asked them about the 23rd Psalm, they might tell you that it is the one with the Good Shepherd in it! It is a familiar Psalm at weddings, funerals, or baptisms. If you were to ask people about Psalms in general, they may describe them as boring and irrelevant. It is my experience that, churchgoer or not, generally the Psalms are not on the top of someone's favourites list. Just how much are they missing?

Psalm 8 is very firmly on my 'favourites' list! This Psalm, like many others, was written by David. Being a Rural Officer and Agricultural Chaplain, I realise that it has so much to say about creation, the natural world and the glory, majesty, wonder and sheer awesome might of God. This Psalm is, without a doubt, an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who he is and what he has done, and relating us and our world to him.

The range of thought here is amazing and brings us back to ask, 'what is humankind?' The Psalm states that God has put people 'a little lower than the angels [NIV] and crowned them with glory and honour'. Out of this whole array, from stars to sea creatures, only we can look at this scene with insight. God bestows us with such honour, and yet what do we do? So often we travel around this world with our eyes closed, taking it all for granted, not languishing in such beauty! At our worst we try our level best to destroy it by being either greedy or wilfully neglectful. We ruin the ozone layer, create global warming and, even at a very local level, often down a country lane, get rid of our consumerist lifestyle by fly-tipping our rubbish. We do these things when all God wants is to lavish his love on us! It is worth noting that, once lockdown occurred and very few vehicles were on the road, and industrial activity was reduced, the levels of CO₂ were diminished.



Of course, the farming community, whether religious or not, have an extraordinarily strong spirituality, based on creation and the natural world. They eat, sleep, breathe and live with it every day. During the lockdown particularly and throughout the whole of this current pandemic, I have been fortunate enough to 'stargaze', to wonder on creation and our natural world. Because my work has enabled me to do that, I could get out into the wilder parts of Dorset and wonder at the whole of creation. It renewed my faith and made me realise that I too have taken both God and his creation for granted. Yet in love he sought me out and brought me back to appreciate the wonder of it all. All this because of a Psalm or two!

Prayer

Bearing in mind my comments on the misuse of God's creation, I came across this prayer from *Seasonal Worship from the Countryside* by the Staffordshire Seven, which is a Declaration of Forgiveness:

May God the Creator forgive our misusing of his creative work.
May God the Son take up onto his cross the sufferings of our land,
our animals, our families and ourselves.
May God the Holy Spirit give us the strength and power to
overcome our troubles, weaknesses, and temptations.
May God the Holy Trinity forgive us all our sins. Amen.

Response

Perhaps as now many are finally coming out of shielding and have often had little opportunity to recently see creation in all its glory, then you could encourage them to go out into the wilds and soak up the natural world. Equally, there are those who are very frightened to come out of lockdown. Pray for them as the days go by. Maybe you could find some ways of encouraging them to come out and begin to live something like normal lives again. Depending on each circumstance, this may need approaching with a great deal of love and sensitivity. You may know someone who would love to prayerfully explore the Psalms with you, particularly Psalms 8, 23 and 121 ('I lift up my eyes to the mountains...').

The Reverend Canon Ken Baker

I am sorry to have to report the death of The Reverend Canon Ken Baker. Ken was a long-standing member and supporter of the Association. I have written to the family to express condolences on behalf of the Association.

Ken was ordained in 1997. He was very much into football. He was a referee and became Chaplain to Northampton Town FC and then to Aston Villa FC - a post he held for seventeen years.

His ministerial roles in Leicester Diocese saw him involved in many tiny rural parishes, and he was later appointed Rural Dean of Guthlaxton and an honorary Canon of Leicester Cathedral. In addition, he was a part-time Rural Officer for Leicester Diocese.

On his retirement, Ken moved to Rugby Deanery within Coventry Diocese. He will be sadly missed, not only by his diocesan friends, but also for his support and contributions that he made to the Association. May he rest in peace and rise in glory!

Supply of Affordable Homes at Risk

The Rural Services Network, along with Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), The Rural Housing Alliance, The Plunkett Foundation and Rural England Stakeholder Group, has written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP, urging the Government to consider that, without revision, proposed changes to the existing planning system risk drastically reducing the supply of affordable homes in rural communities. There are two key elements identified in the Planning Consultation which will seriously affect this supply:

1. 'Requirements for affordable housing contributions on smaller rural development sites'

The letter states: "The proposal to raise the threshold that triggers affordable housing contributions from 10 to 40-50 dwellings for a limited time period will drastically reduce the supply of rural affordable homes. This is because, in many rural communities, residential developments tend to be smaller than 10 dwellings. The consultation document proposes an exemption to this rule in designated rural areas based on the S157 1985 Housing Act definition. However, this measure will be largely ineffective because it will not apply to 70% of smaller rural communities."

2. 'Supply of rural exception sites'

The letter states: "First Homes Exception Sites will seriously damage the supply of rural exception sites in non-designated areas, and with it, the ability to meet a broad range of housing needs. Landowners will choose to sell their land for First Homes Exception Sites, which, because they will provide predominantly affordable housing for sale, are likely to command a higher land value than rural exception sites. They will also cause confusion and destroy the emphasis on community engagement. Gone will be the opportunity provided by rural exception sites to provide a mix of affordable homes tailored to the specific needs of the community, often including discounted market sale in perpetuity."

The letter goes on to suggest two amendments to protect the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas. Each of these concerns is a problem in itself, but together they will be catastrophic to the delivery of rural affordable housing. This can be avoided by two simple steps:

- i. Replace the definition of designated rural areas from those areas listed under S157 regulations to all parishes with a population of 3,000 or fewer. This would provide a definition that is transparent and readily understandable, easy to evidence and update, efficient and simple to apply, whilst providing consistent coverage across rural England.
- ii. Adopt the wording in the NPPG (*National Planning Practice Guidance*) that was introduced in July 2019 that allows local planning authorities to set their own thresholds for affordable housing in their designated rural communities but, as above, not just those with S157 designation.

Watch this space...



Pub becomes a Hub

The Green Man in Scamblesby near Louth, Lincolnshire, has opened a permanent village shop - with support from rural pub champions, Pub is The Hub - providing new employment for two local people.



Situated in an old storeroom next to the pub with its own separate entrance, the shop is open six days a week to supply newspapers, fresh bread, local dairy produce, meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, and a full range of grocery essentials. Anyone visiting the pub in the evening can also buy anything they need.

The shop has been refurbished and fitted out with the help of a grant of £3,000 from Pub is The Hub's Community Services Fund. Pub owner Richard Bradley explains: "While we were closed during lockdown, I realised that the villagers and surrounding area would benefit from having a village shop. I came across Pub is The Hub's work following a search online for support available for village pubs. We had amazing support from Dave Allen the regional advisor with Pub is The Hub and, following our application, our grant was approved within days. From enquiring to the point of opening the shop, it only took six weeks."

Richard Bradley and his business partner, Charles Nickerson, purchased the pub in September 2019 after it had been closed for 12 months. They spent three months completely refurbishing it and re-opened again in December, only to be closed again just three months later due to COVID.

Richard continued: "The Green Man had not been fully open for three years by the time we purchased the pub and it had lost its place at the heart of the village. When we re-opened at Christmas, we hosted the village choir and Christmas carol concert in a packed-out pub with many smiling faces. It was heart-breaking to have to shut the doors again. We are thrilled to be up and running again and, with the addition of the shop, we aim to be the hub of the village once again."

An Interactive Map for Mental Health Care

Health organisations in Lancashire and South Cumbria have worked in partnership to develop an interactive map of mental health services in the area. The Google Maps-based system lists all the organisations working locally, and allows residents to search for their closest service or for specific types of support, to ensure they get appropriate care.

The interactive map means that people can use it to find:

- their closest mental health service
- most age-appropriate service (e.g. for younger or older people)
- language translation or interpretation facilities
- opening hours for mental health services (e.g. 24-hour support)
- different types of support (for example, bereavement services, counselling, practical support).

The map also includes county-wide services available to residents. When people click on their chosen organisation, they will be given information and contact details generated by a Google search.

This work has been developed by the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS), a partnership of NHS, local authority, public sector, voluntary, faith, community, social enterprise and academic organisations. Paul Hopley, the ICS Mental Health Deputy Director, said: "This is a brilliant initiative, and is a great example of how we are working with partners across Lancashire and South Cumbria to make access to mental health services in our area as easy as possible. We know that people have been struggling for the last few months during the pandemic. We have hugely increased the mental health and wellbeing services available remotely, including offering the Big White Wall (*online forum with round-the-clock support*) and AMPARO (*support following suicide*) to more people, and working collaboratively with Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust (LSCFT), the main NHS provider of mental health support services locally, to launch the LSCFT helplines and text number. This map will help let people know when and where services are available to them."

Access the mental health services map here: <https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/ServiceMap>



Rural Payments Wales Announces BPS 2020 Support Scheme



Following the success of support schemes introduced in 2018 and 2019, the 2020 scheme in Wales will again pay a loan of up to 90% of an individual business' anticipated Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) claim value. The payment will help to alleviate the short-term pressure on those farm businesses which do not receive their BPS payment on day one of the payment window, which opens on 1 December 2020. Applications for the scheme, via Rural Payments Wales (RPW) online,

will be open from 1 September until 27 November 2020. Rural Payments Wales is encouraging all BPS applicants to apply.

For more information, visit <https://gov.wales/basic-payment-scheme-2020-support-scheme-launched>

Care Homes "Thrown to the Wolves"

The decision to discharge around 25,000 patients from NHS hospitals into care homes without first testing them was "an appalling error", according to a report from the Commons' Public Accounts Committee. It says there was a "slow, inconsistent, and at times negligent" approach to social care during the coronavirus pandemic, and warns the sector faces a funding gap of almost £4 billion by 2025.

Cllr. Paulette Hamilton, Vice-Chair of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Those who use, work and volunteer in these vital services were not given as much priority as the NHS from the outset. We cannot and must not allow any of these mistakes to be repeated."

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, the LGA says it is clear that social care needs a complete reset and cannot simply revert back to the way it was prior to the pandemic. The Association has therefore developed a set of seven key principles which should underpin the reform of social care and support, considering the lessons learned from the pandemic - details here:

<https://local.gov.uk/adult-social-care-seven-principles-reform>

And finally...

Seen outside a farm shop...

We offer three kinds of service -
GOOD, CHEAP and FAST.

You can pick any two -
GOOD service CHEAP won't be FAST
GOOD service FAST won't be CHEAP
FAST service CHEAP won't be GOOD.

