

Life and faith in rural Britain...

COUNTRYWAY



Coronavirus Rural Roundup

Like everyone else, we at the Arthur Rank Centre didn't expect to find ourselves trying to work in the middle of a pandemic this Spring. As government advice was published, we worked from home and became proficient in using Zoom, particularly so that we could continue our office custom of having coffee together at 11am. This social time has been a blessing, particularly for those on the team who live alone.

Together Apart: A rural church response to coronavirus

We knew that rural churches would be responding to need in congregations and community, and so we quickly decided to set up our Together Apart hub (arthurrankcentre.org.uk/together-apart), collecting advice, sources of help, and encouragement for rural Christians. Many of you have contributed to it, for which we are enormously grateful. Your ideas will have inspired others; your suggestions of contacts in times of trouble will have eased people's lives.

Weekly reflections

We wanted to stay in touch with you as much as possible and so the idea of a regular reflection on scripture was born. We asked some of our other rural Christian friends if they would like to get involved and within a week of the start of lockdown on 23 March, an extensive network of rural Christian organisations and denominational representatives came together. We are very proud to be able to send you reflections from a wide range of experience and faith week by week. Each partner sends the same core material, and then adds relevant information and messages relevant to their own organisation.

We know that many of you have valued the reflections, and I am glad of that, but I am even more glad that the Body of Christ has been able to 're-member' itself at this time when so much has been taken apart. To be able to respond with scripture in a united way is at the heart of ecumenism, and reminds us of one God who unites us, through the Spirit. There are good things coming out of this difficult situation, and it is my prayer that rural Christians will continue to seek closer ways of working and walking together, nationally, regionally and locally.

Holy Week reflections

This Lent has been unique, and we wanted to mark Holy Week in a way we have not done in recent years. There were online reflections and resources galore, and we debated long and hard whether we should add to the noise. In the end we decided that we would but being sure to bring a rural perspective to those events in the city of Jerusalem. I was blessed to visit the Holy Land at the beginning of 2019, and have a collection of photographs, and so Elizabeth Clark and I prepared the reflections you saw.

We're very aware that many of you receiving this edition of Country Way won't have been reached by the online responses of the rural church. Our challenge is to make sure that all of you have the opportunity to participate and reflect on the changes wrought by coronavirus, and I hope you will take advantage of the reflection space offered for Rural Mission Sunday. We too need to work out what changes we would want to keep at Arthur Rank Centre: what we want to rediscover and where we could do things differently. We're grateful to have your partnership as we journey through this together.

Easter Poem 2020 - Margaret Copland, Kirwee, New Zealand

I am waiting
Waiting in my locked-down room
My waiting room here
Is warm, my chair
Is comfortable, and most important
When I take the air
There's grass and trees and open sky
That's why
I don't mind waiting
But out there! Out there, I hear
Intake of breath – the aching fear
Of money lacking, business cracking, Futures tracking
into mis-happed, unmapped
realms of doubt and fear

I am waiting
Waiting in my native land
Aotearoa here
Kind, calm and clear
Jacinda, and most important
Every day, on air
Four deaths alone and hope rides high
That's why
I don't mind waiting
But over there – over there I hear
Sobbing grief, and desperate fear
Sounds of crying, gasping, dying
Medics overworked and trying
To control a deathly toll
Embroided in the dark nightmare

I am waiting
Waiting in a waiting world
We gather, friends locked-down on line
Sharing words with food and wine – on line
Afraid and laughing, hoping so
For something that I cannot know
Something that will shape and grow

From roots of kindness forming now
Rising under a clear blue sky
That's why
I don't mind waiting

We are in a rural parish on the South Island of New Zealand. There are five congregations in the parish and so getting the service out to members of each of those congregations is a challenge, but God is good! We created both YouTube and email versions of our Easter service and it was wonderful to hear that so many of the congregation had passed it along to friends and neighbours. They might have felt shy about inviting a neighbour to church but had no worries about sharing the Good News of the resurrection by passing along the link to the service on YouTube.

Included in our non-Eucharistic service was a poem written by a parishioner (see box) and a special hymn by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette called 'This Easter Celebration'. The words were perfect for this lock-down Easter and, God willing, this will be the only year when we get a chance to sing it.

Revd Susan Baldwin, Malvern Anglican Parish, Diocese of Christchurch, New Zealand

On Good Friday I asked our villagers 'What Hurts?', then printed responses, nailed them to a cross and ran it around four villages as a witness. On Easter Sunday, I strapped a speaker to the back of my bike and managed to cycle round all six villages plus a neighbouring parish, playing 'Jesus Christ is risen today!' and 'Thine be the glory'. Loud yet meditative!

Revd David Harknett, Frisby on the Wreake, Diocese of Leicester

Dentdale Christian Fellowship erected this cross in our garden besides main road. On Maundy Thursday it had a towel over it with a bowl, on Good Friday a crown of thorns, nothing on Saturday and flowers on Easter Day. It made quite an impression!

Sarah E Woof

Ebenezer Methodist Church is located on a very busy main road in Jersey with lots of passing traffic. This large cross was put in our church porch on Good Friday to remind those who passed it both of the events of the first Easter and of the sacrifice of health workers here and around the world, and the essential role of key workers in supporting each of us. **Our church children's groups created art to send to elderly people connected with the church. We have had loads of phone calls and emails thanking our team for reaching out in this way to those isolated from their loved ones.**

*Mike Picot
Ebenezer Methodist Church, Jersey*

Tell us your stories!

We know that churches across the UK – and the world – have been responding to COVID-19 in creative and innovative ways and we'd love to be able to share those stories! Telling us what you've been up to doesn't need to be complicated: just drop us an email that explains what you did, who it was for, why you did it and what the impact was. If you have some photos do send those too; they need to be at least 2MB in size and you need to get permission from those in the photos before you send them to us for publication.

Send your stories to countryway@germinate.net by 1 July 2020!

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