



Down to Earth

A newsletter
for rural
communities

No. 4

June 2020



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF SALISBURY

Richard's Scribblings!

Praise be!! It looks as though after a long while the UK is generally beginning to come out of lockdown. But we need to do that with extreme caution. We have been told we can open churches for private prayer, although that depends on local arrangements from one church to another! The same with funerals, although again that has been left to local churches depending on the ability to social distance.

In this edition we have articles on domestic violence and rough sleeping; the perennial problem of threats to rural post offices; farmers pleading for people to respect the countryside; and a big drop in the use of cash.

Again, our huge thanks to Rural Services Network, Alan Spedding, The Times, The Telegraph and Yahoo Finance for information received.

With love and Blessings to you all in these difficult and challenging times.

Richard

The Reverend Richard Kirlew
email: rural.chaplaincy@btinternet.com

Rural Officer for Dorset - Agricultural & Rural Chaplain
tel: 01963 23570
mobile: 07966 754110

Thoughts for Now...

So, I wonder if...

post Covid-19, things are going to be different? Have things really changed for the better? Kindness, love, consideration, helping one another, generosity, were the watchwords. How can we carry those values forward into this new world? But there again, what is the 'new normal' going to be? Will it be the same as the 'old normal'?

Just look how the death of a black man in America has caused a reaction across the world and already changed the place that we live in. There is now a real yearning across our world to stamp out racism. What difference *can* we make to any of the thoughts above?

There are many downsides of Covid-19 as well: the untimely and premature death in the UK of over 41,000 loved ones, causing untold grief in many families; a huge increase in all types of abuse during the lockdown (see article below); an increase in scammers preying on unsuspecting and vulnerable people; and, as I write this reflection, the shrinking of the UK economy in April by 20.4%.

Whatever our 'new normal' turns out to be, we must be led by the Grace of God in all these things and follow Him with love in our hearts for all the experiences we are likely to encounter.

Fears for post offices after subsidy slashed

On 3 June, The Telegraph reported that ministers had been accused of failing to protect the Post Office beyond 2021, which could put the future of 11,500 branches at risk. The Government insisted it was "committed to safeguarding the network and protecting rural services" but said subsidies would be reduced to £50 million in 2020/21, given the company's "strengthened financial position". However, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee's report warned that "many sub-postmasters are already struggling and thinking of leaving their post offices, and the removal of £50 million in subsidies could tip many over the edge". The Post Office provides vital services to rural communities, including offering local information, informal support and a place for meeting fellow residents. Rural post offices are also used much more for cash withdrawals, with 24% of rural consumers relying on them compared to only 19% in urban areas.



Lockdown sees increase in domestic violence & homelessness

"Some rise in reports of domestic abuse during lockdown in rural areas and concerns over those unable to escape potentially abusive situations." That's the message coming from Graham Biggs, CEO of the Rural Services Network, following a survey of member organisations about the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown on incidences of domestic abuse and homelessness during April and May. The results are contained in a report which will be sent to DEFRA as part of the Rural Stakeholder Impact Forum, of which the Rural Services Network is a member. The Forum meets each week to share input from rural areas.

The survey shows that 40% of the 92 organisations which responded had noted an increase in reports of domestic abuse. There were concerns that people may not be able to report incidents, being isolated with the perpetrators during lockdown. In addition, the lack of public transport, which has been further reduced in lockdown, and face-to-face support only being available online have created additional issues for rural dwellers.

53% of respondents noted a rise in reports of homelessness/rough sleeping in rural areas, particularly amongst those who were unable to stay with family or friends or sofa-surf due to households' isolating. Councils had worked hard to ensure that the Government's 'Everyone In' policy was met and places were found for people to stay. However, concerns were raised about the additional support that some rough sleepers would require to maintain their position in accommodation. There is also a finite amount of resources/accommodation available in rural areas.

One housing association stated: "Whereas our local drop-ins were supporting 40-50 per hub each week, now it's down to 4-5 phone referrals a week. The need hasn't gone down, but the ability to support it has. This is a problem that will ultimately be felt downstream." Several respondents highlighted the importance of effective partnership working, which has been evidenced during lockdown, and the longer-term need for funding and support. The Rural Services Network campaigns for fairer funding in rural areas. Councils, housing associations, charities and voluntary sector organisations that support those experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness will need targeted resources to help rural residents with particular needs as lockdown eases and it becomes easier to seek help.

Respect the countryside, plead farmers



The Times has reported that farmers have issued a plea to visitors to respect the countryside after widespread reports of litter and human waste being left in fields as more people visit beauty spots. The National Sheep Association said it had received reports of disposable barbecues and litter being left in fields, parked cars blocking the roads, and issues over the lack of open toilet facilities in rural areas. Crowds of visitors last weekend left mounds of rubbish piled up in Dovedale in the Peak District and Ilkley and Bingley in West Yorkshire. The Association said its members were seeing more people than normal on their farms. Many were bringing dogs that had never seen livestock before and some owners were failing to control them.

Half of all purchases now made by card

Just 23% of all purchases made in the UK last year involved cash, according to a new report published by Yahoo Finance. Cash payments declined by 15% in 2019 while card payments accounted for a record 51% of all transactions. The number of people who don't use cash or use it just once a month has more than doubled from 3.4 million in 2017 to 7.4 million last year, and the trend is likely to accelerate in 2020 following warnings from authorities that cash could transmit COVID-19. Card providers have also increased contactless payment limits in response to the pandemic as a safety precaution.

The shift to a cashless society means elderly people, the poor, and rural communities are at risk of being 'left behind'. Similarly, rural communities are becoming disadvantaged in an increasingly digital world that only works for those with broadband and mobile connectivity.



And finally...

Chopsticks are one of the reasons



the Chinese never invented custard. (Spike Milligan)