

The Listening

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ACA

The Agricultural Chaplains Association

The Rectory, Holwell, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 5LF

01963 23570

info@agrishoplains.org.uk

www.agrishoplains.org.uk

Richard's Scriblings

As we continue to endure the twists and turns of the pandemic, in terms of what we can or can't do, or indeed want or have to do, it tests us in so many different aspects of our lives. Our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing begins to suffer. We become irritable and edgy with our loved ones. Some may tread very near the edge. Others, not so much. I have been reflecting on what Our Lord endured in the weeks and days leading up to that final journey to the cross. Very little indeed can have been as bad as that!

So let us think positively, because doing that, we can really help others through what is currently the minefield of life. The farming community have much to think about at present, with food standards, Brexit and all the other stress of modern agriculture. The same can be said for rural businesses who are really suffering at present. I am sure that we need to focus on prayer, perhaps more now than ever before. I know also that at the right time, Our Lord will help and support each one of us in our needs.

In this issue, we have a wonderful reflection from Ben Aldous of Churches Together in England and articles on rural business; an increase in rural homelessness; a new project in Dorset – a shop in a storage container; the Association AGM on Zoom; and a very gentle reminder that our subscriptions are now due please.

Finally, I hear many stories of fantastic things that are happening out there in the many groups and chaplaincies and from individual chaplains and rural officers. Quite often, all our efforts in various projects become forgotten in the melee of life. So, a huge thank-you for all that **you are doing** for farming and rurality in general!!

Just a thought...

As we go back again into lockdown, the various groups that make up the Churches Rural Group of Churches Together in England (CTiE) 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, this time from Rev. Dr. Ben Aldous, Principal Officer for Mission and Evangelism, Churches Together in England.

'Generation COVID' or Generation Hope? - Bible Reading: Matthew 15:1-9

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honour your father and mother.' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God' they are not to 'honour their father or mother' with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'"



Reflection

As I wrote this reflection, I found it almost impossible not to read it through the lens of COVID-19. Surely the Pharisees are right? Washing your hands is a basic necessity in these times of anxiety around spreading infection and yet Jesus turns it on its head and challenges them. Of course, that is no way to read the text.

This encounter marks another point in the narrative of the growing tension between Jesus and the Jewish establishment. Matthew, especially, places Jesus at odds with the Pharisees again and again. They were motivated by a love of the law, yet Jesus challenges them to follow his example and operate out of the law of love. Handwashing and *qorbān* (sacrifice) are two points of pharisaic practice that aren't found in the written law, so here Jesus isn't attacking *Torah* but the Pharisees' propensity to interpret the law out of self-interest.

We seem to be beset by self-interest in our world today.

This week, for example, the world feels like a dark place: on a Zoom call with a friend in the US we were talking about the toxic narratives and narcissism in American politics as the election looms; the appalling murder of three people in Notre Dame Basilica in France; the earthquake in Turkey and Greece. And the UK Government's announcement of another national lockdown for England (following similar 'circuit breaker' lockdowns in the three devolved nations) brings continued levels of distress. Delayed, but on the horizon, we see a tsunami of businesses collapsing and unemployment levels rising. We read about Generation COVID and I'm finding it hard not to be depressed. In fact, over the last few weeks I've tried to limit my exposure to social media, the radio and television.

But for Christians this isn't the end of the story. Jesus invites us to two things. Firstly, as his encounter with the 'law lovers' demonstrates, he flips things upside down. He whispers to us, 'all is not lost.'

Secondly, as we approach the likelihood of a difficult winter, there is hope. The church is called to be a harbinger of hope; that's our mandate, because hope is found in the God who comes from the future with the promise that he will make all things new. He will wipe away the tears, he will be our God, we will be his people. He can redeem, restore, renew, rebuild, rework, rekindle any and every situation. All is not lost. I hate the pessimistic language of 'Generation COVID' because it does not recognise that out of difficulty, adversity, pain, death and discomfort God can, and surely will, be with us and make his face to shine upon us once again, even if that idea feels dim and distant.



Response

Of course, we must continue to obey the rule of six and practise social distancing (physical distancing and social solidarity is perhaps a better phrase) but we can find ways to bring hope. A practical suggestion might be to commit this week to get in touch with people in your sphere of influence who might be struggling – young or old, by phone, email, WhatsApp or in some other way – and whisper 'all is not lost.' Practise the law of love this week.

The power of community can fuel a rural recovery

Today we are living through an unprecedented time of disruption for all types of business – and this includes those that are community-owned and run. The unique nature of community businesses, always



at the hearts of the communities they serve, positions them to respond to these dramatic times in a very special way. The Plunkett Foundation's 'A Better Form of Business' reports on community pubs and shops provide detailed accounts of the countless hours given by people all over the country as they find solutions to the challenges their communities face. This is the magic of community businesses – whether they are pubs, shops, bakeries, woodlands, or farms – they are always the physical manifestation of true community spirit, optimism, creativity and diversity.

Read the full reports at:

<https://plunkett.co.uk/community-owned-pubs-and-shops-show-resilience-in-the-face-of-covid-19/>

Rural homelessness in England rises by 115% in past two years

This topic is one that we have covered before in the not-too-distant past. It should be of great interest to all agricultural and rural chaplains. This article reminds us of the toxic impact of our having no effective housing policy for the provision of appropriate house building in rural areas. It's great to see the Rural Services Network (RSN) leading the charge on this issue. It tells us:

Homelessness in rural areas in England has more than doubled in the last two years, according to analysis published as campaigners warn of planning reforms likely to worsen the situation. The number of households categorised as homeless in rural local authorities in England rose to 19,975 – an increase of 115% from 2017-18 – according to the countryside charity CPRE and the RSN, which represents many parish councils and other countryside organisations.

The rise in numbers of households owed homelessness relief by councils, according to Government figures, has been greatest in the north-east and north-west of England, but an increase has happened in all areas. One woman in Essex told the Guardian she was forced to live in a horsebox for a month when she lost her home. A nursing assistant in Surrey said she was told she and her three children may have to wait up to five years for an affordable property.

Increase in homelessness in rural areas is greater than that occurring in towns and cities, and rural councils fear the housing shortage in the countryside could soon worsen. Local authorities have predicted a potential reduction in affordable house construction by up to 50% if the requirement to build them switches to applying to sites with more than 40 or 50 homes rather than just 10 homes. The change could arise under the Government's proposed alterations to the planning system.

Crispin Truman, Chief Executive of CPRE, said key workers were being priced out of rural areas by high rent in the private sector. "Tragically, rural homelessness continues to soar. Continuing to deregulate the planning system will only make this situation worse. Instead, investing in rural social housing now would deliver a boost to the economy at a time when this is so desperately needed. The evidence is crystal clear that this is the best way to provide affordable homes for rural communities - especially the key workers whom communities rely on now more than ever - while at the same time jump-starting the economy."

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/28/rural-homelessness-in-england-rises-by-115-in-past-two-years>

The Association AGM – Wednesday 2 December 2020

As you will have gathered from previous correspondence, we are having our AGM this year via Zoom and not face-to-face. The AGM will run from 11.00 am to 3.30 pm and the Waiting Room will be opened at 10.40 am. As usual a lot is going on, perhaps even more this year!! We have three excellent speakers, should I say five. I'll explain later. They are:

- ♦ **Dr. Jude McCann, Chief Executive Officer of FCN**, who will be talking about the way FCN is changing and explaining the future for them.
- ♦ **'Through the Roof'** is an organisation which gets its name from the Gospel story of the healing of the paralytic man whose friends lowered him through the roof (*Luke 5:17-26*). The organisation is concerned with disabled people gaining access into church to worship and all the issues surrounding that. Janet Eardley, Fiona Gosden and Lynda Herbert, who are Church Inclusion Officers, will be talking to us. This is why we have five speakers and not three!
- ♦ **The Reverend Richard Teal, President of the Methodist Conference**, who will be talking on 'Farming and the Churches'.



In addition to speakers, there will be the usual business meeting; an Open Forum which allows our members to air their views and tell us what is happening in their area; breakout rooms to allow time to network, and much more. A full Agenda will be forwarded once you let us know you are coming. So, to ensure that you have a place booked, and to receive a Zoom link invitation, please email me.

We will not issue a Zoom link unless you book in, so please BOOK NOW as a matter of urgency! info@agrishoplains.org.uk

Sorry, but it's that time of year again..!

As it is that time of year again, subscriptions are now due. We have yet again retained the subs at £20 a year. I am sure that you would agree that this represents very good value, considering the amount of information that we are now sending out to members and chaplaincies. We, as an Association, are now developing training, and this will be happening this coming year. Although the Committee has been meeting via Zoom, we consider that it is a very useful tool. It means that the AGM (see separate article) can be also held on Zoom, thus enabling many more people to 'attend'. We aim also to start having Regional Groups meeting together without the chore of having to travel many miles to meetings.

To do all the things that we need to do, we need finances, **so please support us!** Would you please send a cheque, **made payable to ARC** to:

The Agricultural Chaplains Association

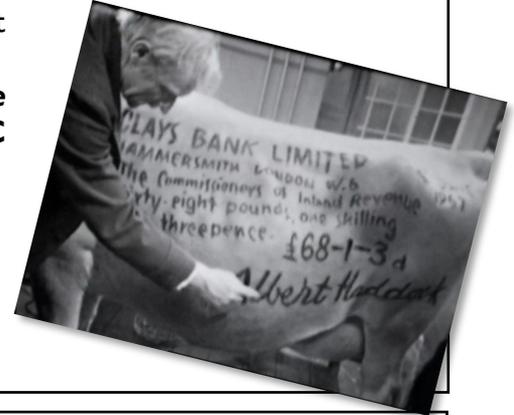
The Rectory

Holwell

Sherborne

Dorset DT9 5LF

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A Shop in a Shipping Container...!?

A shipping container converted into a village shop at a Dorset pub has come to the rescue of locals. The Rose & Crown in Longburton has opened a village shop, called The Larder, in the pub's car park. It offers a range of essentials such as bread, meat, organic milk, fresh fruit and vegetables as well as takeaway coffee. The pub received a Community Services Fund grant of £3,000 from Pub is The Hub to help to provide the shop, which will save local people travelling three miles to the nearest town. Pub is The Hub is the not-for-profit organisation that helps pubs to diversify with services for the local community.



Publicans Becky and John Gibbons took over the running of the pub four years ago. The lockdown spurred the family on to finish the shop project, which became increasingly important during the pandemic. The owners of the pub rallied to help vulnerable and shielding customers by delivering takeaways and supplies. Becky said: "The village has an ageing population as well as a lot of young families who need the support of a local shop. When we were in lockdown, we realised that we really needed the shop in place to help those in the community. The locals love that we have opened a local amenity and have been really supportive."

Pub is The Hub Regional Advisor Reg Clarke said: "This converted shipping container really offers the wow factor for those in the local area that need essential supplies. The Rose & Crown is a great village pub that really offers everything to its local community. This development has reinforced the pub as the hub of the village." The Larder is open daily Monday to Saturday. The pub already has an outreach Post Office, open on Friday afternoons, and also offers breakfast and brunch from a converted rice trailer in the car park.

And finally...

The rain was pouring down outside O'Connor's Irish pub. There, standing in front of a big deep puddle outside the pub, was an old Irishman, soaked to the skin. He was holding a stick with a piece of string on the end, dangling in the water. A passer-by stopped and asked him what he was doing. "Fishing", replied the old man. So, feeling sorry for him, the gentleman said, "Come in out of the rain and have a drink with me". In the warm and dry bar, as they sipped their whiskeys, the gentleman could not resist asking, "So how many have you caught today then?" The old Irishman replied, "You're the eighth."!!!

