

The Listening Ear

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ACA

The Agricultural Chaplains Association

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Richard's Scribblings

Well at least now we have some hope that the COVID Roadmap to ease the lockdown is beginning to happen, with the first stage of schools going back together again. As we journey through Lent, we all have thoughts of how this is going to pan out. How much of a change will the "new normal" be? We hear so much of that phrase and we wonder what our world, or indeed our church, will be like in, say, five years. Whatever does happen, we know that we must follow Our Lord.

In these last two or three years, the role of the Chaplain has really come to the fore in a vast number of settings. At long last, the churches of various denominations have realised that we have to get out into the community where people are, rather than waiting for them to come to us. You will see a link in one of the articles for the Methodist Connexional Team and what it is doing for chaplains in a whole range of settings. Please take the opportunity to explore all of this. You might not be a Methodist, but that's fine. The Association has become involved within the Agricultural sector. Various activities and virtual coffee mornings are being run to enable chaplains to unwind and chill. Look in the site for much more information. Most interesting!!

In this issue, besides a superb reflection from Ann Wright, we have articles on village shops; litterbugs; rural tourism; and housing development in rural and greenbelt land. We also wish to acknowledge the following contributors: The Association of Convenience Stores; Rural Services Network; The Methodist Church; Countryside Alliance; The Times; Farming UK.

The views expressed in Listening Ear do not necessarily express those of the Association.

Reflection for the month

This month's Reflection has been submitted by Ann Wright, Secretary of the Churches Together in England Rural Group.

Are we nearly there yet...?

(The Reflection is based on Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45)

The Bible is full of calls to remember:

- Remember your Creator and the goodness of the Lord.
- Remember your mortality (Ash Wednesday's 'Remember you are dust').
- Remember the story of God's dealings with your ancestors and his covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- Remember Egypt, the burdens of slavery, the wonder of his actions in the exodus.
- Remember his provision in the wilderness – especially when settled into life in a new land.
- Remember the failures to live as his people and the consequences.
- Remember the cost of our salvation ('eat and drink in remembrance that Christ died for you').



continued...

This psalm is worth reading in full as it goes through the story of God's wonderful deeds and calls on us to be glad that we belong to him, to go to him for help, and to sing praises to him. The first part of the psalm also appears in I Chronicles 16, when David is bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem accompanied by processions, singing, dancing and great joy. Interestingly, Chronicles also records that this was the first time when King David gave Asaph and his fellow Levites 'the responsibility for singing praises to the Lord'.

The whole psalm is a reminder of God's faithfulness and his dealings with his people. The middle verses (left out in the selection included in the lectionary) speak of God's provision through Joseph in a time of famine in Egypt, the history of their life in Egypt, God's deliverance and the way that he provided for their needs in the desert. They left Egypt with shouts of joy but then had to cope with forty years of travelling through the wilderness before reaching the promised land. There were many times when they must have asked 'Are we nearly there yet?'

Throughout the uncertainties of the journey, there were the reminders of God's care and provision, with the visible signs of the pillars of cloud and fire, food sent from heaven and water gushing out and flowing like a river through the desert.

As we travel through Lent after this very challenging year, it does begin to feel as though we are nearly there, but sometimes the final stretch is the hardest of a long slog. My walks in my village and surrounding countryside reveal more signs of the coming spring each day, and the promise of a better future just ahead comes in the form of increasing bird song, new buds appearing and the mud from the last storms receding. Neighbours met out walking are looking forward to the first

stages of lifting restrictions after what seem like endless restrictions, rejoicing in both increasing number of vaccinations and a reduction in the number of those getting ill and dying.

The way ahead is still uncertain despite these fragile shoots of hope and it has certainly felt like a desert experience. But, as we move into the new future, we need to remember what we have experienced and learned of God and ourselves through the months of the pandemic. And perhaps we are the people who have been given the responsibility to sing praises to the Lord for his constant, loving presence.



The Methodist Church are doing a huge amount of work on Chaplaincy across many sectors at present. More information

can be found at the following link: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/connecting-chaplains/> The page has information on a whole range of chaplaincy in various settings. The Association will be making submissions in the weeks to come regarding a section on Agricultural and Rural Chaplaincy. Also, if you click on the link above, you will see that Agricultural/Rural Chaplains are meeting on the second Wednesday of the month at 11.00 am on Zoom. Coffee/chat/see how everyone is/share experiences. Everybody welcome – any denomination. Sounds good to me!!

 **The Methodist Church**



£120 Fines for Litterbug Drivers

If you are like me, you get tired of seeing litter down our country lanes and roads. It is springing up everywhere and it makes our "green and pleasant land" look far from that!! The Times reports that a council in Kent is turning to technology to fine motorists who throw food debris out of the window, littering the roadsides.

LitterCam cameras will launch the first pilot scheme in the country in early April to fine motorists throwing litter out of their cars, with fines starting at £90 and rising to £120 if unpaid after 15 days. If the pilot is successful it is hoped it could be rolled out to areas including Wigan, Lancashire and Sheffield. Campaigners say that currently on motorways it is almost impossible to issue fines unless a motorist dumps litter in sight of a police officer. The result is that slip roads are full of coffee cups, plastic bottles and cigarette packets that in some cases aren't cleaned up for decades. Roadsides are often regarded as a wasteland, but the littering is impacting rural communities who live in hamlets and villages near the motorways. Full article:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/120-fines-for-litterbug-drivers-caught-on-camera-c522jkxxm>

Rural Shop Report 2021

The ACS (Association of Convenience Stores) has urged the Government to recognise the importance of rural shops and ensure they are not left playing catch-up when it comes to being able to provide services.



The 2021 ACS Rural Shop Report has revealed how crucial the UK's 17,000+ rural shops are to their local communities, with findings from this year's report showing that, throughout 2020, rural consumers have increasingly used their local shop for a wider range of products, with one in five reporting that they depend on their local shop more now than a year ago. More than a third of the UK convenience sector is made up of rural shops, often trading in isolated locations with no other businesses nearby. Between them, these shops provide local, flexible and secure employment for over 126,000 people – employment that fits around other commitments like caring for family members, studying, and childcare.

ACS chief executive James Lowman said: "Rural shops have been absolutely essential to their communities over the last year, helping customers to shop safely and putting in place new services like home delivery to support those who aren't able to get out to stores. The message from this year's report is that rural shops have become even more important during the COVID pandemic. Retailers now have an even closer relationship with their customers, are employing more people, are taking part in even more community activity, and offer a wider and more powerful range of services than ever. These businesses have been crucial at a time when more people are feeling isolated due to the pandemic." Additional key findings from this year's report include:

- Rural shops have invested over £197m in their businesses over the last year.
- Four out of five (79%) rural shops are actively engaged in their communities, with almost half of rural shops (42%) making donations to a local food bank over the last year.
- 21% of rural shops now provide a home delivery service of groceries in their local area.

Mr. Lowman continued: "Despite still being hampered by less reliable transport links, patchy mobile connectivity and slower internet access compared to the rest of the UK, rural shops are investing in technology and services to improve their businesses and their offer for customers, but we need more support from Government to ensure that rural shops are not left playing catch-up through no fault of their own." As part of the Rural Shop Report launch, Mr. Lowman took part in a virtual study tour with Christine Hope from award-winning rural shop Hopes of Longtown, discussing how the business has responded to the pandemic, tailoring the store's offer to its customer base, and how the shop works with local suppliers. The link to YouTube is as follows: <https://youtu.be/rq7rDuneKrg>
Full report here: https://www.acs.org.uk/sites/default/files/acs_rural_shop_report_2021.pdf



Fresh in today, Vicar - Holy Mackerel

Government's development plans 'destroying rural England'



Ros Coward, Professor Emerita of Journalism at Roehampton University, wrote in the Guardian last month that local action groups are protesting to save stretches of the countryside from destruction, including housing projects and road building projects planned on greenbelt land. She maintains that the current level of destructive development is a 'nationwide problem' that is changing the character of the countryside towards 'urban sprawl' and inflicting irreversible damage on wildlife.

Since the Government introduced the national planning policy framework in 2012, Ms. Coward argues the planning system has increasingly favoured developers, with legislation that insisted councils set housing targets without the land to meet those numbers. Local authorities were forced to redefine greenbelt areas as 'available for development'. Moreover, she claims that Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP's planning reforms will impose an American system of zoning, along with a presumption in favour of development, housing targets imposed by central Government, and local input sidelined, all while doing 'nothing' to increase the number of affordable homes across the country. Full article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/feb/17/development-destroying-rural-england-action>

A fake meat vs. imported meat future?

Written by Mo Metcalf-Fisher, of Countryside Alliance

On 4 March, the Telegraph reported that a series of leaked emails showed the supermarket giant Tesco is planning to encourage customers to eat less meat. The bizarre suggestion arose following allegations that the supermarket 'trades with a company linked to deforestation in Brazil'. David Lewis, the former CEO of the supermarket, wrote to Greenpeace shortly before leaving the company at the end of last year to outline Tesco's commitment to "reduce meat and dairy consumption".

Mr. Lewis's pledge to Greenpeace marked the beginning of a concerning trend now adopted by the current CEO Ken Murphy, who earlier this year reaffirmed the company's commitment to increase meat alternative sales by 300% by 2025.

It is noble, particularly for large chains such as Tesco, to pursue environmentally friendly objectives. However, the way to tackle deforestation abroad lies with a buoyant market for ethically-produced meat by British farmers, not by offering a wider selection of mung bean burgers.

One could argue that a business such as Tesco is in the market exclusively to make a profit. You only need look at the astronomical mark-up on some 'plant-based meat alternatives' to arrive at the conclusion that a 300% increase would yield strong financial gain. How a private business chooses to turn over a profit isn't a major concern to me. The travesty here is how Tesco appears willing to prop up meatless alternatives, while ignoring the benefits of customers buying from British farmers, to swerve legitimate criticism about their relationship with international meat businesses linked to the destruction of the rainforest.

No-one is arguing that consumers should not have the right to select products based on their personal dietary preferences, but those choices should be based on a real understanding of their environmental impact. Biodiversity and our countryside are enhanced by a strong demand for sustainable British farm produce. It is my belief that the vast bulk of the public will continue to lead meat-inclusive diets and they will opt for the real thing, so long as they understand the social and environmental benefits of choosing sustainably-produced British meat.

What absolutely cannot happen is for supermarkets like Tesco to blindly opt for the worst possible option, which would be to offer a choice between fake meat and imported meat products from unsustainable systems. Going forward, Tesco must shout louder about the very positive story British farming has to tell, if it is sustainability they truly intend to promote.

Government urged to back UK rural tourism

Farming UK has reported on calls for the Government to back British tourism this summer following the Prime Minister's announcement of the country's post-lockdown roadmap last week. The sector welcomed news that rural tourism, including shops and outdoor hospitality businesses, could reopen on 12 April.

The Country Land and Business Association warned that many rural tourism businesses were 'teetering on the edge', and that the Government 'must now be brave and unashamedly back British tourism', such as by cutting VAT from 20% to 5%, and making this permanent for small rural tourism businesses.

Full article:

https://www.farminguk.com/news/government-urged-to-back-uk-rural-tourism-this-summer_57651.html



And finally...

A farmer bought a new dog, but after a few days he telephoned the original owners. "I'm not happy, because every time a bell rings, he goes and sits in the corner."

"Well, he is a Boxer!" was the reply.