

Derbyshire Agricultural Chaplaincy (DAC)

Alan Griggs, Agricultural Chaplain with Rural Action Derbyshire

Why Agricultural Chaplaincy?

The Derbyshire Agricultural Chaplaincy (DAC) in partnership with the Methodist Church offers support to farmers and agricultural workers and traders facing all kinds of challenges. Farming has seen some tough times over the years and farmers have a reputation for resilience in the face of adversity. However, even the most efficient farmer continues to face costs of production which are higher than farm gate prices. Add to this rural isolation and extremely long working hours and farmers of all ages are at higher risk of depression and suicide. The DAC aims to visibly be 'church' and an authentic Christian presence in the lives of all those working in agriculture in Derbyshire.



Rev. Alan Griggs

What do agricultural chaplains actually do?

- We attend Bakewell Livestock Market every Monday and agricultural shows to be a Christian presence in the spaces where farmers and traders gather;
- We *proactively* travel to farms to see farmers in their place of work;
- We visit care homes to meet retired farmers in care;
- We work with other support agencies such as the Farming Community Network (FCN), The Farming Life Centre, Rural Health Teams, the Addington Fund, The Royal Agricultural Benevolence Institution, the Rural Church, and other voluntary and statutory organisations to provide holistic help.
- We provide a listening ear and practical support during challenging times;
- We organise special worship services at Harvest and Christmas in the main store ring at Bakewell Livestock Market and support other key farming services around the county.

- We are currently supporting the growth of a care farm for young people in partnership with the Methodist Peak Park Rural Development Enabler (PPRDE) and a Methodist farming family to realize a Christian vision for the farm.



The Store Ring at Bakewell Market

A growing ecumenical team:

The Rev. Alan Griggs, a self-supporting Minister in the Anglican Church took on the role of Agricultural Chaplain in July 2015. Alan quickly realised that growing a team was essential to reflect the diversity across the farming community. And so the Rev. Professor Stella Mills from the Methodist Nottingham and Derby District and Rev. Sue Bamping from Derby Diocese have now joined the team as Associate Chaplains. The DAC has significant support.



Rev. Stella Mills



Rev. Sue Bamping

An Agricultural Chaplain to young farmers:

A gap has been identified in our scope to connect with young farmers. Only 5 to 10% of young farmers attend a supportive young farmers club and the issues of mental health in young people is a growing concern. With this in mind, the DAC has recruited a volunteer chaplain to specifically reach out to young farmers. Tamara from the United Reformed Church has farming and youth work experience and is set to get this new and important work off the ground.

Chaplaincy support as the “prophetic Voice” of the Church:

Much of a chaplain’s work is listening and responding with God’s love on an individual basis but, occasionally, circumstances prompt a chaplain into action to support and help the farmer beyond his or her own problems.

This was the situation when a case of *Mycoplasma bovis* was causing stress and ill health not only for the farmer and family but also for the animals. The chaplains responded by finding funds from a variety of sources including the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Society and the Benevolent Fund of the local Methodist Circuit. In addition, the chaplains recognized the isolation and potential mental health problems that the disease was causing for the farmers and so investigated further the characteristics of *Mycoplasma bovis*.

This work led to the *Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board (AHDB)* being contacted, which responded by holding a webinar on 10th January 2017 that has proved to be supportive and helpful for farmers across the UK. In addition, the chaplains were asked by the AHDB to gather specific data from two farmers whose cattle have suffered from *Mycoplasma bovis* and this work is nearing completion. The wider knowledge gathered will be presented to all interested at Boylestone Methodist Church on 2nd March 2017.



Mycoplasma bovis is an emerging disease that can have devastating effects on a dairy farmer in particular, since the disease affects the milk quality and consequently the financial income of the farm. In addition, treatment is only spasmodically successful and often there is a need to cull infected animals. Some farmers have lost their whole herd with no compensation being available at the present time.

By using the prophetic voice of the Church, the chaplains have been able to support farmers through widening knowledge and awareness of *Mycoplasma bovis*, as well as supporting them through listening and discussing the characteristics of the illness. Interestingly, regardless of faith

acknowledgement, the farmers have also welcomed the spiritual support of prayer as they struggle through this very difficult time.

To God be the glory:

Some key passages that outline our theological rationale are Acts 17: 16 to 32, where the Apostle Paul visits Athens, Acts 16: 11 to 15, the conversion of Lydia, and Luke 10: 1 to 11, the Mission of the Seventy. Each passage demonstrates how life-changing encounters happen beyond the comfort zone of our Christian communities in spaces where God is already at work. The essence of the DAC is to go in the name of Christ, to serve, to support, to listen, to comfort, to share, to tell, to challenge, to pray, at the invitation of others and in the place where they feel safe.

We are very aware as a chaplaincy that it is "...neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor 3 v7). Please pray for us as we seek to get caught up in all that God is doing in the farming community in Derbyshire. Every Blessing.

For more information, visit the Rural Action Derbyshire website: www.ruralactionderbyshire.org.uk

